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Position Paper

The new EU Forest Strategy

an important reference for a more coherent and coordinated approach to European forests

Against the background of significant societal and political changes over the last 15 years influencing the way EU society looks at forests and forestry, the European Commission published a Communication titled "*A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector*" on 20 September 2013 (COM 2013/ 659).

The **Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF)** highly welcomes the Commission communication as an important reference for a more coherent and coordinated approach to European forests.

Although the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU provides no reference to a common EU forest policy, an increasing number of sectorial policies and associated rules, including environmental, climate, energy, trade or market, lead to the development of a de-factor EU forest policy. These are, however, often inconsistent or even contradicting, as for instance the aim to increase the mobilisation of wood and to introduce wilderness. European forest owners are directly affected by the increasing number of other sectorial policy requirements.

The new EU Forest Strategy (EUFS) provides a holistic framework to all elements of forests and sustainable forest management (SFM), including socio-economic and environmental aspects. It aims to balance the increasing sector specific requests and targets on European forests, as well as to better enforce the different policies. CEPF fully supports the proposed guiding principles as well as the 2020 forest objectives. CEPF appreciates that the concept of SFM, as defined under the MCPFE/ Forest Europe process, which is clearly emphasised and acknowledged as the concept of the European forest sector.

However, the new EUFS will be only effective if properly implemented and recognised as a key reference. The EU policy implementation yet lies with the Member States. The concrete decision-making and management of forests on the ground is and should always remain the responsibility of forest owners. This fundamental principle should be further enforced, also in the new EU Forest Strategy.

Although CEPF considers the Commission's communication for the new EU Forest Strategy as positive, there are a few aspects requiring further consideration, including the call for EU criteria for all biomass, the ideas to enforce the cascading use of wood, or the enforced consideration of nature conservation aspects in forest management plans.

The European forest owners regard the competitiveness of the EU forest sector and the increased mobilisation and use of wood as renewable raw material as extremely important. Forests contribute significantly to the vitality and well-being of rural areas. Only a competitive and economically viable forest sector is able to fulfil its multifunctional role. The economic prosperity of the forest sector is a prerequisite for a sustainable development of the environmental and social functions and services provided by forests.

Though these aspects are partly addressed in the new EUFS, CEPF underlines the need to ensure also the full implementation of those targets and measures – in particular growth, employment, competitiveness and mobilisation and use of wood – which are not or rather marginally covered and supported by any other EU legislations.



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CEPF supports the Commissions aim to improve forest policy coherence and coordination, and with this also forest governance as well as overall quality of discussions at EU-level. However, the improvement of forest policy governance should not be limited to an increased number of meetings and improved cooperation between different parties, but should include the evaluation of relevant policies.

The EUFS should be the best relevant document to strengthen the existing advisory bodies, such as the Standing Forestry Committee and Civil Dialogue Group on Forestry and Cork, towards the Commission. It should clearly define their objectives and influence the institutional setup for forest-related issues within the Commission. Key towards forest policy coherence and broader acceptance is, *inter alia*, the early participation of forest owners in the policy formulation processes and evaluation in Commission and Council expert groups.

The Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) is the umbrella association of national forest owner organisations in Europe. Representing family forestry in Europe, CEPF promotes the values of sustainable forest management, private property ownership and the economic viability of the forest sector. Based in Brussels, CEPF is a non-profit organisation, representing nearly 16 million forest owners. These are private individuals, families and cooperatives, which take care of approximately 60% of the European forest area.

For further information please visit: <http://www.cepf-eu.org/>