

## **EUSTAFOR Statement on The New EU Forest Strategy**

This paper presents the views of the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR) – with 28 members - on the new EU Forest Strategy (FS) published by the European Commission on 20 September 2013.

The objective of the FS is to provide a coherent coordination framework for forests and the forest-based sector in relation to other relevant policies in the EU, such as rural development, climate change, renewable energy, biodiversity, resource efficiency, bio-based economy, etc. The strategy has been built around the concept of sustainable forest management (SFM) and the principle of subsidiarity. In order to fulfill its role, the FS should provide a response to the increasing demands on forests and the entire forest-based sector, which result from significant societal and political challenges over recent years. Those challenges have been formulated into policy objectives and targets of multiple EU legislative and policy documents, such as Europe 2020, Biodiversity Strategy 2020, climate and energy 2020 targets or the Bio-Economy Strategy towards 2050. A “Blueprint for the EU Forest-Based Industries” that accompanies the strategy proves consistency with the downstream industries by addressing the EU's wood-processing and related industries and the challenges they face such as increasing global competition, SMEs, raw material supplies, environment, renewable energy and climate policy targets, educational needs, logistics and an aging workforce.

### **Guiding Principles**

EUSTAFOR positively recognizes the principles that guide the new FS:

- SFM and multipurpose forestry as defined by the Forest Europe process;
- Resource efficiency that ensures responsible use of forest resources and their contribution to the development of rural and urban communities, economic growth and sustainable employment;
- Global forest responsibility to be achieved through adequate promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Furthermore, the EU principle of subsidiarity and shared responsibility that has been guiding the EU approach to forest-related policies since 1998 should also remain the leading principle in the framework of the new FS.

### **Future Actions**

The new FS can only be effective if the concrete actions on how to reach its objectives are properly formulated, programmed (by measures and resources), implemented and reported. Moreover, these actions ought to be recognized

as a key reference by Member States, EU institutions and by key stakeholders in their follow-up activities. The new strategy encompasses eight priority areas further clarified and developed by the strategic orientations that are foreseen to enable implementation of relevant actions. Their implementation should be planned for the long-term and enable sufficient participation of Member States and stakeholders since at this stage the strategy does not include any action plan for its implementation. The latter was also a weakness of the previous Forestry Strategy of 1998 as the Action Plan followed it only 8 years after its adoption.

### Priority Topics

EUSTAFOR considers it important to comment on the following priority areas of the strategy:

#### ▪ **Supporting rural and urban communities**

The state forest owners and managers acknowledge the significant contribution from the EU **rural development** policy to improve the competitiveness of the EU forest sector and to enhance the sustained provision of forest ecosystem services to rural and urban communities. A vital and economically viable forest sector needs to be recognized as a provider of opportunities to neighboring communities. Forests should - now and in the future - be a source of income and employment as well as providers of non-marketed goods and services to rural and urban communities. A well-qualified and safe workforce is an indispensable element of this system. The strategy, therefore, should allow for better coordination between the Commission and Member States as regards promoting and supporting forestry measures through adequate programming of rural development at both national and regional levels, including payments for ecosystem services, the development of SMEs and the restoration of forest potential damaged due to biotic and non-biotic agents. The increasing environmental measures affecting timber production should be designed in a way to avoid unnecessary administrative and management costs.

#### ▪ **Sustainable timber is a resource for European forest-based industries**

Promotion of wood as a natural, renewable, reusable and recyclable raw material for the European wood-based industry should remain a top priority, with a view to contributing to the EU's climate and energy targets as well as to the wider green economy. Woody biomass derived from sustainably managed forests plays a crucial role in reaching the EU's renewable energy targets in 2020.

Over the last two decades Member States have developed effective policy instruments at national and sub-national levels that ensure the application of SFM and safeguard sustained levels of forest use. Any additional measures, such as **EU sustainability criteria** to ensure the sustainability of forest management,

including sustainable forest biomass for multiple uses, should only be developed at the EU level if they encompass Member States' multipurpose forest management and remain consistent with relevant definitions, principles, tools and schemes developed by Forest Europe. Such criteria should also respect the present division of competences between the EU and its Member States as regards forests and their sustainable management. Their impact on domestic timber production and marketing should also be assessed, including on the management costs of timber producers.

#### ▪ **Cascading use of wood**

Forestry and forest management remain subject to open market rules. As timber producers, State Forest Management Organizations (SFMOs) are the primary market operators. They must constantly deal with changing market conditions in the face of existing limits of forest ecosystems or the legal provisions for primary timber production. EUSTAFOR supports the overall principle of resource efficiency promoted by the EU, among others in the Roadmap towards a resource-efficient Europe, which could be a vehicle to increase the provision of high value-added forest products that in return could broaden and enhance an economically viable European forest sector. At the same time, however, EUSTAFOR does not support actions towards developing the principle of the **cascading use of wood** in a way which could negatively influence the EU timber market. New and binding administrative restrictions or incentives could only result in an undesirable impact on the already difficult wood market in the EU.

#### ▪ **EU forest governance**

EU forests and the forest-based sector need to remain integrated in the EU policy agenda. To ensure good governance the sector needs support from strong and effective policy instruments with clear objectives and targets in addition to well-designed actions to implement them. In the absence of a common forest policy, the FS remains the only instrument to provide a reference for other sectors whilst addressing forests and their sustainable management. The new strategy ought to install an efficient procedure for the consultation of policy impacts on forests and the wood-processing sector. It should also enable efficient co-ordination and communication both within and outside of the sector by, *inter alia*, strengthening and better defining the roles of different bodies of the EU forestry setup, such as the Standing Forestry Committee (SFC) and the Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork (AGFC), as advisory bodies to the Commission, as well as by improving internal co-ordination among relevant services inside the Commission. A regular reporting on the implementation of the strategy to the Council and the European Parliament would also be useful.

▪ **International context**

The FS should be a means of implementing the provisions of multilateral global and regional agreements, relevant to forests and forest management, of which the EU and its Member States are parties. The strategy should also enable effective elaboration of a coordinated input of EU forest-related policies at the international level. Particularly, proper links should be established with the future Legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe, currently under negotiation.

This statement is a contribution by European state forests to the current discussion on the Forest Strategy for the EU, which is ongoing in the Council, the European Parliament and other EU institutions as well as among relevant stakeholders.

*EUSTAFOR's 28 members (state forest organizations managing state forests) represent around 30% of the EU forest area. They are committed to sustainable forest management and work with the existing forest certification schemes. The total harvest of EUSTAFOR members reaches approximately 115 m3 per annum and together they employ more than 100,000 individuals.*

For further information please contact the EUSTAFOR office ([office@eustafor.eu](mailto:office@eustafor.eu)) or consult our website at [www.eustafor.eu](http://www.eustafor.eu).

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