

# Preface

Given that 2015 is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of FOREST EUROPE, this report offers an ideal opportunity to take stock and analyze the trends in European forests over the last two-and-a-half decades.

Since 1990, the Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe, now known as FOREST EUROPE, has facilitated an open and inclusive policy dialogue between governments, governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector, which addresses common challenges and opportunities relating to forests in Europe.

By providing detailed information about the current status of European forests and the associated trends over the last 25 years, this report aims to stimulate debate on the role of forests in society and the implementation of sustainable forest management in the region.

Among other things, the report reveals that Europe's forest area expanded to 215 million ha or 33 percent of the region's total land area over the last 25 years and continues to expand. In addition to forest area, the growing stock is also increasing. European forests have a higher average density of growing stock than global forests.

The productive role of our forests is also worthy of mention. Europe remains one of the world's biggest producers of equivalent roundwood. The value of marketed non-wood goods, which sometimes provide an important source of income at local level, is also significant.

As highlighted by their contribution to Europe's gross domestic product (GDP), which amounts to EUR 103 million annually, the socio-economic functions of the forest play an important role in the region's economy. It is interesting to note here that Europe has moved from being a net importer of primary wood and paper products to a net exporter.

For these reasons, enhancing the role of sustainable forest management in the context of a green economy, including the promotion of green jobs in forests, is crucial to the social and economic development of Europe.

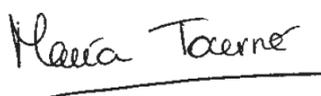
European forests also play a role in tackling current challenges like climate change: they remove large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere. Between 2005 and 2015 the average annual sequestration of carbon in forest biomass, soil and forest products reached 719 million tonnes. The increasing awareness of this issue is reflected in the most frequently mentioned policy objectives, i.e. carbon stocks, stock changes, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The issues on which European forest policy should focus include enhancing the protection of forests to ensure that they can fulfil important environmental roles, and strengthening cooperation at regional level while promoting pan-European and national action.

Despite the achievements of the last 25 years, indicated, not least, by the fact that the number of countries with a national forest programme has almost tripled since 2007, raising awareness of sustainable forest management, research, education and training remain crucial to the success of the forest sector.

I trust that this report will boost the debate on all forest-relevant issues in the pan-European region so that policy-makers can rely on evidence-based information on the status and trends in forest and forest management in their work. This information can also serve as a source of knowledge for decision-makers.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions and work of the national correspondents and the 300 national experts who provided the information required for this report, and the 60-plus authors and reviewers who cooperated to produce the State of Europe's Forests 2015. I owe them all a sincere debt of gratitude.



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