

# UNECE/FAO Timber Section

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## In this issue...

- 10 Questions for Piotr Borkowski, Chief, MCPFE Liaison Unit/Warsaw
- UNECE Timber Committee Market Discussions: Together in 2007 with International Softwood Conference
- New UNECE/FAO webpage on Forest Products Marketing Distance Learning
- Visit of Univ. of Freiburg MSc students to the UNECE/FAO Timber Section
- UNECE/FAO contributes to the 2007 MCPFE, Warsaw
- Current and upcoming events
- Did you know?

*Comments and suggestions from the timber and forestry community are most welcome. Please write to us at:  
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United Nations

## 10 QUESTIONS FOR PIOTR BORKOWSKI Chief, MCPFE Liaison Unit, Warsaw

### 1. What, for you, have been the significant achievements and contributions of the Ministerial Conferences on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) since it was launched in 1990?

This year, 2007, marks the 17th year of MCPFE activities. We are now heavily engaged in preparing a report on the implementation of all MCPFE commitments, for the Ministerial Conference in Warsaw in November 2007. This is a good time to take stock of MCPFE's achievements over the last 17 years. I believe the MCPFE process has made major progress since it all began in Strasbourg in 1990 when the ministers first sat down together to address problems affecting Europe's forests. The first commitment was technical in nature; but it launched the ongoing international cooperation, which has done so much to find ways to safeguard Europe's forests.

Personally, I regard the following as the major achievements:

a. Agreement on the definition of sustainable forest management (SFM) was an essential first step that provided a solid foundation for everything that has followed. We like to say that MCPFE is a process for promoting sustainable forest management in Europe, and having the definition helped us in establishing guidelines to use and define the strategies and approaches to take.

b. The second achievement was drawing up the pan-European criteria and indicators for SFM, which have allowed us to measure progress in implementing SFM in European forests and observe the trends. This served as a useful framework for subsequent activities, studies and work in the area.

c. Third has been the elaboration of the Pan-European understanding of national forest programmes (NFP), a concept translated from the international level (from the IPF/IFF Proposals for action). It was MCPFE that worked out the approach to NFPs which is now used in the region at the national and international levels.

d. Lastly, what is worth mentioning, is the linkage between two concepts: SFM, as developed by the MCPFE and the ecosystem approach (EA), worked on by the Convention on Biodiversity. The joint position on the linkage between SFM



and the EA was agreed last year by the MCPFE and colleagues from another ministerial process – the Environment for Europe/Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (EeE/PEBLDS).

### 2. How would you assess MCPFE's effectiveness as a political platform in addressing pressing issues in the forest sector?

This is an interesting but very difficult question to answer. In considering MCPFE's effectiveness as a process, we need to look not only at the adoption of the commitments that have been made, but also at the other side – the implementation of those commitments. The process can only be considered effective if the commitments entered into by the ministers are implemented. MCPFE relies mainly on implementation at the national level. At the Pan-European and regional levels, different stakeholders contribute, notably, the FAO and UNECE who have helped the whole process greatly.

I think we can also make the assessment in the context of the international debate on forest. At the Pan-European and regional levels, different stakeholders contribute to the implementation process, notably, the FAO and UNECE who have helped the whole process greatly. How do we assess the effectiveness of the MCPFE process? It is indeed a long-lasting debate. I believe firmly, that the extent to which the commitments have been implemented demonstrates clearly the important achievements of the process.

*(Continued on page 2)*

### 3. How did the resolutions drafted by past Ministerial Conferences help to address the problems in the forest sector?

To help reinforce what I have already said, it is worth mentioning that the concept of sustainable forest management, is based on three major pillars: economic, ecological, and social. All 17 resolutions adopted in the MCPFE have contributed to these three pillars.

Every one of the Ministerial Conferences has produced a different set of commitments, all of which fit very well with the concept of sustainable forest management.

For example, the Lisbon Conference feeds into the social needs – the requirements of society, issues on climate change and protecting biodiversity.

Another example - I would propose to look at how the MCPFE process promotes cross-sectoral cooperation by establishing mutual relationships across sectors and defining the role of the forest sector and its contributions and impacts vis-a-vis other sectors.

### 4. How would you describe the evolution of the MCPFE, from its inception to the present? Has it changed with time, has it adapted to political and institutional changes? How different is the MCPFE of 2007 from the MCPFE of 1990?

I am relatively new to MCPFE, having begun my role in the process in 2001. However, as we can see from the available documents and the commitments adopted, the Conference in Strasbourg, was concerned primarily about the condition of Europe's forests. This was why the ministers decided to launch the MCPFE as an international process of cooperation and why those early commitments tended to be of scientific and technical in nature.

As the international debate on forests has widened and evolved, a similar process of evolution can be observed within the MCPFE.

Starting with the Helsinki conference in 1993, the nature of the commitments became gradually more political in nature. The ministers began to take a more global perspective, heeding the advice of the Rio Summit of 1992. The MCPFE responded in terms of the contribution that sustainable forest management could make to meet the needs of society.



The MCPFE is a high-level cooperation of some 46 European countries and the European Community, which takes care of the most important concerns about forests and forestry. The MCPFE process is based on a chain of conferences at ministerial level and follow-up mechanisms. Following the

Ministerial Conferences, the decisions passed by the ministers are further specified and put into action at expert level meetings.

Since 1990, four conferences have taken place. These are regarded as milestones in the development of international forest policy:

1990: First Ministerial Conference, Strasbourg

1993: Second Ministerial Conference, Helsinki

1998: Third Ministerial Conference, Lisbon

2003: Fourth Ministerial Conference, Vienna

The signatory states and the European Community are responsible for implementing the MCPFE decisions at regional, national and sub-national levels. For more information, visit:

During the Lisbon conference in 1998, the discussions and debates were geared very much towards society's needs.

By the time of the Vienna conference in 2003, forest issues had become global and comprehensive. The ministers focused on the issues of what could and should be the role of MCPFE at the regional, global and national levels. It also discussed how to translate the various global commitments to the regional and national levels and how MCPFE could best provide an input to these dialogues. Cross-sectoral issues, particularly, were also underlined at the Vienna Conference.

### 5. With the numerous political platforms we have now (the UN and its various agencies, the EU, NGOs and IGOs), with the ever-increasing requirement to be more than simply a venue for discussions and to do more than draft resolutions, would you say there is a need for MCPFE to re-invent itself? Will it and can it?

I will try to answer as much as I can as a member of the MCPFE Secretariat. I would say that it is up to the ministers whether they want MCPFE to make an assessment of the last 17 years. I am referring more to the political role the MCPFE process plays in the region and not in terms of the assessment of the implementation of previous commitments.

A good opportunity for this has been provided by the development, by UNFF, of a non legally-binding instrument, in which the regional process has a vital role to play. We could expect some kind of request from the global dialogue towards the regional. I think that the demands arising from the global debate will have impacts on the European and the pan-European co-operation (in particular between the three main entities, namely, FAO, UNECE, MCPFE). Even though we assess this co-operation as extremely efficient and useful we might require some measures in the future that will allow us to demonstrate the results of this co-operation to other regions as well as enhance it even more.

Looking for synergies in all the existing collaboration should allow us to reduce costs and workload for all those involved: national experts and the secretariats. Avoiding overlaps should be the driving force for enhancing regional cooperation.

### 6. How do you see MCPFE in the future?

This is very difficult to answer particularly because of MCPFE's political nature. I can only provide my personal view. I believe it will not be difficult to maintain the kind of cooperation we now enjoy – open, transparent and voluntary. I also believe that the MCPFE will further be able to demonstrate effectiveness and usefulness of its commitments, by monitoring, assessment and reporting. On the other hand we can observe increasing activities in forestry across Europe and increasing number of meetings. Many countries and international institutions in the region are restructuring their forest institutions, some are facing budgetary difficulties. We often hear national experts discuss their increasing workload. Therefore, seeking more synergies and avoiding duplication might be the right direction for enhancing regional cooperation.

### 7. With renewed awareness and keen, stronger interest in saving the forests and saving the planet, how is the MCPFE seizing this opportunity to raise public awareness of the essential role of forests?

Society's expectations are changing rapidly and people have higher expectations of forests, looking to forests to fulfil cultural, recreational and spiritual needs, as well as continuing to supply the full range of material needs.

The MCPFE is trying to demonstrate to general public the broadest possible spectrum of contemporary challenges that forests are facing these days. Therefore, at the 5th Ministerial Conference in Warsaw in November 2007, we would like to highlight the roles of forests in safeguarding people's quality of life by protecting water resources and climate on one hand, as well as by promoting use of wood as environment friendly raw material for industry and biomass for energy generation, on the other. The latter, being more of economic nature can



help to understand how forests could provide options for additional income for forest owners and by this contribute to livelihoods.

I believe that this debate will help to find the golden middle ground in meeting the demands of society on one hand, while protecting the forests as natural resource, on the other.

#### **8. What are the biggest challenges in preparing for the MCPFE 2007?**

We can divide the challenges into two parts, the political and the technical.

The next conference will be similar in terms of format to previous conferences. We need to attract as many ministers to attend as possible. This is challenging and depends on the substance of the commitments to be signed. I believe that we will be able to prepare the agenda items and topics which are attractive to the ministers, we will also provide high quality reports on the state of SFM in Europe 2007, as well as demonstrate the progress in the implementation of previous ministerial commitments. We need also to attract as many observers as possible, particularly those dealing with issues about the environment and forests.

There is the topic on interactions between the forest sector and the energy sector. Wood is promoted increasingly as an important source of clean energy but wood is also a vital raw material for the wood-processing industry. This definitely requires political solutions and answers. Another item is to reconcile the protective functions of forests with an increasing public appetite for social functions. There is also an agenda item on forests and water resources which deals with ecosystem services provided by forests and their relation to societal needs.

With this line-up of challenging topics to be discussed at the 2007 MCPFE Conference, I believe that ministers will wish to attend this summit and take part in the debate.

#### **9. How much do you enjoy your work and what aspects of the work do you like best?**

My job in the MCPFE Liaison Unit is very challenging and demanding. When things are going well, there is a lot of satisfaction. I also appreciate very much the very good and effective cooperation with all countries and many international/regional institutions. Networking with many people from other entities and sectors gives me a lot of satisfaction. The experience coming out of co-operation with others, learning their points of view, finding out answers and solutions to common concerns - all these serve as source of enormous satisfaction from my work.

#### **10. What are the important lessons you have learned in being Chief of the MCPFE Liaison Unit in Warsaw? What advice would you give to the next Chief of the MCPFE Liaison Unit?**

Patience and understanding. One thing I learned is to be patient when trying to get results. This dialogue/cooperation, requires a lot of understanding - understanding the views and needs of our counterparts and all those concerned in the process. It requires a lot of time to reach an agreement and satisfactory results.

Another is the importance of having a good team. The Liaison Unit in Warsaw is fortunate to have a very good team. Having good people in the team makes the work easier and very satisfying. I think as a team we are reaching, step by step, our destination point. I sincerely believe that we will be able to prepare a conference that will be satisfactory to all, to the European countries, to the observers, and also to ourselves as secretariat staff.

The future of MCPFE looks promising. At present we have 46 European countries involved in the process and more than 40 observers. And these numbers are increasing. I hope that by organizing a good Conference in Warsaw, we will be able to attract more people from outside.

As for offering advice to the next Chief of the Liaison Unit, I would say, above all, be patient and be prepared for the hard work. There is no doubt that the work is very satisfying, but it is also very hard.

### **UNECE Timber Committee Market Discussions: Together in 2007 with International Softwood Conference**

For the first time, the Timber Committee will hold joint market discussions with the International Softwood Conference in the Palais des Nations on 8-9 October 2007. Both groups have heretofore held separate market discussions based on separate market forecasts and country market statements. All will be combined this year, resulting in greater efficiency and reduced costs. Each group will also hold its normal meetings separately, thereby preserving their identity, needs and interests. ISC delegates will pay a registration fee to cover their additional costs, for example luncheons and a gala dinner. If this first-time merger is successful for both groups, we will repeat joint market discussions.

The number of participants at the market discussions will double, and some new subjects will be added, while traditional market segments will be maintained. As always, we encourage you to reserve your hotel rooms early, especially with the increased participation. We will announce plans as they develop on the TC/EFC website. For more information, please contact: Ed.Pepke@unece.org.

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#### **New UNECE/FAO webpage on Forest Products Marketing Distance Learning**

The new webpage provides useful links on Distance Learning Courses in Forest Products Marketing, which include: forest products marketing and forestry; undergraduate, graduate, general courses; general forest products marketing and forestry information.

The links are organized by the 4 Ps of marketing: Product, Price, Place and Promotion.

Creation of this site is part of an initiative of the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Products Markets and Marketing. We realize that the list of online learning opportunities will need periodic updating and we welcome your suggestions for additional links to info. timber@unece.org.

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### **Visit of University of Freiburg MSc students to the UNECE/FAO Timber Section**

Students of the M.Sc. programme on Environmental Governance of the University of Freiburg, Germany, visited the UNECE/FAO Timber Section in Geneva in February 2007.

The Timber Section organized the programme of the field trip which included meetings, briefings and interaction with officers and staff of the UNECE, UNEP, UNCTAD, WTO, ILO, IUCN and WWF. The three-day field trip aimed at providing insights to students on the various activities of the different UN organizations and NGOs working in the environment sector. The Timber Section welcomed the chance to spread information about its work and programmes, and those of the other UN organizations/agencies in the field of environment and share this information to future decision makers.

The 22 students from 15 different countries and their mentors appreciated the experience and requested the assistance of the Timber Section to repeat it next year.

## UNECE/FAO contributes to the preparation for 2007 MCPFE, Warsaw

UNECE/FAO is giving high priority at present to providing the major background document for the Fifth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (5-7 November 2007, Warsaw, Poland). We are preparing jointly with the MCPFE Liaison Unit Warsaw (LUW) the Report on "State of Forests and Sustainable Forest Management in Europe 2007", which will be available well before the Conference. Up till now the focus has been on collecting and validating data from countries and international data providers.

The Report will be an essential tool for monitoring, assessing and reporting on progress in sustainable forest management in the region and it aims to respond to vital questions on the state and trends in the European forest management. It will present the most recent, objective and comparable data on forest resources in Europe. The Report is organized according to the pan-European Criteria and Indicators of sustainable forest management, including changes in forest cover, growing stock and increment, forest health and vitality, forest biological diversity and social/economic aspects.

UNECE/FAO and the FRA (global forest resource assessment) team in Europe have focused on collecting data through a large enquiry, validating, and analysing them. In addition a special enquiry on private forest ownership, the first in recent years, has been carried out.

As early as February 2007 (9 months before the Conference), the UNECE/FAO Team in Geneva succeeded in collecting impressive set of data from countries in response to the detailed enquiry circulated in March 2006, covering various pan-European forest resource quantitative indicators.

For many MCPFE member countries, the reporting on quantitative indicators proved to be a serious challenge due to lack of data/information, and lack of capacity to prepare the requested information. As a result, some 12 country reports were compiled as "desk studies", presenting estimates for those countries, which were not able to report. This work was led by Kit Prins and Alex Korotkov, and supported by Helena Guarín and Franziska Hirsch. Ms. Hirsch is responsible for the work on private forest owners with the support of Matthias Wilmhammer. Orjan Jonsson and Lars Gunnar Marklund in Rome provided invaluable support to the process. However regular budget resources were not sufficient for this major effort: significant external resources were required. In-kind contribution received from Norway and the Czech Republic were essential in carrying out the tasks (loans of Stein Tomter and Richard Slabý for long periods). Financial support for the report preparation was received from the European Commission (EU DG-Environment), Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

After data on quantitative indicators were checked and validated, all the country reports were formatted in a standard template, and the data were loaded and stored in the global FRA database hosted by FAO Rome. The design, structure and contents of the database were developed in close cooperation with the FAO global FRA team in Rome. The database, which is designed to be compatible with the global FRA-2005 dataset, allows generation of graphs and tables, which will be included in the Report. Some 40 final country statistical tables will be a part of the final report.

The joint efforts of all teams, partners and contributors involved in the preparation of the Report helped to improve considerably the experience and methodology in collecting and managing comprehensive forestry datasets.

At present lead authors are drafting chapters (one per criterion) under the leadership of the two study editors, Michael Köhl and Ewald Rametsteiner. A first draft for review is expected in June, while the study will be issued in October/November.

When finalized, the MCPFE-2007 Report "State of Forests and Sustainable Forest Management in Europe" will provide policy and decision makers with up-to-date data and key facts showing the extent to which the goals of sustainable forest management were achieved at the national and regional levels.

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### Current and upcoming events

- 14-16 May, UNECE/FAO Exchange of Experiences on Forest Policies and Institutions in East European countries, Zamardi, Hungary,
- 14-17 May, UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire: 4th International Wildland Fire Conference, Sevilla, Spain
- 17-19 May 2007 FAO/ITTO Wood-based Bioenergy Meeting at Ligna, Hannover, Germany
- 21-22 May, Monitoring Forest Resources for Sustainable Forest Management: Third Meeting of the Team of Specialists, Edinburgh, UK
- 22 May, Meeting of the Joint UNECE Timber Committee and FAO European Forestry Commission Bureaux with the MCPFE General Coordinating Committee (GCC), Geneva, Switzerland
- 23-25 May, Safety and health in forestry operations: changes, trends and progress, Annecy, France
- June 2007, FAO Technical meeting on Global Forest Outlook, Italy, Rome

### Did you know...

- that the earliest surviving written evidence (approx. 4500 years ago) of an international timber trade occurs in the Palermo Stone (so-named because it is held in the Palermo museum in Sicily), in which Snefru, the first pharaoh of the fourth dynasty, tells of importing to Egypt from Lebanon, 40 ships filled with cedar logs (source: J. H. Breasted, "Ancient Records of Egypt").

- that the oldest known example of plywood occurs in a third dynasty coffin from Egypt. Made from six layers of wood, each 4mm thick, it was held together by wooden pegs. Just like modern plywood, the grain of each sheet was laid crosswise for added strength. Plywood subsequently became much more widespread and, about 3750 years ago, the thickness of each layer was reduced to 3mm and the sheets were bonded together using glue made from bone, sinew and cartilage, which was applied hot (source: J. H. Breasted, "Ancient Records of Egypt").

- that the Frankincense tree provides one of the most evocative scents in the long history of aromatics. Its fresh, fruity, pine-lemon bouquet with delicately sweet, resinous and woody undertones, has been used since ancient times to awaken higher consciousness, and enhance spirituality, meditation and prayer. The name "Frankincense" is widely known as a historic biblical ingredient, and to many as one of three gifts from the visiting Magi to the newborn Jesus. (source: FAO corporate document repository).

