



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG

Employment and Social Governance  
**Social dialogue**

## SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEE FOR WOODWORKING

18 May 2020

Plenary meeting (videoconference)

MINUTES

Chair : Mr Kenneth JOHANSSON

### 1. Opening of the meeting, adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

### 2. Adoption of draft minutes of the meeting dd. 20 February 2020

The Commission explained that the minutes were not yet available, due to COVID-19 related administrative delays. The adoption of the minutes was postponed until the next meeting.

### 3. Work Programme 2020-2021.

Mr GEHRING referred to discussions held in the February meeting asked whether CEI-Bois could agree with a 4-year work programme in the future, which would reflect better the time-span of social partners' activities.

Mr ANTONICOLI replied that the development of a 4-year work programme requires further discussion, since there is a risk that it becomes too generic.

The secretariats will include the proposed changes, so that it can be adopted in the October meeting.

### 4. European Green Deal

The European Commission was not available for a presentation.

Mr GEHRING sketched the contents of the Green Deal (COM/2019/640 final). He added that more concrete policies are needed, since major challenges are upcoming in various areas. He proposed to develop a joint statement, based on the needs of the sector, and its expectations regarding various policies, such as skills, development of rural areas, etc. Mr ANTONICOLI agreed with the lines of EFBWW's introduction. He expressed his readiness to discuss a joint statement. He also mentioned that the Timmermans Cabinet does apparently not consider the woodworking sector as a priority. He wondered whether Commissioners receive complete information. It is thus necessary to communicate that the sector is part of the solution, since it is a sector that is already doing well. However, apparently the Commission prefers asking a sector to make additional efforts than to acknowledge that a sector is performing well. He added that the F-BI sectors contributed to the Vision 2050 document, which should be seen as a first step.

Ms LANDOLFI (EFBWW) pointed at the shortcomings of the COM/2019(640) document, e.g. the fact that the woodworking sector is not mentioned in the context of the circular economy, or in the area of bio-diversity. Maybe this is based on prejudices or the incapability to put the sector in the right context, i.e. not only as a consumer of forests,

who destroys eco-systems. A joint statement should not be too cumbersome or political, but to the point, so that it can be produced quickly.

According to Ms MELEGARI said that a statement on the Green Deal – which is a very comprehensive document - should be narrowed down to concrete commitments or pledges identified by the industry.

Mr JOHANSSON said that the recovery of the sector after the COVID-19 crisis should also focus on increased use of (carbon absorbing) wood for infrastructure, for which funds should be made available. The sector creates employment in a sustainable way.

Mr GEHRING concluded by saying that :

- The influence of the ecologist movement at EU level is underestimated, and these organisations do not always recognise the strength of forestation.
- The sector should clearly explain what it can do in practice.
- The social dialogue should – at EU as well as on national level – stress the sustainability of the sector in terms of products, processes and work places.

Consequently, the position paper should show a broad view, rather than limiting itself to a list of demands.

## **5. F-BI Blueprint and Expert Group**

Due to unforeseen circumstances, DG GROW could not be present at the meeting. However, a number of replies to social partners' questions were provided by e-mail, as copied hereunder.

- *What is the status of a new blueprint for the forest based industries?*

***ANSWER: It is not foreseen at this stage to have a stand-alone F-BI Blueprint as was produced in 2013. However, on the Industrial Policy side, a number of the F-BI are included in other, more horizontal initiatives, such as that for the Energy-intensive Industries, launched in November. Just as the last Blueprint was an integral part of the EU Forest Strategy in 2013, there will also most likely be recognisable parts of the next Forest Strategy – due before the end of this year – that will relate specifically to the forest-based industries. In both contexts, the recent F-BI Vision 2050 will be fully taken into account, together with any other relevant inputs from the sector.***

- *What is the impact of the European Green Deal on our industries and the (positive) role our industries could play. We have the impression that the specific role and possible positive function of the FB-I are underestimated and not sufficiently appreciated. If wood becomes the raw material for more and more areas/applications, do we have the basis to supply enough raw material also in the future?*

***ANSWER: In the context of the Green Deal as more generally, EU policies are increasingly horizontal (non-sectoral), and in Industry Policy with some focus on value chains and networks rather than the traditional linear sectors. There are opportunities for the F-BI under the GD but these are not necessarily identifiable as “F-BI” ones per se but more thematic where all or , more likely, parts of the F-BI can benefit.***

***If the SD feels that the F-BI are underestimated, as has been advised already, this should be brought to the attention of the Commission at the highest level.***

***In the meantime and in any case, it should be recalled that EU policies have to remain material-neutral and so any given material cannot be favoured. Accordingly, wood cannot be directly promoted but its use can be encouraged by its meeting relevant performance criteria, such as being legal, sustainable, low-energy, etc.***

- *Are there any specific action in connection with the current pandemic dedicated to our sectors?*

**ANSWER:** *in keeping with the answer to the last question, there are not specific F-BI actions as such. However, there are likely to be targeted opportunities for specific parts of the F-BI, particularly at national level. Meanwhile, in response to individual enquiries from industry, DG GROW has already informed those responsible at EU level for helping manage the Covid-19 crisis of particular issues, e.g. the need not to have national restrictions on wooden pallets, essential for transporting most goods.*

*Particular opportunities have already been developed by the paper and non-woven sectors in shifting to the production of PPE (personnel protective equipment). (Sadly, there has been a rise in demand for wooden – and other – coffins!)*

*It would be helpful if together the social partners could please inform DG GROW of their ideas for helping to stimulate demand for wood as Covid-19 restrictions are hopefully lifted. Examples might be the wider use of wooden construction products for expanding hospital capacity and also that of schools where pupils have to respect social distancing.*

- *What are the perspectives of the Commissions Expert Group for the FB-I? Is it mainly a for a for information exchange or is it also planned to work on and develop policy actions?*

**ANSWER:** *The future of the F-BI EG is very much in the hands of its members. Expert Groups are targeted and normally meant to be only temporary for a (set of) specified task(s). Their prime function is to advise the Commission for policy-making. The F-BI EG is unusual in being based on a Commission Decision. But that does not set it in stone or concrete! That Decision can be revoked. In any case, the membership is very overdue for revision and we will be considering this during 2020.*

*In the meantime and in any case, members should make the most use of it by being proactive in all senses.*

- *On the roadmap for the new forest strategy. Are there any new initiative to increase our capacity to fight forest fires?*

**ANSWER:** *DG ENV has directed us towards The European Green Deal, which states that:*

***“The new EU forest strategy will have as its key objectives effective afforestation, and forest preservation and restoration in Europe, to help to increase the absorption of CO<sub>2</sub>, reduce the incidence and extent of forest fires, and promote the bio-economy”***

*DG GROW also added that there had been an upgrade of the civil protection mechanism under rescEU:*

*In March 2019, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was upgraded to establish a new European reserve of capacities (the ‘rescEU reserve’) which includes firefighting planes and helicopters. For the 2020 forest fire season, the European Commission co-financed the stand-by availability of additional aerial forest fire-fighting capacities to address potential shortcomings in responding to fires. Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden put together 11 firefighting planes and six helicopters at the disposal of other EU Member States in case of an emergency. The new system also sees greater investment in knowledge sharing and preparedness activities.*

[https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/civil-protection/forest-fires\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/civil-protection/forest-fires_en)

*Also, DG AGRI informed DG GROW that “the EU Forest Strategy will be adopted in Q1 of 2021, having been postponed. There is no other information so far.”*

Mr ANTONICOLI expressed his appreciation for Mr WALL’s replies, but wondered whether a guaranteed presence of DG GROW in the social dialogue meeting could not be made possible. He was also puzzled by the statement that the sector should look for opportunities in the Green Deal. But generally he found the replies promising.

Mr GEHRING did not fully agree with the more horizontal approach of EU policies, but stressed the importance of sectoral policies. He also called for discussions with EU forest owners’ and workers’ organisations to discuss the possibility of creating an EU forest fire brigade, since forest fires are becoming increasingly devastating.

Ms MELEGARI proposed to create a real-time monitoring system for wood availability, which should be included in the bio-diversity strategy. She also referred to information that the Commission intends to create an Alliance of low-carbon industries, which would include the steel, cement and chemical sectors; this would be unacceptable.

The discussion on the F-BI expert group would be continued at secretariat level.

## **6. COVID-19 pandemic in Europe**

The social partners discussed their draft paper on the impact of the COVID-19 on the woodworking industry. The paper deals both with the consequences for people’s safety and health, and the economic impact. It is intended to provide guidance, also in the likely circumstance of changing conditions.

Mr ANTONICOLI mentioned that CEI-Bois sent two reports on the impact of COVID-19 to the Commission.

Ms LANDOLFI welcomed the joint position, and – by way of example - pointed at the consequences of the long lockdown in Italy. She claimed that social distancing measures or personal protective equipment (PPE) did not take into account gender-related issues. Therefore, she claimed that the paper should cover gender issues.

## **7. Project application PCWIE II**

Mr ANTONICOLI provided details on the work programme of this application, which is a follow-up of the previous PCWIE (Perspectives and challenges of the woodworking industries in Europe). The project will be submitted under the “social dialogue” call for proposals VP/2020/001.

## **8. Wood in construction**

Mr ANTONICOLI referred to the “Wood in construction” conference, organised in 2018 which featured a highly appreciated presentation by a Japanese expert architect. He enquired whether there is interest in a renewal of such exercise in 2021. Mr JOHANSSON stated that it is important to discuss the technical possibilities for the use of wood in construction. Ms MELEGARI pointed at ongoing renovation initiatives, and the Renovation strategy of the EU in that area; she also called for joint social partners’ action at EU level in this field. Mr GEHRING welcomed the idea, and suggested to open the event to other technical solutions, and partnerships.

## **9. Wood dust prevention**

Mr GEHRING informed the participants that the German project owner “Berufsgenossenschaft Holz” (represented by Mr GENTNER) is still looking for participants at national level, particularly from Portugal and Sweden.

He also proposed to become involved as European social partners in providing information to companies on the implementation of the new limit value. The “Less Dust” brochure was an example of an interesting joint initiative.

#### **10. Project on the Formaldehyde Agreement**

Mr GEHRING presented this follow-up project, which includes a minor update of the “Formaldehyde” agreement. Also the translation of the document is part of the project. In addition, the project contains a “train the trainer” component and implementation seminars on national/company level .

#### **11. AOB**

The Commission informed the participants on the updated submission deadlines for the calls for proposals, and the date of the next SSDC working group meeting (Friday 16 October 2020).

Annex: - list of participants.

List of participants

<p><u>Employers</u></p> <p><b>CEI-Bois</b> Mr Vitor POÇAS (PT) Mr Patrizio ANTONICOLI (EU) Ms Silvia MELEGARI (EU) Ms Teodora ILIEVA (EU) Mr Mikko LEHTONEN (FI) Ms Margherita MICELI (EU) Mr Anders CANEMYR (SE) Ms Eva GLÜCKMAN (SE)</p> <p>8 employers representatives (4 women, 4 men) (4 EU, 4 MS)</p>	<p><u>Workers</u></p> <p><b>EFBWW</b> Mr Tom DELEU (EU) Mr Rolf GEHRING (EU) Ms Magdalena SIKOROWSKA (EU) Mr Werner BUELEN (EU) Ms Paula CRAVINA (EU) Mr Iwein BEIRENS (BE) Mr Bruno BOTHUA (FR) Mr Johann BOTUHA (FR) Mr John CAMPBELL (DE) Mr Fabio DEL CARRO (IT) Ms Brigitte DOETH (DE) Mr Christian FÖLZER (AT) Mr Mikko HAKKARAINEN (FI) Mr Kenneth JOHANSSON (SE) Ms Mercedes LANDOLFI (IT) Ms Chiara MAFFE (IT) Mr Andrea MERLI (IT) Mr Tomasz NAGORKA (PL) Mr Andrew ROBINSON (UK) Mr John VILLADSEN (DE)</p> <p>20 workers representatives (5 women, 15 men) (5 EU, 15 MS)</p>
<p><u>Other participants</u></p>	
<p><u>European Commission</u> Mr Danny SCHEERLINCK (EMPL.A.2)</p>	