



Bratislava, 12 October 2016

## Joint Statement

### Working Group on the future direction of FOREST EUROPE

12-13 October 2016

The major public and private forest owners, managers, other land owners and the forest-based industries, represented by the Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF), European Farmers and European Agri-Cooperatives (COPA and COGECA), European Landowners' Organization (ELO), European State Forest Association (EUSTAfor), European Federation of Municipal Forest Owners (FECOF), Union of Foresters of Southern Europe (USSE), the Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI) and the European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois), welcome the setup of the Working Group on the future direction of FOREST EUROPE.

The Working Group provides us with a good occasion to highlight the achievements and the added value of FOREST EUROPE including the significance of this process as a platform for cooperation on forests in the pan-European region. In addition, this is a great opportunity to discuss on how FOREST EUROPE can better reflect the current and new challenges and how its working modalities can be adjusted to make this process more relevant and efficient.

Since 1990, in Strasbourg, when ministers responsible for forests gathered for the first time to share their concerns about the health of European forests and to seek for solutions and a European approach to improve it, FOREST EUROPE developed as an efficient platform for European countries and stakeholders to promote sustainable forest management (SFM) and to debate on emerging forest policy issues.

FOREST EUROPE achievements provide us with good evidence that this process has been useful. Today in Europe we have well-functioning forest monitoring systems and research programs, gene banks and advanced forest fire prevention systems. FOREST EUROPE succeeded in developing a genuine European contribution to the global forest agenda agreed at the UNCED Rio Summit in 1992.

Today Europe continues to benefit from having, since 1993, a well-defined concept of SFM and its main principles. Since then, SFM has been broadly incorporated in the national forest legislations and policies of all European countries, making them pioneers in implementing SFM on the ground. Subsequent endeavors gave birth to the pan-European criteria and indicators for SFM and the pan-European operational level guidelines (PEOLG) as well as

national forest programs. These are the practical policy tools for implementing SFM on the ground, which still remain valid and serve as a reference for today's policy developments.

Over the years, the FOREST EUROPE declarations and resolutions addressed emerging challenges and societal demands such as forestry in cross-sectoral cooperation and the economic viability of SFM, the protection of forest biodiversity, soils, and water sources as well as the use of forest biomass for bioenergy and other purposes. Last but not least, this process also succeeded in opening a completely new chapter on discussing a legally binding framework for Europe's forests.

However, further efforts are required to make the process and its outcomes more meaningful and translate them into concrete actions at national and European levels. Today's challenges regarding forests and the forest-based sector are more complex and demanding than ever. We therefore agree that this process needs to be adapted in order to be able to respond to current and emerging challenges and opportunities, such as climate change, bio- and circular economy, sustainable sourcing of bioenergy, as well as green capital and marketing of ecosystem services. We believe that making this crucial decision now to strengthen the FOREST EUROPE process will ensure and further develop the sustainable management of European forests and their multi-purpose use for the benefit of everyone. FOREST EUROPE should demonstrate leadership in this regard.

One of the biggest merits of the FOREST EUROPE process is its transparent and constructive participatory dialogue, which currently involves 46 European governments and the European Commission as well as numerous forest sector stakeholders and other international organizations. European forest owners and managers have always supported the process and have contributed with their highly valuable practical experience and knowledge, which come from the practical implementation of SFM. We appreciate the way of involvement and equitable co-determination of non-governmental organizations as observers. An open and transparent dialogue is the essential guiding principle of this process, ensuring that those who own and actually take care of the forest in Europe remain well involved in all future debates and decisions. In substance there is no alternative to FOREST EUROPE as a political process as long as a global or pan-European binding forest convention is missing. Until we achieve this, FOREST EUROPE should remain as a voluntary process.

To recapitulate, the European public and private forest owners, managers, other landowners and forest-based industries will fully support the work of the group on the future direction of FOREST EUROPE. Further strengthening of the current FOREST EUROPE process with a view to achieve its increased effectiveness and recognition at pan-European and global levels is an outcome we expect from this group. European forest owners, managers and industries are ready to contribute and take further responsibility towards the next stage of this important process.

CEPF – Confederation of European Forest Owners  
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