

# EDITORIAL

When Thomas Waitz, representative of the European Parliament and member of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, published in his official page “a new report on deforestation in Croatia“, a report passed on by ViDrA–“Association of Veterans and Social Action“, this piece of news spread across the Croatian network media. On this occasion the portal Telegram.hr published an interview with Vesna Grgić, chairperson of Vidra Association. The Association’s Forum, called The Green Squad, was established, in their own words, “with the purpose of fighting against devastation of forests and forest land in the Republic of Croatia”.

The concern for common goods, which forests in the Republic of Croatia certainly are, is highly commendable. However, if we read accusations that refer mostly to the activities of the company Croatian Forests, one cannot but feel that there is a lot of misunderstanding of legal provisions and operational actions that take place in forest management. One of the examples of “disastrous forest devastation” mentioned in the interview was the possibility of a ban on logging in all forests for the period of 10 years and a comparison with Albania was given. There was no request from abroad for Albania to do so – it was a decision of the Albanian Parliament to impose a moratorium on cutting down forests for industrial purposes for the period from 2016 to 2025. The ban was implemented as a reaction to uncontrolled excessive logging, resulting in erosive areas clearly visible across the country. To compare this with the Republic of Croatia, which enjoys 256 years of organized forestry, is completely misplaced.

The basic misunderstanding generally displayed by the public refers to sustainable management using the shelterwood system, where at the end of the life cycle of an even-aged stand (the name itself denotes that the trees are of relatively even age), the mature forest, naturally with all trees, including thick ones, is replaced with a young forest, which is not always clearly visible outside the vegetation period. What is important is that the forest remains on the forested land: there is no devastation and no degraded forest stages (just as non-experts consider a young forest in progression a scrub; however, a scrub is an example of a reverse process – regression). The rejuvenation period, which lasts for up to 20 years and in the final cutting stage it may last for one or more years if smaller forested areas are treated, is in fact the birth of a young forest. We all know that in the human world a child is born after labour pains

and growing up and turning an adult takes years. This can be compared with the emergence of a young forest and care for its development. The labour pains bringing forth a forest and its management take time. Not only can the forested area being regenerated be compared to a maternity ward, it is also a work site where special regulations apply, particularly those related to safety at work. Nature lovers who are angry about the damaged forest roads when passing through the forest being regenerated, should know that they are in a construction site and that they would not be able to move freely on the construction site of a building or a bridge. To draw a parallel, a forest construction site could be fenced off like any other construction site, banning access to the area.

It is unrealistic to expect that the condition of a forest, and indeed any other part of nature, can be conserved. Natural ecosystems are dynamic units that change constantly throughout time. In the Republic of Croatia, forests managed on a close-to-nature principle have undergone at least two, and some even three, complete lifecycles from their emergence to the final cut. This means that all stages have gone through this cycle, from a young forest only several centimetres tall, to an old forest with trees up to 30-40 metres tall. The average human lifespan today in our homeland of 78 years is just over half the lifespan of 140 years prescribed for pedunculate oak forests, and about three-quarters of the lifespan of 100 years prescribed for beech forests. It is normal that a resident or a visitor to a forest area overlooks the changes taking place in old forests which are not as drastic as those taking place when an old forest is replaced by a young forest. It is interesting that people rejoice when a new baby is born and is growing up, but are not happy when a new forest is born which foresters endeavour to make even better than the old one. An old proverb says “the world belongs to the young”. It is only logical that the same applies to forests. New forests will provide multiple benefits for new generations. Just imagine what it would be like if all present-day forests were two or more hundred years old (as is the completely protected forest of Prašnik, where very few old pedunculate oak trees are left, while younger hornbeam trees predominate below them, which in fact leads to the disappearance of the principal tree species). We would have forests full of diseased, useless trees. The wood industry would remain without the raw material for their work, and people would consequently be left without employment in the wood industry or without

numerous wood products. Another essential fact in the light of climate change is that the largest carbon sinks are created in forests younger than 140 years, after which carbon input decreases.

Another question to ask is why general concern about Croatian forests focuses only on state forests, while private forest owned by small forest owners, who make up one fourth of the overall forest complex, are the scene of all those actions that mimic the condition deplored by the Associations mentioned earlier. The age structure of the owners, unsolved property and legal relations, neglected and out-of-date cadastres and land registers, fragmented property, as well as inadequate legal solutions and the lack of organized guard service largely contribute to such a state.

The development of technology has provided various benefits and advantages to modern-day life, but also a number of disadvantages. Fast transfer of information has made it possible to gain an insight into different activities and professions, which has in turn created a false idea among people that they understand how all spheres of life function. Thus, many visitors to forests have become forestry experts and have been given an opportunity to express their views on the matter in the media. What is worse, such “experts”

are believed more than the professionals who have been educated in the profession and have acquired experience through practice. Off-the-cuff and easily made accusations take the headlines and become the accepted truth, do denials are completely ignored and go unnoticed. Who is responsible for giving the public accurate and truthful information? There are individuals in every profession who do not work well or who make wrong moves, but this does not mean that generalisations can be made and conclusions passed on the basis of those few. Regrettably, today’s prevailing negativist journalism creates the conditions of distrust in any activity or profession, which is certainly not good and may become even worse in the future.

A young forest that will soon mature and become visible even to a non-forester’s eye, both on the frequently criticized Sljeme felling sites and all over Our Beautiful Homeland, will prove that the forestry profession exists and does its job thoroughly and successfully. In essence, this is the most important thing in the whole story. Such young and tended forests take up large areas, but are not recognized by a non-expert eye.

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