



Assessment of the achievements and added value of the Forest Europe Process

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Abstract

The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (then MCPFE now Forest Europe) process was launched in the early 1990s at which time ministers in charge of forests gathered in Strasbourg. At this point in time, the Forest Europe (FE) process is comprised out of 46 member countries, including the European Union. In addition a large number of interest groups, organisations and countries hold an observer status. The present study analysed the past achievements in terms of output and impacts as well as it assessed the value added of the Forest Europe process as compared to international forest-related processes. The study pointed out that the Forest Europe process since its establishment has become a well-recognised European forest policy forum that accomplished a large number of relevant forest policy decisions and policy instruments including the start of legal instrument negotiations and it showed clearly that the impact of the FE process is considerable, but the discussed achievements are also accompanied by a number of shortcomings. The evaluation of the value added of the FEs outputs and the process itself revealed also a rather mixed picture. While the value added of some of its resolutions ranked high, the limited national implementation rate and the missing systematic relationship with the EU are to be conceived as significant setback. Comparing the FE process to other international forest-related policy processes the analysis showed that the regional one displays considerable advantages in terms of more flexible rules of procedure and looser participation rights, thematic closeness to the region and the development of policy instruments.

Keywords

FOREST EUROPE, evaluation, impact analysis

Table of Contents

1	<i>Forest Europe put in perspective</i>	1
2	<i>Forest Europe's achievements within Pan-Europe: examples and an analysis of its outputs</i>	2
2.1	Examples for major achievements	2
2.2	Systematic output analysis in quantitative and qualitative terms	3
3	<i>Impact analysis and valued added of the Forest Europe process</i>	11
3.1	Impact analysis	11
3.2	Analysis of the value added of Forest Europe as compared to international processes	14
4	<i>Discussion, conclusions and some recommendations for the future</i>	16
	<i>Referenzen</i>	19

1 Forest Europe put in perspective

The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (then MCPFE now Forest Europe) process was launched in the early 1990s at which time ministers in charge of forests gathered in Strasbourg (see Figure 1). Following the Strasbourg conference, five more Pan-European ministerial conferences have been organised in order to promote the implementation of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) in the region.

At this point in time, the Forest Europe (FE) process is comprised out of 46 member countries, including the European Union. In addition a large number of interest groups, organisations and countries hold an observer status. The FE process has mainly concentrated on issuing political declarations, resolutions and developing Europeanised policy instruments, at least up until the 2011 ministerial conference held in Oslo, when negotiations for a Legally Binding Agreement (LBA) on forests commenced.

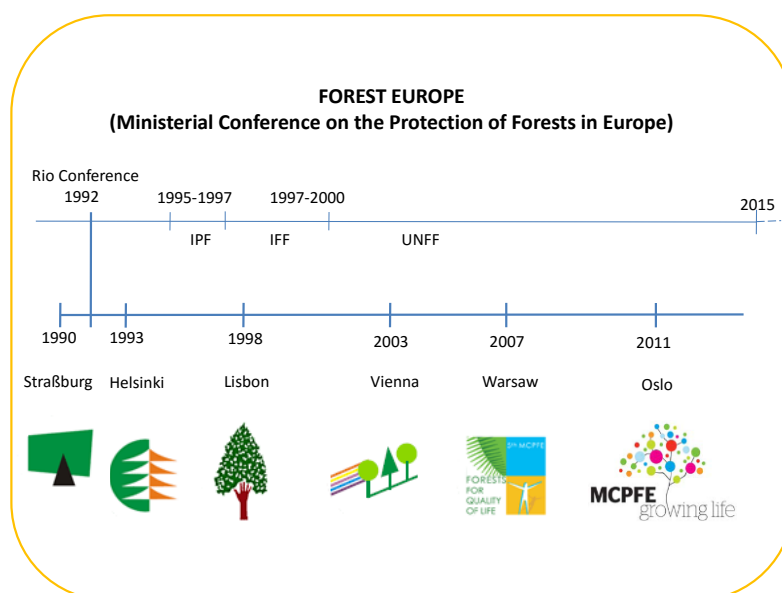


Figure 1 Forest Europe time-line

Put in a more international perspective, the FE process clearly precedes the launch of the global forest policy process (IPF-IFF-UNFF) that began after the Rio conference in 1992. Since this point in time we have furthermore seen the adoption of various forest-related conventions (e.g. CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD) and regional instruments (e.g. the Alpine and Carpathian, European Landscape conventions etc.) that relate directly to forests. Even more, in this time period we have also seen the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Former Yugoslavia, which has resulted in several new European countries. One effect of this development is that the European Union (EU) has more than doubled its number of Member States, and currently only 18 member countries of the FE process do not belong to the EU. The EU has also stepped up its efforts to formulate its own forest policy and has developed a number of policy instruments that directly (and indirectly) support the implementation of SFM. It is with this background in mind that the present assessment has been prepared.

Methods applied: *To be able to assess the achievements of the FE process, including examples of achievements and successful stories, the project team analysed the qualitative and quantitative outputs, impacts and valued added of the FE process. It should however be noted the short timing of the project (1 December, 2014, to 16 January, 2015) forced the analysis to be based on pre-existing documents, the Forest Europe webpage and available scientific literature. It has not been possible to conduct any interviews nor other forms of data collection. The complete list of documents assessed is available upon request.*

2 Forest Europe's achievements within Pan-Europe: examples and an analysis of its outputs

This chapter begins by providing three examples of achievements followed by a more systematic assessment of the various outputs (e.g. resolutions, declarations, policy instruments, publications, events etc.) that have been created through the FE process over the past 24 years. Since fewer documents are available from ministerial conferences prior to 1998, the analysis relies since then on summaries, scientific publications and the MCPE, as well as the Forest Europe homepage (see www.foresteurope.com).

2.1 Examples for major achievements

Clearly the definition of SFM, the development of criteria and indicators for SFM and the design of a European approach to National Forest Programmes (NFPs) are amongst the major achievements of the FE process. Following below is a short summary of some of these achievements in terms of national uptake:

Example 1: Definitions of sustainable forest management included in legislation

According to the latest State of Europe's Forests report, an explicit reference to the SFM definition was included in more than 60% of all 36 reporting countries, pointing towards a significant degree of uptake. For instance, a search in the EUR-lex database¹ showed that "sustainable forest management" was referenced 379 times in all kinds of policy documents since 1994. The exact definition of SFM – according to resolution H1 – was even included in legal text such as the Austrian Forest Act (Paragraph 1) and also directly cited 4 times in EU documents (it was directly referenced in three Commission staff documents relating to forest policy and a European Parliament resolution relating to the green paper on climate change and forests). Sustainable forest management as defined in H1 has thus become a well-recognised concept in Europe but received also considerable attention beyond.

Example 2: National uptake of the pan-European criteria and indicator framework

The criteria and indicator (C&I) set has since 1999 served as a guidance framework for monitoring and reporting as well as for dialogue and communication on SFM in Europe at large. Three State of Europe's Forests reports have been published that

¹ EUR-lex database provides access to all legal texts issued by the European Union.

were all based on the C&Is. A more recent study on the implementation of criteria and indicators (EFI 2013) showed that C&I's have been used as a basis for developing national-level indicators in over two-thirds (64%) of 38 signatory states since 2003. Most of the remaining countries are also planning (or have already developed) national-level indicators. Even more, 33 signatory states already use the C&I to assess SFM nationally. It was also pointed out that the C&I framework has had an impact on the improvement of national forest inventories, monitoring systems and forest data – in terms of availability, quality and comparability. Albeit this success, it was suggested to revise the C&Is to make them fit even better to changing realities by increasing their inter-sectoral relevance.

Example 3: National forest programmes

NFPs first emerged in the mid-1990s. The FE process worked towards a common understanding of NFPs in the European context, culminating in the development of a MCPFE approach to NFPs in Europe (MCPFE 2003). Amongst other things, this resulted in the inclusion of a separate NFP indicator in the C&I set. The continued relevance of NFPs is illustrated by the latest draft version of the text for the LBA. It states that parties, in order to achieve the objectives and to implement the obligations of the convention, shall develop, implement and update NFPs or equivalents (INC Forests 2013). At present, the State of Europe's Forests report (2011) stated that all 38 reporting countries have an NFP or a similar programme in place. No other policy instrument has reached this level of full national uptake (more than 60% in forest policy documents referred to NFPs). The variety of NFP designs and implementing practices existing in the different countries support the conclusion that the idea of NFP has successfully trickled down from the regional and international levels. It has been adopted and translated to meet national (and local) needs, including the re-interpretation of regional and global requirements.

Please note that those examples of FE achievements described are not necessarily exhaustive. On the basis of FE resolutions and policy instruments also other activities have been developed across Europe. Further examples include the EUFORGEN project² that contributes to the implementation of the S2 resolution and among others the forest certification system PEFC³ that has been developed on the basis of the PEOLGs.

2.2 Systematic output analysis in quantitative and qualitative terms

a) Political resolutions, decisions, declarations, policy instruments, visions, partnership arrangements, policy goals and targets

Outputs	1990 Strasbourg	1993 Helsinki	1998 Lisbon	2003 Vienna	2007 Warsaw	2011 Oslo	Total number
Resolutions	6	4	2	5	2	-	19
Decisions ⁴	-	-	-	-	-	2	2

² <http://www.euforgen.org/>

³ www.pefc.org/

⁴ Please note: the two decisions taken at the Oslo conference were signed by ministers.

Declarations ⁵	1	1	1	1	1	-	5
Policy instruments	-	2	2	2(+1) ⁶	-	1	7
Formal partnership arrangements			1	<i>continued</i>	<i>continued</i>	<i>continued</i>	1
Policy visions	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Goals and targets	-	-	-	-	-	7+9	7+9

Table 1 Forest Europe's outputs between 1990 and 2011

Source: Forest Europe homepage, 2014/2015

In total, 19 forest-related resolutions, 2 decisions and 5 declarations were formulated (including 2 visions for the future) and adopted by the Forest Europe member countries and the EU. One partnership arrangement with the Environment for Europe process was agreed to in 1997 concerning the work programme on the conservation and enhancement of biological and landscape diversity in forest ecosystems. Later on this arrangement was more formalised (see Vienna resolution 4, Annex 1). During the last ministerial conference in Oslo, seven goals for forests and nine policy targets that need to be realised by 2020 (see Table 1) were furthermore adopted. Thus, in quantitative terms, the output of the FE process can be considered to be significant. It is however better manageable as compared to for example the approximately 300 Proposals for Action and numerous follow-up decisions taken within the global forest dialogue that show considerable overlap and repetition.

While the number of political resolutions and declarations is much larger as compared to policy instruments, the latter present the most important achievements. As a matter of fact, political resolutions serve well for communication purposes and the general agreement to common targets and goals to be achieved, but it is the impact of policy instruments on actual policy implementation that is looked for as it is expected to be much higher in the long run. Therefore the definition and establishment of policy instruments that serve national and local implementation purposes of FE requirements are essentially well placed. Particularly the definition of SFM, the C&I set, as well as the NFP approach, the guidelines for implementing SFM, biodiversity conservation, afforestation and reforestation and the common assessment framework for protected and protective areas are relevant.

Defining what is meant by SFM presents a clear and significant achievement. For instance, the global decision-making process is still struggling with a definition of SFM amongst a range of competing ideas and definitions.

Based on the criteria and indicators the analysis of the status quo and change of forests and forest-related matters was and is possible. SFM implementation thus becomes comparable across all pan-European countries.

NFPs that are more and more implemented across Europe changed the way forest policy-making is taking place by taking into account different means of participation, interactions and planning processes, as well as, involving sectors outside the core forest sector in decision-making processes.

⁵ Please note: the declarations of the Vienna and Warsaw conferences were also signed by ministers.

⁶ Please note: Criteria and indicators were updated in Vienna

Finally, with the protected and protective areas assessment framework, a European classification was created that allows collecting and comparing related data across all member countries. This can be understood as a reporting tool that assesses how protection is being perceived.

Besides the important partnership arrangement with the Environment for Europe process less formal partnership arrangements exist with a large number of international organisations, stakeholders as well as scientific organisations that support the secretariat (see respective work programmes), but also the implementation of individual resolutions. In this regards we want to highlight the partnership arrangement with the UNECE/FAO Joint Section for the preparation of the State of Europe's Forest (SoEF) report and further collaboration with FAO/FRA concerning forest data collection. All of these partnerships and collaborations help to prevent overlaps in policy developments and data collection and reporting, as well as they have reinforced expert knowledge networks, which in turn benefit forest policy-making. In conclusion, the development of visionary statements and the acceptance of common forest policy goals and targets, as well as a mission statement during the latest ministerial conference, serves to create a more unified picture of the FE process.

b) Topic and instrument assessment

As illustrated by the quantitative analysis (see Figure 2), the topics addressed by the ministerial resolutions and decisions have changed considerably over the past 24 years:

The Strasbourg (1990) resolutions primarily addressed monitoring concerns of forest ecosystems, in particular as regards to air pollution prevention, genetic diversity enhancement, adaptation of mountain forests as well as the creation of a research network. This changed considerably with the Helsinki resolutions, where scientific concerns were still present, but the process got more political at this stage.

The Helsinki (1993) resolutions helped to establish the first Pan-European forest-related policy instruments by putting forward guidelines for SFM and biodiversity conservation. Cooperation with countries in transition and climate change adaptation were also high on the agenda at the time.

The Lisbon (1998) resolutions emphasise socio-economic aspects and functions of forests, especially rural development were addressed at this point in time. Again two important policy instruments (C&I for SFM and Operational Level guidelines for SFM) were approved. These instruments aimed, on the one hand, to assess the existence of various parameters in relation to SFM in Europe and, on the other hand, to support the actual implementation efforts in forest management planning and to help establish common practices for SFM.

development of nine targets. The start of a legally binding agreement negotiation was also positively decided upon. In response to the global climate change regime another policy instrument was adopted, the afforestation and reforestation guidelines.

Even though topics have changed over time, the assessment showed that while firstly forest protection dominated the early resolutions, later ones have also strongly supported a global legally-binding forest instrument and more recent resolutions have embraced all sustainable development functions. At the latest conference FE members agreed to starting negotiations for an international forest agreement.

The manner in which topics have been addressed over the years have changed as well. From being a more scientific process, emphasising strong scientific cooperation, the FE process has become more political. It has put a strong emphasis on the translation of international requirements into regional ones and also developed a European approach to increase action and collaboration with Eastern European partners. Finally, a large range of topics addressed were also topical in other international processes, such as the global forest dialogue, the climate and biodiversity protection regimes, regional processes on criteria and indicators and international organisations, such as UNEP, FAO, UNECE and ITTO to name a few.

c) Signed resolutions per country and the European Union

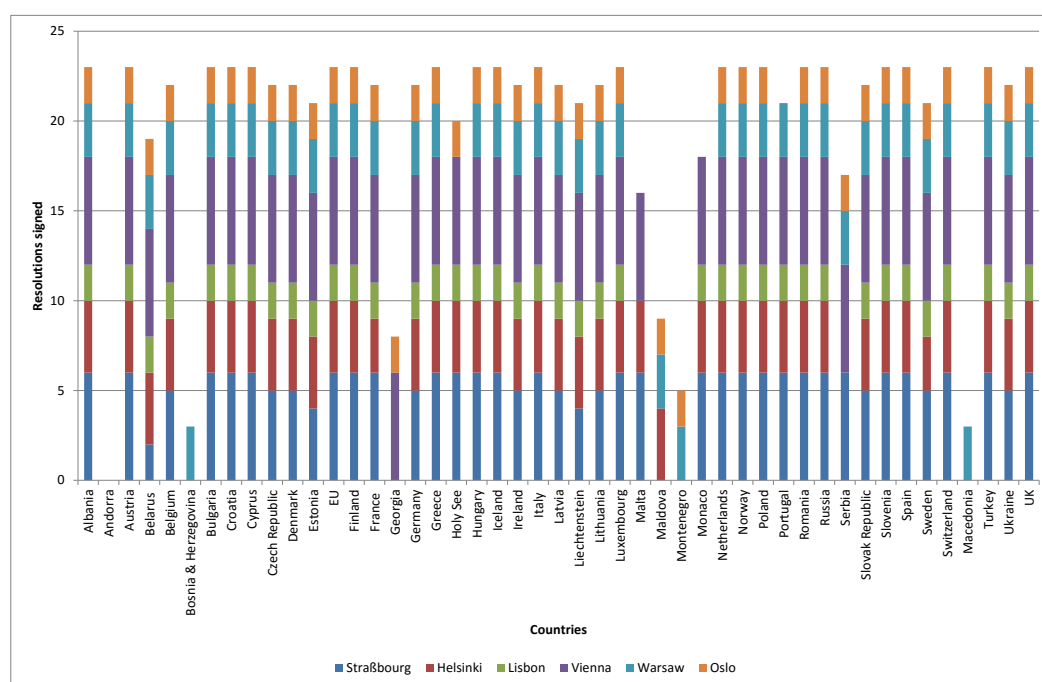


Figure 3 Resolutions and declarations signed by ministers and political leaders in charge of forests

Source: Proceedings of the Forest Europe Process Oslo, 2011

Most of the FE resolutions, including two political declarations (Vienna, Warsaw) and two decisions (Oslo), have been signed by ministers and political leaders in charge of forests in Forest Europe member countries (see Figure 3). Due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia, some European states became independent states during the 1990s and 2000. This explains why some countries have not been part of the process from the onset and why not all previous

agreements have been signed. Twenty-two countries have however signed all resolutions, the Vienna and Warsaw declarations as well as the Oslo decisions. Fourteen countries have decided to not to sign one or two resolutions. The rest has signed fewer resolutions.

While the signing of non-legal texts does not essentially proof to have a comparative advantage in implementation as compared to non-signed resolutions, it seemingly triggered ministers' attention and reinforced their participation at ministerial conferences (see text below) which again may have contributed to rise political elites interest in the matter.

d) Networks created based on participant lists at ministerial conferences

The analysis furthermore showed that ministers, secretary of states or commissioners from the European Commission from more than half of all FE member countries have on average participated in the ministerial conferences since 1993. Only three countries and the EU were represented by political leaders during all ministerial conferences (see Figure 4). This can in part be explained by the fact that some countries ceased to exist, while others were formed during the 1990s and beyond.

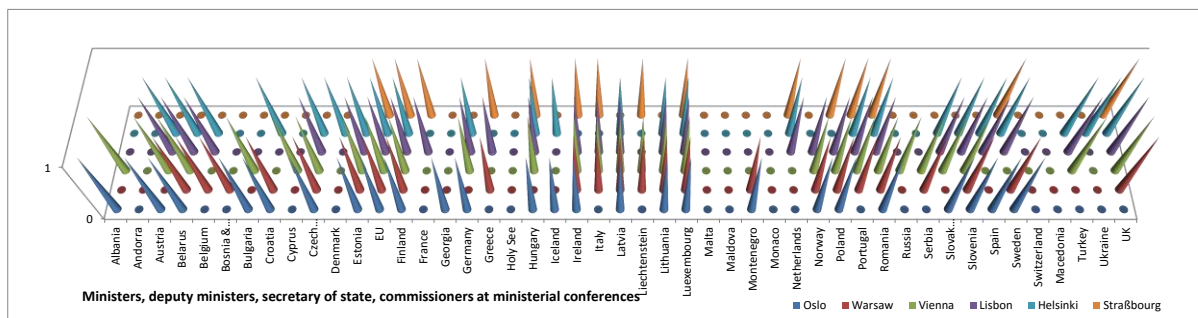


Figure 4 Ministers, deputy ministers, secretary of state, and commissioners at six ministerial conferences

Source: Helsinki, Vienna, Warsaw and Oslo proceedings and report about Strasbourg conference

Another interesting finding (see Figure 5) has been that science organisations and environmental NGOs started to participate only during the second ministerial conference in Helsinki (1993), NGO representation, including forest owners and industry representatives, embarked on the political endeavour only during the Lisbon ministerial conference (1998). Since then, this has changed considerably as more and more NGOs and international organisations (45 according to the Forest Europe's homepage, 2015) seem to find an interest in the process and its decision-making.

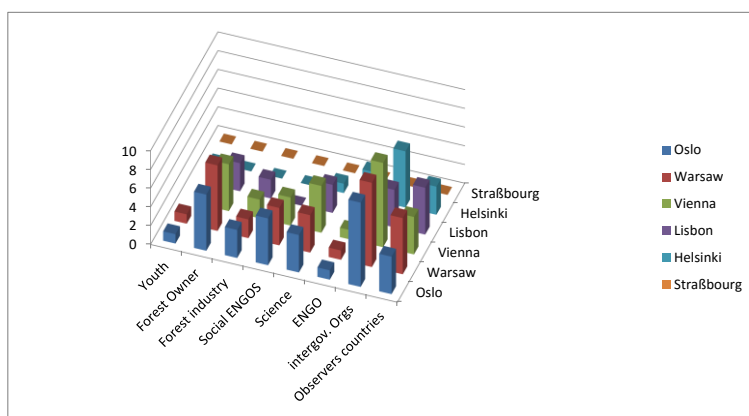


Figure 5 NGO participation at ministerial conferences

Source: Helsinki, Vienna, Warsaw and Oslo proceedings and report about Strasbourg conference

While the participation of ministers and political leaders has more or less remained stable since 1993, NGO representation has clearly increased over the years. This is especially remarkable as no systematic financial assistance is granted to observers or delegates from less favourable economic contexts. This clearly demonstrates that the FE process is perceived as relevant to both the political elite and interest groups. The analysis moreover illustrates that observer countries, such as Japan and the United States, have shown an increasing interest in the ministerial gatherings. Some delegations from observer countries have even been headed by ministers. All in all, 14 countries currently hold an observer status (Forest Europe's homepage, 2015).

The ministerial gatherings represents a unique exchange forum between ministers, NGOs and ENGOs, scientists and scientific organisations as well as national advisors and European(ized) NGOs in charge of forest-related issues within Europe. While other forest-related forums exist in Europe, those do not necessarily show the same thematical ambitions, nor the same political commitment by the political forest elite. In addition, the possibility for observer organisations and countries to participate openly (including text negotiations within Expert Level meetings and thematic meetings) is not necessarily existent in other negotiation contexts, where rules of procedures are much stiffer. This form of exchange is therefore rather unique as it gives a voice to all participants on potentially equal terms. Seemingly it has not reduced the importance of observers to a minimum, particularly as regards to procedural matters, nor has it excluded potentially weaker organisations, as the granting of an observer status seems comparatively easier in contrast to other international forums.

e) Publications available to the public

Based on an analysis of the FE webpage (2014/2015)⁷, nine publications produced during the chairmanship of Austria, fourteen publications during the chairmanship of Poland, twenty during the chairmanship of Oslo and two during the present chairmanship of Madrid were found. Among these publications, 12 reports are directly related to the ministerial conferences (e.g. State of Europe's Forests report, implementation report, work programme etc.), 21 publications provide topical

⁷ While earlier Liaison Units of the ministerial process have also been active in publishing, those publications were not systematically accessible and have therefore been excluded from the analysis.

background information or summarises workshop proceedings and 13 brochures and folders provide short and concise topical summaries. All publications are available to download from the FE website.

Press releases are also provided on the webpage. The availability of press releases fluctuates and there appears to be a peak in 2009. A Forest Europe newsletter has also been supplied to the interested public since the beginning of 2000. It is available for downloading since 2008. The frequency at which the newsletter is published has also been raised over the years. Since mid-2012 it is available on a monthly basis. In addition, a press kit, published in English and Spanish is also accessible. The interested public furthermore has access to a forest fact sheet and a glossary. Seemingly the glossary has not been updated since 2001.

Besides more traditional media, the Forest Europe process is linked to social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Flickr. As of 8 January 2015, the posts available on Facebook have received 3.881 likes, updates on twitter are followed by 1.721, and Flickr meeting pictures are available for download since 2012. The official Youtube channel provides access to a number of videos.

Maximum transparency is granted to the interested public through the presentation of reports and documents on the FE homepage. This encourages process participation and the distribution of process results. Since the end of the 1990s, the rising popularity of social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Youtube, has contributed to a change in the media landscape. It appears as if this change has been recognised by FE and it has subsequently increased its online presence and availability since the beginning of 2000.

f) Achievements in relation to the State of Europe's Forests

According to the State of Europe's Forests reports (Vienna 2003, Warsaw 2007, Oslo 2011) since the 1990s the total forest area has increased in Europe and the loss of biodiversity has slowed down. While the growth of the forest areas continues, fellings are well below increment. 98% of all European forests are nowadays covered by forest management plans. As 70% of the European forests are classified semi-natural, less than 1% is dominated by introduced tree species. Between 2007 and 2011 the area of protected forests has expanded by about 12 million hectare and the total growing stock is increasing. The last report also shows that increasing amounts of carbon are stored since the 1990s. The awareness for the importance of forest management for the protection of soil, water and infrastructure also grows. Finally, as already mentioned above, more and more countries implement national forest programmes while forest policies change and adapt to new challenges stemming from sectors outside the core forest sector (e.g. energy, climate change, agriculture and biodiversity). The latest report also mentions four main challenges for the forest sector: climate change, wood for energy production, conservation of forest biodiversity and the green economy.

g) Structural process components

Despite being without founding documents the Forest Europe process evolved into an important European discussion and negotiation forum for forests that is administrated by a small secretariat (placed in the respective host country) with the support of a general coordinating committee. While various negotiation spaces (e.g.

ministerial conferences, workshops and round table meetings) are available to participants, Expert Level Meetings (ELM) are the main decision-making body. During those meetings not only ministerial advisors and country delegates, but also observers are allowed to take the floor and contribute. Observer organisations and researchers are granted access to the negotiations as well as respective workshops. Meetings are governed by a set of informal rules developed over time. When ministerial decisions and resolutions are prepared, traditional text negotiation practices are however given priority.

Following-up the Oslo mandate 46 European states and the European Union successfully commenced in the beginning of 2012 negotiations of a legally binding forest agreement. This can be regarded as an achievement as for instance the global forest dialogue since the end of the 1980s struggles considerably with the idea of starting similar negotiations.

So despite having developed novel forms of inclusive interaction in the Forest Europe process, traditional negotiation practices show prevalence during document finalisation and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) negotiations.

Even so the ad hoc created institutional set-up shows similarities to international forest organisations, the FE process successfully created a trade-mark identity within the forestry community in Europe. Also outside Europe it is well recognized by granting e.g. observer status to other regional processes and international organisations and holding acknowledged reporting functions itself. Thanks to the rolling process secretariat always located in the respective host country the process has also contributed considerably to personnel capacity building in Europe. Many of the former Liaison Unit employees hold nowadays key positions in the forest sector and research organisations.

3 Impact analysis and valued added of the Forest Europe process

This chapter contains a short impact analysis as regards the global, regional and national uptake of the Forest Europe process and an analysis of the valued added of the FE process as compared to international policy-making processes.

3.1 Impact analysis

a) Referencing in search machines

In the beginning of the year 2015 a google search⁸ produced 46.100 hits for the term “MCPFE” and “105.000” hits for “Forest Europe”. Scholarly search machines like google scholar produced in the same time period about 2.510 hits for “MCPFE” respectively about 717 hits for “Forest Europe”. A search on Scopus and the ISI web of knowledge listed 44 and 4 articles for “Forest Europe” as well as 26 and 9 for “MCPFE” were found in both databases. Compared to other international criteria and indicator processes as well as the United Nations Forum on Forests an initial data comparison shows that the Forest Europe process is well referenced in general and in the academic literature in particular (see Table 2).

⁸ Due to the name change of the process, both terms (MCPFE and Forest Europe) have been searched for.

Process	Google search	Google Scholar	Scopus	ISI Web of Knowledge
Forest Europe	105.000	2.510	44	4
MCPFE	46.100	717	26	9
Montreal Process	27.800	2.650	92	62
Tarapoto Process	5.730	100	1	0
Tehran Process	1.620	22	0	0
United Nations Forum on Forests	127.000	1.740	30	16

Table 2 Reference to MCPFE/Forest Europe in search machines

The increased referencing of Forest Europe/MCPFE in documents and the scholarly literature gives a first impression about the seemingly high impact of the process as compared to others.

b) Observer status and collaborations in and beyond Europe

The Forest Europe process holds an observer status to the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Food and Agricultural Organisation and the Convention on Biological Diversity. It has established cooperation and collaboration forms with the Environment for Europe process/PEBLDS, the FAO and the UNECE and to a certain extend also to the European Union and some research organisations such as the European Forest Institute. Those are meant to support the joint implementation of its work programmes as well as the development of new policy instruments. Exchange with like-minded regional processes is continuously sought for.

Since 2004 the MCPFE/Forest Europe process continuously reports to the UNFF. This shows that also the global forest policy process gives attention to regional activities including the Forest Europe process. As most other international forest-related conventions, organisations and processes only ask member countries to hand in national reports, this reporting opportunity might not arise systematically with others. Since the end of the 1990s members of the Liaison Unit represent the Forest Europe process and its outcomes also more systematically in meetings of the global and regional forest-related processes as well as in academic contexts and meetings.

c) Uptake in EU and international policy documents and legal texts

For the present analysis 610 forest-related documents were examined. These mainly included EU policy and legal documents, but also international legal texts were covered. The MCPFE was referenced in 35 documents that were all issued by European Union bodies. Among those the analysis found a reference to the MCPFE in 4 regulations and one commission decision:

Regulation 1257/1999 on rural development

- Council Regulations (EC) No 870/2004 and 1590/2004 on conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture
- Regulation (EC) No 614/2007 concerning the Financial Instrument for the Environment (LIFE+) and
- Commission decision (2009/598/EC) on ecological criteria for the award of the Community Ecolabel for bed mattresses.

Other policy documents were topically linked to issues of biodiversity conservation, EU forest policy and forest protection, climate change, energy, biomass sources in electricity, rural development and agricultural policy, genetic resources and the

authorisation for state aid⁹. Forest Europe was referenced in 13 EU policy documents. Those references are made in the context of the new forest strategy, the green paper on forest protection, climate change and protective measures against plant pests, challenges of the commodity market and raw materials; one Commission communication only addressed the 6th ministerial conference held in Oslo. Based on this analysis a topical impact of the Forest Europe process can be concluded. Although some documents only refer to the process itself or to data collected and issued, others do clearly refer to its topical achievements.

In documents of international processes no clear direct reference could be found. This does not mean that an uptake of Forest Europe topics has not taken place. Delegates from member states or the European Council did reference Forest Europe achievements in their statements in forest-related processes. The latest evaluation of the UNFF achievements also concludes that regional processes are important and directly refers to the Forest Europe process on 15 occasions. Therein Forest Europe is presented as outstanding example for a systematic engagement with international commitments like the IPF/IFF Proposal for Action (Blaser et al., 2014). Furthermore it is argued that the global forest policy dialogue should strengthen its relation with regional processes much more. The various discussed future options do also refer to the Forest Europe process in that regards.

d) Implementation of Forest Europe's outputs

Although prior to the year 2000 no systematic reporting efforts regarding the implementation of MCPFE/ Forest Europe resolutions existed, the respective secretariats have compiled follow-up reports after each ministerial conference that describe actions taken. From the analysis (see Figure 6) it can be concluded that on average about 30 to 35 countries reported about the implementation of commitments taken during every reporting period. Only 5 members, among these the Holy See that hardly holds forests in its territory, have never taken the chance to hand in a report.

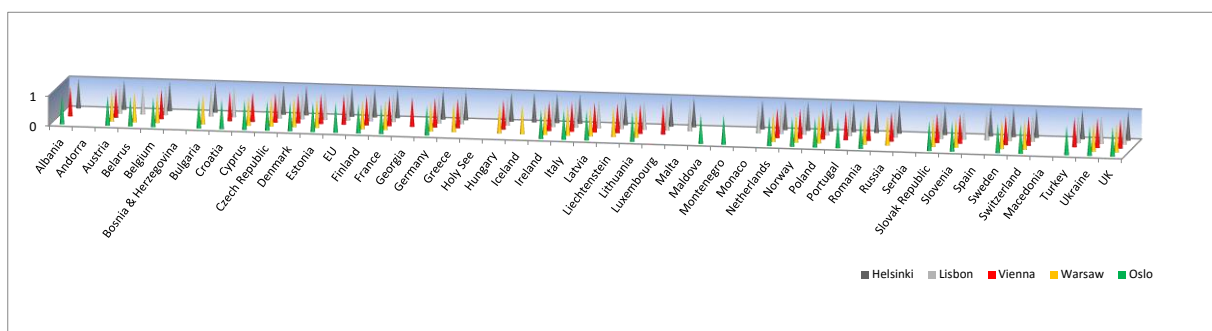


Figure 6 Reporting about the implementation of Forest Europe's outputs

Source: Implementation reports (Vienna 2003, Warsaw 2007, Oslo 2011)

The first national implementation report presented in 2003 concluded that only less than 1/3 of the resolutions were being implemented nationally. Latter reports like the one published in 2007 and the one published in 2011 did not make quantitative summary conclusions, but laid an emphasis on either descriptive accounts or short summaries of national reports. Since not always the same member countries have reported their implementation activities it is also hard to perform a comparative

⁹ Please note that the MCPFE was referenced only by the Italian document.

analysis over the whole reporting period. What can be said however is that generally in all reporting periods the main emphasis was led on the implementation of the more recent commitments. Secondly, in the later reports a large range of countries reported the implementation of national forest programmes and putting more emphasis on the role of wood (also for biomass, bioenergy production etc.). Besides the enhancement of forest biodiversity and climate change issues were perceived as important. Finally some activities in relation to the Warsaw resolutions have also been implemented by member countries.

In addition to national implementation all three reports also included a section on the implementation of the respective programmes of work and a section on the implementation of all commitments taken in pan-Europe. Generally all of these showed a high implementation degree of the respective work programmes (nearly 100%). They also reported a large amount of activities in relation to the implementation of the Forest Europe commitments adding value to the political process and impacting on the political outreach in the region.

e) Mechanisms and practices created

Previous chapters showed that observers from forest-related interest organisations and ENGOs are actively engaged and participate in process deliberations and workshops. For the development of policy instruments (e.g. guidelines) the latter's expertise is actively searched for as implementation is thus expected to be smoother. Those informal inclusionary mechanisms have evolved over time since the Strasbourg meeting also culminating into the creation of forest-related major groups at ministerial gatherings.

The development of policy instruments including guidelines for action have all been also based on scientific expertise of scientists, researchers and experts; those have been invited to present topic related (research) results and take part in workshops and expert groups. As a matter of fact main policy instruments as for instance the criteria and indicators or the MCPFE approach to national forest programmes have all benefited considerably from this experts-based approach.

The Forest Europe process has been a recognised regional forest policy process that actively translates international forest-related requirements and ideas into regional action since 1993. This acknowledged translation function has had an impact on national forest policy-making in Europe.

3.2 Analysis of the value added of Forest Europe as compared to international processes

Assessing the value added of a whole policy process is seemingly more difficult than assessing the output of the same process as this can be linked to an impact assessment (see chapter 3.1.). For the output assessment the present analysis therefore relies on the results of the MCPFE review (Nilsson and Rametsteiner 2009) that analysed the strategic positioning, relevance, value added, effectiveness, and efficiency of the MCPFE since its existence up to the year 2009. For the process assessment the analysis is based on the results of a scientific assessment on forest governance in Europe including the pan-European forest policy process that was performed by a group of forest policy scholars in 2013 (Pülzl et al. 2013) as well as the independent assessment of the international arrangement on forests (Blaser et al. 2014) done by an international group of consultants and published by the end of last year.

As for the output assessment, the MCPFE review back then clearly located an added value of policy instruments and certain resolutions (in particular H1, H2, L2, V1, V5), while the existence of the process itself has been conceived important for forest policy-making in pan-Europe. They concluded however also that the low national implementation rate has not contributed to increase its value added and even being seemingly committed to the process the European Union/ European Commission has missed out on a more systematic intake of FE commitments. This view is confirmed by the more recent criteria and indicator assessment report (EFI 2013). 29 out of 40 interviewees noted the weak position of the FE process towards the EU, national and sub-national levels as well as in regards to all topics outside the core forest policy areas.

Comparing the Forest Europe process to other international forest-related policy-making processes (e.g. global forest dialogue, international climate and biodiversity regimes etc.) and assessing its value added we need to distinguish between core policy-making and implementation functions as well as uptake and political influence: In terms of policy-making, most forest-related international processes clearly follow the rules of procedures established by the United Nations that put member countries at the centre of the decision-making process, granting observers only minor participation rights. Legally binding forest negotiations in the International Negotiation Committee (INC) follow similar rules of procedure. Apart from this the FE process clearly grants observer organisations the right to participate in decision-making by neither limiting their intervention time nor excluding them from taking on more active roles in the development of policy instruments. This said a clear added value in terms of the establishment of more flexible participatory practices can be ascertained. Secondly, while the climate and biodiversity regimes have both established scientific and technical bodies that grant systematic access to scientists, this has not happened in the FE process. Thematically decision-making in global regimes cannot solely be triggered by specific regional interests; therefore the FE process is more advantaged in developing specific pan-European policy instruments including definitions and guidelines for action that serve the European region.

Regarding the potential implementation of outputs at the national level neither global forest-related processes nor the FE process are more advantaged. It can be assumed however that pan-European policy tools are more precise in targeting national implementation than global forest policy instruments. This is because tree species as well as political, social and environmental conditions clearly differ between world regions. Neither the global forest dialogue nor the FE process disposes however of financial means or technical support for speeding implementation efforts. In addition the FE process translates global commitments into regional outputs processing them further down the line.

The international uptake of FE outputs and political influence of the FE process on global forest-related decision-making is so far very limited. For instance UNFF recognised the importance of regional processes by inviting them to report on their contribution to the implementation of the four global goals and the forest instrument. The FE process was also granted the possibility to hold side-events at UNFF meetings, the systematic uptake of European decisions remains questionable. In return, processing international requirements in the European regions works better, because of the FE process although their practical impact on forests shall not be exaggerated.

In conclusion it needs to be added that the on-going legally binding agreement negotiations have substantially upheld the parallel FE process from further

proceeding with important policy decisions increasing its valued added in the region. This is also reflected by rather low participation rates in Expert Level Meetings.

4 Discussion, conclusions and some recommendations for the future

The present paper has clearly pointed out that the Forest Europe process since its establishment has become a well-recognised European forest policy forum that accomplished a large number of relevant forest policy decisions and policy instruments including the start of legal instrument negotiations.

The FE process showed enough flexibility to thematically evolve from concentrating mainly on forest protection to discuss more cross-sectoral forest-related topics. The creation of enough political awareness to be able to continuously gather forest ministers and leaders of NGOs to a sequence of ministerial meetings clearly shows that the Forest Europe process has reached a unique decision-making status outside the United Nations. Despite that it has also succeeded in publishing a number of important policy documents including the Europe's Forest report (SoEF) that continuously reports about the forest status in Europe as well as it has increased its reach-out via social media and its internet presentation. Beyond these straightforward process dimensions it has also contributed to personnel capacity building in its host countries.

The analysis showed also that the impact of the FE process is considerable. Not only is it well referenced in the World Wide Web and the scholarly search machines, the FE process has also been granted observer status with a number of important organisations and established collaborations. FEs outputs have been referenced in EU policy documents and legal texts on some occasions. Nationally at least one third of FEs commitments have been implemented, while on a pan-European scale much more was accomplished. In conclusion it can be said that participatory practices and developed mechanisms are expected to increase the implementation of the FE policy instruments as well as to put a boost on its translation function.

The here discussed achievements are also accompanied by a number of important shortcomings:

- A large amount of time and resources are invested into the development of political resolutions and decisions to be signed by ministers, while more current and politically highly sensitive topics remain unaddressed (e.g. the economic crises in Europe, rising unemployment rates, increasing migration rates, big data and upward trends of extremist parties etc.) and their potential impacts on forests and forest policy are not examined. In addition the rather "sectoral view" might tend to withhold other sectors from taking up or implementing decisions. Older resolutions do also not receive the same attention as newer ones (e.g. in implementation reports).
- Policy instruments and guidelines are mainly seen as static policy tools, while they need continuous review and update in order not to become useless for practical implementation. In addition, their visibility has not been extremely high as other sectors continue to develop related instruments for their purposes.
- Thematic collaboration and leadership towards other organisations that publish forest-related reports has not been fully embraced.

- The considerable increase in membership of the European Union and the impact of the FE outputs on its policy documents and legal texts has not lead to an increase in importance of the relationship between the FE and the EU. In addition the FE has remained in a weak position as regards topics outside the core forest policy areas (e.g. MCPFE review 2009).
- The continuation of a rolling process secretariat located in the respective FE host country impedes the generation of strong institutional knowledge of respective key personnel as well as it hampers the formalization and institutionalisation of the Forest Europe process.
- Finally, although the FE process has started as a scientific policy process and currently developed into the main European forest policy process, no systematic linkage between forest science and FE has developed. The inclusion of scientists and researchers resembles a piecemeal fashion. Access to the process is linked to forest-related knowledge access that is not systematically made available so far.

The evaluation of the value added of the FEs outputs and the process itself revealed also a rather mixed picture. While the value added of some of its resolutions ranked high, the limited national implementation rate and the missing systematic relationship with the EU are to be conceived as significant setback. Comparing the FE process to other international forest-related policy processes the analysis showed that the regional one displays considerable advantages in terms of more flexible rules of procedure and looser participation rights, thematic closeness to the region and the development of policy instruments. The analysis showed also that generally spoken no comparative implementation predisposition can be ascertained between global and regional processes. Both clearly depend on their members' willingness to speed up implementation activities. Finally the international uptake of FE outputs so far remains rather negligible.

In conclusion, it can be said that members of the FE process shall either think about increasing the respective agenda-setting role through the generation of new knowledge to feed into national and global processes or put more emphasis on an agenda-taking role (including for instance of taking on a reporting role to global forest fora by decreasing the individual national reporting burden). In addition other sectoral policies and cross-sectoral developments also need to be better recognised and a continuous dialogue needs to be established to overcome sectoral views and become more integrative. FE members shall thus engage in proactive policy development in other sectors and sell their FE policy instruments.

Summary recommendations result as follows:

I. Increase problem-solving orientation of the process:

A more systematic interaction between political decision-makers, stakeholders and advisors also outside the core forest sector through different institutional settings (e.g. minister/political actors roundtables with stakeholders on hot topics in a set of concerned countries or regions) could increase political relevance not only within the sector, but also outside; A stronger emphasis on problem-solving activities and less on text negotiation could potentially decrease problematic situation transnationally; policy learning activities where

countries are asked to contribute and exchange information on how they go about problem-solving could thus be very helpful.

II. Widen the policy relevant theme development:

More current social and economic topics shall find their way on the agenda of the FE process. This would potentially increase respectively stabilise the political relevance of the process itself as well as it would potentially raise the awareness of the political elite and of members outside the core forest sector. A quick response mechanism that allows making political statements regarding major political development of outmost relevance on behalf of the FE process shall be developed.

The FE process does not necessarily have to lean towards translating international decisions to the region only, but FE could also increase its input to global discussions. A possible way to do this (for instance in the global forest dialogue) would be the development of a Forest Europe grouping at UNFF meetings.

III. Continuously update and develop policy instruments:

The development of new policy instrument and a continuous update of guidelines and important policy instruments making them dynamic and less static shall be included in the FE work programmes. Through an enhancement of its thematic leadership and collaboration with other organisations and processes the importance of policy instruments shall be increased.

IV. Strengthen the process through Institutionalisation:

The institutionalisation of the FE secretariat to increase political influence seems necessary at this moment in time as strong leadership is important and the loss of institutional knowledge can be held at a minimum. Due to the fact that so many members of the FE are also members of the EU it would be important to think about new partner arrangements between both in order to enhance for instance the implementation of FE commitments in the region.

V. Establish a science platform:

The institutionalisation of a science platform that systematically engages with relevant topics development and the provision of knowledge and expertise could substantially increase the relevance of the political process.

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