

The natural forests of Europe are vanishing:

Focal point Romania

While we look in horror at the catastrophic destruction of the primary forests in Brazil, the remains of natural forests are also disappearing in Europe. But hardly anyone takes any notice. According to the “Forest Europe” report (2015), only 4% of Europe’s forests are in a “more or less untouched” state. And even these last remnants of our “real forest” - in contrast to the widespread, ecologically unstable und unnatural coniferous plantations - are getting more and more troubled.

The focal points of forest destruction are the Romanian and Ukrainian Carpathians, the boreal forests in Finland and Sweden and, more recently, also the wild mountain forests in Southeast Europe.

Especially the development in Romania is causing the nature conservationists a massive headache, because the brutal destruction of these largest primary and old growth forests in the moderate climate zone of the EU is advancing rapidly.

According to Romanian insiders, the drivers behind this development are long-established, widely ramified networks that even extend into the government and traditional political parties.

These circles - in which state forests enterprise and international timber companies, ministerial officials, government representatives, forest inspectors and forestry professors ensure howling chainsaws and humming business – obviously even ignores an EU infringement proceeding and national supreme court judgments.

Austria timber manufacturing companies such as Schweighofer Holzindustrie or the world’s largest chipboard producer Kronospan are particularly in the focus of criticism: The wood hunger of their huge plants would drive logging volume across the country to extremes. The control of the origin of the huge amounts of timber is either lax or technically inadequate. Schweighofer Holzindustrie has introduced at least one GPS tracking system for trucks, but this only records part of the deliveries and leaves out wood from collection depots.

There is still a huge forest treasure left: The “Primofaro” inventory (EuroNatur, 2019) identified a total of 500,000 hectares of potential primary and old growth forests in Romania. But not even a fifth of it is currently adequately protected, although 300,000 hectares are located in Natura 2000 areas (at least in paper).

In February 2020, after a complaint by the NGOs EuroNatur, Client Earth and Agent Green, the EU Commission opened an infringement procedure against the Romanian government for illegal logging in Natura 2000 sites and for violations of the EU timber trade regulation (EUTR). Felling in protected forests is

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omnipresent and the prohibition of “deterioration” of habitats / species as well as the obligation to conduct “appropriate assessments” prior to logging to avoid any risk of damages to nature are systemically ignored.

The Romanian forestry scene is trying to counter with an attack against this “foreign” assault and conservative forest professors were called to march against nature conservationists with pseudo-scientific pamphlets: the assertions are not true and launched by forces from abroad. The Romanian forest industry is more sustainable than the German and old growth forests are just a result of the 120-year logging cycles ...

But these attempts of disinformation cannot hide the fact that in Natura 2000 areas such as Fagaras or Maramures there are giant clear cuts in the mountain spruce forest. Also in the mixed beech forests, entire mature forest ecosystems - some of which are centuries old - are being liquidated in three-phase felling cycles. There are no serious environmental audits be-

forehand. A considerable part of the timber harvest takes place illegally, or “legal-illegal”, as they call it in Romania: There is a permit for a certain amount of timber. The difference to the real “harvest” is shared among all those who are involved ...

The EU infringement procedure could soon become a case for the Court of Justice of EU. In 2018 the supreme stopped the Polish government’s clear-cutting campaign in the Bialowieza Forest. Large-scale logging of old, deadwood-rich forests which is habitat of protected species (primary forest beetles, woodpeckers, owls, etc.) is not compatible with Natura 2000. A similar ruling by the Court of Justice of the EU in the case of Romania could point the way for the whole EU: Also in Finland, Sweden, Germany or Austria, high biodiversity value forests are being cut in Natura 2000 sites.



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