

READING PASSAGE 3

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 27–40**, which are based on Reading Passage 3 below.



Forests are one of the main elements of our natural heritage. The decline of Europe's forests over the last decade and a half has led to an increasing awareness and understanding of the serious imbalances which threaten them. European countries are becoming increasingly concerned by major threats to European forests, threats which know no frontiers other than those of geography or climate: air pollution, soil deterioration, the increasing number of forest fires and sometimes even the mismanagement of our woodland and forest heritage. There has been a growing awareness of the need for countries to get

together to co-ordinate their policies. In December 1990, Strasbourg hosted the first Ministerial Conference on the protection of Europe's forests. The conference brought together 31 countries from both Western and Eastern Europe. The topics discussed included the co-ordinated study of the destruction of forests, as well as how to combat forest fires and the extension of European research programs on the forest ecosystem. The preparatory work for the conference had been undertaken at two meetings of experts. Their initial task was to decide which of the many forest problems of concern to Europe involved the largest number of countries and might be the subject of joint action. Those confined to particular geographical areas, such as countries bordering the Mediterranean or the Nordic countries therefore had to be discarded. However, this does not mean that in future they will be ignored.

As a whole, European countries see forests as performing a triple function: biological, economic and recreational. The first is to act as a 'green lung' for our planet; by means of photosynthesis, forests produce oxygen through the transformation of solar energy, thus fulfilling what for humans is the essential role of an immense, non-polluting power plant. At the same time, forests provide raw materials for human activities through their constantly renewed production of wood. Finally, they offer those condemned to spend five days a week in an urban environment an unrivalled area of freedom to unwind and take part in a range of leisure activities, such as hunting, riding and hiking. The economic importance of forests has been understood since the dawn of man – wood was the first fuel. The other aspects have been recognised only for a few centuries but they are becoming more and more important. Hence, there is a real concern throughout Europe about the damage to the forest environment which threatens these three basic roles.

The myth of the 'natural' forest has survived, yet there are effectively no remaining 'primary' forests in Europe. All European forests are artificial, having been adapted and exploited by man for thousands of years. This means that a forest policy is vital, that it must transcend national frontiers and generations of people, and that it must allow for the inevitable changes that take place in the forests, in needs, and hence in policy. The Strasbourg conference was one of the first events on such a scale to reach this conclusion. A general declaration was made that 'a central place in any ecologically coherent forest policy must be given to continuity over time and to the possible effects of unforeseen events, to ensure that the full potential of these forests is maintained'.