

EDITORIAL

WILL A CHANGE IN THE MINISTRY BRING ABOUT A CHANGE IN THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE FORESTRY PROFESSION?

We have written on several occasions about how we expected the present Government to bring the word forestry back into the name of the line ministry and to change its attitude towards forests and the forestry profession. Regrettably, this has not happened, with the final result of the forestry sector within the Ministry being at the level of parts of agriculture, vegetable growing for example, although forests cover almost half of the land area of the Republic of Croatia. Needless to say, the forest is the most complex ecosystem in the world, whose management requires supreme expertise. The Constitution itself states that, along with soil and water, the forest is a resource of particular interest for the Republic of Croatia. We do not insist that the sector minister should be a renowned forestry expert, but the state secretary or assistant minister in charge of forestry should definitely be one. The Minister should take every opportunity to get to know the profession which is a constituent part of his Ministry. The best way to do it is to attend at least several professional symposia in which the status and problems of the profession are discussed on a scientific-professional basis. We regret to say that the deposed department minister did not attend one single gathering, not even the one organized by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. This we regard as both the belittling of the profession and of the mentioned scientific institution. The only visible trace that he left in forestry was the establishment of “his” Forestry Administration at the expense of reducing the area of the adjacent Administrations. At present, the forestry department is headed by a wood technologist, which is illogical, but even worse, the forestry profession seems to approve of this. Who runs the forestry policy and do we have a good strategy for running it? Who is the forestry policy subjugated to? There is a general impression that the forestry policy is led by wood processors, and what is tragic, by wood processors in primary wood processing, who are guided by non-market conditions and who disregard the principles of sustainable management.

At the scientific-professional gathering held to mark the Days of Croatian Forestry, Oliver Vlainić, President of the Croatian Forestry Association, mentioned current problems in forestry and attitudes of the profession. We have nothing more to add to this but to ask the readers to read the reviews of the gathering in the past double issue of the journal. Clearly, the profession repeatedly warns of the alarming conditions in forestry which the competent ministry obviously does not recognize.

Considerable financial means will be required to repair the damage caused by ice and wind storms in Gorski Kotar and to remedy the situation with disastrous ash dieback and the oncoming problems with oak, the most valuable tree species in Croatia. Where to find these means if, according to the new Forest Act, the financial means from non-market forest functions fees have been significantly reduced while wood assortments continue to be sold at non-market conditions? We did not have to wait long to see how the new lady minister will treat forests and forestry by her Decision to lower the fees for forests and forest land. The value of the points was reduced by 30 to 90%, depending on the silvicultural form of the forest. To quote her words, this will accelerate investment projects, because, allegedly, many investments in which it was necessary to exclude forests or forest land from forest management plans, were called into question due to excessive fees for local or regional self-managing units. Of course, they are “not crazy” to pay to private owners, who have hundreds of thousands of hectares of abandoned and overgrown land, when the state (read: public) land is almost free of charge. For them a scrub, a thicket, maquis, and garrigue is not much of a forest anyway. The latest is the announcement of a new reduction in the non-market forest function fee by “increasing the level of total annual income from 3 000 000.00 kuna to 7 500 000.00 kuna, which was explained by a burden, both on the entrepreneurs and the administrative processing”. Due to reduced means from non-market forest functions, which are currently mainly used for demining and for the fire fighter service, very little is left for “green” operations on about one million hectares of karst. What is there left to say?

Let us talk a little bit about climate change, oxygen, carbon dioxide, erosion, potable water, recreation and environment protection in general, where the forest is one of the most important and most complex ecosystems, and about which everybody, although lacking professional education, knows everything because they all love forests.

We often mention the principle of sustainability and the insurance of the multipurpose role of a forest, which is the motto of business-making in forestry. However, the first step is to change the general belief that the forest can be used without investing into it or without returning to it a part of the benefits. Only if we do so will forests remain an eternal asset.

Editorial Board