FECOF Statement

on the communication of the European Commission
on a new EU Forest Strategy : for forests and the forest-based sector
(COM (2013) 659)

Local and regional authorities own approximately 20 million hectares of forest in Europe (municipal forests).They ensure responsibilities as owners and managers in charge of the local implementation of numerous forestry-related policies:

They must guarantee a sustainable forest management (SFM) in order to provide :

- economic growth and jobs with increasing competitiveness and innovation in forest-based sector, promoting the use of wood from sustainable forest for energy efficiency building, biomass heating supply, innovative products ;
- social uses, as forests allow for tourism, local populations, children education, fire and natural risks protection ;
- environmental services such as clean water, rainfall erosion mitigation, biodiversity protection, climate change mitigation … .

The municipal forests are the ones that have as a matter of priority always combined manifold land-use requirements and maintained them by a multifunctional sustainable forest management: participation and identification of the local population play an essential role.

Furthermore, the management of these forests have a strong social impact by not only providing jobs and livelihood but also the direct contribution of the management income to local public budgets, with enhanced importance for keeping rural areas worth living and preventing rural depopulation.

These forests and their public owners are the first to be involved in the implementation of european policies and they support increasing obligations.

In accordance with the opinion of the Committee of the Regions, the FECOF deeply regrets the fact that the European Commission doesn't refer to the role of local and regional authorities, in implementing the Strategy.

The FECOF should be more involved in the definition of European policies related to forests and forest-based sector (rural and regional development, energy and climate, environment).

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Against this background, the FECOF welcomes:

- the target to generate an increased coordination of the EU sector policies with regard to the European forests;
- the attempt to do justice to the manifold needs and demands to Europe's forests by the holistic approach of the Forest Strategy;
- the core role of sustainable forest management recognized as crucial to ensure forests multifonctionnality : FECOF acknowledges the importance to make better use of existing criteria for SFM on the basis of a common scheme such as Forest Europe, in order to implement consistent Forest Management Plans all over the EU;
- the emphasis on the raw material supply by a sustainable forest management, the efforts to increase the resource efficiency of the wood, its contribution to the European green economy and its positive effects on the rural development;
- the fact that the European Commission recognises the importance of forest ecosystem services such as sinks in the carbon cycle, water quality and quantity regulation, soil protection, biodiversity preservation… and the goal to evaluate them : FECOF supports the target to develop a conceptual framework for evaluating ecosystem services, promoting their integration in accounting systems at EU and national levels by 2020.

At the same time, the FECOF wonders:

- whether the non-binding legal nature of the new Forest Strategy well-suited to achieve a progress compared to the forest strategy of 1998;
- whether the introduction of a binding cascading use of wood could be too restrictive, bearing in mind that the preferred use of wood should be prioritized in areas where wood provides the highest contribution to growth, jobs, energy savings and carbon capture : the FECOF supports the Committee of the Regions opinion which considers it would be more realistic to promote this principle under the guidance of local and regional authorities, according to local forestry and forest-based sector contexts.
- why, despite the adoption of the 2014-2020 Common Strategic Framework, the Commission doesn't apply the multi-fund approach in accordance with the holistic approach of the Strategy : the implementation will depend on all European funds raising (EARDF for forests management and protection, ERDF for forest-based sector competitiveness and innovation, ESF for professional training and skills growing). This point is supported in the opinion of the Committee of the Regions

The FECOF requires that the **new Forest Strategy be endorsed by the following issues:**

- The public forests in the EU consist of the **municipal forests** and the state forests.
- The municipalities as forest owners and authorities have a **special function** in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy.
- New approaches are necessary in order to overcome previous impediments in the EU support. The EU Forest Strategy should therefore go along with a comprehensive **multi-fund approach for forests and forest-based industry** which is to be created.

Brussels, 21st February 2014