** REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

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 **Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management**

 **Ministry of Finance**

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 **Programmes**

**PRESS RELEASE**

The European Union supports the Republic of Serbia in Improvement of forest management in Serbia as a contribution to climate change adaptation and mitigation

 Belgrade, 22 June 2021

The kick-off conference of the EU Twinning project **"Improvement of forest management in Serbia as a contribution to climate change adaptation and mitigation"** was held today at the Club of the Parliament Members in Belgrade,combined with online participation and attendance via the Zoom platform.

This project, with a budget of EUR 1 million, is funded by the European Union and is being implemented by the Twinning Project Consortium of Austria and Slovakia together with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia–Directorate of Forests: The Member State partners include the Austrian Research Centre for Forests and Austrian Federal Forest Office (BFW), the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism, Austria (BMLRT), the Austrian Federal Forests (Österreichische Bundesforste AG) ÖBF, the Environment Agency Austria (EAA), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Slovakia (MARD) and the National Forest Centre (Národné lesnícke centrum) (NLC). The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia–Directorate of Forests is the beneficiary institution of this project.

The Kick-off Conference was opened by Ms. Vedrana Ilić, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia, followed by welcome remarks by H.E. Ms. Sabine Kroissenbrunner, Deputy Ambassador of the Republic of Austria to the Republic of Serbia, H.E. Mr. Fedor Rosocha, Ambassador of Slovakia to the Republic of Serbia and Mr. Sakellaris Hourdas, Head of Operations 3, in the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia. The Conference was also be attended by representatives of the diplomatic core and competent institutions of Austria, Slovakia and Serbia.

Speeches were also given by Ms. Maria Patek, Director General for Forestry and Sustainability*,* Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism, Austria and Mr. Michal Tomčík, Director General for Forestry and Timber, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Slovakia, who talked about the cooperation in sustainable forest management between their countries and Serbia.

In the second part of the conference, Mr. Saša Stamatović, Beneficiary Country Project Leader, Acting Director of the Directorate of Forests*,* Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia, talked about forests and forest management in Serbia – challenges and perspectives on the road to EU accession. Mr. Peter Mayer, Member State Project Leader, Director of the Austrian Federal Forest Office and the Austrian Research Centre for Forests talked about the EU and international policy making on forests and forest management. Mr. Boris Greguška, Chief State Counsellor, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Slovakia, focused on the lessons learnt from the accession process in Slovakia. The project was presented by Mr. Jozef Turok, Resident Twinning Advisor, and Ms. Ljiljana Sovilj, RTA Counterpart.

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| The purpose of this two-year, EU-funded twinning project with a budget of € 1.000.000 is to strengthen capacities of the forestry sector in Serbia to implement obligations stemming from EU standards and regulations in forestry and related fields, including timber market, Forest Information System, subsidies, NATURA 2000 and bioeconomy. The project will deliver a contribution towards climate change adaptation and mitigation in forestry, fully in accordance with the European Green Deal. The project partnership consists of Austria as lead Member State, Slovakia as junior partner MS and Serbia as the beneficiary country. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management plays the central implementation role in Serbia. The project was launched on 11 January 2021. |