



Confederation of European Forest Owners

Madrid, 20 October 2015

CEPF Statement

on the 7th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference in Madrid, 20-21 October 2015 Roundtable 4: Future challenges and opportunities

The Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) expresses its gratitude for having the opportunity to share its views on the future challenges and opportunities of the European forest sector and the FOREST EUROPE process in particular.

CEPF, the European umbrella organisation of national forest owners organisations, is representing the interests of millions of private forest owners across Europe who are responsible for managing about 60% of Europe's forest area – people who have to deal with the consequences of executing several policies on the ground.

CEPF welcomes the 7th Ministerial Conference and the documents to be endorsed by the Ministers as a crucial step forward in today's rather complex and challenging context.

The European forest owners support and regard very highly the dialogue developed between government and stakeholder representatives under the FOREST EUROPE process over the past 25 years. FOREST EUROPE plays a key role in placing the views of the forest sector in the international policy arena. For the forest sector FOREST EUROPE serves as a strong reference as it significantly helps to better promote and further develop the concept of sustainable forest management (SFM) and multifunctional forestry.

We consider the common definition of SFM, the pan-European Criteria and Indicators for the monitoring, reporting and assessment of SFM, the Pan-European Operational Level Guidelines (which primarily served as the basis for PEFC forest certification), the further support and common framework for establishing National Forest Programmes, as well as the regular reporting on the state of Europe's forests as the milestones of this 25 years process.

SFM as a key concept for the forest sector is increasingly challenged. Europe's forest owners and the actors in and beyond the forest sector are confronted with a myriad of demands and challenges, as well as with an unprecedented complexity thereof. Against the backdrop of a growing interest in a bio- and circular economy, in climate mitigation and renewable energy, wood as a key renewable and climate friendly raw material is increasingly in demand. At the same time, however, this leads to further (partially even conflicting) demands for proofing sustainability and carbon neutrality as well as a balanced land use management with biodiversity well integrated. Consequently, a mutual understanding of and a trustful dialogue between various actors on SFM, both on the ground and at high political level, is more important than ever.

25 years ago, when FOREST EUROPE started, the European Union constituted 12 member states. Since then the geo-political context has changed significantly. Until today the EU has expanded to 28 member states. Their forests are recognised as a vast source of renewable biomass and multiple other high-value



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ecosystem services. However, the sustainable use and management of Europe's forests has gotten into the spotlight of various other sector policy processes, often driven and regulated directly or indirectly by concrete international and EU legislations. Considering this shift in scope and political weight, the role of the FOREST EUROPE process, and in particular its link to EU policies, needs to be revised.

CEPF fully supports a strong future FOREST EUROPE. Only an invigorated FOREST EUROPE based on a new ambitious vision can move forward with meaningful actions in response to the current and new opportunities and challenges.

FOREST EUROPE ought to better promote and politically strengthen the role and contributions of Europe's forest sector to a future bioeconomy. Generating, maintaining and enhancing green jobs and income, rural development, long-term economic viability and competitiveness of our sector in Europe require an active and sustainable management of our forests and a stronger promotion of the use of wood. This requires robust and supportive policy conditions. Therefore a strong and well-recognised FOREST EUROPE process as a key reference for our sector is needed.

Promoting and applying the pan-European criteria and indicators for SFM in all forest-related assessments should be at the core of FOREST EUROPE. Otherwise the forest sector is likely to risk losing its holistic approach and integrity on SFM, as multiple other policy sectors and industry-led initiatives (e.g. from the energy and chemical side) increasingly touch upon and have started to define forest sustainability from their particular perspective.

FOREST EUROPE needs to better interlink with and contribute to global level processes, not only towards UNFF and IAF, but in particular towards other leading processes such as UNFCCC, the CBD or UN commitments towards SDGs.

Well-known to us, the concept of sustainability has become a role-model far beyond the forest sector. Consequently, also FOREST EUROPE ought to have a much greater outreach to other leading sectors and businesses, helping to share and promote the views, experience and knowledge of the European forest sector. Regrettably, the environmental NGOs withdrew from the FOREST EUROPE process after the Oslo conference, followed by a reduced involvement by the forest industry partners shortly thereafter. Nevertheless, if FOREST EUROPE aims to be widely recognised and well accepted, a more open, inclusive and trustful dialogue between governments, governmental organisations and a wide range of key stakeholders is required.

CEPF welcomes to review the FOREST EUROPE process, especially considering its structure, procedures and work modalities, reflecting on the lessons learnt, making it more effective and meaningful for the future. In this context, CEPF strongly recommends also to assess the European institutional arrangement on forests in general, which also includes the set-up and work of FAO, UNECE and others.

Reinforcing its commitment, Europe's forest owners maintain their full political support and remain a constructive partner to FOREST EUROPE, encouraging the Signatories to lead this process to a more concrete and ambitious level. CEPF calls for a strengthened FOREST EUROPE to respond adequately to today's and tomorrow's challenges as well as opportunities for our sector, aiming to maintain and enhance a productive and sustainable forest management in Europe.