

## Description of the FOREST EUROPE structures, procedures and work modalities

*Summary: FOREST EUROPE Expert Level Meeting held on 28–29 Nov 2017 in Bratislava, Slovakia, decided to mandate Liaison Unit Bratislava, under the strategic guidance of GCC, to implement a set of actions based on recommendations of the Working Group on Future Direction of FOREST EUROPE, which are listed in the Annex I of the Summary of the key decisions from this ELM. One of the actions to be implemented was to task to “Develop a description of current structures, procedures and work modalities of FOREST EUROPE, including financial arrangements and reflecting any adjustments from the review process to be adopted by the ELM and/or by the Ministerial Conference as appropriate “.*

*ELM is invited to discuss and adopt the draft document “Description of the FOREST EUROPE structures, procedures and work modalities”.*

### 1. Background

FOREST EUROPE<sup>1</sup> (formerly known as the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe MCPFE) is Europe’s voluntary high-level political process that develops common strategies for its 47 signatories (46 European countries and the European Union) on the sustainable management of forests (including the protection of forests) in the European region. It takes decisions on common aspects of the highest political relevance regarding forests, forestry and forest related issues in order to maximise the contribution of European forests to the ecological, social and economic well-being of the region.

The FOREST EUROPE process was launched on 18 December 1990 at which time ministers responsible for forests gathered in Strasbourg, France. In the Strasbourg General Declaration<sup>2</sup>, ministers declared their intention to “*promote and reinforce cooperation between European states in the field of forest protection and sustainable management, by developing exchange of information and experience, and by supporting the efforts of the international organizations concerned*”; and „*examine the follow-up of decisions taken during the present conference and pursue the actions that will have been initiated, in the course of any subsequent meetings of government ministers or officials, and of international institutions, responsible for seeing that forests fully assume their ecological, economic and social functions.*“

Later on, at the Ministerial Conference in Oslo, in 2011, the signatories expressed their shared **vision** for forests in Europe – to shape a future where all European forests are vital, productive and multifunctional. Where forests contribute effectively to sustainable development, through ensuring human well-being, a healthy environment and economic development in Europe and across the globe. Where the forests’ unique potential to support a green economy, livelihoods, climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, enhancing water quality and combating desertification is realised to the benefit of society.

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<sup>1</sup> Expert Level Meeting held on 24-25 November 2009 in Oslo, agreed to use the brand name FOREST EUROPE (all with capital letters) instead of the abbreviation of the process MCPFE

<sup>2</sup> General Declaration from the Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe, 18 December 1990, Strasbourg

To advance the realisation of this shared vision, they decided on the following **mission** for FOREST EUROPE, under which FOREST EUROPE enhances 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.

Following the Oslo Ministerial Decision: European Forests 2020<sup>3</sup>, FOREST EUROPE shall undertake 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.

## **2. Formal structures and their procedural aspects**

In line with the established practice of the FOREST EUROPE process and basic principles rooted in the Helsinki General Declaration<sup>4</sup>, pan-European activities aimed either at the implementation of previous ministerial commitments or the formulation of new ones, are carried out within the following formal structures of the process<sup>5</sup>:

### **Negotiation and decision-making structures:**

- *Ministerial Conference (MC)*
- *Expert Level Meeting (ELM)*

### **Collaborative tools for strategic debate:**

- *Roundtable Meeting (RTM)*
- *Working Group*
- *Advisory Group*

### **Collaborative tools for technical debate:**

- *Expert Group*
- *Workshop*

### **Supportive coordinating structures:**

- *General Coordinating Committee (GCC)*
- *Liaison Unit (LU)*

### **Focal points nominated by signatories and observers**

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<sup>3</sup> Ministerial Decision from the Sixth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, 14-16 June 2011, Oslo (para 21.)

<sup>4</sup> General Declaration from the Second Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, 16-17 June 1993, Helsinki (para 6.1)

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that as FOREST EUROPE is a voluntary process, all structures described have been developed over time and are the results of agreed practise and recommendations of the Working Group on Future Direction of FOREST EUROPE in its Final report

## **a. Negotiation and decision-making structures**

### **Ministerial Conference (MC)**

Ministerial Conference represents a high-level forum for political dialogue on forests and forestry in Europe. It is the decision-making body of the process where ministers responsible for forests take decisions on issues of the highest political relevance regarding forests and forestry. The commitments are made in the form of a declaration, resolution or decision, and serve as a basis for decision-making processes in signatory countries.

MC is attended by the delegations of FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers. The delegations of signatory countries and observer countries are usually led by the ministers responsible for forests, or alternatively by other high-level officials or senior policy makers (e.g. state secretaries, ambassadors, directors general, senior diplomats). Members of the country delegations are formally nominated by their respective ministries. Delegations of observer organizations consist of their representatives nominated by the heads of these organizations. The involvement of representatives from other sectors shall be sought where appropriate.

Since the inception of the FOREST EUROPE process in 1990, MCs have taken place at 3 to 5 years' intervals. The date and venue of the MC is determined by the country that co-chairs the process and hosts MC.

Agenda and topics of MC are defined by the co-chairing countries in consultation with the General Coordinating Committee (GCC). The co-chairing countries take into consideration the views of other signatory countries when deciding on the topics of the forthcoming Ministerial Conference. For this purpose, the co-chairs discuss the potential topics and the agenda of the Ministerial Conference through a Roundtable Meeting or an Expert Level Meeting.

All documents tabled at MC, especially those to be considered and signed by ministers, are developed by drafting meetings and formally adopted by ELM.

MC is co-chaired by the ministers representing the two countries co-chairing the FOREST EUROPE process.

Format: MC is a formal event, in which heads of delegations deliver statements on the topics addressed in the ministerial documents, however more interactive and more dynamic session formats with professional facilitation is welcome, whenever appropriate. Possibilities for informal and/or direct discussions among ministers can also be sought, and if requested, space for bilateral meeting arrangements in order to facilitate experience exchange and partnership among countries is provided.

Press conference(s) and high-level GCC meeting are usually held at the occasion of MC. Media coverage and enhanced media communication should be provided including the launching of joint ministerial initiatives or inviting well-known personalities to ensure better visibility and outreach of ministerial commitments.

### **Expert Level Meeting (ELM)**

Expert Level Meeting represents the decision making body during periods between MCs. At these meetings, the delegates of FOREST EUROPE signatories mandated by their ministries take decisions regarding the implementation of ministerial commitments, adopt and make amendments in FOREST EUROPE Work Programme, review progress made during implementation of the Work Programme, address arising issues and give advice on steps to be taken, prepare and adopt documents for upcoming high-level MC, and establish ad hoc structures.

ELM is organized in the form of a plenary session having the function of a “general assembly”, attended by representatives of FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers. ELM may also provide room for informal discussion to exchange information and views on emerging issues, or brainstorming, where the expected duration of such informal discussion does not require the organisation of a separate Roundtable Meeting.

Interactive discussion formats of meetings using different facilitation techniques aiming at better involvement of signatories and observers in discussions are applied, whenever possible. Sharing good practices and experiences in the implementation of the FOREST EUROPE resolutions, declarations and decisions in signatories can also be one of the roles of ELM, if appropriate.

ELM meets once or twice a year depending on needs and usually takes place in the country that co-chairs the process and convenes the next MC. Decision on frequency, dates and agenda of ELM is taken by the GCC.

ELM is open to representatives of FOREST EUROPE signatories, observer countries and observer organizations. According to established practice, signatory countries through the ministries responsible for forests and the heads of observer organizations, respectively, nominate delegates (so-called focal points) to participate in the meetings. Cross-sectoral partnerships and a broad range of stakeholder's involvement (reaching also outside the forest sector) is welcomed at ELM to increase the recognition of the role that forests and forestry play in solving emerging issues relevant to society; and at the same time enhance the effectiveness of the implementation of the Work Programme with special attention to cross-sectoral topics.

ELM is chaired by the representatives of delegations of the two countries that co-chair FOREST EUROPE.

Documentation: Draft agenda and background documents for ELM are usually prepared by the Liaison Unit in consultation with GCC. All documents are distributed to FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers 4-6 weeks prior to the meeting. Summaries with key decisions are provided and endorsed in plenary at the end of the meeting.

During ELM, proposals to a draft agenda or discussed documents are made by the signatories at the request of the co-chairs. Motions can also be made by observers if they have relevance to the topic discussed at the meeting. The objective of a proposal is to facilitate discussions on respective decisions related to documents submitted to ELM, such as Work Programme, guidelines, final reports of Roundtable Meetings (RTM), Expert Groups (EG), Advisory Groups (AG), Working Groups (WG), etc.

Decisions during meetings are taken by consensus among the signatories. Normally, if no signatory makes an objection, the co-chair makes a decision. In some cases, and wherever necessary, a decision can be taken through written procedure after the meeting.

When the drafting procedure of a particular document is expected to take more time beyond the scope of a general ELM (or even requires several independent meetings or the engagement of specific experts who normally do not take part at ELM) a separate Drafting Meeting can be organized. The main outcome of Drafting Meeting(s) is a final draft document to be submitted to the subsequent ELM for further consideration.

## **b. Collaborative tools and structures for strategic and technical debate**

The main role of the collaborative tools and structures for strategic and technical debate is to contribute to the implementation of the FOREST EUROPE Work Programme and/or the implementation of previous commitments.

### **Roundtable Meeting (RTM)**

Roundtable meeting is a platform for strategic discussion, exchange of information and views on emerging issues, and gives room for brainstorming and the engagement of all participants. RTM also provides essential guidance for the implementation of FOREST EUROPE commitments and on strategic issues.

RTM is conducted as an informal discussion forum convened *ad-hoc* on topics of high or emerging political relevance. Decision on frequency, dates, and venue of RTM is taken by GCC.

RTM is open to representatives of FOREST EUROPE signatories, observer countries and observer organizations. According to established practice, signatory countries through the ministries responsible for forests and the heads of observer organizations, respectively, nominate delegates (so-called focal points) to participate in the meeting.

RTM is chaired by the representatives of delegations of the two countries that co-chair FOREST EUROPE. If appropriate, discussion at RTM may be facilitated by a moderator in an interactive manner.

Draft agenda and other related documents are usually prepared by the Liaison Unit in consultation with GCC. All documents are distributed to FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers no later than 4-6 weeks prior to the meeting.

At the end of RTM, a co-chairs' summary is provided to participants highlighting the main points discussed. The summary is submitted to the subsequent Expert Level Meeting for further consideration.

### **Working Group (WG)**

Working Groups represent *ad hoc* mechanisms for advancing work on specific tasks/subjects of a political nature. Working Group is composed of representatives of FOREST EUROPE signatories, observer countries and observer organizations, with membership based on interest and the capacity to contribute.

Working Group is established by ELM either by adoption of the Work Programme or during the implementation of the Work Programme. ELM also adopts its terms of reference and/or roadmap, and appoints its chair(s).

Draft agenda and background documents for the Working Group meetings are usually prepared by the Liaison Unit in consultation with GCC. All documents are distributed to FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers no later than 4-6 weeks prior to the meeting.

Outcomes of Working Group are presented for consideration to ELM.

### **Advisory Group for the preparation of State of Europe's Forest Report**

Advisory Group represents *ad hoc* mechanisms for advancing work related to the preparation of the State of Europe's Forest Report. Advisory Group is composed of representatives of relevant international organizations and invited experts who formulate its recommendations regarding the scope and organisation of work and advise LUB on technical matters. Liaison Unit in cooperation with GCC proposes experts to be invited to the Advisory Group. Advisory Group has a chair and a vice-chair elected at the first meeting and are selected from the list of the Advisory Group members.

### **Expert Group**

Expert Groups represent *ad hoc* mechanisms for advancing work on specific subjects of a scientific and technical nature. Expert Group provides guidance to the Liaison Unit in its work related to the particular activities and actions of WP and specific expert advice to ELM.

Expert Group is established by ELM either by adoption of the Work Programme or during the implementation of the Work Programme, which also defines the scope of its work and expected outcomes.

Expert Groups are composed of experts in a particular field nominated by signatories and observers, and if needed also by invited experts on specific topics, depending on the expertise needed.

Methods of the EG work comprise face-to-face meetings (including thematic sub-group meetings when EG finds them appropriate) combined with continuing work between the meetings e.g. analysing documents, preparing drafts of documents, etc. If there is a need to discuss particular issues between the face-to-face meetings, an online meeting or consultation

can be arranged. Moreover, other appropriate forms of work can be considered by EG, considering their effectiveness and efficiency FOREST EUROPE Expert Groups are welcomed to collaborate together to use synergies where appropriate.

Results of Expert Group are presented for consideration to ELM.

### **Workshop**

Workshops represent *ad hoc* mechanisms for debate on specific subjects of a scientific and technical nature among experts and stakeholders also outside of FOREST EUROPE process including representatives of research and academia, and the private sector.

Decision on the organisation of a workshop is made by ELM either by adoption of the WP or during the implementation of the WP according to the need, which also defines the main purpose and scope of the workshop.

Agenda of workshops is prepared by the Liaison Unit in consultation with relevant FOREST EUROPE Expert Groups.

Outcomes of workshops are usually presented in the form of a workshop report including a summary of key conclusions or recommendations for policy makers on the topics addressed.

The list of these collaborative tools for strategic and technical debate is not finite. If there is a requirement for a different structure (combining features of the above described structures or with own rules), such a separate ad-hoc structure may be created in duly justified cases by negotiation and decision making structures of the process.

## **c. Supportive coordinating structures**

### **General Coordinating Committee (GCC)**

General Coordinating Committee is responsible for the overall coordination of FOREST EUROPE work and has an oversight function towards the Liaison Unit regarding the implementation of the ministerial commitments, functioning of the process (e.g. financial and procedural matters) and addressing strategic developments.

GCC consists of five countries (taking into account geographical balance), namely the co-chair country that convenes the next MC and the co-chair country that hosted the previous MC. In the middle of the Work Programme implementation period, the country that will convene the MC after the next MC takes over the role of the second co-chair country from the country that hosted the previous MC. Apart from these three countries, two more countries, which will succeed in line of the chairing of FOREST EUROPE are also members of GCC.

Hence the membership of GCC is based on rotation principle. At each MC a new country is appointed as the incoming GCC member to replace the country that organized the previous MC. Participation in GCC depends on country willingness and the ability to play an active role including the provision of financial support to the process. The GCC countries provide core funding of the FOREST EUROPE process.

GCC meetings are held *ad hoc* based on actual needs and usually take place in one of the GCC countries (rotating), or back to back to other international meetings or events wherever possible and feasible. Minutes are taken by the Liaison Unit staff and are subject to approval by GCC. Summary of the minutes approved by GCC are published at the FOREST EUROPE website.

The main roles and responsibilities of GCC are:

- Provide strategic guidance and advice on implementation of the Work Programme, manage and guide the work of Liaison Unit in its implementation;
- Provide advice in procedural matters of FOREST EUROPE functioning;

- Provide strategic guidance on thematic focus and main aspects of the Ministerial Conference;
- Provide professional guidance and recommendations for strategic partnerships with various actors;
- Review and approve officially released documents prepared by the Liaison Unit;
- Review and approve annual budget for the Liaison Unit;
- Approve annual financial report.

### **Liaison Unit (LU)**

Liaison Unit serves as the rotating secretariat of the FOREST EUROPE process. Its location, hosting arrangement and staff are determined by the country that chairs the process and convenes the next MC. The hosting country may consider operational adjustments of the Liaison Unit that would enhance effectiveness of operation, such as a combination of national staff provided by the hosting country and seconded staff from other signatories or observer organizations.

During the implementation of all activities, LU proceeds in accordance with the political and operational documents adopted by the formal structures of the FOREST EUROPE process i.e. Ministerial Conferences, Expert Level Meetings and in line with the guidance of the General Coordinating Committee.

LU acts as a liaison point for the overall communication between FOREST EUROPE stakeholders (i.e. representatives of governments of signatory countries, international institutions and processes, international interest groups of forest managers, wood-processing organizations, universities, and research institutions) to promote SFM concept and implement the FOREST EUROPE Work Programme.

Key tasks of LU include:

- Elaboration of the draft of the Work Programme under the guidance of GCC;
- Organization, logistics and administrative support of all types of FOREST EUROPE meetings, events as well as for Working Groups, Expert Groups and other collaborative structures;
- Preparation of reports, background documents and other documents for the meetings;
- Preparation of background documents for respective Expert Groups, assignments for the work of external experts conducting analysis, studies, expertizes etc., necessary for implementation of the Work Programme and ministerial commitments;
- Day-to-day coordination of the implementation of all actions and activities of the Work Programme;
- Preparation and implementation of communication strategy;
- Liaison with FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers, relevant international and regional organisations and processes;
- Representation of the process, in consultation with GCC, in regional and international forest related events and organizations;
- Management, control and implementation of the FOREST EUROPE budget.

The hosting country of a current Liaison Unit in cooperation with the country which will host the next Liaison Unit consider timely transition arrangements of the Liaison Unit with the possibility of a partial overlapping of the secretariat teams. Transition of the secretariat should also include transfer of the process documentation (including resolutions, declarations and decisions of ministers).

#### **d. Focal points nominated by signatories and observers**

To enhance cooperation on forest policies among signatories and observers, signatory countries through the ministries responsible for forests and the heads of observer organizations, respectively, nominate their delegates, so-called “focal points”, to represent their countries/organisations in the FOREST EUROPE process. Focal points are appointed by national authorities or heads of organisations to liaise with the secretariat of the FOREST EUROPE process. Signatories and observers are encouraged to inform the secretariat about any changes of focal points, at their earliest convenience to secure smooth communication with country/observer organisations and the delivery of meeting documentation.

### **3. Other work modalities**

#### **Financial mechanism**

Currently, the core budget of FOREST EUROPE is covered by pooled financial contributions of five member countries of GCC. The amount of individual contributions differs depending on those countries’ position in the GCC. The co-chairing country that convenes the next MC provides 60% of the budget. The second co-chairing country provides 16% of the budget and the other three GCC countries contribute 8% each.

The core budget covers mainly the cost of LU maintenance, the organisation of FOREST EUROPE events and the implementation of the activities and actions of the Work Programme.

Voluntary and in-kind contributions are possible and strongly encouraged, particularly from those signatories and observers leading activities of the Work Programme. Also other signatories of the FOREST EUROPE process can provide voluntary financial contributions to the core budget or for special tasks.

Ministerial Conference as a special event is financed by the two co-chairing countries of the process (contributing by equal shares).

#### **Languages**

MC is usually conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation into French, Russian and official languages of the two countries that co-chair the process. Ministerial documents are presented for signature in English; however, official (signed) version of commitments in English, French and Russian are available (published at the website). Other FOREST EUROPE documents are generally available in English.

ELM are generally held in English and interpreted into French and Russian, while other FOREST EUROPE meetings are held in English only.