

Brussels, 18 June 2015

## Forest owners call for support for bioeconomy and ownership rights

**Bioeconomy and forest ownership rights were identified as two of the most important topics at the CEPF General Assembly 2015 held in Zagreb, Croatia, on 10-12 June. Private forest owners from 15 countries gathered to discuss EU action on how to further develop the European forest sector.**

The European forest owners see a great potential in the bioeconomy as a key concept to properly respond to jobs and growth as well as climate change mitigation by further promoting and investing into wood and wood-based products and industries, including bioenergy. While creating a European bioeconomy, it is of utmost importance to include and support private forest owners, as they play a decisive role in further mobilising wood as a sustainable and climate friendly raw material. In addition, they guarantee implementing nature and other relevant land-use policies and contribute to further developing rural areas. One of the strongest messages coming out of the CEPF GA was that the EU should create “more value and less regulation” when it comes to forestry, the rural sector and bioeconomy.

While visiting Croatian forest owners, CEPF members once more noticed that private forest ownership rights are not acknowledged to the full extent in all EU countries. Particularly in several Eastern European countries, which went through an intensive transition over the last two decades, private forest owners are still confronted with considerable restrictions when it comes to the use and management of their forest land. In addition, the European private forest owners still see several critical elements in the context of implementing Natura 2000, as private forest owners have been largely excluded in many regions in this process from the very beginning.

The CEPF President, **Hubert de Schorlemer**, underlined that EU policy-makers should bear in mind that the growing tendency to merge forestry into national environmental policies may lead to undesired market effects on an international level if the use of EU forests and timber gets further restricted. *“The demand for wood is increasing in countries such as China, and every cubic meter which is not produced in Europe will be replaced by timber produced e.g. the Amazonian and African forests, where sustainability is not always guaranteed.”* Mr. Schorlemer warned in his opening speech.

The annual report for 2014 was presented by the CEPF Secretary General, **Aljoscha Requardt**. CEPF has successfully contributed to various EU policy processes, including the new EU Forest Strategy, SFM criteria, ILUC and cascade use, Bioeconomy, and Natura 2000. The report shows the progress made in several lobbying activities and further depicts the increasing complexity of forest-related EU policies. *“The vast number of EU policies addressing forests and forestry directly, with often contradictory goals, pose a great challenge not only for the private forest owners but also entire European forest sector. A further strengthened CEPF and forest sector lobbying at EU level is needed”*, Aljoscha Requardt emphasised when concluding his annual report.

As a part of the formal procedures, the CEPF GA re-elected unanimously Mr. **Juha Marttila** (MTK, Finland) and Mr. **Felix Montecuccoli** (Land & Forst Betriebe Österreich, Austria) as Board members for the period



2015-2017. Furthermore, the GA welcomed Mr. **Michael Podstatzky-Lichtenstein** (SVOL, Czech Republic) and Mr. **Arnis Muižnieks** (MIB, Latvia) as new Board members. The CEPF President and the GA participants thanked Mr. **Josef Barton-Dobenin** (SVOL, Czech Republic) and Mr. **Algis Gaizutis** (FOAL, Lithuania), who both stepped-down from their Board positions, for their valuable contribution and commitment to CEPF during the last years.

The CEPF General Assembly was hosted by the Croatian Union of Private Forest Owners' Associations, which became a new member of CEPF in 2013. They presented an inspiring example of a young forest owners' organisation, really making a difference in the development of private forestry. For instance, in cooperation with the public administration, they succeeded to develop a strong rural development programme with several important forestry measures included, helping the private forest owners and Croatian forest sector to further develop over the next years.

At the end of the event, the GA participants visited the Slavonian oak forest close to Našice in the eastern part of Croatia. The excursion gave the participants a great opportunity to experience local Croatian forestry. *"The ground level should be well known when making decisions at EU level"*, the participants agreed before heading back to their home countries.

Before starting the internal meetings, CEPF members met with the research experts of the EU COST Action Facesmap, which studies the private forest ownership types, structures and changes from a social science perspective. For further information on Facesmap, please visit <http://facesmap.boku.ac.at/>.

CEPF very much thanks Mr. **Zdenko Bogovic** (the President of the Croatian Union of Private Forest Owners' Associations) and Mr. **Miljenko Županić** (the Secretary General of the Croatian Union of Private Forest Owners' Associations) for organising and hosting an excellent General Assembly in 2015.

For some pictures of the event, please refer to the following Dropbox-folder:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9c1e8tvxox7rnd1/AACl8xdKKUmcwnG0w3Drnu9Xa?oref=e>

Pictures with kind courtesy of Mr. Markus Brunner, Forestry Association of Switzerland.