

Forests are one of the main elements( ) of our natural heritage( ). The decline( ) of Europe's forests over the last decade( ) and a half has led to an increasing( ) awareness and understanding of the serious imbalances( ) which threaten( ) them. European countries are becoming increasingly( ) concerned by major threats ( ) to European forests, threats which know no frontiers( ) other than ( ) those of geography( ) or climate( ): air pollution, soil deterioration( ), the increasing number of forest fires and sometimes even the mismanagement( ) of our woodland( ) and forest heritage. There has been a growing awareness of the need for countries to get together to co-ordinate( ) their policies. In December 1990, Strasbourg hosted( ) the first Ministerial Conference( ) on the protection of Europe's forests. The conference( ) brought together 31 countries from both Western and Eastern Europe. The topics discussed included the coordinated study of the destruction( ) of forests, as well as how to combat( ) forest fires and the extension( ) of European research programs on the forest ecosystem( ). The preparatory( ) work for the conference had been undertaken( ) at two meetings of experts. Their initial ( ) task was to decide which of the many forest problems of concern to Europe involved the largest number of countries and might be the subject of joint action( ). Those confined( ) to particular geographical areas, such as countries bordering( ) the Mediterranean( ) or the Nordic( ) countries therefore had to be discarded( ). However, this does not mean that in future they will be ignored( ).

As a whole( ), European countries see forests as performing a triple function: biological( ), economic and recreational( ). The first is to act as a 'green lung( )' for our planet( ); by means of photosynthesis( ), forests produce oxygen( ) through the transformation ( ) of solar energy( ), thus fulfilling( ) what for humans is the essential role of an immense( ), non-polluting( ) power plant( ). At the same time, forests provide raw materials for human activities through their constantly ( ) renewed( ) production of wood. Finally, they offer those condemned( ) to spend five days a week in an urban environment an unrivalled( ) area of freedom to unwind( ) and take part in a range of leisure( ) activities, such as hunting, riding( ) and hiking( ). The economic importance of forests has been understood since the dawn( ) of man( )—wood was the first fuel. The other aspects( ) have been recognised( ) only for a few centuries but they are becoming more and more important. Hence( ), there is a real concern throughout Europe about the damage to the forest environment which threatens these three basic roles.

The myth( ) of the 'natural' forest has survived, yet there are effectively( ) no remaining 'primary' forests in Europe. All European forests are artificial( ), having been adapted and exploited( ) by man for

thousands of years. This means that a forest policy is vital, that it must transcend( ) national frontiers and generations of people, and that it must allow for the inevitable( ) changes that take place in( ) the forests, in needs, and hence in policy. The Strasbourg conference was one of the first events on such a scale( ) to reach this conclusion. A general declaration( ) was made that 'a central place in any ecologically coherent( ) forest policy must be given to continuity( ) over time and to the possible effects of unforeseen( ) events, to ensure that the full potential( ) of these forests is maintained'( ).

That general declaration was accompanied( ) by six detailed resolutions to assist( ) national policy-making( ). The first proposes the extension( ) and systematisation( ) of surveillance ( ) sites to monitor( ) forest decline. Forest decline is still poorly understood but leads to the loss of a high proportion( ) of a tree's needles ( ) or leaves. The entire continent( ) and the majority of species( ) are now affected: between 30% and 50% of the tree population. The condition appears to result from the cumulative( ) effect of a number of factors, with atmospheric( ) pollutants ( ) the principal culprits( ). Compounds of nitrogen( ) and sulphur dioxide( ) should be particularly closely watched. However, their effects are probably accentuated( ) by climatic factors, such as drought( ) and hard winters, or soil imbalances( ) such as soil acidification( ), which damages the roots. The second resolution concentrates on the need to preserve( ) the genetic diversity( ) of European forests. The aim is to reverse ( ) the decline in the number of tree species or at least to preserve the 'genetic material' of all of them. Although forest fires do not affect all of Europe to the same extent( ), the amount of damage caused the experts to propose as the third resolution that the Strasbourg conference consider the establishment of a European databank( ) on the subject. All information used in the development of national preventative( ) policies would become generally available. The subject of the fourth resolution discussed by the ministers( ) was mountain forests. In Europe, it is undoubtedly( ) the mountain ecosystem which has changed most rapidly( ) and is most at risk. A thinly( ) scattered( ) permanent( ) population and development of leisure activities, particularly skiing( ), have resulted in significant long-term changes to the local ecosystems. Proposed developments include a preferential( ) research program on mountain forests. The fifth resolution relaunched( ) the European research network on the physiology( ) of trees, called Eurosilva. Eurosilva should support joint European research on tree diseases and their physiological and biochemical aspects. Each country concerned could increase the number of scholarships( ) and other financial support for doctoral theses and research projects in this area. Finally, the conference established the framework( ) for a European research network on forest ecosystems. This would also involve harmonising( ) activities in individual countries as well as identifying a number of priority research topics relating to the protection of forests. The Strasbourg conference's main concern was to provide for the future. This was the initial motivation( ), one now shared by all 31 participants( ).

representing 31 European countries. Their final text commits( ) them to on-going discussion( ) between government representatives( ) with responsibility for forests.

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