
Portugal: Petition to protest the “eucalyptization” of the country

This past September 21, to mark the International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations, the Portuguese environmental organizations Liga para a Protecção da Natureza (League for the Protection of Nature) and Quercus launched a petition against a proposed new regime for tree planting and replanting presented by the government.

The petition argues that a number of the problems faced by forests in Portugal – most of which are made up of small plots of privately owned land – result from the expansion of plantations of eucalyptus trees, an exotic tree species that is the most commonly used for monoculture plantations, primarily geared to pulp production.

Eucalyptus monoculture plantations have affected the natural forest ecosystem in Portugal through both the destruction of natural vegetation and the erosion that they have generated due to major alterations in soil composition and the water cycle.

According to figures from the National Forest Inventory, in 2005-2006, eucalyptus plantations occupied 740,000 hectares of land in the country. Since that time, the area of plantations has expanded with no controls. The authorities have adopted neither zoning regulations to minimize the loss of biodiversity nor effective measures to prevent forest fires.

In the meantime, situations have emerged in which fires, the low productivity of the plantations in mountainous areas and other factors have led eucalyptus plantation owners to abandon them, thereby increasing the risk of fire. These areas become permanently degraded as a result of the specific characteristics of eucalyptus and the difficulties in financing the reconversion of abandoned plantations on rural landholdings.

A proposal for the revision of the country's Forest Code presented by the government is aimed solely at changing and revoking the regulations for tree planting, which would allow for the establishment of eucalyptus plantations free of any limitations or conditions. Those who would benefit from this are the pulp industry and their eucalyptus suppliers, to the detriment of the public interest.

The participating organizations have called on the Portuguese public to sign a petition to express their opposition to this “eucalyptization” of the country. The petition can be accessed and signed at <http://www.peticaopublica.com/?pi=PCE2012> and <http://www.quercus.pt/scid/webquercus/defaultArticleViewOne.asp?categoryID=567&articleID=3938>

