

Good Afternoon, ladies and gentlemen

As a member of the EPP with a special interest in climate change and environmental issues, the sustainable management of EU forests is a matter that is close to my heart.

Although the sustainability of European forests is certainly threatened by unregulated demand, placing an unrealistic burden on existing resources, this is only one of a number of problems.

Two other related problems strike me as being of particular importance:

\* The first is the collapse of European prices due to illegal competition from third countries. This in turn leads to low revenue for European suppliers of wood.

\* Against this background, secondly, the revenue that derives from activity related to the maintenance of forest land is not sufficient to actually pay for the cost of this maintenance. This gives rise to two difficulties.

On the one hand, forest managers might be tempted to allow the forest land to run down (increasing the risk of fires in the process)

given that they cannot afford the costs of maintenance.

On the other hand, managers might attempt to cover their costs by cutting down too much wood, something that is encouraged by the unregulated demand that I have already mentioned.

Although forestry is not my speciality, I feel that of the different courses of action that can be adopted to deal with this problem, three stand out:

\* Firstly, we require more urgent action at EU level. A useful step in the right direction,

in this respect, would be to ensure a more effective implementation of an inventory of forest land across the EU-27. For example, in Portugal we do not yet have a complete inventory in this respect.

\* Secondly, a more pro-active approach to preventing man-made disasters in the forest sector should be instituted. This supposes that forests are properly managed and maintained, particularly in so far as fire breaks are concerned. Early warning systems and adequate means for nipping disasters in the bud are required.

\* Lastly, the European Community in general has been pressing for clear sustainability criteria for biomass. This is already the case, as you will know, for biofuels. This strikes me as being a good idea as long as it is kept simple and easy to manage.