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**FAO FORESTRY ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION – *SILVA MEDITERRANEA* RESEARCH  
NETWORKS IN THE REGION**

(Item 8(b) of the Provisional Agenda)

Secretariat Note

The Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions *Silva Mediterranea* is an FAO statutory body whose parent bodies are the European Forestry Commission (EFC), the Near East Forestry Commission (NEFC) and the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission (AFWC). *Silva Mediterranea* reports to its parent bodies. This note was prepared by the *Silva Mediterranea* Secretariat to report to the European Forestry Commission.

## Background

1. It is as far back as 1911 that the idea to develop co-operation on the Mediterranean forestry questions was first expressed. A Mediterranean Forestry League was established under the name of "*Silva Mediterranea*" in 1922. In 1948, *Silva Mediterranea* evolved into a subsidiary body of FAO as the Committee of Mediterranean Forestry Questions within which the Mediterranean countries from the European Forestry Commission (EFC), the Near East Forestry Commission (NEFC) and the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission (AFWC) meet, share their experiences and develop co-operative programmes. Twenty-five countries and the European Union are members of the Committee, but non-member countries are invited as observers to the Session.

2. *Silva Mediterranea* normally holds its sessions every two years to review common forestry problems. Extraordinary sessions can be organized to examine important and/or urgent items. *Silva Mediterranea* acts as a forum for regional co-operation, aiming at sustainable development of the forestry sector and the protection of the environment. *Silva Mediterranea* has drafted a conceptual strategic framework to support Mediterranean countries in defining their own forest policies, the Mediterranean Forest Action Programme, facilitating the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (Rio, 1992) which urged all countries to formulate national forest programmes (nfp). The Committee has established co-operative research networks among the concerned countries. Presently six research networks exist, including: a) Forest fire management; b) Selection of multi-purpose species for arid and semi-arid zones; c) Silviculture of species: *Cedrus sp.*; d) Silviculture of species: *Pinus pinea*; e) Selection of stands of Mediterranean conifers for the production of seed to be used in reforestation programmes; and f) Silviculture of species: *Quercus suber*.

3. Since the last session of the European Forestry Commission, the major achievement in support to *Silva Mediterranea* and its research networks has been the implementation of a regional trust fund project on "*Co-operative information on prevention and control of forest fires in the Mediterranean Region*". This project, funded by France, has been implemented in the framework of the network on "*Forest Fire Management*". A workshop was held in Morocco (Tétouan, 27 April – 1 May 1999) on the demonstration of the newly established computerized databases on forest fires in selected countries of the Region and on their effective use in forest fire management. It followed a first workshop on the design and implementation of these computerized databases, which was held in Tunisia in 1998. The workshops evidence the excellent results achieved in particular in the training of national staff and the building of a real capacity for, and awareness of, the issue of forest fire related information generation and management.

4. The socio-economic context of forest fire causes was studied in the target countries. Research activities on preventive measures and the inflammability of Mediterranean plant and tree species were also carried out in some countries. Training material (videotapes) on forest fire prevention and control were produced and widely distributed to all *Silva Mediterranea* member countries. Technical guidelines for field activities on Mediterranean forest fire management have been produced and will be issued soon.

5. The research network on “Silviculture of species: *Quercus suber*” has been very active. It looked for ways and means to support the sustainability of the cork oak agro-silvo-pastoral systems through promoting the trade and the use of cork products. This activity was supported by the private sector including producers, manufacturers and users. The second part of its programme of work concerned activities related to genetic resources of cork oak which were developed in co-ordination with the “Mediterranean Oak Group” of the European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN).

6. Very few outputs came from the other four research networks.

7. An external review of *Silva Mediterranea* and of its research networks has been implemented, following the recommendation made by the Committee at its last session (Antalya, Turkey, October 1997). This review was motivated by the apparent reduction of interest of the member countries in the activities of their committee. Since the last session of the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee and before the start of the review, two letters were sent by the Secretariat to all member countries, proposing that each member organize an in-country reflection on the future of *Silva Mediterranea*, in order to ascertain the views of the country, its interest in regional co-operation and the ways and means which should underpin this co-operation. Very few answers were received, unfortunately.

8. The external review which has been implemented by two consultants, Mohamed Skouri (Tunisia) and Plácido Plaza (CIHEAM)<sup>1</sup>, aimed at appraising the following:

- support the Committee offers to member countries in terms of transfer of knowledge; solutions to problems facing them within the environmental and natural resources sector at large, and more particularly within the forestry sector;
- relevance of the Committee’s mandate and objectives, assessed according to its own value but also taking into consideration other regional or sub-regional bodies of the Organization and other co-operating organizations such as UNESCO, UNEP, UNDP, CIHEAM, the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the International Association for Mediterranean Forests (AIFM);
- interest shown by, and involvement of, the member countries in the Committee and its activities;
- operating costs of the Committee and of the networks, and ways and means for improvement;
- adequacy of its objectives with respect to the human, material and financial means provided by FAO, the co-operating organizations and member countries;
- operating methods and level of activity and efficiency of the research networks;
- value of achievements reached by the research networks and benefits gained by countries in terms of technical and scientific co-operation, and development.

9. The team visited Italy, France, Morocco, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey, contacted several international or regional organizations including UNESCO, *Plan Bleu* (MAP/UNEP), CIHEAM, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (SSO), and AIFM and reviewed documentation and information provided by the *Silva Mediterranea* Secretariat. The reviewers contacted also the national co-ordinators, the co-

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<sup>1</sup> CIHEAM: International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies

ordinators and focal points of the different research networks and various personalities concerned by *Silva Mediterranea*.

10. The general conclusions and recommendations of the external review are summarized in the following paragraphs.

### **Objectives**

11. The information gathered from the countries, researchers and forestry sector authorities strongly confirm the will to maintain and reinforce Mediterranean regional co-operation in the various fields under the forestry administrations. The EFC/NEFC/AFWC Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions *Silva Mediterranea* has unquestionably played a positive role in sustaining regional forestry co-operation in the same spirit and with the same objectives of the Mediterranean Forestry League established in 1922 as *Silva Mediterranea*. Foresters have been in a way the forerunners of Mediterranean co-operation in the key sector of natural and renewable resource management.

12. In 1948, the statutes changed from a professional international non-governmental organization to an intergovernmental committee, one of the FAO statutory bodies. This reflects the will of the countries, in the context of the UN System, to entrust a specialized agency, FAO, with the mission to develop such a technical co-operation. It is evident that during these last 50 years the international context has largely evolved. Does *Silva Mediterranea* respond to this new context? How should it evolve to adapt itself to the new situation?

13. The *Silva Mediterranea* mandate is very large and covers the following three fields:

- Collection and distribution of information on the evolution of forestry techniques and on progress achieved;
- Forest research priorities identification and co-ordination of the corresponding research projects ;
- Implementation of technical studies and inquiries needed for the designing and implementation of national forest policies.

It is clear that with the limited resources made available, *Silva Mediterranea* is not able to fulfil totally such large objectives.

### **Functioning of the Committee and of its Research Networks**

14. The Committee held its sessions every second year, quite regularly after having had a 15-year interruption in the past. Well prepared, these meetings are very useful because they allow participants to review the status of the forestry sector and to exchange ideas and information on subjects of common interest. Regarding the *Silva Mediterranea* research networks, they have had variable performance. The “Forest fire management” and the “Silviculture of species: *Quercus suber*” research networks follow a favourable dynamic and have achieved significant results. The four other networks have had a very low profile. Some activities are going on at country level, but very few exchanges occur between members. The “Silviculture of species: *Cedrus sp.*” research network, which functioned very well in the past, is now less productive. The funds allocated to *Silva Mediterranea* in the budgetary lines of the FAO Programme of Work and Budget cover only the expenses for organizing the sessions. Only very limited funds have

been made available from other budgetary lines to support networks activities, but those funds can hardly allow good functioning of the networks if they are not supported by extra-budgetary resources.

15. Is *Silva Mediterranea* (the Committee and the Secretariat) able to play a more efficient role in raising the necessary funds for a good functioning of its research networks? It seems timely to withdraw from *Silva Mediterranea* the responsibility for direct management, animation and financing of the research networks. It should concentrate on the *ad hoc* group on forest research and on its role in defining regional priorities. The role and functioning of *Silva Mediterranea* should evolve to take into account the institutional and policy changes which have occurred since the last three decades:

- creation of UNEP and its regional programmes such as Mediterranean Action Programme (MAP);
- new co-ordination mechanisms established after UNCED, such as those of the Conventions on biological diversity and on combating desertification;
- increasing role of the multilateral development financing institutions (World Bank) and of regional political organizations (European Union);
- emergence and increasing activity of civil society, including non-governmental organizations working in the same fields.

### Proposals

16. No doubt that *Silva Mediterranea* will not be able to function in the future with modalities developed more than half a century ago. Its means have largely diminished and the working capacity of its secretariat is consequently much reduced. Three kinds of solution can be studied:

- suppression (*hypothesis 1*);
- retaining the present statutes with a considerable improvement of the resource allocation and an in-depth revision of the mandate (*hypothesis 2*);
- far-reaching change in structure with several possible options (*hypothesis 3*).

#### *Hypothesis 1: Suppression*

17. The suppression of *Silva Mediterranea* can be considered only if the other possible solutions appear to be too difficult to implement. If this solution is adopted, sound decisions should be taken to maintain a new way of continuing to promote forestry cooperation in the Mediterranean region, since countries have clearly confirmed their interest in it.

#### *Hypothesis 2: Retaining the present statutes*

18. The revival of the activities of *Silva Mediterranea* while maintaining and updating its present statutes is only possible if more resources can be provided for the secretariat work. The full-time assignment of an officer is the requested minimum to boost the *Silva Mediterranea* activities. Presently, the assigned officer has several other responsibilities and spends no more than one third of his working time to *Silva Mediterranea*. He should be able to mobilize potential partners, look for additional means, prepare working documents, animate working groups, organize the collection and distribution of

information, regularly contact the national co-ordinators and other partners, and carefully prepare for the Committee sessions and working group meetings.

19. Even with increased means, it seems difficult that an intergovernmental body such as *Silva Mediterranea* would be able to animate and follow-up the activities of the research networks. Other mechanisms can implement these tasks in a better way. Its role should concentrate on facilitating the definition of regional forest research priorities in co-operation with the *ad hoc* group on forestry research. This new mandate should include the study of common scientific, technical and strategic questions and/or current issues, the involvement of collective expertise to further study those issues and to synthesize the results obtained.

#### *Hypothesis 3: Change in structure*

20. While maintaining the general orientation suggested in the previous option regarding objectives and contents, several more flexible institutional options may be proposed to ease the workload entailed by conventional intergovernmental bodies. These proposals can be inspired by already existing and efficient regional structures such as: the MAP regional activity centres (RAC); the European Forestry Institute (EFI), and the SSO.

21. Such organizations are functioning like NGOs while remaining under the supervision or, at least, the patronage of an international organization (UNEP in the case of RAC, UNESCO in the case of SSO). If the RAC structure is chosen, a double FAO/UNEP supervision could be envisaged in order to benefit from the Barcelona Convention dynamics. Such a new structure could easily involve itself in the fields of combating desertification (all Mediterranean countries are concerned with and have signed the UN Convention to Combat Desertification) and of conserving biological diversity. Within the Mediterranean Basin, *Silva Mediterranea* would be a unique tool for the promotion and implementation of concerted actions in the framework of various programmes and conventions related to forest management and conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

22. This last proposal requires that one of the countries in the region take the lead for its implementation and commit itself to provide a long term logistical support. This leader country, with the support of FAO, should convince the other concerned countries and organizations of the interest of this initiative and in providing an appropriate support.

#### **Secretariat View**

23. The provisional view of the secretariat is that the evaluation mission did a thorough work and considered carefully the various options. What is evident from the report is:

- countries have definitely continued to show interest in the Committee;
- if the Committee is terminated, it will certainly be necessary to establish an alternative mechanism;
- countries may not be ready to provide significant financial resources to the Committee.

24. The conditions for any continuation would be for the member countries, if they agree, to show clear and strong signs of interest and willingness to maintain *Silva Mediterranea*. The countries should then engage themselves in providing means and support to the Committee and its networks. They should also follow up carefully the activities they are engaged in at country level. They should put a pro-active pressure on the secretariat to boost its activities.

### **Present Situation**

25. These above considerations were proposed for discussion by the Near East Forestry Commission as one of the parent bodies of *Silva Mediterranea*, at its 14<sup>th</sup> session (Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 1-4 July 2000). The Commission confirmed its interest in *Silva Mediterranea* and proposed that it be maintained. The Commission recommended that the 18<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee, originally planned for November 2000 in Egypt, be postponed to 2001 in order to allow a deeper reflection on the relevance and necessary reform of the research networks. The Secretariat has organized a consultation between the research network coordinators and high-level responsables of the forestry administration of some member countries, as a satellite meeting to this Joint Session.

26. The European Forestry Commission may wish to discuss and comment on the different proposals (made by the review, the Secretariat, the Near East Forestry Commission and the Consultation meeting) and provide recommendations and guidance on this subject for final decision.