



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Subdued expectations in 2008 for the European timber trade General Assembly of the European Timber Trade Association (FEBO) 28th May 2008 in Nantes**

2007 was a good year for the 13 member countries of the European Timber Trade Association - FEBO. Countries such as Finland and Belgium were able to book double-figure growth rates. The building sector of lots of the countries remained stable thus contributing to satisfactory turnover development for the timber traders. This was backed by lively demand for finishing and renovation products.

The trend has not continued in 2008. In spring a general worsening of the situation in the timber trade became clearly noticeable: house and apartment construction stagnated in most countries. According to entrepreneurs the reason for the failing economy lies in the general "unfavourable" global situation: the emerging recession in the USA, the continuing financial crisis and rising prices for oil and raw materials. Inflation, too, which in this year will reach 3.2% for the EU 27, will also affect the buying power of the consumer. Positive impulses, however, are resulting from the renovation and finishing sectors. Panel products, outdoor timber products and also doors and windows are predicted to supply similar or increasing turnover. On the whole FEBO member countries expect at the best a standstill in their business for 2008.

This year's FEBO General Assembly was held at the international timber fair Carrefour International du Bois from 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> May 2008 in Nantes

The effects of CE marking on the timber trade were discussed: a simple and practicable solution must be found for timber products. FEBO is working towards individual marking of construction timber products in co-operation with the relevant European standardisation committees and other bodies.

Another FEBO issue is the need for uniform marking and designation of timber and timber products, wood surfaces and imitations in Europe. Uncertainty can be perceived in the product choice of the timber trading consumer clientele with regards to the current variety of timber and timber products. Numerous innovations involving composite materials have emerged in the last years in the interior fittings and furniture sectors. Timber and its components are no longer readily recognisable, in particular when incorporated into a finished product. On the one hand wood is experienced as a solid timber product and on the other hand processed into chipboards, fibre boards or solid timber boards finished with veneer or film. Wood imitations can often be found amongst the film-faced boards and as far as the optical and tactile impressions are concerned these are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish from real wood.

Added to this are the frequent misleading and incorrect product designations which are confusing for the consumer: products are labelled as wood although they are not wood. Wood imitations are often named after a timber species without the information that the product is an imitation.

FEBO is of the opinion that the overtaxed customer can be assisted by correct product designation which clearly and unmistakably declares whether an article on sale is a real wood product or not. FEBO is considering the compilation of a consumer guide and has gained the approval of the umbrella organisation of the European woodworking industries – CEI Bois – for a shared project.



Intensive consultations are taking place in Brussels on the need for additional measures to stop illegal imports of wood into the EU. "We are observing the decision-making process in Brussels closely and are on the spot to represent the interests of the importing timber wholesalers," commented Lutgart Behets-Oschmann, FEBO Secretary General, in Nantes.

The second part of the General Assembly was an event jointly organised by FEBO and the French timber importing association Le Commerce du Bois (LCB) based on the subject of a "Responsible procurement policy for the European timber trade". The active and earnest efforts of the timber trade in the UK and France to import "legal" timber were highlighted. A report followed on the Timber Trade Action Plan (TTAP), an initiative of the European timber trade which is operated with EU funds and supported by the European timber trading associations. TTAP offers concrete assistance for the timber trader to co-operate with his local supplier in the production of the proof of legality of timber products.

The representatives of the FEBO member countries elected a new leadership in Nantes for 2009 and 2010. Franz-Josef Kall from Aachen was designated as successor to the present FEBO President Géraud Spire from Charleville-Mezières (F). Franz-Josef Kall has represented the German Timber Trade Federation as German delegate to FEBO for many years. The new Vice-President will be John White, CEO of the Timber Trade Federation, London (UK).

Wiesbaden, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008  
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