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EUSTAFOR Marks 20 Years with Anniversary Events, New Strategy, and High-Level Policy Dialogue on the Future of Europe's Forests



The European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR) celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2026, marking two decades as the voice of Europe's state forest management organisations and a key contributor to EU forest policy. This year celebrations combines reflection on past achievements with a forward-looking agenda, including a new strategic vision, public engagement activities, and a high-level policy conference in Brussels.

Founded in 2006, EUSTAFOR today represents 40 members across 29 countries. Collectively they manage one third of Europe's forests and overall ~40% of state forests are protected or protective forests, with ~16% specifically Natura 2000 designated.

Over the past two decades, the association has played a central role in ensuring that European forest-related policies are grounded in practical experience, supporting sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, climate action, and the development of the bioeconomy.

High-Level Conference and Political Engagement

The celebrations culminated in a **high-level conference on 16 April 2026**, held alongside EUSTAFOR's General Assembly under the title *Growing Together – 20 Years of EUSTAFOR*. The event gathered representatives from EU institutions, Member States, industry, NGOs, and research organisations to reflect on two decades of EU forest policy and explore future pathways toward resilient forests by 2050.

The conference featured the participation of the **European Commissioner for Agriculture and Food Mr. Christophe Hansen** underlining the growing political importance of forests within the EU policy agenda, the importance of sustainable forest management and the importance of forests and the public forest managers for replacing fossil-based materials by bio-based ones, providing ecosystem services & recreation, tourism, biomass for bioenergy and bioeconomy.

“Active and sustainable forest management is needed to make our forests fit for the future. (...) Sustainably managed forests, under the Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) principles, are key to maintain the production potential and to be able to harvest raw material but also to continue to produce public goods. (...) I am convinced that with the right policies and cooperation, we can unlock the full potential of our forests for both the economy and the environment.” Said Mr. Hansen during his opening speech¹.

Shaping the Future of European Forest Policy

As EUSTAFOR enters its third decade, it highlights the increasing pressures on European forests such as climate change, evolving societal expectations or delivering forests products while also recognising their critical role in achieving climate neutrality, biodiversity goals, and a resilient bioeconomy.

The organisation calls for a more integrated and balanced EU forest policy framework that reflects on-the-ground realities and supports long-term, multifunctional forest management. Strengthening communication and public understanding of forestry is also identified as a key priority to maintain societal trust and engagement.

“Forests and the forest-based sector are not only part of Europe’s environmental agenda, but they are also fundamental to its economic resilience and societal wellbeing. Public forests demonstrate every day how multifunctional management can deliver for climate, biodiversity, and people at the same time. They provide renewable raw materials, support rural livelihoods, and offer essential ecosystem services, while remaining accessible to citizens. As EU policies continue to evolve, it is crucial that they recognise the realities on the ground and enable forest managers to actively contribute to Europe’s green transition.” Said EUSTAFOR’s President Mr. Juha Niemelä.

Launching the Strategy 2026+. The future of EUSTAFOR

But anniversaries are not just about looking back. They are about asking: where do we go from here? EUSTAFOR’s Strategy 2026+, is our answer to that question, and our commitment for the years ahead.

At the heart of EUSTAFOR’s work lies the concept of multifunctionality. Public forests are expected to deliver multiple benefits simultaneously: timber production, biodiversity conservation, climate regulation, recreation, and more. This is both their strength and their challenge. EUSTAFOR’s new strategy makes a clear case: these objectives are not mutually exclusive. Through integrated, science-based management, forests can provide a wide range of benefits. However, this requires coherent policies that recognise the realities on the ground, rather than fragmented or sectorial approaches.

The new strategy reaffirms a clear vision: European state forests should be resilient, multifunctional, and sustainably managed, delivering environmental, social, and economic benefits for generations to come. To achieve this, EUSTAFOR focuses on four interconnected priority areas.

- **Bioeconomy and rural development:** Promoting sustainably sourced wood and non-wood forest products as essential to Europe’s transition to a circular, bio-based economy, while supporting rural livelihoods.
- **Climate change adaptation and resilience:** Strengthening adaptive forest management to address increasing risks such as droughts, storms, pests, and wildfires, while contributing to climate mitigation.

¹ [Opening speech by Commissioner Hansen at the 20 Years Anniversary Conference of the European State Forest Association – 16 April, 2026](#)

- **Sustainable forest management (SFM):** Reinforcing SFM as the cornerstone of multifunctional forestry, integrating environmental, economic, and social objectives in practice.
- **Ecosystem services and biodiversity:** Enhancing recognition of forests' role in water regulation, soil protection, and biodiversity conservation, alongside improved valuation and communication of these services.

Anniversary Programme Brings Forests Closer to Citizens and Policymakers

As part of its anniversary celebrations, EUSTAFOR is organising a series of events throughout 2026 aimed at increasing visibility and strengthening dialogue between forest managers, policymakers, and society.

To commemorate this milestone, EUSTAFOR is rolling out a **series of anniversary actions throughout 2026**. Key anniversary actions include:

- **A renewed visual identity**, including a dedicated 20-year anniversary logo, rolled out across EUSTAFOR publications and communication materials.
- **A new public-oriented EUSTAFOR website**, designed as a reference hub for forest and forestry information, improving accessibility, transparency and digital visibility for policymakers, stakeholders and the wider public.
- **A wood-based public installation in Brussels**, developed in cooperation with the Municipality of Schaerbeek. EUSTAFOR is co-financing inclusive wooden tables made from certified European wood for a newly renovated public park, expected to open in May, highlighting the social value of wood products and public forest management for society
- A key highlight was the **public pop-up event held on 19 March 2026 at Place du Luxembourg in Brussels**, ahead of the International Day of Forests. The event brought forests to the heart of the EU quarter, engaging citizens, EU officials, and Members of the European Parliament through interactive materials and showcasing forest-based products from across Europe.

Media Contact:

Josep Milà-Puigdomènech
Policy and Communications Officer
josep.mila@eustafor.eu
office@eustafor.eu
Eustafor.eu

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Sophie Hugon





Image 1 and 2. Commissioner Hansen delivering the opening speech



Image 3. EUSTAFOR's president and CEO of Metsähallitus Finland opening



Image 4. Panel 2, (left to right) Jędrzej Damski (Lasy Państwowe PL), Elodie Champseix (IUCN), Andreas Erikson (Forest Europe SE liaison office), Gaëlle Marion EC and Johan Elvnert (FTP)