

A short history of the Mediterranean Forest Weeks

by Alain CHAUDRON & Christophe BESACIER

As we are assessing in this special issue the Fifth Mediterranean Forest Week (MFW), it seems useful, while it is still fresh in our memory, to recall the history of the “Mediterranean Forest Weeks” from its first edition until now.

1st MFW: Antalya (Turkey), April 13th-16th, 2010

Combining resources for better regional cooperation on Mediterranean forests

It is early 2010.

At the time, the present authors held the following positions: Alain Chaudron was a senior advisor for international forestry affairs at the French Ministry of Agriculture in Paris and Christophe Besacier had been seconded by the same ministry to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, at the Secretariat of the Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions-*Silva Mediterranea*¹.

We had a good and trusting working relationship and we had to organize two meetings in the coming months:

– the second meeting of the Enlarged Executive Committee (EEC) of *Silva Mediterranea*;

1 - Formally “AFWC/EFC/NEFRC Committee on Mediterranean Forestry questions (*Silva Mediterranea*)”. It is a technical statutory body of FAO composed of 27 states of the Mediterranean Rim and the European Union. It is the only intergovernmental forum dealing with forests in this region. See: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/en/>



Pictures 1:
The 1st Mediterranean Forest Week in Antalya, Turkey, 2010.
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– a workshop to prepare a position paper for the ministers of agriculture of the Union for the Mediterranean.

In order to join resources for better regional cooperation on Mediterranean forests², minimize travel and reduce costs, we were wondering how to combine our two meetings.

In April, the Mediterranean Regional Office of the European Forest Institute (EFIMED) was due to hold its annual scientific seminar in Turkey on the theme: “Knowledge-based management of Mediterranean forests under climate driven risks: the ways ahead”. The issue of the interface between science and civil society and political decision-makers was recurrent and EFIMED agreed to organize its meeting back-to-back with ours. The Turkish authorities expressed their interest and agreed. Other partner-organizations like AIFM, ARCMED and Plan Bleu joined us and organized their own meetings during this week.

2 - After a preparatory meeting at the Villa Valmer in Marseilles in September 2009, the future Collaborative Partnership on Mediterranean Forests (CPMF) was in the making. It would be signed on September 29th, 2010 in Istanbul.

This immediately brought up the question: “How can we make these events more useful, visible and attractive?”

In October 2008, the first “European Forest Week” was organised in Rome, in conjunction with the 66th Session of the UNECE Timber Committee and the 34th Session of the FAO European Forestry Commission (EFC - chaired that year by Alain Chaudron).

In March 2009, the first “World Forest Week” was organized in conjunction with the 19th session of the FAO’s Committee on Forestry (COFO). The second Week was announced for October 2010, on the occasion of the 20th session of COFO.

Why not us? If there were European weeks and World weeks, why not Mediterranean weeks? We would therefore organize these meetings under the name of “Mediterranean Forest Week”.

In conclusion, this first editions, after a very short preparation time, was the juxtaposition of a series of events that had already been planned. Thus, it was the results of the collaboration of Mediterranean actors that brought together many people and fostered networking between several partner-organizations.

The Turkish Forest Service organized a field trip on the third day of the Week and a cedar planting ceremony at its new international training centre for forest fires. These events allowed the host country to show the significant achievements accomplished³ and to share them with the participants in constructive debates.

At the end of the week, EFIMED announced that its next annual scientific seminar would be held in Avignon in 2011 with the support of the French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA). France immediately agreed to host on this same occasion the Second Mediterranean Forest Week.

Incidentally, many participants remained stuck for many days in Antalya, waiting for the ashes of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano to disperse and air space to be reopened for Europe...

3 - Similarly, and this is not anecdotal, the gala dinner allows the host country to share its traditions and to pass messages in a less solemn setting than during the official opening ceremony. It is an appreciated moment of conviviality and exchange.

**2nd MFW: Avignon (France),
April 5th-8th, 2011**

Celebrating *Silva Mediterranea*'s centenary in a prestigious setting while pursuing regional cooperation

The second week was set in the double context of:

- the International Year of Forests 2011, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly with the theme “Forests for People”;

- the centenary of the launch of *Silva Mediterranea* by Robert HICKEL at the 9th International Congress of Agriculture in Madrid in May 1911.

It took place in the prestigious setting of the *Palais des Papes* in Avignon and the participants still remember the ceremony commemorating these two events and the gala dinner in the magnificent hall of the Grand Tinel, the former hall for banquets and, also, for conclaves...

A small organizing committee, including the FAO, the host country's Ministry of Agriculture, EFIMED, AIFM and INRA from Avignon, was set up from June 2010. Later on, other partners also joined this committee (Plan Bleu, ARCMED...). Finally, the week was structured into a series of sessions:

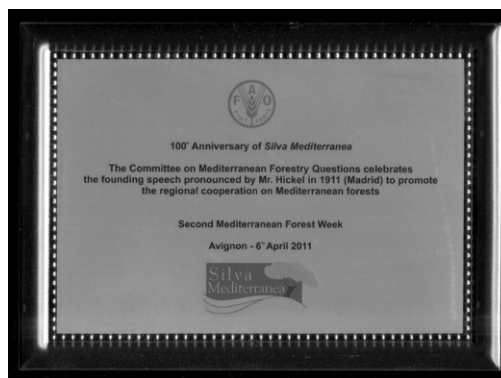
- the scientific seminar of EFIMED, “Biodiversity of Mediterranean Forest Ecosystems: changing the paradigm of conservation”;

- a session “Water for forests and people in the Mediterranean region: a challenging balance”, also organized by EFIMED;

- a session “Forests, societies and territories”, organized by AIFM with the support of the European project on forest governance (MED Qualigouv) and France (MAAF);

- a session on forest fire prevention in the Mediterranean, organized by the FAO, Spain and the Union of Foresters of Southern Europe (USSE), to prepare a synthesis document for the decision-makers;

- several parallel sessions, including the third meeting of the Enlarged Executive Committee of *Silva Mediterranea*, which created the idea of preparing a Strategic



Picture 2:

The 2nd Mediterranean Forest Week was an occasion to celebrate the centenary of *Silva Mediterranea*, in Avignon, France, 2011. © AIFM.

Framework on Mediterranean Forests (SFMF) and a State of Mediterranean Forests (SoMF).

**3rd MFW: Tlemcen (Algeria),
March 17th-21st, 2013**

Commitment of the countries for the implementation of the SFMF: the Tlemcen Declaration

In the organization of this 3rd Week, several changes occurred:

- EFIMED no longer organized its annual scientific seminar during the Mediterranean forest week;

- a broad theme was chosen: “Mediterranean forests for sustainable development of territories: what strategies for mitigating and adapting to global

Picture 3:

The 3rd Mediterranean Forest Week was held in Algeria, in Tlemcen, in 2013. © AIFM.





Picture 4:
The “Medforval project”
workshop during
the 4th Forest Week
Mediterranean.
Barcelona, Spain, 2015.
© AIFM.

change?” and the various sessions illustrated this theme. The program was detailed and presented in a quality information booklet for participants;

– a high-level segment was organized at the end of the week and resulted in the “Tlemcen Declaration”.

During this third Week, the first “State of the Mediterranean Forests” was presented, as well as the SFMF. In the Tlemcen Declaration, the high-level participants (ministers, forest directors, heads of delegation) committed to implementing the actions and measures contained in this strategic framework, structured in three strategic lines and nine priority objectives.

The 21st session of the *Silva Mediterranea*

Committee, held independently in Antalya on February 2nd and 3rd, 2012, decided, *inter alia*, to launch an evaluation of its working groups. The independent evaluation panel conducted interviews during the 3rd week in Tlemcen, but no meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the Committee were held there.

4th MFW: Barcelona (Spain), March 17th-20th, 2015

New impetus and adoption of a renewed framework for enhanced collaboration

The organization of the fourth Week was similar to the third, based on the collaboration of several Mediterranean partners. Its general theme was “Improving livelihoods: the role of Mediterranean forest value chains in a green economy”.

Different sessions developed this theme and a full day was devoted to carbon finance and the mobilization of financial resources.

An extraordinary meeting of the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee was held on March 18th, 2015. It resulted in the adoption of a series of 38 decisions containing most of the recommendations of the Committee’s evaluation (previously presented at another extraordinary meeting of the Committee in June 2014, in parallel to the 22nd COFO).

The high-level segment met on March 20th and adopted the “Barcelona Declaration”, which took note of the decisions taken by the member States of the Committee two days earlier and approved them. Implementing these decisions “will provide a new impetus and a renewed framework for countries in the region to collaborate and work together on Mediterranean forest issues”.



Picture 5:
Field trip during the 5th Mediterranean Forest Week.
Agadir, Morocco, 2015.
© AIFM.

5th MFW: Agadir (Morocco), March 20th-4th, 2017

A regional initiative for the restoration of degraded Mediterranean landscapes

Following the same collaborative organization process of the previous Weeks, but involving new partners active around the Mediterranean like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the general theme selected for the Fifth MFW was: "Towards enhanced regional cooperation to restore Mediterranean landscapes: improving resilience for the benefit of people and the environment".

The high-level segment adopted the "Agadir Commitment" which suggested establishing a Mediterranean regional initiative to restore at least 8 million hectares by 2030. We will not develop here this important point, as it is largely presented below in this special issue.

The 22nd session of the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee met on March 22nd, 2017 in the afternoon. A new Spanish President, José Manuel Jaquotot, was elected and the 38 decisions taken at the extraordinary meeting of March 18th, 2015 were endorsed, many of them in line with a renewed, rekindled, revitalized framework for the Committee. It was therefore a short and transitory session, having set new rules for the future.

In particular, in terms of organization:

- in even years, an extraordinary meeting of the Committee will be organized in parallel with COFO: the next one will be in July 2018 on the occasion of the COFO 24th Session;

- in odd years, the Committee's session will be organized in conjunction with the Mediterranean Forest Week. Since Lebanon applied to host both events, the 6th Mediterranean Forest Week and the 23rd session of the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee will be organized jointly there in 2019⁴.

A meeting of the Bureau of the Committee was then organized in Madrid on July 17th and 18th, 2017 to begin to clarify matters. The first meeting of the Joint Organizing

Committee (JOC) is scheduled to take place in December 2017 in Beirut, on the sidelines of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission's 23rd session.

On the road toward the 6th MFW, Lebanon, 2019

Joint organization of renewed *Silva Mediterranea* Committee and an even more open Mediterranean Forest Week

As we tried to show above, the 1st and 2nd Mediterranean Forest Weeks were first and foremost the combination of various events, facilitating networking.

The 3rd, 4th and 5th Weeks were more structured, with a broad technical theme and a high-level segment adopting a political declaration or commitment.

The 6th Week will again be different, bringing together a session of a renewed *Silva Mediterranea* Committee and a Mediterranean Forest Week that is even more open to debating issues.

A great challenge for the new Spanish president of the Committee, for the secre-

4 - Thus, FAO adopts the same organization at its global (World Forest Week and COFO), European (European Forest Week and EFC) and Mediterranean (Mediterranean Forest Week and *Silva Mediterranea* Committee) for its statutory forestry meetings.

Picture 6:

The 6th Mediterranean Forest Week will be held in Lebanon in 2019.
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tariat of *Silva Mediterranea* in Rome and, more generally, for all the members of the Joint Organizing Committee!

A.C., C.B.

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Webography

The website of the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee has a very rich section on "Past Events", on which one can find the files of the Committee's sessions, its extraordinary meetings, its enlarged executive committees, the Mediterranean Forest Weeks, Organization Committees, etc.
<http://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/88943/en/>

For the first 4 weeks:
<http://www.medforestweek.org/>

For the 5th week:
<http://www.5.medforestweek.org/>

Summary

A short history of the Mediterranean Forest Weeks

"But what are the Mediterranean Forest Weeks? ".
"Is it formal or informal? What do we have to commit to? ".
"How and by whom is it organized? ".

The article tries to provide answers to these questions asked in Agadir. It begins by recalling the origin of these weeks. The idea of regional cooperation on Mediterranean forests is old and the hundredth anniversary of the founding speech of Robert Hickel was celebrated. However, it is the organization in 2008 of the first "European forests week" and in 2009 of the first "World forest week" which was the trigger for the adoption in 2010 of the name "Mediterranean forests week".

The article then shows how these weeks, from the second to the fifth, have evolved now with technical sessions on a broad theme and a high-level segment adopting a political declaration or commitment. Finally, it concludes with a note of hope and optimism for the future. Indeed, in 2019, the 23rd session of the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee, renewed and revitalized following its evaluation, and the 6th Mediterranean Forest Week, even more open to debates, will be organized jointly in Lebanon. A new challenge!

Résumé

Petite histoire des Semaines forestières méditerranéennes

« Mais au fait, les semaines forestières méditerranéennes, c'est quoi ? ».
« C'est formel ou informel ? Ça nous engage à quoi ? ».
« C'est organisé comment et par qui ? ».

A ces questions entendues à Agadir, l'article tente d'apporter des réponses. Il rappelle tout d'abord l'origine de ces semaines. L'idée d'une coopération régionale sur les forêts méditerranéennes est ancienne et le centième anniversaire du discours fondateur de Robert Hickel a été célébré. Mais c'est bien l'organisation en 2008 de la première « Semaine européenne des forêts » et celle en 2009 de la première « Semaine mondiale des forêts » qui aura été le déclencheur de l'adoption en 2010 du nom de « Semaine forestière méditerranéenne ».

L'article montre ensuite comment ces semaines, de la deuxième à la cinquième, ont évolué et se sont structurées, avec maintenant des sessions techniques sur un thème général et un segment de haut niveau adoptant une déclaration ou un engagement à caractère politique.

Il se conclut enfin par une note d'espoir et d'optimisme pour l'avenir. En effet en 2019 seront organisées conjointement au Liban la 23^e session d'un Comité *Silva Mediterranea* renouvelé et redynamisé après son évaluation et la 6^e Semaine forestière méditerranéenne toujours plus ouverte aux débats. Un nouveau défi !