

FOREST EUROPE EXPERT LEVEL MEETING
19-20 March 2019, Bratislava, Slovakia

Item 3.2: Possible inputs from the FOREST EUROPE work stream “Protection of forests in a changing environment including their adaptation to climate change”

Note by the General Coordinating Committee

I. Background

In line with the FOREST EUROPE Work Programme 2016-2020, the Expert Group on Adaptation to Climate Change made efforts to advance the implementation of the ministerial commitments. EG members have explored the current state of implementation of adaptation measures to climate change at national levels and are currently working on a publication “Integration of adaptation measures into SFM in Europe”. In addition, a workshop is planned in September 2019 generously hosted by Turkey to share experience in the European region on management of forests against current and future natural hazards to increase their resilience and climate change adaptation. A close cooperation with the European Forest Institute (EFI) has been established which will lead to a joint ThinkForests event in the beginning of April in the Czech Republic.

One of the main conclusions of all these activities is the understanding that the unprecedented extent, intensity and spatial coverage of forest disturbance impacts across Europe over the recent years pose an increasing risk for European forests and their multiple functions and a significant challenge for forest policy and sustainable forest management in Europe. It is also widely understood that these threats will most likely further increase in frequency, intensity and extent in the coming years. For more details on the challenge, a reference is made to the joint EFI and LUB paper: “Mobilising knowledge and expertise on managing forest risks to enhance the resilience and adaptive capacity of European forests - Creating a European Forest Risk Facility”.

The current progress of climate change impacts as well as preliminary outcomes of this work stream suggests the conclusion that it will become increasingly relevant for the European forest sector to manage large-scale disturbances and that the management may be facilitated or may achieve better results through increased transnational collaboration and support, capacity building and knowledge transfer. It also seems very likely that such an approach would lead to better informed decisions in the framework of a more holistic forest risk management with a strong emphasis on prevention, preparedness as well as enhanced inter-sectoral cooperation (initiated at the ministerial level).

II. Proposal for further action

1. Due to the current high political relevance of the issues related to adaptation to climate change, the General Coordinating Committee (GCC) proposes to select this issue as one of the main topics for the forthcoming Ministerial Conference in 2020.
2. Based on the outputs of the above mentioned FOREST EUROPE Work Programme activities a Ministerial Resolution should be drafted and adopted by the Expert Level Meeting (ELM) and subsequently submitted to Ministers responsible for Forests for consideration and signature at the Conference in autumn 2020.
3. The draft Resolution should build on the Madrid Ministerial Resolution „Protection of forests in changing environment” and other commitments of previous Ministerial Conferences of Forest Europe and lead to a concrete added value in response to the emerged developments.
4. The main focus of this Resolution should be on concrete commitments and actions for the coming years to strengthen transnational collaboration and support, capacity building and knowledge transfer with the emphasis notably on prevention and preparedness of forest disturbances. Options for ensuring rapid responses and facilitative action across borders in case of large scale disturbances could be foreseen. They may also include institutionalized solutions as proposed in the above mentioned reference document taking into account the lessons learned of projects such as SURE, FRISK – GO carried out by the European Forest Institute and other relevant studies and research projects.
5. Already existing mechanisms and networks at European or regional level should be taken into account with the aim to synergise efforts, add value, make use of synergies, and thus strengthen the overall adaptive capacity and response power of the forest sector in Europe. Any potential new “facility” should be highly effective and at the same time as slim and complementary as possible. In that context the existing Resilience unit of the European Forest Institute deserves due consideration.

III. Next steps

1. First discussion by the ELM in spring 2019 on the GCC proposal to address the “forest protection” topic at the 2020 Ministerial Conference,
2. GCC could be invited to propose elements/building blocks for such a first draft based on the guidance given by ELM on the issues raised in this document.
3. An open-ended drafting meeting (s) could be convened to elaborate a draft Ministerial Resolution.
4. The draft Resolution could be presented for further consideration to the next ELM.