



SUMMARY REPORT

“Greater political will and integration of Member States will make the difference”

MEP Gaston Franco, Chair of the “Forestry” Working Group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development”

On 21 January 2014, **Gaston Franco MEP** hosted a conference in the European Parliament entitled ***“A New EU Forest Strategy: Ensuring sustainable forest management for socio-economic and environmental services”***, following the recent Commission communication in September 2013 (COM[2013] 659 final). This conference offered an opportunity for the leading Commission DGs co-responsible for the strategy to meet with the stakeholders and exchange on some preliminary thoughts, as the services of the European Parliament have decided to wait until after the elections to allow an initiative report to be led by the AGRI Committee. The conference was divided into three sessions presenting some of the views of the diverse forest sector, while also covering environmental, industrial and international aspects of the strategy.

“European forests are rich in terms of biodiversity” said MEP Gaston Franco *“but are increasingly under pressure, mainly due to climate change. It is the duty of Europe to preserve and value this potential.”* **MEP Gaston Franco** positively noted that this issue attracted the attention of an important amount of policy-makers and stakeholders. Indeed, among the 90 or so participants, three Commission DGs (AGRI, ENV and ENTR), several political advisors and policy departments of the European Parliament and several Member States were represented among other eminent representatives from the forest sector, the private sector and NGOs. The Greek Presidency represented by **Dr. Argyro Zerva** of the Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Climate Change, highlighted the need to maintain key environmental and socio-economic services of forests in Europe and welcomed the new strategy as being a holistic, coherent and integrated documented. She reiterated the current EU Presidency’s wish to have this dossier finalised by July 2014, mentioning that discussions on the draft text of the Council’s conclusions have already started.

María Gafo Gómez-Zamalloa (DG AGRI) argued that the new strategy sought to respond to recent societal developments and can contribute to put forests at the heart of the European agenda. Covering 40% of European land, forests are key ecosystems as well as a source of wealth and jobs in rural areas if they are managed in a proper way. Sustainable forest management is a key pillar of rural development and it is one of the principles of the new forest strategy. The strategy was said not to consider anymore forests as isolated entities, but instead to link forests in a holistic way with other priority areas and policies, such as rural development, environment protection, climate change, energy, etc. The new strategy was generally positively welcomed by the stakeholders being seen as providing the possibility to increase visibility of forest-based industries, among others, in the next Parliamentary term. **Aljoscha Requardt (CEPF)** sees the





strategy as helping to improve coherence and coordination of several sectoral policies, especially since the forestry sector seems to be increasingly losing political ground in his view. On the other hand, CEPF, COPA-COGECA, EUSTAFOR and AEBIOM expressed concerns about the Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) criteria and the practical implementation of the cascade-use principle asking what goals are to be achieved and how these would be measured. **Pascal Viné (EUSTAFOR)** stressed that forests are a source of activity and argued that no additional burden should be put on the shoulders of forest managers. In his opinion, forest resources should be prioritised for the industry, with a view to contributing to the EU's climate and energy targets as well as to the wider green economy. He added that governance could be improved if all the decision-making bodies were aware and informed of the situation and called for better coordination between the Commission and the Member States. Concluding the first session, **Christian Pinaudeau (USSE)** decried a regression of the forestry file at the political level and criticised the weak political value of the new strategy, since it has no legal basis: *"We have a mere declaration that offers little change since 1998,"* he said. Nevertheless, he expressed support for it hoping that the dossier will not fade away after the upcoming elections, since opposition to its implementation arose from several actors. He called for strong political commitment in the European Parliament to bring this issue forward.

In the second session, **Pia Bucella (DG ENV)** thanked MEP Franco for his continued commitment to ensure that the right balance is struck between environmental concerns and other concerns of European citizens. She regretted that forests are not on the radar screen of European politicians although almost half of the European area is made of forests: *"We need to do something about this heritage or we will miss one of our main goals,"* she said and called for policies that are more consistent with what Europe is preaching in third countries. Finally, Mrs. Bucella acknowledged with disappointment the opposition of some stakeholders to any regulatory measures in this field in view of sustainable management of forests. **Marijan Kavran (Croatian Wood Cluster)** argued that this new strategy represents a big potential for the Croatian forest sector. He called for greater cooperation on technological innovation, raw materials mobilization and illegal logging among EU Member States and with neighbouring third countries, and for enhanced exchange of good practices between Northern and Southern EU countries. Finally, **Jean-Marc Jossart (AEBIOM)** recalled that biomass reduces CO₂ emissions significantly and that the carbon-cycle is neutral for sustainable biomass in the long run when the forest is considered in its whole – although this last argument has been at the centre of a polemic that is, according to him, laying on a false debate because of often wrong assumptions not corresponding to the reality of the bio-energy business. Mr. Jossart welcomed the attempt for the harmonisation of an EU sustainability framework, which is needed to bring credibility for the bio-energy sector, he said. He argued that it makes sense to have criteria independent of the end use of forest. About cascading the Commission should not impose/forbid to the industry the use of certain products and not others. One consequence will be to raise administrative barriers to bio-energy market players for instance. He called for the creation of proportional and stable criteria, without which investors will not play their part.





Stressing the importance of improving competitiveness of European industries, **Flor Diaz Pulido (DG ENTR)** presented the Blueprint on EU forest industries. It aims at creating growth and jobs through boosting internal and international demand for forest-based products, secure supply of raw materials, and ensures a coherent regulatory framework and fair level playing field. In this regard, she informed that the sectoral strategy foresees launching a cumulative cost assessment (CCA) for forest-based industries, developing a guidance on cascading principle as well as an action for increased wood mobilization. In addition, Mrs. Diaz also put the accent on the need to invest in education and R&I, where the EU funds such as Horizon 2020, COSME and ESF can play an important role. **Philip Buisseret (CEI-bois)** welcomed the strategy's aim at increasing the demand for wood products and at promoting a more efficient use of wood (including through better recycling), which provides a good economic outlook of the sector. Mr. Buisseret showed that demand for wood for bio-energy purposes is growing; he warned about a potential gap of production and supply of wood in the market in the future, as there is increasing demand for wood for bio-energy use, which will be far greater than demand for food in 2050 (projected). Lastly, **Pekka Pesonen (Copa-Cogeca)** also showed support for the need to have a coherent framework in this domain and called for Member States to use the tools that are already available, such as the second pillar of the CAP and rural development funding. Like several speakers before him, he also believes that the cascade principle should not be legally-binding but should instead take into account specific situations. He argued that competitiveness will trigger sustainability, which will allow investments in research and promote knowledge-sharing.

To conclude the conference, MEP Gaston Franco proposed to organise a de-briefing session before the end of the parliamentary term in order to assess the achievements of the forest sector in this field and prepare a roadmap for the next mandate.

Contact: Paolo Mattana (EBCD), Secretariat of the Intergroup, paolo.mattana@ebcd.org, +32 2 230 30 70

