

EDITORIAL

THE DEMISE OF A MAN WHO HAS DEVOTED HIS LIFE TO FORESTS AND FORESTRY

Slavko Matić, Academy member, Professor Emeritus of the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology of the University of Zagreb, Doctor Honoris Causa of the Mendel University of Agriculture and Forestry in Brno (Czech Republic) and the Technical University in Zvolen (Slovakia), member of the presidency of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, one of the founders and the first president of the Academy of Forestry Sciences in Zagreb, member of the Deans' Club of the University of Zagreb and long-standing president of the Croatian Forestry Association, passed away on March 30th, 2021, at age 83.

We are not going to discuss his scientific achievements here. His bibliography, available from the web site of the Croatian Forestry Association, fully testifies to his immense scientific legacy, as do numerous awards and recognitions which he received during his rich career of forestry pedagogue and scientist.

Although Slavko Matić's scientific work focused more specifically on silviculture within the scientific area of biotechnical sciences, his broad spectrum of activities left an indelible mark on the whole era of forestry history at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

His life path was determined by his love for forests and forestry. He would often say that forestry was not only a profession but also a way of life. He staunchly advocated and promoted the unity of forestry policy, science, education and profession.

His words, spoken at the 107th annual assembly of the Croatian Academy of Sciences in Županja illustrate his mission and his understanding of the forestry profession. „We are proud of our long tradition marked above all by the utmost care for forests and forestry of Croatia. We would like all those who are actively involved in this profession to do their best in order to improve the quality and eternity of forests. We have always believed and we still believe that all our efforts and love invested in the forest will be paid back manifoldly and permanently, but not in enormous and unnecessary material goods, but in the satisfaction and knowledge that we belong to a profession in which work, love and honesty are the basic principles and laws. Without these principles it would not be possible to raise and maintain forests today, whose structure and worth rank them among the most beautiful and valuable in Europe. These beliefs allow us to cultivate and preserve forests in the state in which they provide both market and non-market goods, goods dedicated to every person in this country”.

He was the protector of forests and the forestry profession in every sense of the word. We still remember vividly how our professor would “storm and thunder” if something was not done according to the rules of the forestry profession. It might have been a number of things, such as the conversion of forests and forestland for the needs of building infrastructure or for agricultural production, when construction interventions would be undertaken in the affected zone with negative impacts on the forest ecosystem (the Danube-Sava Canal, the Zagreb Project on the River Sava, hydro-power stations on the River Drava, the Kalje forest). He also frequently spoke against the policy of passive forest protection promoted by the Croatian Ministry of Environmental Protection, stressing felling as a means of tending forests.

When interventions were made in forests which went against the principles of the Zagreb School of Silviculture, of which he was one of the founders, foresters knew with certainty that it was Professor Matić who would react and respond adequately.

He openly opposed the payment of the water fee for forests and forestland, while at the same time they are the only ones that ensure a natural water regime and provide clear water. He always highlighted the importance of non-market forest functions and viewed timber as a side product of forest management.

He considered the Croatian Forestry Association as his second home. Here, we would often discuss in detail issues related to forests and forestry.

He expressed dissatisfaction with the current policy towards forestry, which systematically neglected the interests of the forestry profession, particularly after the word forestry was omitted from the name of the corresponding ministry. He was also saddened by the fact that a number of our colleagues who, under the influence of politics, put the conformism of current managerial functions above the forestry postulates we were taught at the faculty.

The demise of Professor Matić ends a period which we, his contemporaries, will always look upon as an unforgettable experience of living a noble foresters' life in togetherness, the result of which are well-tended and preserved forests.

Will the new trends increasingly visible in present day forestry, in which foresters have less and less contact with forest and with their colleagues, be able to respond to all the challenges, particularly in conditions of growing climate changes, remains to be seen.

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