

EDITORIAL

WHAT, IF ANYTHING, HAS CHANGED?

On several occasions this column has addressed the attitude of the society/politics towards forests, the forestry profession and its status. We may discuss the way the society perceives forestry and the forestry profession and we may even feel responsible for certain inaccurate perceptions because we may not have tried hard enough to change such perceptions. However, crucial things cannot be changed without political will, and the attitude of politics towards the forest and the forestry profession greatly influences the general perception of the society. We have eagerly awaited changes, but have they really taken place regardless of the elapsed time? In our opinion, the main changes have not, regrettably taken place yet! To start with, the term forestry has not been restored to the name of the relevant ministry, and as far as we know, not a word has been said about this. The relevant minister has not even found time to receive the representatives of the Croatian Forestry Association, which, as has always been proclaimed, unifies the forestry education, science and practice and which has in the past period critically responded to some incompetent procedures in the profession. Since the minister is not a forestry expert (and he need not be one), we expected him to learn about the problems of the profession through relevant talks and to endeavour to eliminate them. However, if he relies solely on advice from the Ministry employees, then we will be waiting for changes in vain. We leave it to the readers to understand this sentence in any way they wish, but truth cannot be ignored. Some statements uttered by wood processors and even by some people from the Chamber of Commerce, on their satisfaction in further supporting „log distribution“ lead us to the conclusion that market economy in forestry is just a tale. National resources continue to be sold at highly reduced prices and raw material and semi-finished goods rather than highly finalized products continue to be exported, which ends in the loss of working places. The belief that the Croatian wood processing industry will be saved by cheap raw material and that this will ensure higher employment and export is still deeply rooted. We, on the other hand, continue to ask the same questions: how much raw material and how many final products do we export and why do we expect someone to strive towards high finalisation when they can earn sufficiently on raw materials and semi finished goods without large investments in modern equipment and highly specialized personnel? The product they export does not require either of the above; in contrast, to be competitive in the final production, the two above mentioned points are of crucial importance. This leads to another question: why do we educate wood processing specialists and who will employ them? The answer is very simple – the mar-

ket price of wood raw material will determine its finalisation and stimulate the development of the accompanying industries (equipment, glues, metal articles, varnishes and others), which will consequently lead to higher employment.

Next, the declaration on supporting the economy/entrepreneurship mentions the lessening or even the abolishment of some para-fiscal taxes. Surprisingly, the first among these is the tax on non-market forest functions (NMFF). The basic question is whether this is a para-fiscal charge or the generally beneficial contribution to the society as a whole. When some, including primarily the politicians, finally realize what this is all about, there will be no problem in paying this tax. The TV spot „We may get lost in a forest, but we must not lose forests“ sounds nice, but the society with its acclamatory behaviour is heading in exactly this direction. The Law on Forests lists about 15 non-market forest functions. These functions can be expanded depending on the space they cover and their purpose. There is also an EU Forest Strategy which specifically emphasises sustainable forest management, a principle that the Croatian forestry has been implementing for a long time. The Strategy focuses especially on rural space. Sustainable management primarily involves silviculture and protection against harmful biotic and abiotic factors, that is, active rather than passive protection. The brochure Croatian National Treasure by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which we mentioned in the last issue of the Forestry Journal, also contains relevant data on the soil (which is hard to form and easy to lose), water and climate, the essential constituents of a forest. The forest has an important hydrological role because it absorbs and purifies water during rainy seasons and snow melting. It retains part of it and lets off the rest into water springs and courses, which it refills in the dry season from its reserves. Its hydrological role is reflected primarily in the protection of soil against torrents, erosion and wind. We can illustrate the role of a forest in terms of erosion in the karst area with the article „The Anti- Erosion, Hydrological and Water-Protective Role of Mediterranean Forests“ by V. Topić, PhD, and L. Butorac, PhD, in the monograph „Forests of the Croatian Mediterranean“, which shows the condition of the soil under the forest and without the forest. Needless to say, the forest has a profound impact on the main climate factors and on the social and spiritual life of men in general. There is not enough space in this column for more detailed data and for all non- market forest functions, but we instruct the readers where to find these data if they really want to get them, because ignorance excuses no man in making detrimental decisions.