

EFIMED in brief

A snapshot on the Mediterranean Regional Office of the European Forest Institute (EFI)

by Marc PALAHI & Yves BIROT

Mediterranean forests are undergoing many environmental, economic and social constraints that make their future particularly uncertain. Driving forces such as demographic factors, intensity of climate and land use changes can lead to a regressive evolution of Mediterranean forest ecosystems, as currently shown by the assessment of many indicators. The extension of the Mediterranean climate to new geographic areas amplifies in turn the problems. More than ever, a sound management of Mediterranean forests, based on knowledge, is a necessity. The size and the difficulties of encountered issues, call for ambitious and better coordinated research efforts, based on jointly agreed priority objectives, and increased research capacities and financial means.

EFIMED, the EFI Mediterranean Regional Office was established in 2007, thanks to the initiative of the Spanish government and to the strong commitment of a network of forest research organizations and scientists from various disciplines and countries around the Mediterranean Basin. EFIMED was the first Regional Office established by EFI.

The main objective of EFIMED is to promote and coordinate research in the institutions and in the framework of cooperative networks, as background to policies targeting the conservation and management of Mediterranean forests. EFIMED also aims at strengthening key research capacities in the South and the East of the Mediterranean, in order to advance knowledge, and to integrate it into development oriented policies. Furthermore, EFIMED strives for favouring the interactions, at national and international level, between the research and scientific community, and the policy and decision-makers, and seeks financial support to scientific projects and programmes. The important EFIMED network in the Mediterranean Region, as well as the EFIMED international statute legitimate its role as “voice” of the Mediterranean forest research community. Over the last years, EFIMED activities have developed quite significantly; the main ones are reported below.

EFIMED has initiated the organization and catalysis of the joint elaboration of a Mediterranean Forest Research Agenda (MFRA) for the period 2009-2020, and has taken steps for its implementation. The main reasons for this development are as follows:

- Mediterranean issues are nowadays highlighted in political arenas;
- At the European level, the Forest-Based-Sector Technology Platform and the 7th RTD Framework Programme, are powerful instruments for strengthening forest research;
- The future of Mediterranean forests is under threat;
- Mediterranean forest research is fragmented and lack financial resources, and therefore needs increased support and improved structuring;
- The MFRA is a key tool in the context of a society more and more knowledge based.

The MFRA results from an extended consultation process, which has allowed to reaching a broad consensus on the vision on the future of Mediterranean forests, as well as on the priority research areas. The vision has four pillars:

1. Coping with climate changes and their impact on Mediterranean Forest ecosystems.
2. Living with forest fires and acting on their structural cause.
3. Increasing the sustainability and profitability of Mediterranean Forests through economic, governance and policy instruments.
4. Managing multifunctional forests in multiple use and scale landscapes

The MFRA, forms an integral part of the Strategic Research Agenda (SRA) of the European Forest-based Sector Technology Platform (FTP); it contains four priority research areas which have become the main EFIMED axis:

- Impact of climate and land use changes on forest ecosystem functioning and on related key resources: soil and water;
- Integration of wildfire risk in forest and landscape planning;
- Instruments and economic policies for the sustainable production of goods and services;
- Models and decision support systems for optimizing forest management and planning.

The existence of the MFRA has been decisive in the preparation and success of a very important E.U. funded project: AGORA. AGORA’s objectives are to advance scientific

Picture 1:
EFIMED scientific seminar gathered many participants of the Mediterranean, in Antalya, Turkey
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Picture 2:

From the platform of the first Mediterranean Forest Week in Antalya, Turkey :
(from left to right) Alain Chaudron (French Ministry of Agriculture), Mohamed L. Chakroun (AIFM), Joan Rovira (ArcMed), Marc Palahi (EFIMED), Nora Berrahmouni and Spas Todorov (Silva Mediterranea)
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knowledge on sustainable forest management in Tunisia and Morocco, through scientific cooperation and networking, and targeted strengthening of research capacities in these two countries. The project should allow a better use of available knowledge and existing resources in some forest research organisations of the Mediterranean Region.

The MFRA was also instrumental in convincing the European Commission (DG Research) to include in its call an ERA-Net on Mediterranean Forest Research (ERA-Net is a powerful instrument of the FP for RTD for strengthening and coordinating research in a given area). This ERA-Net, FORESTERRA, under Spain leadership, is under preparation to be submitted to the call. It has been given support from main funding agencies as well as main research organizations in the Mediterranean Region. If successful, FORESTERRA will be THE key instrument for implementing the MFRA.

EFIMED is particularly interested in favouring the dialogue between science and policy dialogue and more generally between science and society. In this respect, EFIMED has published in 2009 a “discussion paper” in five different languages on forest fires: “living with wildfires; what science can tell us”. This book aims at making available for managers and decision-makers, the most recent and best collective scientific expertise. About

twenty authors, all renowned experts in their field, have contributed to the book. In the same spirit, a second discussion paper on “water for forests and people in the Mediterranean: a challenging balance; what science can tell us” is expected for spring 2011. This book has mobilized the competencies of forty international experts.

EFIMED pays a special attention to young scientists as they are future key players in the development of the knowledge-based society, in particular by organizing “summer-schools” on MFRA related topics, and offering grants for short term scientific visits in partner laboratories.

Lastly, EFIMED would like to be a full member of the Mediterranean forest community, by developing its interfaces with administrations, universities, NGOs, managers and decision-makers, public and private forest owners, and by and large with the civil society. It is why EFIMED is fully committed in the organization of events, such as the Mediterranean Forest Week in 2010 in Antalya (Turkey) and in 2011 in Avignon (France).

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