"We are living in a place, Europe, that the large majority of the world population envies" with these words, aimed at emphasising the key role of Europe in providing welfare, the Chairwoman Honourable Member of the European Parliament Mrs Maria Noichl opened this new edition of the Club du Bois meeting wishing to all participants a positive 2018. She welcomed the woodworking industry family to this event and she warmly thanked the Members of the EU Parliament present to this meeting: Mr Eric Andrieu, Mr Paul Brannen, Mr José Inácio Faria, Mrs Marijana Petir, Mr Paul Rübig, Mr Tom Vandenkendelaere, Mr Ricardo Serrão Santos and Mr Carlos Zorrinho.

The Club Du Bois is an event jointly organised by the three Brussels based organisations: CEI-Bois, EPF and EOS representing the interests of the European Woodworking Industry. Since 2014, Mrs Noichl, Honourable Member of the EU Parliament, is the Chairwoman of this dedicated Club.

The main focus of the meeting was the contribution of the woodworking chain to the European Communication "Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable Industry - A renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy".

The European wood Industries are very innovation-minded: through technical innovations, the sector is now undeniably in a position to supply high-quality products all over the world providing market oriented solutions and new systems to ensure the highest level of traceability of timber. Establishing a Wood Industry 4.0 requires companies to rethink the way they do business and a long-term effort is needed to successfully navigate the changing industrial environment of Industry 4.0.

Honourable Member of the European Parliament Paul Rübig (EPP) emphasized the importance of research and innovation: if the woodworking industries aspire to be competitive in an increasingly challenging economic arena they need to devote enough resources to research and innovation. To this end, he called for all stakeholders to seize the opportunities provided by Horizon 2020 (FP8) and by the programme which will succeed the FP8, the new framework programme funding research, technological development, and innovation (FP9, starting from 2021).

For further information & date of the next meeting, please visit www.clubdubois.eu.

Brief report on the presentations:

Innovative product approach - Mr Bert Vandenkendelaere, Sales & Marketing Director Unilin, Division Panels, Belgium

Mr Vandenkendelaere, Sales & Marketing Director at one of EPF’s industrial members here in Belgium, Unilin, provided a presentation on the innovation in the Company.

As he stated, the wood based panels Industry needs innovation: a large part of what is sold is a commodity product, in this sense innovation is a key tool to remain competitive and expand exports outside the EU borders. “Within UNILIN company innovation is part of the climate, and young and old colleagues,
from sales to maintenance, via accounting, all departments are invited to innovate and to think further about what our company, our processes and our products should look like in the future.” Mr Vandenkendelaere said. Creating a competitive wood based panel requires important and continuous high-tech investment. Today, Unilin is changing its production assortment using more and more recycled wood rather than fresh wood. In the past, chipboards used to contain 100% fresh trees - cut and chipped into chipboards; now Unilin is using 80% recycled wood obtained from old pallets and old furniture. Recycled materials need to be cleaned and this requires enormous investments into new cleaning technologies for urban wood and changes in the production technology.

“UNILIN can be considered as one of the founding FATHERS OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY. Creating wood based panels from recycled materials is one of the ways in which our industry reduces the consumption of resources and contributes to carbon storage, low energy consumption in a sustainable way. This was an example of how we innovate in our production process, but also in our products. We continue to strive to make a difference against our competitors outside of Europe!”

LOOKING INTO PRODUCTS: In the eighties for example, the floors in houses, offices and hotels were usually covered in carpet. Laminate flooring became more popular from the eighties onwards, but most of us will remember that laminate flooring needed to be glued to the floor surface, which was time-consuming. One of the innovations that rocked the flooring industry was the Unilin system. Unilin invented a system, which is now over 20 years old, that enabled glue-less locking of floors. The system is now present in various types of flooring of most of the world’s flooring manufacturers and has made it unnecessary to glue floors. This enabled consumers to install the floors themselves in a simple and fast way and allow professional workers to install floors much faster than before. Obviously, not only Unilin, but the entire wood based panel Industry is trying to make installation easier and to be more competitive on the market. The same system has in the meantime also been applied to wooden parquet flooring, to carpet and vinyl tiles, to wall panel systems and even to furniture, for which you no longer need screwdrivers and screws, but can click them together! Thanks to the international protection of intellectual property rights, these European systems have conquered all other continents as well and are used by manufacturers there under license.

Another significant example of excellence in innovation is the development of woodgrain designs and embossed pressing. Unilin, as the rest of the wood based panel Industry, has been spending many years in trying to create melamine faced chipboard panels with a design that looks and feels just like solid wood!

The industry thrives thanks to its innovations of the past years, such as click technology, recycled wood as raw material and registered and embossed designs. The wood based panel industry will continue to invest in the coming years to innovate further and to stay competitive as an important European industry, directly creating jobs for more than 100.000 Europeans.

UNILIN based in Belgium, employs approximately four thousand nine hundred staff spread over twenty production units, with a turnover of approximately one point five billion euros. Since 2005 UNILIN is part of the New York stock exchange listed Mohawk group.
Integrating innovation in the sawmill business – Mr Michael Proschek, Head of Compliance and Sustainability at Schweighofer, Austria

Mr Michael Proschek, Head of Compliance and Sustainability at Holzindustrie Schweighofer opened his intervention explaining that the approach of Holzindustrie Schweighofer to innovation can be summarised in two main activity areas:

- Innovation in the supply chain and sustainability approach;
- Support sector-wide innovation with the Schweighofer-Prize.

Supply chain traceability is a key element in order to guarantee sustainability of timber products; for this reason, as explained by Mr Proschek, Holzindustrie Schweighofer has introduced one of the most innovative solutions to ensure the traceability and transparency for the timber supply chain: the publicly accessible TimFlow GPS system. The GPS tracking system “Timflow” for saw log deliveries represents an innovative tool related to the company’s action plan for a sustainable timber supply chain in Romania. Following its commitment to fight unlawful logging, the company bases its approach on constructive dialogue with environmental NGOs, transparent communication and an overall enhanced control system for its supply chain. Since the company does not harvest any trees itself, it requires its suppliers to equip all trucks with the GPS system Timflow. This allows tracing of the delivered timber back to its exact loading place. Holzindustrie Schweighofer is even publishing this data (GPS tracks and photos) of all trucks on www.timflow.com, thereby providing providing for maximum transparency within the supply chain.

The measures laid down in Holzindustrie Schweighofer’s action plan surpass all legal requirements by far and set novel control standards within the timber industry in Romania and the regulatory requirements. It also complies with the standards laid down by the European Timber Regulation (EUTR) for placing legal wood on the European Single Market. Every one of the more than 700 trucks delivering saw logs to the company’s mills is now equipped with a GPS device that tracks its exact route from its loading place to delivery at the mill gate where all information will be thoroughly checked.

ONLY SUSTAINABLE SOURCED WOOD: Holzindustrie Schweighofer has put in place a very strict control system: if suppliers don’t follow the company’s purchasing policy, they are excluded from the supply chain. Moreover, Holzindustrie Schweighofer does not accept timber from national parks trough the “Zero Timber Transports from National Parks”. Although the Romanian legislation would allow for logging in so called national park buffer zones and in case of sanitary cuttings, timber from this area is not accepted by the Company.

Further and more detailed information is available on the website www.timflow.com
Finally, Mr Proscheck informed that since 2003 the Schweighofer family awards with a prize money of €300,000 biannually the best innovative ideas, technologies, products and services in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the European Forest Based Sector. On the occasion of the 2017 Schweighofer Prize, the main prize was awarded to the internationally renowned wood structural engineer Hermann Blumer and the Japanese architect Shigeru Ban. Their joint projects include among others the intricate support structure for the Yeoju Golf Club in South Korea and the structural system of the Tamedia building in Zurich made entirely of wood. Mr Proscheck concluded his intervention inviting the Club du Bois participants to the next Schweighofer Prize that will take place in Vienna in 2019.

Holzindustrie Schweighofer is a traditional family-owned company of Austrian with over 3,500 employees in Austria, Germany and Romania producing high-quality wood products for industrial customers all over the world. Holzindustrie Schweighofer support sustainable forestry, and have implemented a comprehensive action plan for this purpose.

Digitisation in the forest-based sector State of technology and opportunities for innovation -Mr Uwe Kies, Secretary General of Innovawood

Mr Uwe Kies of, Secretary General of Innovawood, was the last presenter of this edition of the Club du Bois. The title of his presentation, which was co-authored by Mr Andreas Kleinschmit von Lengefeld (Director of Research and Innovation at FCBA - Forêt Cellulose Bois – construction Ameublement), was Digitisation in the forest-based sector State of technology and opportunities for innovation.

In his remarkably forward-looking presentation, Mr Kies, raised the attention of the audience by inviting the stakeholders to focus on how fast innovation is changing the world. The so-called fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0) is underway. It is going to be characterized by interconnected, self-configuring and self-optimising Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS); value chains will be more and more horizontally integrated, while there will be a vertical integration of production systems. The internet of things and internet of services will play an important role and together with several highly disruptive technologies may ensure highly flexible and customized products and the creation of new business models such as virtual value chains. While it is premature to prophesy the real impact in everyday life, it appears increasingly likely that as a result of the mass diffusion of these disruptive innovations many industrial sectors will look completely different in some years. Forests and forest-based industries will partake of the benefits connected to these technologies.
Mr Kies proceeded to dwell on the opportunities connected across various segments of the industry. In forestry, high resolution scanning will allow better forest inventory, while optimized, efficient harvesting reduces impacts on ecosystem. Safety in forestry will improve courtesy of rescue chains. Automation will probably allow the utilization of remotely controlled harvesters.

In the sawmill sector, better machines will reduce downtime. In general, there will be an optimization of material flow and use, while activities such as grading and sorting will be enhanced thanks to better technology. Better traceability systems are already available and allow to better determine the origin of wood. Flexible and more customized products are gaining momentum.

Wood construction will be made much easier by better computational design, rapid prototyping and the use of robotics for assembly. Many engineered wood products are already available in the market and there is hope that they will boost the utilization of wood in construction.

Customised solutions will also characterise more and more the furniture sector, while a fully connected smart factory will reduce production time. Value chain integration will make collaboration of specialized manufactures and suppliers easier.

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As stated by Mr Kies, the paper industry is supposed to acquire full real-time control of complex, large-scale productions while wood and wood fibres will be more and more used in textiles, chemicals, plastics, biofuels. There are thus huge opportunities to be reaped from ‘upgrading’ Europe’s forest-based industries to take full advantage of the digital transition. It is important, however, not to neglect the obstacles on the way of the sector – such as the presence of millions of private forest owners who are not sufficiently aware of the relevance of forests, a sector characterized by multiple and at times competing supply chains and the prevalence of Small and Medium Enterprises which do not have enough funds to invest in research and innovation.

Therefore, an adequate policy frame (which should keep into account that the forest-based sector is a main contributor to climate protection and wood is Europe’s most underdeveloped renewable resource) is fundamental for the sector to fulfil its potential.

InnovaWood is an umbrella organisation that integrates four European networks in the Forest, Wood-based and Furniture industries into a more effective mechanism to support innovation in these sectors.
PHOTO GALLERY
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