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MANAGING STATE FORESTS RESPONSIBLY

How forests boost the bioeconomy

Key Note Speech by Per-Olof Wedin, President of EUSTAFOR
at the International Forum "THE VALUE OF WOOD"
on 21 March 2017, at the Résidence Palace, Brussels

- I was born in a small village outside of Ådalen, in Northern Sweden, on the outskirts of the EU. My grandmother, Selma, lived her whole life within a radius of 25 kilometers, and when I left to study she was afraid that I would get lost out there in the huge city of Stockholm/world.

- The world and the EU are standing in front of a similar transition, stepping out into the great unknown, transitioning into a new bio-based economy. We need to dare to challenge ourselves.

- The future is about collaboration, combining new sectors and value chains to make better products and services. We need to have a common vision on what we want to achieve, what kind of society we want to build together. It is just like picking up this glass. It seems effortless but it requires coordination and team work of the joints and muscles in my hand.

- The forest sector is a good platform for innovation as we already collaborate extensively to improve the resource efficiency and product value. Forests can enable the EU to export sustainable solutions instead of continuously import expensive fossil problems.

- However, to unlock the full potential of the European forest sector and boost the bioeconomy as well as the economic growth of the EU - we need to improve our collaboration with other sectors. Therefore, EU policies need to

    - Expand the markets for bio-based products
        - Set clear ambitious targets for the bioeconomy
        - Put a price on carbon emissions
        - Not limit the sectors where woody biomass can be used

    - Support innovation within the forest sector,
        - FTP is a very positive example
        - But we also need support from large scale investment to commercialize new technologies

    - Promote active forest management to increase the growth and climate gains of our forests to mobilize more biomass
        - Help forest owners to increase productivity and growth
        - Not hinder mobilization of forest material, i.e. LULUCF
        - Not increase administrative burdens

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- Value the various forest ecosystem services that forest owners provide to society and, finally,

- Help consumers make better choices and demand product designs that improve the bio-based circular economy through labels and incentives for better products

- As forests owners, we have a responsibility not only to take care of our forests. We must also do our best to save our planet. This is why we need to use our forest for the betterment of society. This is especially important for us as State Forest organizations.

- Apart from creating climate smart houses, we can offer an array of materials, products, and services from our forests. Anything you can make from oil, you can make from wood. However, from a tree we can make much more then we can make from fossil resources. There are a lot of fossil-based products that we don't need, such as most plastic bags or plastic packaging.

- It is not enough to just replace fossil products. We should strive to reinvent and modernize them to fit our societal needs better. Innovation is therefore a key issue for boosting the bioeconomy. Politicians must support innovation and resource efficiency, promoting the full use of the whole tree. Do not try to limit biomass use in certain sectors with regulations on cascading use. Bioenergy is not a competitor to the bioeconomy, it is one of its enablers.

- We have huge forests in Europe. Within the EU we only harvest around 70 % of the annual growth.

- A forest can be harvested sustainably again and again with multipurpose forestry. There is no conflict between climate gains and forest management. The more we harvest the more the forests grow. In Sweden we have steadily increased our harvest levels and still we have almost twice as many trees compared to what we had in the 1920s.

- The wealth of the forests that we have today is the result of decisions made by the men and women who came before us. They gave us a gift.

  - A gift of a thriving forest and renewable materials that can carry us forward towards a greener economy. It is our responsibility, no, it is our duty, to accept this gift and pay it forward to future generations

  - It is a gift that can safeguard a strong and competitive Europe, with a secure and stable economy and societal services for our grandchildren and which, at the same time, provides them with the opportunity to give the same gift to coming generations.

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- For, as history has proven to us, investments in our forests is an investment in the future, a true green capital bond for future generations to come

- All of Europe needs to thrive, and not all of us want to live in big cities. The term urbanization does not, by default, mean that we must all move to the city. Urbanization means allowing people in rural areas to have the same opportunities as people in the city. With digitalization, urbanization will be less about moving from one area to another and more about the quality of life.

- Like all European forest owners, state forest management organizations, are the cornerstone of the bioeconomy, providing a carefully monitored source of raw materials while at the same time boosting competitiveness by creating jobs in rural areas and enabling the development green industries.

- Forestry therefore allows Europeans to make their own choices: To either, like me, get lost in the world outside. Or, like my grandmother Selma, stay in the region where they were born, with the same opportunities to have a good life, a steady income and the same societal services as people in the cities. Even in Ådalen, up the northern outskirts of EU.

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