

Dear Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin these opening remarks by welcoming you to the Parliament and thanking you for your invitation to host this event today.

The main purpose of today's lunch debate is to discuss the role of research and innovation in the European forestry sector. The European forest-based sector contributes directly to such industries as the woodworking and the pulp and paper industries and, as such, represents a significant share of European GDP.

At the same time, forests - which cover 35% of the European landmass - are evidently of central importance in combating climate change. They also contribute to clean water, to biodiversity and they protect against soil erosion. Socially, forests are central to preserving rural development.

It is important at a European level that we extend harmonised principles of sustainable forest management to all member states and that we ensure that we valorise this valuable resource and maintain our forests for both their natural beauty and economic functions.

From a European point of view, H2020 has just been agreed between the three EU institutions. However, this is not the end of the road and a great deal of work still needs to be done. It is now necessary for the European Commission to concentrate on the fine details of the working programme. To this end, your document Vision 2023 for the European forest-based sector will be of real, practical value.

I think that is enough from me and I look forward to what I am sure will be a stimulating and fruitful discussion.

Thank you very much.