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„Consiliul Economic și Social este organ consultativ al Parlamentului și al Guvernului în domeniile de specialitate stabilite prin legea sa organică de înființare, organizare și funcționare.” (Art. 141 din Constituția României revizuită)

The Economic and Social Council, having regard to the provisions of Article 2(3) and (4) of Law No. 248/2013, republished, with subsequent amendments and additions, formulates the following

OPINION

on the draft law amending and supplementing Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2007 on the regime of protected natural areas, the conservation of natural habitats, wild flora and fauna (Plx 452/2025)

The **Economic and Social Council** maintains the arguments contained in its **unfavorable opinion** on the **legislative proposal to amend and supplement Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2007 on the regime of protected natural areas, the conservation of natural habitats, wild flora, and fauna (b456/30.09.2025)** and draws attention to the risk of adopting legislative amendments without consulting the relevant experts and stakeholders.

The draft law changes the **purpose of protected natural areas**, defined at European level as areas intended for biodiversity conservation, not economic activities. The current form violates the fundamental principles of protecting these areas, as it allows for rapid and intrusive interventions in a very short time frame, with the risk of significantly affecting the entire protected ecosystem.

We believe that introducing the possibility of rapid phytosanitary interventions in protected natural areas through national and local emergency plans is based on an apparently legitimate premise, namely that prompt action could limit the spread of forest pest outbreaks, particularly the spruce bark beetle (**Ips typographus**). However, a careful analysis of European

experiences and current scientific knowledge on the dynamics of these populations shows that intervention during the expansion phase of the attack is, in fact, a counterproductive measure with long-term negative ecological and economic effects.

From a biological point of view, pest attacks follow a predictable pattern: an early phase, in which prevention and monitoring measures can be effective, followed by an explosion phase, when populations expand exponentially, and finally a plateau and natural decline phase, determined by the depletion of food resources and the self-regulating factors of the ecosystem. In this context, the timing of intervention is crucial. Either action is taken very early, at the prevention stage, or nature is allowed to run its full course, with interventions subsequently focused on restoration and renaturation.

The legislative solution aims to establish rapid interventions to limit pest attacks, but this has, in the practice of other countries, had the opposite effect: expanding and aggravating the phenomenon. This wastes resources and interferes in an area that, by definition, should be left to evolve naturally, without frequent intervention. Interventions can instead take place in the area of conservation/renaturation, as appropriate. This conclusion is supported by consistent European studies and practices documented in Annex 1.

Therefore, based on all the arguments developed above, as well as the recommendations of European institutions specializing in forestry policy, we explicitly recommend abandoning reactive approaches and moving to a strategy based on **prevention, resilience, and adaptive learning**. Rescue and sanitary felling are no longer considered effective pest control tools, but only marginal elements in a broader risk management plan. In forests with high conservation value, such as national and natural parks, the focus should be on maintaining natural processes, observing ecosystem dynamics, and facilitating natural regeneration after the decline phase of outbreaks.

However, the draft law under discussion ignores this ecological logic and risks reviving an outdated approach focused on exploitation in the midst of a crisis. The mechanisms introduced, in particular the vague definition of "**phytosanitary emergency**" and the establishment of "**tacit approval**" in the absence of an administrative response within five days, create the possibility of rapid but poorly substantiated interventions, even in **areas of full protection**. Any decision to intervene in these areas must be based on independent scientific expertise and ecological impact assessments, not on administrative or economic pressures. Without this rigorous scientific filter, the concept of "phytosanitary emergency"

becomes an arbitrary tool that can be used to justify the exploitation of forests under the pretext of conservation.

It is essential to emphasize that **integral protection areas** represent only about **2% (160,000 ha in Romania)** of the national forest fund, but they concentrate the most valuable ecosystems in terms of biodiversity. In the remaining **98%** of Romania's forests, logging and forestry work are already carried out freely, in accordance with management plans. Extending the pressure of intervention to the few remaining islands of unspoiled nature would mean the irreversible loss of a unique heritage.

Experiences in Central and Eastern Europe show that logging during the peak of an infestation not only fails to reduce outbreaks but can actually amplify them. Cutting, transporting infested material, and mechanized work create additional stress on forests and can spread insects over larger areas. At the same time, soil disturbance, loss of dead wood, and habitat fragmentation profoundly affect fauna dependent on decaying wood, reducing biodiversity and slowing natural regeneration. In other words, massive phytosanitary interventions in **strictly protected areas** compromise the very values for which these areas were established.

Therefore, the solution is not to accelerate exploitation, but to rethink how we relate to these natural phenomena. Pest attacks should be seen not only as a "crisis," but also as an **opportunity for ecological transformation**. Affected forests can be **natural laboratories** for understanding how ecosystems adapt to climate change and for promoting more diverse and resilient forest models. Instead of rushing to intervene with chainsaws, we should invest in **prevention**: early monitoring based on remote sensing, increasing species diversity, reducing tree vulnerability through adapted forest management, and public education on the role of natural processes in the forest life cycle.

In conclusion, we consider that the draft law amending and supplementing Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2007 on the regime of protected natural areas, the conservation of natural habitats, wild flora and fauna (Plx 452/2025), in its current form, does not respond to the ecological realities and long-term risks facing Romania's forests. By introducing a permissive framework for forestry interventions in full swing, it creates the conditions for the irreversible degradation of protected natural areas and undermines the fundamental principle of **integral conservation**. Romania needs a modern forestry policy based on science, prevention, and resilience, not legislation that reactivates exploitation reflexes under the pretext of urgency.

The draft legislation also contradicts the direction taken by the **European Union** through its **Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** and the **Regulation on nature restoration**, which provide for an increase in areas designated for natural processes and a reduction in human intervention in areas of high ecological value. Romania should align its forestry policies with these objectives, not reverse their meaning.

Adopting such a proposal would represent a **step backward**, contrary to European trends toward renaturation and adaptation to climate change. Instead of reactive intervention, the real solution is a **proactive risk management strategy**, in which nature is a partner, not an adversary. Only in this way can we ensure a sustainable future for Romania's forests and the communities that depend on them.

We propose excluding this **National Plan** and maintaining the **Phytosanitary Emergency Plans (PUF)** specific to each ANP. The **national PNUF** cannot cover specific cases that occur in each protected area (e.g., strictly protected areas in PN vs. integral protection, natural forests vs. spruce monocultures, scientific reserves vs. Natura 2000 sites). Furthermore, as proposed, the PNUF is mandatory and is not subject to procedural stages (e.g., **EIA - Environmental Impact Assessment**), and the CS decision becomes a formality, which is implicitly positive.

The phytosanitary emergency plan must also include **ecological reconstruction** measures that take **climate change** into account. In particular, in monoculture forests, these ER measures should be taken preventively, with a view to returning to more resilient, natural forests. A **SUMAL analysis (2023 and 2024)** is needed in the **Romanian Forest Fund**, with the exploitation deadlines for all accidental products to date compared with the evolution of tree stands, to see whether, to date, where intervention has been permitted, it has been carried out in a timely manner.

We recommend the establishment, at the central level, of a structure with a **preventive and coordinating** role in phytosanitary risk management, made up of specialists in **forestry, biology, climatology, ecological restoration, and environmental protection**. This structure should adopt an integrated approach, with the following main directions:

1. **Adapting Romania's forests to climate change** through management models differentiated by ecosystem type, specific to the species characteristic of each region.

2. **Ensuring a method of conservation for protected natural areas** that guarantees sustainable management, based on intervention modeling and ecological reconstruction.
3. **Identification and conservation of areas with high ecological potential**, whether natural or artificial, that require special conservation measures (e.g., the **Carașuhăț area in the Danube Delta**—an area of ecological reconstruction of UNESCO importance, with exceptional biodiversity).
4. **Proposals for establishing tree and shrub species suitable for the current and future climate context**, accompanied by long-term evolution scenarios for maintaining forest resilience.
5. **Prohibition of replacing native species with invasive species**, given the major risks they pose to the integrity of natural ecosystems.
6. **Revision of intervention procedures for forest diseases and pests** (e.g., bark beetles, *Lymantria* spp.), based on updated scientific data and European practices, focused on prevention, early monitoring, and reducing ecosystem vulnerability.

**Rapporteur,
Andrei Coșuleanu**

Annex 1 - European case studies

The annex includes examples used to support scientific arguments regarding the dynamics of Ips typographus attacks and the effects of different types of intervention in forests with high conservation value.

A classic example is that of the **Bayerischer Wald (Germany) and Šumava (Czech Republic) national parks**, which have been affected by massive attacks by Ips typographus. In Germany, over **4.000 hectares** of affected forest were left untouched, and natural regeneration was spectacular, forming young, diverse, and resilient forests. In the Czech Republic, however, massive forestry interventions carried out under the pretext of "saving the forest" led to the spread of outbreaks, habitat fragmentation, and delayed ecosystem recovery. Today, the German park is considered a successful example of natural renaturation, while the Czech park is a case of accelerated degradation through exploitation. For this reason, European institutions specializing in forestry policy—including **FOREST EUROPE**, in the document **Managing bark beetle outbreaks in the 21st century (Hlásny et al., 2023)**—emphasize the need for preventive approaches and management based on natural processes as more effective solutions than rapid forestry interventions.