



## Members of the European Parliament

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Brussels, 6 November 2020

### **Subject: Deforestation and illegal logging of Romania's primary forests**

Dear Commissioners,

we, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, are addressing you to express our deep concerns about **massive violations of the protection of Natura 2000 areas, primary and ancient forests and UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Romania.**

In Romania, deforestation caused by illegal logging is continuing on an alarming scale. It threatens the last and irreplaceable primary forests in the EU, which are more crucial than ever in the fight against climate change and for the preservation of biodiversity. According to expert estimates, up to two thirds of the EU's remaining primary forests are located in Romania. Largely untouched areas in the Romanian Carpathian Mountains and the Făgăraș Mountains have survived until today – a European if not global heritage of invaluable

ecological value. Some of these forests are also included in the List of World Heritage Sites UNESCO.<sup>1</sup>

Now, ruthless greed and large-scale corruption are seriously endangering these European natural treasures and the time for protective measures is running out. If no immediate action is taken, the still existing forests will soon be lost forever. Since the launch of the **European Commission's infringement procedure against Romania on 12 February 2020 for failing to establish effective measures against illegal logging<sup>2</sup>, thousands more hectares were destroyed**. These come in addition to the tens of thousands of hectares that had already been illegally cut down in previous decades. Estimates of at least 80 million cubic meters of wood lost are most likely too conservative.<sup>3</sup> In March 2020 Environment Minister Costel Alexe announced that the largest operation of illegal logging had been discovered with 100,000 cubic meters of wood gone forever.<sup>4</sup> The announcement itself came with no surprise but the sheer scale testifies to a new, because even more shocking reality.

Those who oppose illegal logging and actively advocate the protection of the forests enshrined in law are facing violence, intimidation and defamation. Since 2014, six rangers were killed<sup>5 6</sup> and hundreds of cases of violence against rangers, NGOs and the population have been reported. **Romania is the only country in the European Union where environmental defenders and those who aim to protect the environment are murdered.**<sup>7</sup> We wish to express our deep concern over defamation and slander campaigns against civic actors and organisations launched by institutions like Nostra Silva (a controversial federation of landowners) and distributed via Romanian television. Lately the **Conservation Carpathia (FCC) LIFE<sup>8</sup> restoration project in the Carpathian Mountains came under heavy attack**. We strongly condemn any use of violence, disinformation, defamation and threats against organisations, NGOs, journalists and the population as well as attempts of intimidation against protest.

In accordance with the EU's 2030 Biodiversity strategy all old-growth forests in the EU are under strict protection.<sup>9</sup> Green Deal and the EU forest strategy set standards for forest preservation and restoration in the EU<sup>10</sup>. We therefore urge the European Commission to do everything in its power to **force the Romanian government to end the destruction of these forests by illegal logging** - and thus to stand by the side of those who are fighting on the ground, sometimes at the risk of their lives, to save our common natural heritage and to defend the respect of European laws and regulations.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1133/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/INF\\_20\\_202](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/INF_20_202)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.agentgreen.ro/scrisoare-deschisa-adresata-presedintelui-romaniei-cu-privire-la-inventarul-forestier-national-si-nivelul-exploatarilor-forestiere-ilegale/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.romaniajournal.ro/society-people/prosecutors-notified-over-the-largest-illegal-logging-case-in-romania/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.panda.org/wwf\\_news/?354714/Romania-Second-Forest-Ranger](https://www.panda.org/wwf_news/?354714/Romania-Second-Forest-Ranger)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/defending-tomorrow/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/defending-tomorrow/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.dspPage&n\\_proj\\_id=4305](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.dspPage&n_proj_id=4305)

<sup>9</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

<sup>10</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/forests>

Yours sincerely,

Viola von Cramon-Taubadel