

Major group “Forest owners”

CEPF (Confederation of European Forest Owners)

COPA-COCEGA (European farmers and European agri-cooperatives)

ELO (European Landowners’ Organization)

FECOF (European Federation of Municipal Forest Owners)

EUSTAFOR (European State Forest Association)

USSE (Union of Foresters of Southern Europe)

Forest owners are strongly in favour of a legally binding forest agreement

Distinguished Madam Chair, Ministers, Excellencies, Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

I have the honour and pleasure of taking the floor here today on behalf of the major group representing public, private and community forest owners, families, producers and landowners - all those who are involved in the practical side of what forests provide for society.

This conference is the culmination of years of work and cooperation between those who share the same values and dedication to sustainable management of forests in Europe. And we, the European forest owners, are amongst these. We are very pleased to see that the Forest Europe process has once again been at the forefront in ensuring that the open dialogue on sustainable forest management continues to move forward; we are grateful to be an integral part of this process. We also look forward to continuing our role in managing forest resources in the future.

The Forest Europe process has, for more than 20 years, been instrumental in fine-tuning the best ways of balancing the ecological, economic and social benefits provided by forests. Thanks to this, a number of practices and guidelines on sustainable forest management are in use today, carried out by the national forest services, forest communities and the private sector alike. The accomplishments achieved by all these are considerable, as we have learnt from the report on the State of Europe’s forests.

However neither the explicit achievements reflected by the positive state of Europe’s forests, nor the concept of sustainable forest management as such, have been recognised in the political sphere or by society at large. And this, I believe, is why we are here today; we need to ensure coherent, stable and effective policy development in order to maintain the vitality and multi-functionality of forests, as well as to address emerging challenges.

And today’s challenges are more complex than ever. Climate change and globalisation exert pressure on natural resources around the world. Both issues encompass a variety of ecological, social, economic, as well as political, aspects in relation to forests. We need a stronger voice and better tools to convince society and policy makers that forests are a part of the solution to these issues.

Thus, we welcome the ongoing and persistent work that Forest Europe has been doing on a legally-binding agreement. It seems to be the best way to strengthen political commitment, implementation, as well as further development of sustainable forest management.

Our experience and daily practices in forestry have taught us to look ahead and consider the needs for the future. Naturally, this aligns the forest owners with the proposed vision and goals for European Forests in 2020, when vital, productive and multifunctional forests contribute effectively to sustainable development.

Forest growth is based on a long time scale. Thus looking towards the European 2020 targets, we strongly believe that our contribution to the accomplishment of these already began many years ago. All the issues listed in the Oslo Ministerial Decision are relevant to our practices. Innovation,

improved education and information sharing, prevention of natural disasters as well as the valuation of ecosystem services, to name just a few, are of special interest to the forest owners. We look forward to continuing work on these and will support the efforts of Forest Europe to consolidate current and future developments.

As already mentioned, the European forest owners are committed to continuing the implementation of sustainable forest management at the practical level. Therefore, we call upon national governments, the European Commission and all other actors behind this process to step forward and to ensure the development of an holistic, legally-binding agreement for forests at the pan-European level.

We all know how difficult it is to ensure coherence between various sectorial policies and processes relevant to forests and forestry today. An instrument providing a legal framework for better coordination and cooperation both within and outside of the forest sector is what is lacking.

At the same time, we believe that taking this crucial step now ensures the continuation of the multiple use of forests, achieving a balance between all three aspects of sustainability. This is necessary in order to reach common acceptance and recognition of this viable concept, both among citizens and decision-makers. It is important to enhance the role of forests as a renewable natural resource, a provider of various ecosystem services as well as the prerequisites for human well-being, such as employment and livelihoods.

Underlining the need for further elaboration on this, we want to stress that such a process should be led with respect to the competence of the signatory states as well as the ownership rights. As we, the forest owners, are the major actors in putting policies into practice, we also call upon to ensure credible and powerful representation of all forest owner groups in the negotiations. It is essential that we have an opportunity to influence and contribute to the development of such an agreement.

To recap, the European forest owners not only fully support the ongoing initiative towards a legally-binding agreement but also wish to see that Forest Europe remains the leading pan-European forest policy process. We believe that the whole of the forest sector would benefit from upgrading the achievements of Forest Europe to a legally binding instrument. Taking the step forward to political recognition and further, the integration of sustainability principles into other policies, is in fact the bridge that needs to be built.

European forest owners are ready to assume their responsibility in strengthening these joint commitments. We need to provide solutions to satisfy the increasing demands for wood as well as for bio-energy production. Fortunately the long history of sustainable forest management forms a solid basis in addressing climate change and the protection of biodiversity. It also offers a response to the current needs for transition to a green economy. We hope that the outcome of this conference will provide the chance of finding solutions for the present environmental and economic challenges, even more effectively.

The year 2011 is special for forestry as we are celebrating the International Year of Forests. We sincerely hope that it will become special also due to the historic decision on the launch of negotiations leading to a legally-binding agreement on forests in Europe. We forest owners are proud to be a part of this founding moment. We look towards this with hope, but also in readiness to carry out its implementation on a day to day basis.

I thank you for your attention.