

EDITORIAL

WHY DO WE LAG BEHIND IN THE GREEN TRANSITION AND ENERGY INDEPENDENCE?

It is the middle of summer marked by unprecedented heat. The heat waves, caused by climate warming, are pushing the planet Earth in an unfavourable direction for life, compared to that until now, especially in the region of the planet's temperate zone. Temperatures have reached new records, fires are raging, and frequent strong winds and intense, abrupt changes in rainfall are inflicting extensive damage. The beds of rivers and lakes have reached the lowest points due to droughts; there are ongoing water reductions, and agricultural yields are reduced. In addition to all these misfortunes, Russia's unjustified and brutal war aggression against Ukraine continues for the sixth month with no signs of stopping. The situation is further complicated by the efforts of the European Union to gain instantaneous energy independence from Russia, which has already begun to reduce gas and oil supplies. At the end of July, the Government of the Republic of Croatia announced that it would propose reducing the VAT rate from thirteen to five percent for firewood, pellets, wood chips and briquettes, as well as thermal energy from thermal stations.

Could we have achieved energy independence and reoriented our own economy in the green direction much earlier? We already addressed this topic in the volumes 3-4 of this year, but due to the pertinence of the issue, we shall refer to it once again. We wish to remind you of what we have done and proposed within the forestry sector and beyond for the past 17 years. You can read about it on the pages of the Forestry Journal.

Thus, with the view of organising professional potential in the best possible way, the Croatian Forestry Association founded the "Croatian Biomass Association" section at its 109th regular session held in Karlovac on June 17th, 2005, within the Croatian Forestry Day ... According to the 2006 activity plan, we organized a three-day professional excursion in Austria – Gradišće, from May 18 to 20. The Croatian Forestry Association, as the founder of the Croatian Biomass Association, organized a visit to this Austrian province where the use of bioenergy is most prevalent. It can be said that fossil fuels have been almost completely replaced with renewable resources, such as energy wood for thermal energy and electricity production, rapeseed oil for biodiesel production and the use of windmills for electricity production (Forestry Journal 5-6/2006).

The professional visit to Gradišće mentioned above was described in the Forestry Journal 9-10/2006. "Then we visited

the Güttenbach (Pinkovac) biomass heating plant, with a biomass boiler power of 1 MW and a reserve heating oil boiler with a power of 1.35 MW. Franz Jandrisitz, BSc, introduced us to the Pinkovac Central Heating System, where under a 10-year contract, about 240 households have been supplied with heating energy through a 12-km long hot pipe for the past 7 years.

In the editorial of Forestry Journal 1-2/2007, we discussed the positive effect of forests on global climate warming. A recent gathering of scientists in Paris confirmed that the cause of global warming on Earth is attributed to unreasonable human behaviour. Excessive use of fossil fuels enriches the atmosphere with carbon dioxide, leading to the greenhouse effect.

It is well known that numerous excursions by various associations, companies, and local government and self-government units have been paid to Gradišće in order to admire the results achieved in the field of energy independence of this once least developed Austrian province. It turns out that almost twenty years were spent on tours that never led to the application of the results in their own regions. The hilly-mountainous area of Croatia abounds in forest resources, which means that the majority of the settlements in the area could solve the issue of heating by building biomass plants. In addition to the heating itself, there would also be many other benefits, such as the employment of the local people and the economy, not spending funds on fossil fuels, a cleaner environment and the retention of the rural population in the area. The results of using forest biomass in Croatia are reflected in the cogeneration plants along the motorways, which bring profit to their owners with a preferential price for the delivered electricity, but do not contribute to the local community by ensuring thermal energy, which would appease worries arising from the uncertainty related to the supply and price of gas, oil and electricity. Haven't we foolishly created yet another accumulation of capital by which financial resources, including a large part from EU funds, line the pockets of a small number of private investors, while the local population living surrounded by forests has a hard time getting firewood, at a price that, instead of being social, unlike that of other assortments, is closest to the market price. The Government's recent reduction in VAT on firewood was soon annulled by an increase in its price.