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## **Demands of European municipal forest owners for the 2024 European elections**

The sustainable management of European forests is based on the consideration of the multifunctionality of these forests. For the implementation of these principles, as well as qualified forestry personnel, a constant exchange of experience in the European context is necessary to resolve conflicts of interest and to take account of local particularities.

FECOF, as the representative body of municipal forest owners, fulfils these objectives and advocates the interests of municipal forests at European level. The FECOF develops objectives for community forests in a democratic sense and contributes to the sustainable conservation of these forests. The national administrations of the member countries ensure that multifunctionality and the various environmental, economic, social and cultural functions are taken into account. All of the abovementioned aspects of forest functions are of crucial importance for a forest that is close to its citizens.

The weather and climate are changing rapidly, and this also affects forests. However, municipal forest owners are well prepared to meet future challenges and are in favour of implementing the principles described with the long-term aim of securing regional jobs and economic growth without damaging the environment. The European forestry and timber industry generates a total annual total gross value added of 1.1 trillion euros. This is equivalent to the economic output of Spain. It secures 17.5 million jobs. This means that every 16th job in Europe is directly or indirectly linked to the forestry and timber industry.

In order to fulfil this claim and the objectives in the future, European municipal forest owners need practicable regulation from the EU. We therefore call for this:

### **1. Take bureaucracy reduction seriously and limit overarching EU regulation**

In view of the challenges of adapting European forests to climate change, a variety of solutions are required. These solutions must always be adapted to local conditions. General and highly restrictive top-down requirements prevent the diversity of forests and the solutions of those who manage them. European forests are too diverse to be regulated with only a single solution. The principle of subsidiarity is of crucial importance here.

### **2. More pragmatic, consistent and practical regulation that remains affordable**

Before the EU Commission adopts legal standards relating to forests, greater attention must be paid in future to the actual effects in other areas. In particular, burdensome economic effects must be avoided. The various management requirements in forestry lead to considerable monetary losses, which are no longer sustainable in view of the already difficult economic situation in forestry operations due to climate-related damage. As a rule, there is no financial compensation or at least it has not been conclusively clarified.



### 3. Systemic thinking and action in terms of the diverse services provided by the forest

It is important to think and act holistically when it comes to appreciating the diverse services provided by the forest. In addition to its contribution to climate protection, the forest provides a wide range of ecological services. Forest policy should aim to achieve a balance between these services instead of focussing exclusively on individual aspects such as biodiversity. Comprehensive and sustainable forest management should take into account ecological as well as social and economic aspects.

It is regrettable that the European Parliament's Environment Committee often promotes one-sided policy initiatives focussing exclusively on biodiversity. Such a one-sided focus should be reconsidered and the Committee's remit reduced to an appropriate level to ensure a more balanced consideration of different policy areas.

### 4. We need a science- and fact-based forestry policy

The debate on forestry policy is emotionalised and polarised, with facts often being ignored. Some political actors defend their positions with exaggerated alarmism. It is important to return to an objective discourse and to support sustainable forest management with scientific foundations. When the Renewable Energy Directive RED III was revised in 2023, the initial intention was to define all forest wood as "non renewable" for energy use, which contradicted scientific findings. Such an implementation would have hindered the use of forest wood as a renewable energy source and made the transition to climate-stable forests more difficult.

### 5. Motivate forest owners and involve them in policy development

Legal standards were often established without the involvement of local forest owners. A partnership-based dialogue at EU level is necessary, but the restructuring of the technical committees is hampering this. The EU regulation on the deforestation-free supply chain, for example, aims to stop illegal deforestation, which is positive in principle. However, the planned implementation in some FECOF member countries poses a minor problem, as hardly any illegal deforestation takes place here. The impending bureaucratic burden is disproportionate if it applies across the board to all member countries and will exclude many forest owners. It is crucial that national implementation is appropriate and pragmatic, so that there is room for manoeuvre for a design that is appropriate to the risks.

### 6. The EU must once again become more attractive for skilled labour and remain so in the long term

We call for increased investment in the training and employment of forestry professionals across Europe to ensure the sustainable management of our forests and to effectively tackle the challenges of climate change and increasing forest fires. We believe that the EU has a particular responsibility in this regard, as cross-border employment is already commonplace in the forestry industry.

In many European regions there are numerous centers providing highly qualified forestry training. Centers capable of training future forest managers in our region. It would be necessary to improve the professional opportunities of these students and their chances of finding a quality job with added value in the forestry sector in the field of European Union.

7. We call for the expansion, coordination and promotion of the efforts of the member states in forest fire protection

There is an urgent need to strengthen forest fire protection in Europe. This includes investment in preventive measures such as fire monitoring systems, improved infrastructure and the training of emergency services. In addition, cross-border cooperation must be intensified in order to be able to respond effectively to forest fires and minimise ecological and economic damage. Otherwise, we will permanently jeopardise the forest ecosystem in many places in the future and thus the extensive ecosystem services that are provided free of charge.

8. Organisation to implement the demands and ensure a uniform European forestry policy

In order to guarantee the above mentioned requirements it is necessary to establish within the New European Commission a new Directorate responsible for fulfillment of the European forest policies under the authority of the Commissioner on agriculture.

FECOF, as a municipal forest owners' association at EU level, emphasises the importance of European cooperation. Europe is a source of solutions to many challenges and strengthens fundamental values such as democracy and the rule of law worldwide. The integration of Europe is an integral part of the political and economic identity of the FECOF member countries. In order to move Europe forward, weaknesses must be identified and improvements sought.

The FECOF calls for a revision of EU forest policy that enables sustainable and environmentally sound management without imposing restrictions. It is crucial that all ecosystem services provided by forests are recognised in order to ensure sustainable management. Failure to do so would have serious ecological and economic consequences and place a burden on future generations. The FECOF hopes that the voice of European municipal forest owners will be heard more strongly at EU level in future.

