

EDITORIAL

FOREST REGULATIONS AND POLITICS

The forest law proposal has gone through the first reading in the Sabor of the Republic of Croatia. It has been prepared for almost two years. The conflict of interest committee was participated by the representatives of all relevant sector institutions; the Law proposal also underwent an e-consultation after which a part of the comments were accepted. At the Board of Agriculture there was considerable discussion on the amount of reimbursement for the nonprofit forest functions, the rate of which should be retained at the present level of 0.0265%, though with the exemption from payment granted to all legal and physical persons with a yearly income up to three million Kunas. In connection with the distribution of the means from the OKFŠ (nonprofit forest functions) fund, the proposed regulations that would reduce the finances for the scientific research from the present 5% to only 1% have caused a turmoil among the scientists; this would practically mean that only about 1.5 million Kunas would be allotted to forestry science. Considering the many current threatening issues related to the Croatian forests, a proposal of this kind is irrational and degrading. We hope that the critical comments and suggestions will support the efforts toward achieving the required 10% of the OKFŠ fund for scientific research. On the other hand, the new Regulations on the non-wood forest products are causing the unnecessary huge administration due to the issuing licences for free uncontrolled collection of forest fruits for personal use, which could lead to considerable damage to one part of the ecosystem; besides, this would increase the already high danger of forest fires. The recently announced foundation of the 17th branch office of the Croatian Forests in Slatina for the region of the Virovitica/Podravina county has been almost unnoticed and only marginally commented in the forestry environment. However, the realisation of the idea would open the Pandora's box, out of which who knows what would emerge; the myth says, all the evils of the world. The distribution of state forests and forest areas in the Republic of Croatia does not coincide with the political borders of the counties and municipal areas, as it used to be for a long time. The trading company Croatian Forests Ltd. is entirely owned by the Republic of Croatia, so that the state takes care of the manage-

ment of its forests without considering the local border lines. The care for the forest comes first. The local population should benefit from the forest resources, which is achieved through employment in Croatian Forests Ltd., sale of fuelwood, collecting the non-wood products, etc. The announced benefit for the Virovitica/Podravina county through the foundation of the new branch is in conflict with the present constitution and management of the Croatian Forests. No county makes development plans in the name of the Croatian Forests Ltd.; however, there is a collaboration among the units of the local management because foresters have always been a part of the community in which they have been active. Not only that the announcement of the management of a new branch office in a county is unacceptable, but it would also open a possibility of changing the borders of other branch offices, some of which could then be cancelled, others would cross outside of the historical traditional borders. With all the disadvantages of the present constellation, we cannot claim that the present one is ideal; with every proposed change, particularly such that is not global but particular, its implementation usually results in conflicts, not caused by rational economic reasons, but by current political power. There are now twenty-one counties, including the City of Zagreb. Disputes have been going on for years on whether the number of these administrative units should be reduced. In a few years, there may be only several regions. Should the borders of the branch offices be then again changed within the borderlines of the Croatian Forests Ltd? Though monopolistic, the present business management of the trading company owned by the state is not defined by the market but by the distribution of raw materials at the lowest prices in the region and all European Union over a long time. The highest price of "giving away" the state resources has been paid by the forest without reimbursing it with what is fundamental - satisfactory forest management operations, not to speak of improvements by recovery after damages, climate change, new pests and other threats. At this time the opening of new branch offices in order to satisfy local appetites is neither wise nor rational.

Editorial Board