

# FOREST ACADEMY FINLAND

## - New approach for cooperation with the new EU countries

**Forest Academy Finland (FORAFIN) is a Finnish initiative of a new forest forum aimed at supporting EU's commitment for sustainable forest management, and developing mutual exchange of views on forestry's role in socio-economic development, particularly in the new EU countries. Finland wishes to make a contribution in this respect, because in Finland, like in many new EU member countries, forests play an important role in socio-economic development. Finland is also a rather new EU member country itself.**

The economic restructuring process of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries has led to a number of changes in forest ownership, management and utilisation in these countries. Meeting these challenges has been on the agenda of many international forest policy processes.

Signatory states of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe have committed themselves to developing co-operation among countries with different socio-economic situations (e.g. CEE countries). Especially in regard to private forestry, the ECOSOC report on the Eastward enlargement of the EU and the forestry sector recommends the establishment of forums for information exchange between new and old EU countries. Moreover, the FAO/IUCN/CEPF workshop on Multifunctional Forestry in the CEE countries pointed out that owing to limited availability of international funding, individual countries' own resources to start up meaningful project activities are needed.

Finland has announced an initiative to respond to this call - Forest Academy Finland (FORAFIN). The idea is to invite groups of top-level representatives of the forest sectors of the new EU countries to Finland for open brainstorming and exchanging information and experiences with core actors of the Finnish forest sector. We aim at a two-way process where Finland and the new EU countries can learn from each other. FORAFIN is not a scientific forum, nor a policy forum. Instead, it is aimed to support national forest sector development in the new EU countries. It is envisaged that within the process of the forum, the European sustainable forest strategy and the competitiveness of EU's forest sector as a whole will be strengthened, and Europe's role as an example region in international forest policy highlighted.

In order to test and further develop the concept, a pilot forum of 25-30 key persons is arranged in Finland in late 2003. The participants are expected to represent the decision-making level in the forest sectors of the respective countries, representing different aspects of forestry, e.g. forestry administration, state forest services, private forestry, forest industries, forest research, and social and environmental aspects of forestry.

We would like to develop the agenda of the forum through a co-operative process between Finland and the new EU countries. Finland is also seeking cooperation with relevant international organisations. The pilot forum will involve plenty of discussion and group work on developing the forum concept further so that it corresponds to the needs and expectations of all parties involved.

If successful, the pilot forum will be followed by 3-4 additional forums to be held in Finland during 2004, in accordance to the recommendations made by the pilot forum. It is envisaged that after the pilot phase funded and organised by Finland (2003-04), the networking activities between old and new EU member countries would be continued at other fora.

The forum is hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland. Responsibility for implementation is assigned to the Finnish Forest Association, which has long experiences in organising forest forums for top-level decision-makers in Finland (Forest Forum for Decision-Makers).

### **Additional information**

[www.forestacademy.fi](http://www.forestacademy.fi)

Mr. **Anders Portin**, Head of Unit, Forestry Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland, [anders.portin@mmm.fi](mailto:anders.portin@mmm.fi), tel. +358-9-16052418 (Chairman of the advisory team).

Dr. **Eeva Hellström**, Director, Forest Forum for Decision-Makers, Finnish Forest Association, [eeva.hellstrom@smy.fi](mailto:eeva.hellstrom@smy.fi), tel. +358-50-3512412 (Project manager).

**Finnish Forest Association**  
Salomonkatu 17B, FIN-00100 Helsinki  
Tel. +358 9 685 0880, fax. +358 9 685 08820



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