

## **Background concept for the Working Group on the future direction of FOREST EUROPE**

### **1. Objectives and the scope of the review of FOREST EUROPE**

In line with the Madrid Ministerial Decision, the overall objective of the Review is to further develop the FOREST EUROPE process with a view to adapting to current and new challenges, and to enhancing its contribution to the promotion of sustainable forest management (SFM) in Europe. More specifically, it will ensure that the process maintains or, if needed, regains efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and inclusiveness. It will also aim to strengthen an agenda-setting role, so that it continues its ability to enhance and promote SFM at pan-European level while adding value to activities of other pan-European partners. The subject of the review is the FOREST EUROPE process, especially its structure, procedures and work modalities, which will be reviewed reflecting on the lessons learnt in order to make it more effective and inclusive.

The expected outcome of the review are proposals and recommendations for future direction of FOREST EUROPE. Findings and recommendations will be elaborated by the Working Group on the future direction of Forest Europe in the form of a report, which will be presented to an Expert Level Meeting at end of 2017, for its consideration and adoption. The Working Group on the future direction of FOREST EUROPE was established at the first Expert Level Meeting follow-up the seventh ministerial conference in Madrid. France and Ukraine were appointed as co-chairs of the working group. Detailed description of the objectives, tasks and expected outputs of the Working Group is mentioned in the Terms of Reference and Roadmap adopted at the FOREST EUROPE Expert Level Meeting 11-12 May 2016 in Bratislava, Slovakia.

### **2. Methodology and workplan**

In accordance with the ToR and Roadmap for the Working Group on the future direction of FOREST EUROPE (hereinafter referred to as WG), the WG was given the task to take stock of signatories' and observers' views on three different areas:

- a) FOREST EUROPE achievements and added value,
- b) FOREST EUROPE structures, procedures and work modalities,
- c) FOREST EUROPE interplay with other actors in the Pan-European forest policy arena.

The opinions of signatories and observers will be collected through discussion forum at the first meeting of the WG and web-based questionnaire surveys that aim to obtain all relevant information, inputs and findings that will **provide a clear overview of opinions contributing to the elaboration of a final report including practical proposals and recommendations for the future of the process.**

The target group of the questionnaire survey comprises following two sub-groups:

- a) representatives of FOREST EUROPE signatory countries (46 European countries and the European Union) and
- b) representatives of non-European countries and intergovernmental organizations/processes, and non-governmental organizations with observer status to the Forest Europe process (14 countries and 45 organizations).

In order to enable iterative process of learning and long-term improvement, the review process will be conducted in four phases (i) discussion forum at the first meeting of the WG, (ii) comprehensive survey (iii) discussion of results and elaboration of the draft report, (iv) preparation and finalization of the report including recommendations for future direction of the FOREST EUROPE process.

### **Phase 1: Discussion forum of the WG at the first meeting**

Main objectives of the 1<sup>st</sup> WG meeting are to discuss FOREST EUROPE achievements and added value, structures, procedures and work modalities, as well as interplay with other actors in the Pan-European forest policy arena, especially:

- (i) identify main issues and areas, which are broadly accepted and supported by FE signatories and observers,
- (ii) identify key issues that need to be further addressed including the reasoning behind,
- (iii) gather innovative approaches and new inputs from FE signatories and observers,
- (iv) evaluate importance of factors that influence efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and inclusiveness of the FOREST EUROPE process, its structures, procedures and work modalities.

### **Phase 2: Comprehensive survey**

The key issues identified during the 1<sup>st</sup> WG meeting will be the basis for the comprehensive survey. The questionnaire in the second phase will be developed by a group of experts with international experience in close cooperation with the co-chairs of the WG and the Liaison Unit taking into account outcomes of the 1<sup>st</sup> WG meeting and in consultation with GCC. This will include decisions on survey design (purpose, methods, survey types), data collection and analysis including the interpretation of results.

### **Phase 3-4: Elaboration of the final report including recommendations**

Results of the questionnaire survey will be discussed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting and may bring up specific topics that will need additional work on particular issues. Depending on the decision of the Working Group and if any additional activities are needed, the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the WG may be convened. Summaries of discussion forum (phase 1) together with outputs from comprehensive survey (phase 2) and following work of the WG will be encompassed in the final report.

### **Indicative time schedule of the review**

| <b>Timeframe</b>            | <b>Activity</b>  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| September 2016              | Distribution of the background paper   |
| 12-13 October 2016          | Discussion forum of the WG (1 <sup>st</sup> meeting of WG)   |
| Mid-October – December 2016 | Development of the comprehensive follow up questionnaire   |
| January 2017                | Implementation of comprehensive follow-up questionnaire survey   |
| February - March 2017       | Processing of data collected, interpretation of results, elaborating draft report  |
| April 2017                  | Discussion on results (2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting of WG) , If needed WG will decide on additional work aimed at finalizing the report |
| May - September 2017        | Additional activities (if decided by the Working Group)  |
| July-September 2017         | Preparation of the final report  |
| September 2017              | Possible 3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting of the WG if needed   |
| November 2017               | Presentation of the report to ELM  |

### 3. Scope and main issues to be tackled in the survey

#### A/ FOREST EUROPE achievements and added value

The outcomes of the “Review of the MCPFE” (2009) and “Assessment of the achievements and added value of the Forest Europe Process” (2015) provide an important reference for this Review. Based on a thorough survey and analysis, the review team in 2009 concluded that, in general, the FOREST EUROPE process [known as MCPFE at the time, but referred to as “the process” in this text] had strategically positioned itself better, become more relevant, generated added value and become more effective and efficient since its establishment in the 1990s. The respondents regarded its advantage of stretching cross-regionally and including a wide network of stakeholders, peers and experts in its works; especially its commitment to SFM; its informality and openness were highly appreciated. The respondents valued the contribution to the coordination and cooperation between different actors at national and international levels. However, it was found that improvements were needed in communication, coordination between different actors and in the structure of the organization. There were four strategic recommendations presented by the review team at the Sixth Ministerial Conference in Oslo, in 2011:

1. *Redefine the strategic position of the process;*
2. *Strengthen relevance and added value by developing long-term partnerships with other bodies, including the EU;*
3. *Strengthen effectiveness and efficiency of the process by re-designing roles and responsibilities of different bodies;*
4. *Strengthen effectiveness and efficiency of the process by redesigning procedures and main outputs.*

In response to the first recommendation, the Oslo Ministerial Decision (2011) laid down the vision, goals and targets for forests in Europe (paragraphs 17, 18, 19), and the mission and tasks (paragraphs 20, 21) of FOREST EUROPE.

The mission of FOREST EUROPE was defined as to „*enhance the cooperation on forest policies in Europe under the leadership of ministers, and secures and promotes sustainable forest management with the aim of maintaining the multiple functions of forests crucial to society*“

To fulfil the mission, FOREST EUROPE undertakes the following tasks:

- a. *Develop and update policies and tools for sustainable forest management, including by facilitating open and flexible policy dialogue, active participation by relevant stakeholders and cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination with other actors;*
- b. *Monitor, assess and facilitate implementation of commitments on forests and sustainable forest management in all European countries and in the region as a whole;*
- c. *Promote education, research and the use of scientific knowledge and facilitate sharing of experiences across countries, sectors and stakeholders on all aspects of sustainable forest management and other forest related issues;*
- d. *Raise awareness and understanding of contributions by FOREST EUROPE to sustainable forest management in relevant fora including at international level and among the public, including through implementation of the communications strategy.*

The other three strategic recommendations presented by the review team and mentioned above (2-4) were not directly and clearly linked to a policy decision nor translated into operational action. The Madrid Ministerial Decision (2015) recalled the need to conduct the review of the process by giving emphasis to structures, procedures and work modalities, which are the core issues of this survey.

### **Issues to be tackled:**

- Relevance and significance of key recognized accomplishments of FOREST EUROPE to date (SFM definition/concept, Criteria and Indicators, European approach to National Forest Programmes, Forest reporting and monitoring, ... )
- Degree of impact of outputs as referred to above at national level (added value of the process outputs measured at national level)
- Progress in implementation of the mission and tasks of FOREST EUROPE as identified and adopted in Oslo in 2011

## **B/FOREST EUROPE structures, work modalities and procedures**

The overall structure of the FOREST EUROPE process consists of the Negotiation structures (Ministerial Conference, Expert Level Meeting, Roundtable meeting, Expert/Advisory Group, Working Group and Workshop) and the supporting structures (General Coordinating Committee and Liaison Unit).

### **Issues to be tackled:**

- Relevance of the overall structure as a complex of its particular elements
- Need for any additional structure

## **B1 Negotiation structures**

### **B1.1 Ministerial Conference**

Ministerial Conference (MC) is the highest decision-making body of the process where ministers responsible for forests in Europe take decisions on issues of the highest political and social relevance regarding forests and forestry through decisions and resolutions. These political commitments serve as a non-legally binding framework for policy making in the European countries.

According to the 2009 MCPFE Review, MC has the potential to be uniquely positioned as a body providing voluntary, high-level policy leadership at the forefront of policy development. As a high-level political body, it has the potential to uptake such a leadership as well as to deliver a strong message on the political will to implement forest-related policies.

### **Issues to be tackled:**

- Relevance and role of MC
- Effectiveness and efficiency of MC including factors such as:
  - frequency
  - nomination of participants
  - agenda – topics covered
  - background documentation
  - participation and engagement (of signatories and of observers)
  - format, chairing
  - format of ministerial commitments
  - proposals, amendments and written rules of procedure
  - languages
  - quality and quantity outputs

### **B1.2 Expert Level Meeting**

Expert Level Meeting (ELM) represents the decision making body between MCs. At these meetings, the delegates of FOREST EUROPE signatories have the mandate to take decisions regarding implementation of commitments, review progress made, address arising issues, and prepare upcoming MC.

**Issues to be tackled:**

- Relevance and role of ELM
- Effectiveness and efficiency of ELM including factors such as:
  - frequency
  - nomination of participants
  - agenda – topics covered
  - background documentation
  - participation and engagement (of signatories and of observers)
  - format, chairing
  - decision-making procedures
  - proposals, amendments and written rules of procedure
  - languages
  - quality and quantity outputs

**B1.3 Roundtable Meeting (RTM)**

Roundtable Meetings (RTM) are platforms for strategic discussions and exchange of information and views on emerging topics. They also provide essential guidance for the implementation of FOREST EUROPE decisions and on strategic developments of FOREST EUROPE.

**Issues to be tackled:**

- Relevance and role of RTM
- Effectiveness and efficiency of RTM including factors such as:
  - nomination of participants
  - agenda – topics covered
  - background documentation
  - participation and engagement (of signatories and of observers)
  - format, chairing
  - decision-making procedures
  - proposals, amendments and written rules of procedure
  - languages
  - quality and quantity outputs

**B1.4 Working groups, expert/advisory groups and workshops**

Working groups, expert/advisory groups and workshops represent ad hoc structures focused on specific subjects of scientific, technical or political nature. The results of these meetings are presented for consideration to the ELM level.

**Issues to be tackled:**

- Relevance and role of working groups, expert/advisory groups and workshops
- Effectiveness and efficiency of working groups, expert/advisory groups and workshops including factors such as:
  - nomination of participants
  - agenda – topics covered
  - background documentation
  - participation and engagement (of signatories, observers and experts)
  - format, chairing
  - quality and quantity outputs

## **B2 Supportive structures**

Supportive structures of the FOREST EUROPE process comprise the General Coordinating Committee (GCC) and the Liaison Unit (LU).

### **B2.1 General Coordinating Committee**

GCC is responsible for overall coordination of the FOREST EUROPE work and has an oversight function towards the Liaison Unit regarding implementation of the FOREST EUROPE decisions and strategic developments. GCC provides core funding of the Liaison Unit maintenance and partial funding for the implementation of actions and activities of the FOREST EUROPE Work Programme. GCC consist of five countries (country which holds the chairmanship of the process and will convene the next Ministerial Conference, country which organised the previous Ministerial Conference and three more countries which will succeed in the line of chairing FOREST EUROPE) and membership in this body is based on rotation principle.

#### **Issues to be tackled:**

- Relevance of the body
- Effectiveness and transparency of its work
- GCC composition and principle of membership including selection process
- Functions, tasks and competencies of the GCC

### **B2.2 Liaison Unit**

LU serves as the secretariat of the FOREST EUROPE process. It coordinates the implementation of all actions and activities of the Work Programme, including organisation of all FOREST EUROPE meetings and preparations of reports and necessary documentation for the meetings. Its location and staff composition depends on the country which holds the chairmanship of the FOREST EUROPE process.

#### **Issues to be tackled:**

- Relevance of the body
- Effectiveness and transparency of its work
- Arrangement of the Liaison Unit and rotating principle and hosting of the LU
- Functions, tasks and competencies of the Liaison Unit

## **B3 Financial mechanism**

Currently, the FOREST EUROPE process is predominately funded by pooled financial contributions of the five GCC member countries. The amount of individual financial contributions differs depending on counties' position in GCC (i.e. financial contribution is higher in case of co-chairing countries) The co-chairing country, which is responsible for hosting the forthcoming MC provides 60% of the budget. The other co-chairing country provides 16% of the budget and the other three GCC countries contribute 8% each. Other signatories can provide voluntary financial contributions to the budget (e.g. Estonia). The budget covers mainly Liaison Unit costs, organisation of the FOREST EUROPE meetings and partially also the implementation of activities of the Work Programme.

MC itself is financed by the two co-chairing countries of the process (contributing by equal shares).

#### **Issues to be tackled:**

- Adequacy and sustainability of the current arrangement as described above
- Alternative model: funding of the process considering share of possible financial contributions and involvement of all signatories

- Extend/Scope of financing of Work Programme (what part of the Work Programme should be necessarily covered by the FOREST EUROPE budget and which costs should be covered by signatories and observers individually) and Liaison Unit costs
- Financing of main FOREST EUROPE events (Ministerial Conference, ELM and RTM)
- Mobilisation of financial resources from third parties
- Rules for the provision of travel support to “eligible signatory countries” and, if appropriate, other partners, and source of this support

## **C/FOREST EUROPE interplay with other actors in the pan-European forest policy arena**

Long-term partnerships of the FOREST EUROPE process, including interplay with other actors in the pan-European forest policy “arena”, have been an important subject in both reviews and in debates at different levels and stages of the process. In 2009, the review team acknowledged the existing, visible partnerships built with UNECE/FAO, the scientific community and others, but specifically called for a collaborative arrangement to be made with the European Union.

The review conducted in 2015, which was a desktop study, highlighted the open and informal nature of FOREST EUROPE, which, together with its high-level political grounding, has allowed the process to fulfil a role no other process was able to take up in a similar way: to identify current and future issues, and be an agenda setter rather than an agenda taker.

The Expert Level Meeting held in May 2016 clearly reinforced that view, by emphasizing the forest policy agenda setting role of the process, relying on technical work of others; and by adding “interplay” to the terms of reference of the Working Group on future direction of Forest Europe.

### **Issues to be tackled:**

- Efficiency and effectiveness of interaction with key actors in the pan-European forest policy “arena” (also concerns inclusiveness and transparency aspects)
- Efficiency and effectiveness of interaction with key relevant global actors and processes including similar processes in other regions
- Efficiency and effectiveness of cross-sectoral interaction and cooperation
- Efficiency and effectiveness of communications and outreach by the different levels/structures of FE and contribution to positive perception of forest sector