



Register of Interest representatives registration number 2736429262-21

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CEI-Bois contribution to the “Commission working document – Consultation on the future “EU 2020” strategy”, COM(2009)647 final.

The European Confederation of Woodworking Industries, CEI-Bois, acknowledges the intention of the European Commission to adopt a formal Communication in Spring 2010 to deal with the major challenges faced by Europe at the present time and to determine the policy as a follow-up to the current Lisbon strategy.

The working document released to this aim rightly refers to the need for partnership. CEI-Bois considers that well co-ordinated approaches are required, with uniform actions at European, national and local level, rather than a plenitude of different initiatives likely to lack the right focus.

The effects of the financial and economic crisis will need to be addressed with urgency. In this context it is important that, whatever measures are taken or support given, these ensure a level playing field for all economic actors and do not lead to distortions of competition between countries, sectors or even within sectors.

CEI-Bois can largely subscribe to the key drivers of EU 2020 put forward in the consultation paper, in particular the first “creating value by basing growth on knowledge” and third “creating a competitive, connected and greener economy”.

The future of woodworking in Europe will depend strongly upon the ability of the sector to innovate and attract skilled workers for its operations. With the creation of technology platforms in advance of the 7th EU framework programme, such as the one for the forest-based sector, the EU could already adjust its priorities to those of industry. More efforts are, however, required, in particular regarding the involvement of SMEs, which make up the majority of woodworking companies in Europe (>75%). Though welcoming the installation of major public-private partnerships in the field of research, CEI-Bois is concerned that these do not provide the right forum for SMEs.

We furthermore consider that the impact of the digitalisation of society and economy is somewhat overrated. Europe has to maintain a basic production basis in order to ensure that other sectors can flourish and develop.

It is evident that the woodworking industries see themselves in the centre of the creation of a competitive, connected and greener economy. They use man’s only naturally renewable and sustainably produced material: wood, and play a key role in the development of new, greener technologies e.g. for wood products, bio-energy and biofuels.

Through an increased use of wood products, the pressure on non renewable and energy intensive resources can be reduced, allowing Europe to better comply with its commitments in the fight against climate change.

Caution should be taken, however, when looking at the issue of low carbon or carbon neutral energy. Presently, EU member states strongly focus on biomass to achieve the targets imposed by Europe. These should, however, not lead to negative impacts on the raw material supply to industry in order to safeguard competitive operations. The EU and Member States should carefully monitor possible negative side-effects of an over-emphasis on renewable energy sources, and wood in particular. The sector should be involved at all stages of the decision-making process.

A topic hardly addressed in the consultation paper is the issue of climate change. Considering that the COP15 conference in Copenhagen has unfortunately not come up with a clear answer nor agreement, the EU will need to maintain putting focus on this global issue, and speed up its efforts to have harvested wood products recognised as part of the solution in further discussions.

CEI-Bois suggests that, when further defining its EU 2020 strategy, the European Commission would duly consider the recommendations and action plan proposals included in its “Communication on competitive and sustainable forest-based industries in the EU” as issued in February 2008 already. These proposals match with the overall intentions of the EU consultation paper and translate the political goals into tangible actions. Their realisation would certainly bring the required support to woodworking in Europe.

Concluding this contribution CEI-Bois takes the opportunity to highlight some of the requests it made in the “CEI-Bois Memorandum to the European Institutions”, released and submitted to the European Institutions late 2009:

Prior to new or revised regulations or measures being introduced, authorities should carry out impact assessments to make sure no additional unwarranted burden is placed on companies.

With regard to climate change authorities are requested to:

- Recognise harvested wood products as carbon stores in a post 2012 Kyoto agreement
- Promote an increase in the use of wood and wood-based products
- Promote the substitution of non-renewable materials by wood and wood-based products
- Create innovative applications, opening up new markets
- Research new products and materials from wood raw material

The Commission services should prioritise the implementation of the action plan included in its “Communication on innovative and sustainable forest-based industries in the EU”, as announced at the meeting of the Advisory Committee on Forestry and Forestry-Based Industries on 23 April 2009.

On the promotion of renewable energy sources and biomass:

- Member States should evaluate in their national RES action plans the amount of woody biomass that is nationally/regionally available and to what extent the woodworking industry already uses it as a raw material before implementing measures to promote the use of renewable energy sources;
- Subsidies in the field of renewable energy, in particular for burning wood, are to be avoided since they have a severe impact on market mechanisms for wood raw material and strongly disadvantage traditional users, providing no net environmental benefit whatsoever;
- The recycling of biomass, particularly timber, should always take precedence over its use for energy production;
- Measures for increased wood mobilisation are to be promoted based on the report from the Standing Committee on Forestry on wood mobilisation.

Continued support from the EU for the goals set by the Forest-based sector technology platform is to be ensured, as this work may promote the use of wood and wood products and contribute strongly to fighting climate change. Strategic priority areas identified by industry are to be considered in future support programmes.

Concerning access to wood raw materials, CEI-Bois requests the following:

- Ensure access to primary wood raw materials by combating trade restrictions that seriously undermine the competitiveness of the woodworking industry, and to continue opposing Russian export taxes;
- Take measures to avoid trade barriers and ensure access to wood raw materials on world markets in undistorted conditions;
- Carefully consider the possible impact of EU forest protection plans on future wood availability.

CEI-Bois finally wants to emphasize that it strongly supports the concept of a European internal market.

Brussels, 2010-01-14.

(signed)

Filip De Jaeger
Secretary General