

## International Science Cooperation is Key for Research Excellence



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**Elfriede Moser** is Director-General for Forestry and Regions at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management. She holds a degree in Forestry and Wood Management from the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna. Around 50% of Austria's land area is forest, which equates to 4 million hectares. The Federal Ministry is the supreme regulatory agency for forests in Austria. Elfriede Moser is as Board member of IUFRO as Headquarters Host Country Representative.

**Dr. Georg Rappold** is Head of Department "Wood Policy, Bioeconomy and Innovation" of the Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management of the Republic of Austria. He started his professional career in 2001 as head of the secretariat "Austrian Forest Dialogue" in the Ministry. In this function he laid the foundation for an internationally recognized participatory policy formulation process - the Austrian Forest Dialogue. Georg Rappold holds an MBA (Public Management) from the University of Salzburg Business School (Austria) and a PhD (Natural Sciences) from the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (Vienna, Austria).



- *Ms. Moser*, Austria as the host country of IUFRO Headquarters since 1973 has been very supportive of international forest science cooperation. **Why is international science cooperation important?**

International science cooperation is key for research excellence - it enhances communication and collaboration across borders and sectors; it is crucial in fostering partnerships instead of redundancy and competition.

Austria has been a strong supporter of IUFRO for many years, as we believe in its mission and vision of bringing together researchers and therefore also countries from all around the globe.

- *Ms. Moser*, from an Austrian or Central European perspective, what are the most pressing issues of the time related to forests and **how do science and research contribute to solving them?**

*Climate change* for example – it is important to highlight forests as part of the solution as they are offering wood as a resource and store not only carbon but also water. Wood use and timber construction are essential factors in combating climate change.

*Human health* is another pressing issue and forests play an important role as areas of recreation! We all know the concept of “forest bathing” well, but also the effects of using wood in buildings on our health system are moving more and more into the focus of research interest.

*The biodiversity crisis* – forests are number one biodiversity hot spots and we are still discovering new species.

We are also facing challenges in the *worldwide economy* – forests provide goods and services; the timber-based sector in Europe employs about 17.5 million people!

*Research can contribute to all these challenges* by showing possible pathways of how to solve them and to communicate the positive effects of sustainably managed forests!

- *Mr. Rappold*, you have initiated a wood policy platform for Europe recently. **Why wood policy?**

The potential of wood as a renewable resource, of wood-based products, and the wood-based value chain to contribute to climate change mitigation and substitute fossil-based products is increasingly being recognized. A growing number of countries are working on strengthening the vital role of wood but coordination among administration, industry and research has been lacking. Against this background, the ‘European Wood Policy Platform’ (woodPoP) was initiated by Austria and Finland in 2021 to exchange best practices and actively shape wood policy in the Pan-European region.

- *Mr. Rappold*, how do you see the **role of science and research** in this context and what is needed from science **to support international forest and wood policy?**

Science has the task of increasing understanding and presenting possible solutions among policymakers about pressing issues such as the effects of climate change on our forests or the efficient use of wood as a contribution to climate protection. To this end, science must continue to work on presenting its findings and recommendations in an understandable way.

Collaboration between forest scientists, climate scientists, ecologists and other relevant disciplines can lead to more comprehensive and effective policy recommendations. However, it is also important to point out the limits of knowledge and scientific findings and to recognize the boundaries between scientific advice and political activism.