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## **FINAL MINUTES**

### ***Joint Meeting of the Civil Dialogue Group Forestry and Cork and of the Standing Forestry Committee***

***Date: 05/12/2017***

Chair: Mr Budil and Mr Poinelli

All Member States present except DK, EL, LT, LU, MT, RO and UK.

All Organisations were present, except EEB and EFFAT.

#### **1. Approval of the agenda (and of the minutes of previous meeting<sup>1</sup>)**

**The Chair** of CDG FC welcomed the participants to the meeting and introduced the agenda of the day. **The Commission** asked for the approval of the agenda, which was approved.

#### **2. Nature of the meeting**

The meeting was non-public.

#### **3. List of points discussed**

**The Commission** informed the participants of the meeting about the joint hearing of the European Parliament AGRI, ITRE and ENVI Committees on the EU Forest Strategy that was held on 4 December 2017. The Commission noted that the hearing and the joint meeting of SFC and CDG FC would give an input for the review process of the EU Forest Strategy.

The Commission introduced the questionnaire that was sent to the participants prior the meeting. It was underlined that the questionnaire was intended only for the purpose of sparking discussion in the meeting and the views expressed would be anonymous and would furthermore not be considered to reflect opinions of Member States or organisations or to be seen as a statistical outcome.

Moreover, the Commission presented the process of the review of the EU Forest Strategy. It said that currently the Commission is finalising the evaluation of the

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<sup>1</sup> If not adopted by written procedure (CIRCABC)

contractor candidates to undertake the review study. The study will help forming the knowledge base for the review that will be presented as a Commission Staff Working Document. The Commission estimates that the duration of the study would be approximately take from 8 to 9 months.

**a. Stocktaking the implementation so far**

The participants of the meeting were introduced to the electronic software with which the questionnaire was electronically conducted. The participants answered the first two questions and then a discussion on the stocktaking of the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy was opened.

78% of the participants considered that the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy has been somewhat successful whereas 10% answered that they do not know, 10% answered that the implementation has not been successful at all and 2% considered that it has been very successful.

Regarding the eight priority areas in the Strategy, 30% of the participants considered that the most progress has been made in *supporting rural and urban communities*. 18% of the participants answered that *protecting forests and enhancing ecosystem services* has been an area where the most progress has been made. 13% of the participants chose *new and innovative forestry and added-value products* as the main progress area. Two areas, namely *fostering the competitiveness and sustainability of the EU's Forest-based Industries, bioenergy and wider green economy* and *forests from a global perspective*, were selected by 11% of the participants respectively. 7% of the participants considered that the most progress has been made in the area of *working together to coherently manage and better understand our forests* and 7% thought that the most progress has been made in the area of *forests in a climate change*. 4% answered that the most progress has been made in improving knowledge base on *what forests do we have and how they are changing*.

**COPA** informed the participants that they were happy when the Strategy was launched as it represents balanced views on forests and forestry. However, they saw a lack in implementation and how it is used in policy making, such as when working with the Commission proposals on e.g. the Land Use Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation and the recast of the Renewable Energy Directive (REDII). They stressed that the Strategy should be better implemented and special attention should be drawn to policy coherence and actions.

**CEPI** was surprised that among SFC and CDG FC experts, 10% could not answer the first question. CEPI also pointed out that it is difficult to draw conclusions if some of the legislative proposals look as they do due to a specific strategy. In fact, there are so many other developments that might have played an even bigger role.

**Finland** said that they support the Strategy and when looking at the long list of actions, many of them have been carried out. However, the representative noted that the Strategy should have brought systematically forestry expertise to the Commission and in this area there is a need for an improvement.

**Spain** questioned the result of the first question although the Strategy includes many positive points. It said that the Strategy is not complete nor ambitious enough regarding nature conservation. It underlined the need of national action plans and said that the Strategy should be more binding if further progress and impact is required.

**France** noted that the Strategy is very well written and its existence is vital to ensure policy coherence. It highlighted the importance of the Strategy and explained how it has helped France in developing their own national program for the next ten years. The program had been presented in the meeting of SFC in June. In addition, the representative said that they have established a working group with different stakeholders and considered their input of utmost importance.

**Portugal** said that the strategy is a balanced one but questioned if it is recognised outside the sector. The representative called for a discussion on SFM criteria and indicators and stressed that already existing tools of SFM should be better acknowledged by others.

**Germany** thanked the organisers of the meeting for the opportunity to have a joint meeting with CDG FC. The representative spoke about the importance of the Strategy as a political instrument and remarked that there have been different views, but as the Strategy was updated in 2013 there was a consensus of its relevance for the sector. Germany also asked how to better link the Strategy with other EU strategies namely the Biodiversity Strategy and the Bioeconomy Strategy. It should also be analysed what is the impact of these other Strategies for the development of the sector. It was stressed that the Biodiversity Strategy is the only strategy with tangible measures. In addition, Germany asked about the state of play in and the role of EU forest governance. Finally, it mentioned that Member States should work more closely together and a new network could be put in place in order to improve the situation.

**CEPF** reminded the participants that the 1998 Strategy was made as Finland, Sweden and Austria joined the Union and there was a clear need to improve cooperation in common markets. Priorities were set after two years of its adaptation and this work was done in the Commission in cooperation with the sector. It was noted that the impact of the Strategy on other sectors is not as strong as the impact of e.g. Biodiversity Strategy.

**COPA** spoke about the outcome of the electronic vote and noted that the experts in the group are at the drivers' seat when it comes to improvement of the Strategy. It stressed the importance of forest owners, coherence and consistence. It also referred to the changed political environment with updated SDGs and the Paris Agreement which should be taken into account in the implementation of the Strategy. It also wished that the Commission and Member States would make the most of developing the Strategy further.

**Sweden** talked about the evaluation and said that the detailed analysis on how the implementation has been conducted so far is crucial. All actions should be analysed and their impact on initiatives, such as solid biomass sustainability criteria, should be addressed. Sweden highlighted the importance of the priority area on coordination and noted that changes after the launch of the new EU Forest Strategy in 2013 should be identified.

**WWF** said that the result of the first question does not reflect the current discussion and indicated that, when looking at the current Strategy, one should be more critical. It noted that the sector should not only look at what they have gained from the Strategy but should also seek new opportunities by learning from others. In the context of SDGs and the Paris Agreement we should not consider us as a separate group from others. Furthermore, when talking about the future Forest Strategy, we should assess if there is a common goal that we all would like to achieve.

**CEPF** continued by asking if the forest sector is a strategic sector in Europe. In addition, it called for more cooperation and coherence in order to raise the importance of forestry in Europe.

**COPA** agreed with Sweden that a detailed analysis of the implementation of the actions is needed.

#### **b. Ideas on priorities for the future**

The participants answered the last two questions and then a discussion was opened.

47% of the participants of the group considered that the least progress has been made in the priority area on *working together to coherently manage and better understand our forests*. 12% thought that the least progress has been made in *supporting our rural and urban communities*. 10% thought that least progress has been made in *fostering the competitiveness and sustainability of the EU's Forest-based Industries, bioenergy and wider green economy*. 9% chose *new and innovative forestry and added value products*. 7% respectively chose *forests in a changing climate* and *protecting forests and enhancing ecosystem services*. 5% chose *forest from a global perspective* and 3% chose *what forests do we have and how are they changing* as the areas where least progress has been made.

**WWF** reminded the participants that the results of the questionnaire should only be seen as a tool for the discussion and should not have an impact on the process of the review.

**EUSTAFOR** reiterated the need for coherence and consistency and stressed the importance of the Strategy as a catalyst for Member States to develop their own strategies and programs. EUSTAFOR asked how to use the Strategy to increase the holistic understanding of forests. As an example it raised some of the current legislative developments under Energy Union and Circular Economy Package that include restrictions for the use of forest biomass. EUSTAFOR talked about the climate benefits of forests and encouraged to look at the landscape level how different initiatives are improving biodiversity in forests.

**CEI-Bois** talked about hardwood exports to China and reduced saw milling capacity in Europe where there is a low demand for hardwood species. It was stressed that the Strategy should seek for solutions for the use of domestic hardwood species inside the EU.

**CEPF** noted that the results of the questionnaire go well with the discussion. CEPF agreed on the importance of the Strategy as it provides a holistic view on forests. It noted that there are many good actions in the MAP and these should be better put together. It also asked how to make better use of existing groups and their knowledge in the evaluation process.

**CEPI** thanked the Commission for organising the meeting. It raised as a striking thing the failure of turning the interest of politicians. There is a vital forest resource and this should be lifted to the strategic agenda of the EU. As a solution CEPI raised the importance of communication.

**Bulgaria** said that the EU Forest Strategy is in the shadows of other sectors. It is instrumental for Bulgaria in building their own strategy at national level.

**ELO** said that the Strategy should be used as a reference document more often. It said that forest owners should be considered as partners and not only as stakeholders. It suggested that the use of financial instruments could be guided by the Strategy.

**COPA** noted that some of the priority areas related to competition are missing in the current strategy. Therefore, the evaluation should not only look at what is already there but also what is missing. The representative mentioned SDGs, the Paris Agreement and digitalization as main trends and noted that also the Rural Development program provides many interesting elements that could be included. In addition, COPA asked for synergies with the GCBN group and highlighted that SFC should play an important role in the review.

The participants of the meeting were asked to define the most important area to prioritize in the EU Forest Strategy for the future. The group discussed some of these suggestions.

**CEPF** talked about *mobilisation* and said that there is a need to enhance vitality in rural areas and mobilisation of local resources plays a crucial role (also in avoiding the export of the footprint outside the EU).

**CEETTAR** said that *harvesting* is the key word and noted that the human aspect is missing from the Strategy. CEETTAR noted that the active forest management needed investments and *harvesting* should be prioritized in order to enhance sustainability.

**Finland** said that when discussing future priorities, there is a clear need to concentrate on coordination and coherence. Member States need to take care of the internal coordination in their countries but the EU coordination needs more financial investments in order to gather ad-hoc working groups. Finland asked the Commission if there is a lack of resources as there are not as many ad-hoc working groups and meetings as in the past. Finland also talked about FISE and noted that some Member States are very eager to develop the system. It noted that successful coordination and FISE are very much related to each other. It also stressed that the EU should improve its link to global forests and that the actions taken in the EU are coherent with our global messages. As an example, Finland raised that instead of focusing only on global deforestation (i.e. EU Action Plan for Deforestation) the EU could also address the importance of sustainable forest management in the global context.

**The Commission** said that they are aware of the need for coordination, and that coordination does not only apply to the Commission but other actors in particular. Regarding the establishment of ad-hoc working groups and organising more meetings, the relevance of these groups should be ensured. As well as a proper assessment is needed before new groups are established. Regarding FISE, the Commission informed that JRC will hand over the system to another institution and that the institution will present its plan for SFC next year. Regarding the global challenges the Commission called for a more comprehensive vision that address international priorities of the strategy that is in fact the promotion of SFM.

**The Chair of CDG FC** asked the Commission why other Directorate-Generals were not represented in the meeting.

**The Commission** noted that in SFC meetings there is a wide range of DGs represented and the cooperation is working well. The cooperation could always be improved and the review of the Strategy would provide a good platform to enhance the cooperation as all

relevant DGs are involved with the review. The Commission is establishing a steering group for the study. Regarding the participation of other DGs in this meeting, the Commission said that due to busy times with the Energy Union Package it was challenging for some to participate.

**Portugal** thanked the Commission and addressed the importance of *communication* as a key word for future priority area. Portugal was in line with the Commission that there should be a careful analysis whether more meetings or groups should be organised. Instead of creating new groups, it encouraged to make most of existing ones. It also noted that not all instruments are equally implemented in different Member States but that we should neither put all our efforts in EU forest owners, farmers or operators.

**WWF** clarified that forest degradation is a part of EU Action Plan on Forests and noted that deforestation is mainly due to agricultural production that is happening outside the EU.

**Belgium** said that the major challenge is coherence and coordination and in order to improve these we would need a vision document on forests. It highlighted that it would be better to work with the existing instruments than including forestry into the EU treaty. It suggested that a joint strategy for the biodiversity and forests could be considered as it would bring needed new perspectives for the future. The representative explained that logs from the Sonian forest are sold to China and semi-processed products brought back to Belgium and this could be corrected by increased cooperation with other policy areas.

**Germany** raised caution about adding more meetings but suggested that there could be technical level expert groups on certain issues in the multi-annual implementation plan. It said that there is a potential to expand the Strategy to cover other sectors and addressed the importance for creating stronger links to economic and environmental aspects. Germany also mentioned pan-European processes and FOREST EUROPE.

**Via Campesina** expressed its concerns towards the Strategy and its implementation. The representative raised their concerns on the impact on smallholders due to the trade agreements and the Common Agricultural Policy. Land grabbing, lack of decent working conditions and low raw-material prices are also challenges in the EU and Nordic countries.

**COPA** talked about timber trade and global markets and concluded that there are many reasons for the situation that was explained by Belgium. It noted e.g. that high standards in the EU production might be one of the main reasons why processing is made outside the EU. COPA stressed that the commitment to a legally binding pan-European processes should be strengthened.

**Spain** agreed with Portugal and noted that we do not pay enough attention to situations described by the Belgian representative. Spain addressed that there is a need to better spread the information on forests' importance for society and for the carbon cycle. A crucial potential lies also in economic valuation of different ecosystem services. Spain also said that the interest towards the legally binding agreement should be addressed.

**Poland** talked about the priority areas and the importance of SFM in the Strategy. Moreover, it would like to see more ambitious actions in the Strategy to support rural areas, forest-based industries and bioenergy. It said that the implementation should be better conducted at both EU and national level.

**EURAF** noted that the inclusion of foresters and farmers are crucial and that there is a lack of good data on non-wood forest products.

**The Commission** thanked the participants for the discussion as the review process is about to be launched. It informed the participants that the Commission has an inter-service group on forestry and communication could be one key element for better coherence. The Commission recognised that the Strategy is valid and comprehensive despite some of the criticism.

## **2. Assessment of the wildfires in Europe in 2017 through the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS)**

JRC gave a presentation on the topic that is available on CIRCABC.

**CEPF** said that the main cause of forest fires is climate change but the fire happens due to human activities. CEPF stressed the importance of forest management in fire prevention. It also stressed the importance of Member States cooperation and communication with public.

**Portugal** thanked JRC for the comprehensive presentation and spoke about the unfortunate figures from Portugal and wide losses it has caused. The representative expressed the country's gratitude towards Spain when cooperating on the issue. It suggested that the data system could also include damages caused to buildings and infrastructure.

**France** said that on the basis of the data, countries can be helped to put in place needed measures. France asked if the system separates between fires on vegetation and forest. It also asked if the burned area could be then compared to a country's forested area.

**Croatia** talked about forest fires that took place in 2000. It suggested to change the resolution in the database to be more detailed.

**COGECA** thanked JRC for the presentation and spoke about fires in agricultural land. The representative indicated that forest fires is a problem for all Member States and sectors.

**EUSTAFOR** stressed the importance of preventive actions regarding forest fires and asked how the data from JRC could be brought closer to forest managers on the ground.

**Italy** thanked JRC for the excellent work and presentation and stressed the importance of constant work in preventing forest fires and tools such as COPERNICUS.

**JRC** addressed the importance of increasing knowledge among public, preventive actions and cooperation. It noted that resolution layers will be further developed and satellite images would be updated many times a day. It said that current resolutions are not accurate enough to provide information on damages on buildings or infrastructures and encourages Member States to make this analysis at national level. It noted that many burned areas are on old agricultural land and not properly managed. The data covers also other vegetated areas but excludes pure agricultural areas. It also said that the EFFIS Communication materials for training are under development.

The Commission mentioned that it is currently working to improve the situation and encouraged Member States, with help of the Commission if needed, to reform its civil protection mechanisms.

**4. Conclusions/recommendations/opinions**

**5. Next steps**

**6. Next meeting**

No decision was taken on the date of the next meeting of the CDG for Forestry and cork.

**7. List of participants - Annex**

*Disclaimer*

*"The opinions expressed in this report represent the point of view of the meeting participants from agriculturally related NGOs at community level. These opinions cannot, under any circumstances, be attributed to the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of the here above information."*

List of participants– Minutes

*Joint meeting of the Civil Dialogue Group Forestry and Cork  
and of the Standing Forestry Committee*

Date: 05/12/2017

	CDG MEMBER ORGANISATION	NAME OF REPRESENTATIVES
1	BirdLife Europe	AVOTINS ANDRIS
2	BirdLife Europe	COSTA JULIETA
3	CEETTAR	HELOU TAMMOUZ
4	CEI-Bois	MELEGARI SIVLIA
5	CEJA	HEIKKILA MATTI
6	CEJA	NOBREGA CLAUDIO
7	CEPF (Note Taker)	SILJAMA MERI
8	CEPF	BERGLUND EMMA
9	CEPF	BERTRAND OLIVIER
10	CEPF (President)	BUDIL BERNHARD
11	CEPF	HUGNAGL NATALIE
12	CEPF	LINNAMAA PENTTI
13	CEPF	MUIZNIEKS ARNIS
14	CEPF	SANS IGNASI
15	CEPI aisbl	ALBIZU PEDRO
16	CEPI aisbl	LEBERLE ULRICH
17	COGECA (New President)	ACKZELL LENNART
18	COGECA	GESZPRYCH MAREK
19	COGECA	JOEAAR PRIIT
20	COGECA	SOVERAL JOAO
21	COGECA	SZEP TIBOR
22	COPA	COLLINS PATRICK
23	COPA	HAKKARAINEN JUHA
24	COPA	HOEBARTH MARTIN
25	COPA	NEAGU OANA
26	COPA	ZEC SILVIJA
27	ECVC	FONTES DINIS JOAO
28	ECVC	KASME LAYLA
29	ECVC	OESTLING TORGNY
30	ELO	DUARTE SILVEIRA PEDRO

31	ELO	GAIZUTIS ALGIS
32	ELO	ROCHA ANA
33	ENFE	JAKKOLA SIMO
34	EURAF	RIGUEIRO ANTONIO
35	EURAF	LOSADA MARIA
36	EUSTAFOR	BORKOWSKI PIOTR
37	EUSTAFOR	JOHANSSON OLOF
38	FECOF	WENDLANDT ALEXANDER
39	IFOAM EU GROUP	SLABE ANAMARIJA
40	UEF	DIEMER MICHAEL
41	USSE	LACALLE EDURNE
42	USSE	SALABERRIA ISASI LEIRE
43	WWF	SCHULMEISTER-OLDENHOVE ANKE
<i>TOTAL</i>		43

MEMBER STATE	Ministry Or Organisation	NUMBER OF PERSONS
BE	Flemish Agency for Nature and Forests	1
	Service Public de Wallonie - DGO3 - Département Nature et Forêts	1
BG	Executive Forest Agency	1
CZ	Ministry of Agriculture	1
DK		
DE	Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry	1
EE	Ministry of the Environment	1
IE	Department of Agriculture	1
EL		
ES	Direccion General de Medio Ambiente Junta de Extremadura	1
	Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente	1
FR	Ministry of Agriculture and Agrifood	1
HR	Ministry of Agriculture, Directorate for Forestry, Hunting and Wood Industry	1
IT	Ministero politiche agricole alimentari e forestali	1
CY	Department of Forests - Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment	1
LV	Ministry of Agriculture	1
LT		
LU		
HU	Ministry of Agriculture	1
MT		
NL	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality	2
AT	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management	1
PL	Ministry of the Environment	1
	State Forests National Forest Holding (Directorate General of the State Forests)	1
PT	Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas/Ministério da Agricultura, Florestas e Desenvolvimento Rural	1
RO		
SI	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food	1
SK	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	1
FI	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	1
SE	The Swedish Forest Agency	1
UK		
<i>TOTAL</i>		25