Statement on the EU Communication on Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests

CEI-Bois welcomes the EU Communication on “Stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests” and supports the objective of the EU to prevent deforestation and forest degradation at global level. The European woodworking industry considers the priorities outlined in the Communication to be the right way forward. The EU woodworking industry agrees on the need to carefully assess the potential for further regulatory and non-regulatory actions and the impacts of possible new measures. The assessments should also take into account strengthening the enforcement of existing legislation and tools.

Preventing deforestation and promoting sustainable forestry is not a matter for the EU alone, and therefore a partnership approach is important.

The EU Communication acknowledges that the main direct driver of deforestation worldwide is land use change caused by agricultural expansion (accounting for 80% of total deforestation), with weak governance, illegal activities and lack of investment in sustainable forest management also playing a role. Lack of sustainable forest management and natural disturbances such as pests and fires are also factors causing forest degradation.

The Woodworking industry is committed to sustainable forest management and over 90% of the roundwood used by the EU wood-processing industries is harvested in Europe, where adequate legislation against deforestation and forest degradation is already in place. Moreover, CEI-Bois fully supports already existing EU initiatives such as FLEGT (EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan) and the EU Timber Regulation (Reg. EU 995/2010), that aim to improve forest governance in third countries and to prevent wood and wood-based products that derive from illegally logged forests to enter the European market.

Therefore, CEI-Bois takes the opportunity of the launch of the new Strategy to express the following recommendations:

- Extend the scope of the EU Timber Regulation to include all wood products, printed products and furniture products currently outside the scope, except for recycled materials and wood packaging for transport. This would avoid loopholes in the environmental policy framework and would ensure a level playing field between competitors inside and outside of the EU. Ensuring a consistent implementation and enforcement of the EU Timber Regulation by Member States is also of key importance.

- Increase the support to and awareness about FLEGT licensing system to improve forest governance in tropical countries and encourage the consumption of verified legal tropical timber. Today 15 tropical countries are negotiating or implementing FLEGT agreements with
the EU, accounting for 80% of global tropical timber trade\(^2\). In 2016, Indonesia become the first country to issue FLEGT licenses to timber products exported to the EU. A study\(^3\) reveals that misconceptions about tropical timber persist in public procurement bodies and that the understanding of the benefits of Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) and FLEGT is still limited. Increasing the recognition of FLEGT licensed timber in national Public Procurement policies as a mean of verification of compliance with legality requirements would send a positive signal to countries engaged in VPA processes.

- EU Forests are increasingly exposed to the effects of climate change, which directly and indirectly affect their growth and productivity through changes in temperature, rainfall, weather and other factors such as the increased number and intensity of fires\(^4\) or pest outbreaks. **Active and sustainable forest management** is a key to keeping the European forests healthy. Healthy and multifunctional European forests are essential to reach the environmental objectives of the EU and to meet the manifold societal expectations on climate change mitigation, protection against natural hazards, recreational space, development of the bioeconomy and biodiversity conservation, just to name a few.

- CEI-Bois emphasizes that the European forests and the forest-based sector should be integrated into the new European Green Deal through a robust **EU Forest Strategy post-2020**, that would provide a framework for a consistent and well-coordinated action at EU level. Thanks to its properties of absorbing CO\(_2\) and storing carbon in wood, trees and timber play an important role in the fight against climate change and in decarbonising key economic sectors such as construction. The carbon stored during the tree’s growth phase is also stored in wood products throughout their life cycle, including re-use and recycling.

- CEI-Bois fully supports the role of **EU Trade Agreements** as a leverage to promote sustainable forest management and halt deforestation worldwide. Sustainable development chapters of FTAs are of paramount importance and their implementation and enforcement should be duly monitored by the EU.

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**CEI-Bois, the European Confederation of the Woodworking Industries, numbers 18 national organizations, 4 European Sector Federations as well as 1 Private Industrial Group. It is the Organization backing the interests of the whole industrial European wood sector: more than 171.000 companies generating an annual turnover of 133 billion euros and employing 1 million workers in the EU.**

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\(^2\)See [http://www.euflegt.efi.int](http://www.euflegt.efi.int) for more information.

\(^3\)International Tropical Timber Organisation / FLEGT Independent Market Monitor (IMM), A study of EU public timber procurement policies, related guidance and reference to FLEGT, May 2019