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Impacts of the EU energy policy on the European woodworking industries
Session I

Paper by Mr. Chris Van Riet, Technical and environmental adviser,
European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois)

Summary

The study “EU Energy Policy Impact on the Forest-Based Industries” carried out by consultants reporting to a joint DG Enterprise/Industry (CEPI/CEI-Bois) Steering Committee reveals that the measures set out in the 1997 White Paper on renewable energy, if implemented, would have a significant impact on the timber and wood residues market. The target is to double the current contribution of renewables to gross energy production to 12% by the year 2010. Biomass, including wood, used for energy generation is targeted to triple its contribution.

Although the White Paper did not specify any exact quantities for the increased use of wood fuels, its likely contribution has been calculated from existing energy combinations as an extra 27Mtoe, which would mean extra demand for wood to the tune of 163 million m³. This would come, either directly as fuel wood, most used domestically, or indirectly as industrial wood residues, which would otherwise have been available for wood-based products.

This illustrates how a regulatory text promoting the production and use of renewable energy might have an impact on other natural resources, in particular woody biomass, by:

- leading to a potential shortage of wood for the wood-based industries, whose environmental credentials have been improving since decades;

- leading to the likely use of substitute products, which might not be as renewable, recyclable and eco-efficient as wood is.
- leading to an increased pressure on the forest resource, further endangering notably the biological diversity.

Furthermore, it should be avoided that wood, which is suitable for the production of wood-based products, would be used directly for energy generation. As such, the energy market should be governed by free market principles. From a material efficiency point of view, the full carbon and life cycle should be respected and exploited so that wooden products over their lifetime are transferred to other categories through a cascade of re-use, recycling and finally energy use. This would also help maximise the carbon retention efficiency of wood in general.

Keywords: renewable energy sources, wood availability, and woodworking industries.
