

## **Experience from Bulgaria!**

On 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> June 2013, a team of representatives of the National Federation of Communal Forest and Pastures of Albania participated in a Study Visit for exchanging experiences with the National Association of Private Forest Owners of Bulgaria (NAPFOB). The Study visit was organized by REFORD and supported by CNVP. As well, participants in this two-day visit were representatives of the Private Forest Owners Associations from Kosovo and Macedonia. Traveling from Albania to Bulgaria was a relatively long trip in time, but the picturesque views unfolded forward made this trip very interesting and nicely. Bulgaria is a rich country in forest resources, with about 4.15 million hectares forests, where 74.5% are state forests, 12% are communal forests, 11% are private forests, 0.5% religious forests and 2% former agricultural lands. It's worth to be mentioned the very good state of the forests, mainly of the conifer species such as *Picea abies* and *Pinus silvestris*, which we encountered during the trip. Late evening of the date 4<sup>th</sup> June the team arrived in Chepelare, a small town with about 7 thousand people, located between a valley surrounded by high mountains and forests. Teams from the three countries were hosted by Mrs. Anelia Dimitrova Pochehanska, President of the National Association of Private Forest Owners of Bulgaria, as well as owner of 600 hectares of forests. In next days Mrs. Anelia was our host presenting the association, the history of establishment of this association, the purpose, organization, functioning, achievements, tasks and responsibilities.

### ***Brief history of establishment of the National Association of Private Forest Owners***

The genesis of National Association of Private Forest Owners of Bulgaria begins since 2002, but the history of forest cooperatives begins earlier than that, where the first cooperative “Pamperov” was established in 1905, whereas the other cooperatives were established somehow later during 1912 to 1915. After 1915 each cooperative was obliged by the law to be registered at the respective institutions. The particularity of these cooperatives was that in the kingdom time, the forest area of each cooperative, is bought as a single unit by collecting the money of all inhabitants of the village and based on the amount paid by each one, the total forest area is partitioned. Thus, nowadays each owner doesn't have an exact map of the location of his forest area. But this does not impede them to cooperate or to have conflicts amongst them, it fosters furthermore the cooperation. Functioning of cooperatives has continued till 1947, the time where all forests were nationalized in the time of communism system. After the system broke down, by initiative of private forest owners started gathering of all forest ownership documentation they had. Re-establishment was done after 1990 and cooperative “Gora” was re-established in 1992 and in 1996 it has requested abrogation of the law of 1947, which is achieved in 2000. All forest cooperatives were functioning as independent till at 2002, the time where was established the National Association of Private Forest Owners, which has as its aim the sustainable management of forests, lobbying and protection of private forest owners interests and supporting to establishment of economically viable and effective business units.

### ***Organization and Functioning of the National Association and of Forest Cooperatives***

The NAPFOB is composed by 22 forest cooperatives, 1 commune, 2 forest companies, 2 joint-stock companies and 15 physical entities. All in all, the association represents interests of about 85 thousand forest owners. The structure of forest cooperatives is composed by: General Assembly, which is the highest governing body and is composed by all private forest owners, Control Council, Management Board, Chairman, and Operative Units. For election of Governing Bodies of Cooperatives, is convened

the respective assembly of each cooperative, each year at the end of April, whereas for election of Governing Council of the National Association and its leaders is convened each year at the end of June. Each cooperative has its own staff composed by administration, operative units, as well as by a forest technician and a forest engineer that in total varies 2 to 5 people. The Forest Cooperative “Gora”, which was the object of this visit, possesses 1652 hectares of forests, mainly with *Picea abies* but even *Pinus halepensis* and it’s comprised by 3128 forest owners, with various area size and amongst them. From it, 1216 owners were active members of the association, paying the annual quota and who were influencing in the forest management and have the right to benefit from economic activities carried out in forests, whereas the other part, who are not members were benefiting only from the rent of forest use.



### ***Achievements of the National Association of Private Forest Owners of Bulgaria***

Among achievements of the National Association, is that the forest owners are responsible and organize their forest management and guarding. The forest cooperatives organize and are allowed to issue all the respective documentation regarding to harvesting and transportation of the wood material. Those have the rights and responsibilities equal as the state forest bodies and communal forest owners and there is a single supreme authority that controls them all. As well, in 2010, as it is said “union makes power” the National Association has lobbied and has reached to become part of drafting of the new forest law, where for the private forest there is a particular chapter, prepared by the association itself.

### ***Tasks and responsibilities of the Forest Cooperatives***

Forest Cooperatives have tasks and responsibilities clearly defined by law. They are responsible for managing and guarding of the forest area they possess, whereas the control is conducted by a supreme state body, which controls the state, communal and private forests. Forest governance is carried out based on the management plans, which are drafted by state companies and after their approval these plans are

submitted to forest cooperatives. After submission of the management plan to cooperatives, then they are responsible for its implementation. For conduction of exploitation operations foreseen in the management plan, the cooperatives contract companies of forest exploitation. Marking of trees which are going to be harvested, is done by the forest technician and it's controlled by the responsible forest engineer. To start with exploitation, responsible forest engineer is informing by email authorities for timber marking done and receive permission answer in a period of three days to start with harvesting operations. For each quantity of harvested wood material, monthly and annual reports are prepared and are submitted to the state forest bodies electronically by the chairperson of the cooperative.

After the presentation done by Mrs. Anelia, we continued with the field trip, concretely in the forest area of the Gora Cooperative, during the time of forest exploitation. Participants were able to see the forest exploitation operations, starting by cutting, selection of assortments, hauling to roadside with stationary winch and loading in self-loader trucks. Through the discussion and from what we saw on the spot, selective thinning was applied and the exploitation was mechanized. The annual exploited quantity was 8 thousand cubic meters. The exploitation costs of wood brought to forest road were 14 euro/m<sup>3</sup>, but this cost went lower by selling the residues remained from exploitation to the exploitation company with a price of 5 euro/m<sup>3</sup>. The task of the exploitation company was till to extraction of the wood material to roadside, then afterward another company was buying the wood material. The price of round wood of *Picea abies* varied according to the seasons but it reached up to 60 euro/m<sup>3</sup>. As well, in this forest area could be noticed the presence of several ski tracks, what evidences that this cooperative, except numerous forest resources was utilizing even the winter tourism potential of skiing, of which could provide considerable incomes from the rents of using the forest areas by the skiing companies, where for an hectare was paid 400 euro a year.

For two years in a row, in this area was developed the fair for promoting the technology in exploitation and processing of wood, supported even by the government of Bulgaria. A fair which aimed to encourage all forest cooperatives for improving and increasing the scale of mechanization in forest exploitation, as well as increase of the processing scale of the wood material, as it is known, by increasing the processing scale, the margin of incomes increases too. Near the place where the fair was held, easily could be noticed a metal tower about 20 meters high, which made curious the participants. It was a tower for fire monitoring, on the top equipped with a digital camera with a rotation angle of 360 degrees and with long distance observation capacity, and even more special it was that the energy used for supplying the camera was solar. This tower and many other similar are placed throughout the whole country and are connected in a network with a central monitoring system. In case of noticing smoke, they signalized the location, thus it was easier for the respective structures of fire extinguishing to put the fire under control. Among others, this perhaps might be an additional reason why we didn't notice any sign of forest fires during our visit there.

The second day and the last of the Studz Visit was planned to visit another forest cooperative named "Chil Tepe" in the commune named Laki. This cooperative possess 2500 hectares of forests and was composed by 855 owners and the cooperative's staff was composed by 48 people, including working staff in wood processing mill. We had a long and interesting discussion with the chairman of this cooperative, who expressed that the EU in the framework of the Rural Development program had financed this cooperative for buying of equipments and building of a sawmill. A sawmill is with a processing capacity up to 60m<sup>3</sup>/day. The process of processing is fully automatic. The mill has two drying chambers with retentive capacity of 40m<sup>3</sup>. The fuel used for putting the furnaces to work was chips and sawdust, what

enabled the maximal use of residues from processing of wood material and reduction of the cost at minimum. The reason for having these two furnaces was trading of the sawn wood according to customer demands, something that is an added value in the market. From the discussions done could be noticed that incomes of this cooperative were considerable. This is a good indicator of the advantage of organization in cooperatives.

Generally, this two-day Study Visit was impressive, for the fact that a country not too far from us have a very good state of the forests, with a forest law where the roles, tasks and responsibilities are clear, where the private property is respected and treated equally by the Law. Organization of private forest owners in cooperatives provide increase of the benefits for forest owners and supports sustainable forest management. Perhaps, conditioned by the circumstances of the forest ownership in Bulgaria, cooperation or union in cooperatives was a necessity, but this successful experience, why not, can be followed even in our country. This can be done, but firstly forests should be devolved to the farmers, who historically and traditionally have used them, and afterward the farmers themselves or even fostered, can create such unions in cooperatives to increase their wellbeing, as well as sustainable management of forest and pastures in their ownership, as well to have a forest law – as it is known it is ongoing – with clear roles and tasks for administration of state, communal and private forests.

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