

EDITORIAL

WHY ARE WE SURPRISED?

At a recent 118th regular electoral meeting of the CFA Assembly, we were particularly intrigued by several conclusions from the report by CFA's former president Petar Jurjević, MSc, by some principles of planned programme trends outlined by the new president Oliver Vlainić, BSc in forestry, and especially by the factual state contained in the expert topic of EU funds in forestry reported by Goran Gregurović, MSc. The limited space of one page of this column does not allow us to discuss the mentioned observations in depth; we shall therefore only briefly touch on them, while the readers are referred to the Minutes of the Assembly and its expert topic. *"Foresters and the forestry profession cannot and will not accept the fact that, for the first time in history, forestry has been omitted from the name of the ministry to which it belongs ... We are still hoping ... that Mr Jakovina, Minister of Agriculture, will do his best, as he has promised, to rectify this historical injustice."* The promise was made two years ago, but the forestry profession has not yet had the opportunity to seriously discuss forestry issues with the minister, since he, although invited, has almost never attended forestry meetings, let alone fulfilled his promise. In view of how the forestry profession is treated by the competent ministry and the Government in general, where we have never heard a word about forestry from the Minister for Regional Development (at the same time, the EU Forestry Strategy is closely associated with rural and regional development), we should not be surprised by the attitude towards our profession. Add to this the fact that, according to the presenter at the Assembly, forestry as a separate economic branch is, regrettably, not included in the EU funds (apparently, forestry seems to have been the issue only when excessive forest areas were included in the NATURA 2000 network), but will have to be "squeezed in" via the rural development funds, the attitude of those responsible becomes even clearer. For this reason, despite the well argued attitudes of the profession concerning the issues contained in the report by Mr Jurjević, MSc. and submitted to many relevant addresses, his conclusion that *"today we are free to express our opinions, but we, and not only we, are neither heard nor heeded by the competent bodies"* is more than accurate.

Mr Vlainić, the new CFA President, addressed the assembly by citing the late Professor Emeritus Branimir Prpić, who warned in 1979 that *"we have severed contacts with the public and isolated ourselves, we do not relate to socio-political workers and we do not introduce them to our specialist problem issues. ... Other professions fight more strongly and assert themselves. ... The entire profession should not wait for others to decide on and solve our problem matter. ... We*

should disclose to the public how things stand, what is best and what the profession is fighting for". Comparing the present situation with the one he cited, our colleague Vlainić concluded that *"our future requires that we continue to improve the state of the profession" In doing so, we should optimally use all the resources provided by the forest, primarily of the forest ecosystem itself, the state, the local community, all those employed in forestry and the wood industry, and the citizens of the Republic of Croatia"*.

Why should we wonder at the present state in forestry? Everything becomes clear if we answer the following question: do we have a **forest policy** and if so, who is responsible for it? Every country, and especially a mountainous one, has such a policy, which is based on a set of specific circumstances with tradition and interest being the most important. If the State had a forest policy, then the politicians would listen to the profession. Forest resources and forest areas as a part of general infrastructure would be put to optimal use. There would be no question of abolishing the means for non-market forest functions, which are otherwise invested in the ecosystem conservation. The needs of the local communities would be recognized, especially through the employment policy, and wood raw material would be utilized fully and directed into production that yields the highest additional value. If forestry was valued as an important economic branch, then there would be sufficient justification to invest into it. It is a well known fact that, in terms of investing only into simple forest reproduction, the interest on forests amounts to just 2 %, unlike the interest on bank savings or other investments. If we demand from the company Hrvatske Šume maximum rentability and not the "optimal benefit", do we not force it to cut down on investments in extended forest reproduction, forest accessibility and other issues? If only maximum rentability is required, and optimal benefits provided by forests and forestry are not valued (non-market forest functions, biomass as a renewable energy source, tourist facilities, broadening the activities to include horticulture, recreation, contribution to the local community through employment and preservation of rural areas, etc.), then we should not wonder at the reported surplus labour in forestry.

However, the manner in which forests are managed should not be determined by a company which is entrusted only with caring for state forests, but by the State as the owner. The State should adhere to a consistent forestry policy which we regrettably, along with many other things, do not have.

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