



MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT,  
WATERS AND FORESTS

CABINET OF THE MINISTER

To: Ms. Matina Stevis-Gridneff, Brussels bureau chief for The New York Times

Reff: Right of Reply regarding the NYT article “Europe Is Sacrificing Its Ancient Forests for Energy”, published on 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2022

Dear Ms. Stevis-Gridneff,

I am writing to you regarding the allegations about Romania presented in the NYT article “*Europe Is Sacrificing Its Ancient Forests for Energy*”, published on 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2022 and signed by Sarah Hurtes and Weiyi Cai.

This article, which reports on Europe’s energy sector struggle because of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, contains false information about our country, presented one of the main proofs of evidence in support of the article’s narrative.

It is very unfortunate that, in this era in which fake news, manipulation and misinformation have become main stream and affect the majority of the population, a publisher such as NYT allows itself and its readers to become the victims of such practices.

In fact, the mentioned article states that the so-called investigators encountered an alleged environment crime:

*“Today, after a 2,200-foot hike up Ceahlau Mountain in Romania, a trail of wooden carcasses is visible below, a scar across one of Europe’s last old-growth forests where 200-year-old trees once stood.*

*Further down the mountain, logs were loaded on a truck branded for Ameco, one of Romania’s biggest pellet producers. “Pellet production offers the possibility to use waste from agriculture and forestry,” the company says on its website. Its pellet bags are labeled as coming exclusively from sawdust and wood chips.*

*Times journalists saw trees from Romania’s protected forests being fed into Ameco grinders.”*

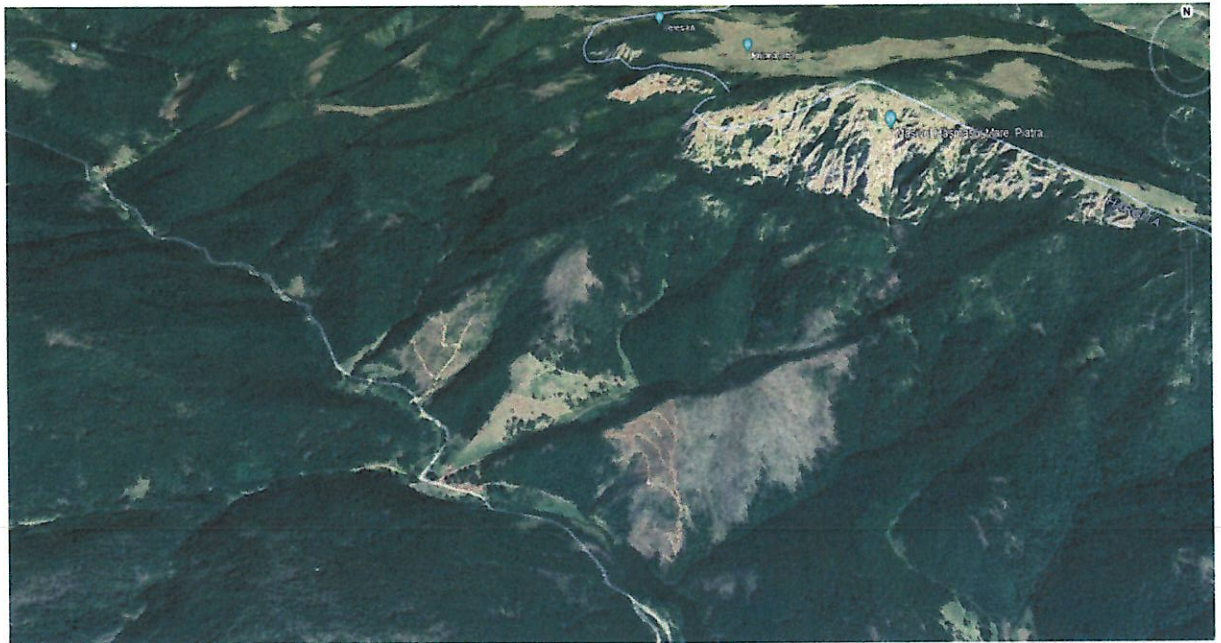
The conclusion of the so-called investigator that your team consulted is almost apocalyptic: *“Once you cut down these old trees, you degrade ecosystems that took centuries to form with little human intervention”.*

We also see a succession of four satellite images from 2019 to 2022, subtitled “*Damage from logging in Romania’s Cheile Bicazului-Hasmas National Park*”, that show the forest cover loss in the respective area.



The main problem with all these allegations is that all those trees in the “investigated” area were never cut down by anyone. A basic (but genuine) journalistic investigation, or a simple inquiry to the Romanian Ministry of Waters and Forests or the National Park administrator, would have revealed that in the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2020, an extreme meteorological phenomenon, a windstorm, affected forests all over Romania. On that day, only in Cheile Bicazului-Hășmaș National Park, 87.000 cubic meters of trees were collapsed by the wind, on approximately 1.200 hectares of forests.

This can also be easily seen from the public satellite images:





The forests in the area were affected by the windstorm on a scale of almost 90%.

This situation generated a huge environmental risk for the remaining forest of the national park. Collapsed trees on such a scale are highly susceptible to diseases, that ultimately will spread to the remaining forest. As such, the Scientific Council of the Cheile Bicazului-Hășmaș National Park approved the removal of the collapsed trees, which were gradually collected between 2020 and 2022, and mainly became raw material for the bioenergy sector.

We find it very curious that such an accessible (but essential) information was utterly excluded by the creators of this article. More so, the questions that were sent to our Communications Directorate on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, near the end of work day, never addressed this specific case, and only presented a general approach of the topic:

*“I would appreciate an answer by Monday 5 Sept. end of day.*

*[...] In Romania, we have analysed in part with the Sumal system as well as evidence on the ground that the majority of certified ENplus pellet plants have received logs from protected forests within the last year (including from Depresiunea și Munții Giurgeului Natura 2000, Cheile Bicazului Hășmaș National park and Ceahlau National park).*

*We know this is not illegal, but wonder if this is something you encourage?*

*We also saw that some trucks do not register themselves when loading, carrying, and depositing wood to several factories. Other times, we found shipments were understated or identical load weights were recorded several days in a row. To our understanding, this constitutes illegal logging. What do you make of such allegations?*

*It is our understanding that forest owners, whether private landholders or government authorities – are supposed to replace cut trees with new ones within two years to help balance the carbon cycle. But environmental groups have shown over the years that this is not always done. We noticed at times areas of land that had been registered as logged years ago, yet no replanting was done. In some cases, young trees died, possibly because of the degraded soil. What do you make of these allegations?*

*How do you view the upcoming RED vote and the proposed revisions to cut subsidies for primary wood?”*

Collaborating the content of the questions with the very short timeslot provided for us to answer, we almost tend to believe that receiving our answers was never the intention of the creators. We strongly hope that this was not the case.

Dear Ms. Stevis-Gridneff,

In the spirit of transparency and good relations between public authorities and the Media, and hoping that only deceiving intended was the one suffered by your journalists, at the hands of the local so-called investigators, we urge you to correct the information from the article as explained above. You can use all the information provided by us as you see fit, and we remain at your disposal for further inquiries.

Best regards,

**Barna TÁNCZOS**



**Minister of Environment,**

**Waters and Forests**