

**Statement to Plenary Session No. 3 of FOREST EUROPE 9<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference, Bonn, October 2, 2024**

**Prof. Dr. Norbert Weber, President of SILVA Network**

Distinguished participants of this conference,

For more than 35 years, SILVA Network is dedicated to improving higher forestry education in Europe. One of the key features of our network of universities is encouraging active student contributions in our conferences and beyond. That is why we strongly support the *Youth Position on the Future of Europe's Forests*. Against the background of large-scale generational changeover in forestry, intergenerational collaboration and dialogue across countries and between stakeholder groups are essential.

SILVA Network is prepared to support the Youth Position in several ways. Our members are striving towards standardized and internationally recognized qualifications in the forest sector, including the updating of curricula as requested in the *Section on Green Forest Jobs and Forest Education* in the position paper. We also agree that the importance of communication skills should be strongly mirrored in forestry curricula to make graduates prepared for new challenges. What we find especially promising is the idea of the organizational memory within the FoRISK-concept. Such kind of repositories might be worth considering in other fields as well.

Taking into account the increased number of "digital natives" indeed there is a high potential of youth for SFM communication and outreach. It could be tapped, for instance, to improve public relations activities for forests, forestry and forest sciences. However, what should be avoided is a decoupling of communication where youth and elderly people are only exchanging views within their respective spheres and media. This might cause a new form of digital divide.

With regard to the *Green Forest Jobs* concept, it should be in our common interest to emphasize that green jobs include jobs both for the protection and the use of forests for timber production. We are worried about tendencies in some European countries where foresters and forest workers are increasingly stigmatized as destroyers of nature.

To summarize, Youth representatives have elaborated a position paper that deserves support in many ways, especially with regard to its substantial request: the intergenerational dialogue. We look forward to meet some of you at our next SILVA Network Conference 2025 in Zvolen, Slovakia!

Thank you very much for your attention!