



REFORD General Assembly Meeting Report



2nd- 5th July 2015, Peja, Kosovo

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1. Introduction

On 3rd – 4th July 2015 the fifth REFORD Assembly meeting was held in Peja, Kosovo. The president of NAPFO/Kosovo, Bashkim Gashi has opened the meeting, welcoming the participants and expressing his satisfaction for the possibility to hold the meeting in Kosovo. The assembly meeting was held during the regional workshop on service provision, forestry and rural development. This activity was enabled through the support of two projects implemented by CNVP Albania and CNVP Kosovo, respectively FLED and SSPDF Projects. In this activity participated REFORD members from six countries, respectively from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. The seventh member from Republic Srpska-BiH was not present due to objective reasons. Guests on the GA were Agron Niqki and Ali Thaci from the association from Kosovo.

For full list of REFORD assembly meeting participants see Annex 1.

The Assembly started after the organised field visit for sharing experiences related to Joint Forest Management from Kosovo on 3 July 2015.

The detailed program for REFORD general assembly meeting was as follows:

3 rd Friday		
14:00 - 14:30	Analysis of REFORD work during 2013-2015 (Report in English)	REFORD Presidency
14:30 – 14:50	REFORD financial analysis for 2013-2015 (Report in English)	REFORD Technical Secretariat
14:50 – 15:15	Coffee break	
15:15 – 16:00	Problems of REFORD organizational functioning	Rexhep Ndreu
16:00 – 17:00	Discussions and proposals for improving organizational functioning	All participants
19 :00	Dinner	
4th Saturday	Detailed agenda	
08:00- 08:15	Opening of meeting; - Facilitator - Minutes	Board members Board members
08:15 – 08:20	Acknowledgement of present participants	Board members

08:20 – 08:25	Approval of agenda	Board members
08:25 – 08:30	Voting for presented activity and financial reports for 2014	Board members
08:30 – 08:45	Election of a new President / Management board	Board members
08:45 – 09:45	General discussion Questions, Suggestions, Any other business...	Board members
09:45 – 10:00	Closing official part of REFORD assemble meeting	New elected president

2. REFORD Activity, Financial reporting and internal issues

Following the agenda the first part was prepared presentations related to activities and finances. The narrative activity report for the period of October 2013 – June 2015, was prepared by Mr. Arjol Lila on behalf of NFCFP Albania. During this period REFORD Chairperson was Ms. Albora Kacani supported by NFCFP Albania and Mr. Rexhep Ndreu.

For more information see the narrative report in Annex 2.

The second presentation on financial analysis was made by CNVP Forestry Advisor Mrs. Anela Stavrevska – Panajotova, in the role of representing REFORD’s secretariat.

For more information see financial report in Annex 3.

After the two presentations, the Assembly meeting continued with reflection on problems related to internal functioning that REFORD faced during the Albanian Presidency. Mr. Rexhep Ndreu, chairperson of NFCFPA presented to the REFORD Management Board the problematic issues of functioning which have created some obstacles in well-functioning such as location of REFORD Secretariat and availability of legal and other documents in one single country become and obstacle and create delays, especially in cases of application for various projects and also another issue he addressed was improving and increasing frequency of communication between REFORD Presidency – Secretariat – Members.

After the presentation by Mr. Ndreu the floor was left to discussions and proposals for improving the organizational functioning of REFORD. There were discussions by the participants on how to improve the organizational functioning, but as conclusion the concrete solutions are to be given in the next REFORD Assembly meeting which is to be held in October 2015. Mr. Miljenko Zupanic reminded the delegates that any change of statute must be pre discussed.

As a conclusion it was proposed that the board will discuss online about internal related issues and prepare better for the next Assembly.

3. Approval of the agenda

Second day of the Assembly started with the formal procedures. The Associations from Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia and Bulgaria were present and the association from Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) was absent. It was acknowledged that the Assembly has sufficient number of present participants in being able to vote.

The right to vote by the association from countries:

- Albania - 2 members
- Kosovo - 2 members
- Montenegro - 2 members
- Croatia - 1 member
- Bulgaria - 2 members
- Macedonia - 2 members
- Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) was absent.

11 votes were present in the meeting (in the absence of Srpska)

The representative from Albania presented the agenda of the GA, there were no comments and changes to the agenda. Herewith it was concluded by Mr. Arjol Lila that the agenda is approved. Assembly members all agreed that Mr. Ariol Lila will continue leading the meeting and Ms. Blerina Hoxha will keep the meeting minutes. The GA meeting further continued according to the approved agenda.

4. Election of the Interim President and Management Board

After approving the agenda the assembly members voted for accepting the activity and financial reports (presented in the first day) for the period of October 2013 – June 2015.

Further a clarifying discussion was opened regarding REFORD statutory procedure to replace the former REFORD President Mrs. Albora Kacani after her resignation. Taking into account that the presidency mandate is with a two year period, REFORD presidency will change in October 2015 based on alphabetical rotation scheme. However the discussion showed that there is a need for a new decision to be made on procedures in case of President Resignation.

Mr. Arjol Lila from NFCFP Albania was chosen as REFORD Interim President until the next election in October 2015 (refer annex 4 for the decision).

After determination of the issues to be addressed, as the last point of discussion was appointment of the working group for adjustments of the REFORD statute and designing of an internal functioning regulation. The composition of the working group was agreed to consist of REFORD Management Board Members and the Executive Director of CNVP.

It was agreed that the Management board should remain with 7 members. Each association selected a member to be part of the Board, and the selected members remain as:

1. Vojo Sokolovski (Macedonia)
2. Miodrag Bakic (Montenegro)
3. Dusko Topic (RS/BiH)
4. Milenko Zupanic (Croatia)
5. Arjol Lila (Albania) – already elected as President
6. Blerina Hoxha (Kosovo)
7. Aneliya Pochekanska (Bulgaria)

The secretariat role will continue to be supported by CNVP and Mr. Peter Kampen suggested that the management board and the secretariat together deal with all further required documents and regulative according REFORD statute and respective laws of the registering country (Macedonia). In this line it was agreed that the board members are part of the working group that will further work online to adjust REFORD statute and designing of an internal functioning regulation. The drafts will be prepared before the next Assembly meeting in October 2015.

The president of REFORD thanked all REFORD members for their participation and contribution, CNVP staff and NAPFO Kosovo representatives for the hospitality and organization. With this REFORD Assembly meeting was closed and minutes will be shared by end of July 2015.

5. Joint Statement

After the closure of the formal Assembly meeting of REFORD the regional workshop continued with sharing the last developments in Forestry, Rural Development and Service provision of each REFORD member. Representative from the Croatian Union of Private Forest Owners Associations, Miljenko Zupanic, presented REFORD with a power point presentation in the Assembly of CEPF. This presentation provoked big interest among CEPF board members. Becoming member of CEPF has a very high cost however Mr. Miljenko advised to start discussing the options of becoming CEPF member and in the meantime a common or shared interest may be found from both sides. Since the membership procedures are time consuming his advice was to start the discussions as soon as possible.

Each association made a presentation on situation of the forestry sector in their respective countries. After the presentations a discussion followed where all REFORD members agreed upon the main mutual problematic topics. Based on the mutual problems that associations are faced it was decided to prepare a joint statement that will be shared with all respective governments of the Balkan region.

It was agreed that the statement focus will be on the need to support family forest for sustainable management and social economic development and securing environmental services and the issues to be addressed were:

- Inclusion of forestry activities in Rural development measures;
- Enabling environment with proper legislation;
- Proper inclusion of family forest in protected areas;
- Land and user rights:
 - Disputed land
 - Involvement of local communities in state land.

The Joint statement is attached in Annex 5.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Participant list

No.	Organisation	Name	E-mail address	Telephone
1.	NAPFO- Kosovo	Blerina Hoxha	hoxha.blerina@gmail.com	+37744373161
2.	CNVP - Kosovo	Ardita Dinaj	ardita.dinaj@cnvp-eu.org	+37744296808
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5.	NFCFP - Albania	Arjol Lila	arjol.lila@fkpkk-shqiperi.org	+355692987734
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10.	NFCFP - Albania	Rexhep Ndreu	rexhep.ndreu@fkpkk-shqiperi.org	+355682077157
11.	CROCUPFOA Croatia	Miljenko Zupanic	zupanicm@sumins.hr	+38598604739
12.	NAPFO-Kosovo	Bashkim Gashi	bashkingashi@gmail.com	+38649656444
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19.	NAPFO - Bulgaria	Aneliya Pochekanska	gorovladelez@abv.bg	+359886317946
20.	NAPFO - Kosovo	Ali Thaci	ali_thaci@hotmail.com	+37744200730
21.	CNVP - Kosovo	Haki Kola	haki.kola@cnvp-eu.org	+37744964671

Annex 2: REFORD Narrative Report

REFORD activities during 2013 - 2015

- **Workshop on Sustainable Forest Management Standards and Forest Certification, 12 June 2015 in Prishtina, Kosovo.** CNVP organized through REFORD a workshop on Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) standards and Forest Certification. From REFORD their member organizations the National Associations of Private Forest Owners from Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro and the National Association of Communal Forests and Pastures of Albania as well as representatives from Kosovo forest institutes (KFA and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development) participated.
- **Representation of REFORD at CEPF meeting,, Croatia, date** The aim of this representation was for building partnerships, lobbying and better positioning of REFORD at international level.
- **Meeting with REFORD Presidency and Secretariat with CNVP, 15 June 2015, Struga, Macedonia.** The objective of the meeting was to improve understanding of FLED and SSPDF project management, regional activities coming from these two projects, REFORD's role in implementation of the regional activities and CNVP role in overall management of the above mentioned projects and activities.
- **Linking the voices of family forestry in Balkans, meeting held in Tirana, Albania, October 28, 2014:** All members participated actively addressing the main challenges of their respective countries. The meeting concluded with a Letter of Support for the NAPFO of Macedonia and a Position Paper addressed to decision and policy makers of seven Balkan countries.
- **The 4th General Assembly of REFORD, 30th September – 03rd October 2013, Kolašin, Montenegro:** Two new members were welcomed (Croatia and Republic of Srpska – Bhi); the New President and Management board were elected.

- **REFORD members participated at The FAO Technical Workshop: From 29 to 31 of October 2013**, REFORD members participated at the Technical workshop on the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forest in the context of National Food Security. The workshop was held in Sofia, Bulgaria and it was part of FAO's strategy to raise awareness on the Guidelines and discuss their use and implementation in European regions. The REFORD representatives had the opportunity to promote REFORD as an existing network in the Balkan region.
- **Celebrating the European Forest Week, Forest Fest 2013 –under the slogan “Every tree has its own family”, Berovo, Macedonia on 07-08 of December.** To promote family forestry highlighting the contribution of forests, forest products and services to a green economy. This activity was supported by CNVP in partnership the National Association of Private Forest Owners in Macedonia (NAPFO), Municipality of Berovo. REFORD member organizations from Bulgaria, Kosovo and Albania participated on the Festival and shared good experiences on the multiple services forests contribute to our daily lives.
- **Celebrating Terra Madre Day and European Forest Week, 13-14 of December 2013.** This activity took place in Shkoder, Albania, supported by CNVP (Connecting Natural Values & People) Foundation and REFORD (Regional Centre for Forestry and Rural Development). Participated members of REFORD network from Albania, Macedonia, Croatia, Kosovo and Monte Negro. In the framework of this event, was held a workshop where except the other participants joined representatives of local government units, local producer's organizations, educational institutions, etc. REFORD made a presentation on forestry situation in the region, forests in rural development, REFORD network and activities and challenges in the future. A discussion was organized, where representatives from REFORD, women's producer groups, LGUs, chestnut and medicinal plants collectors were invited. Article published in REFORD website, facebook page, and “Live Green” newsletter, CNVP website and FB.
- **Application for projects**
 - January 2014, IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Kosovo-Macedonia
 - March 2014, REFORD to be engaged with CEPF (as an associated member
 - The Netherlands Fellowship Programmes (NFP), Tailor-Made Training Programme
 - April 2014, call for Regional and Global Grants from Forest and Farm Facility (establishment of the working group)
 - Letter of support, to collaborate with the project “FORESEE”.
- **Workshop on best practices for forest owners associations.** The workshop took place in Skopje, Macedonia from 17-19 September 2014. It was organized by CNVP Foundation in cooperation with US Forest Service. Members of the REFORD network from Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania, where part of the workshop and were actively involved.

Importance of activities related to sectorial needs

Initiatives undertaken by the respective governments and various donors in the region for development of forests and pastures are highly appreciated by REFORD. Nevertheless, despite the progress and development, as result of discussions between REFORD members, so far the long tradition of a strong forest administration and state forest enterprises dominates in most of the Balkan countries. The main challenges remain poverty in rural areas and constraints for the traditional use of coppice forests, which have led to illegal cuttings and forest degradation. Interests of forest owners/users are entirely on the hands of state forest administration. This situation is not in compliance with the democratic systems.

Effectively, more than twelve representatives of the forestry sector from seven countries are actively involved in discussions, generating more opinions and thoughts, which are presented at the National Conference from each state, at the Assembly of REFORD and later at decision-making institutions to aid establishment of a more efficient, competitive and sustainable sector. This analysis will lead the sector toward making more effective the use of its natural resources. All national and regional actors of the forestry sector will join their forces to define a vision for the future of forests with clear strategic objectives. As well, they take over the tasks defined in a Strategic Action Agenda and its implementing in continuity.

Policy Framework

Governments in all states of the region have made a series of changes in bylaws and regulations which comprise the political and legal structure of forestry. These changes should continue, as the government and the society gain experience and identify the needs for adjustment of policies.

Goals of the Forestry Sector

Orientations of Governments, along with the positive experiences in forests and pastures and different materials drafted by working groups at regional and local levels are a basis for definition of the forest sector's goals, improvement of respective policies and legal provisions. Meanwhile, should be taken into account the external influences on the sector, such as: economic, political, demographical and social developments, which influence in formulation of forest national policies and institutional adjustments, on private and communal forest management.

Creation of an adequate institutional framework is necessary for development of forests and pastures in the future. Moreover, it is needed an adequate institutional system with competences and the authority for conduction of charged activities.

Importance of activities and the need for changes

In the road toward membership in EU it is required that the policy, legal and institutional reforms to be approached to the European standards for preservation and sustainable governing of forests. Analysis conducted on the state of forests and recommendations emerged are serving to incite policy-makers and decision-makers for drafting policies and taking decisions in line with the EU legislation and in benefit of improvement of the state of forests, but even local communities, mainly of the rural areas, which are more depending on forest and pasture resources. This because restoration of the rights of local people on forests is essential, likewise the increase of responsibility of the state administration for forest protection, both elements that are treated in detail bringing the best practices of the Balkan and EU countries. All our activities influence and will raise awareness and encourage communities of the rural areas to protect and enhance forests, what will simultaneously provide to them improvement of their livelihood. The impact is obvious even in the civil society, as the activities have taken into account even the communities organized in communal forest and pasture user associations, where the best national and international practices give a very important role to involvement of the community in management of forest resources. This process is in line with their mission, where they can play a catalytic and supportive role in forest preservation and rural development.

Communication of results

Communication of results has taken a particular place in this period, as in this way can be ensured the support and the validity of the proposals made. The results are communicated through REFORD Assembly, where have attended the most important actors of the civil society from seven countries; through social media, website, "Jeto Gjelber" newsletter, "Mjedisi Sot" magazine, and periodic publications in the national print media.

Promotion of results and submission of recommendations to the state actors

The working group designed a detailed plan, where initially promotion of the results was made in the Assembly of REFORD. At the end is agreed a proposal-document with recommendations for the strategic action agenda for improvement of the state of forests in the Balkan. This document is addressed in the form of a memo to all central policy and decision maker institutions via official post to the Presidency, Parliament, Council of Ministers, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Internal, Ministry of Justice and all other important institutions. This memo also will be delivered to important diplomatic headquarters, such USA and EU Embassies.

Review of challenges in the communal and private forestry

Property issues in the communal and private forests are not solved yet. Reforms for decentralization (transfer of properties and competences, registration at cadaster and forest fragmentation) should be addressed in continuity.

Forestry is necessary to be recognized in the crosscutting strategies in rural development.

Non-governmental and governmental organizations need further support for improving and enhancing capacities and knowledge on forestry, as well as for further measures for education and awareness raising.

Except forest non wood products, the private and communal forests provide even environmental services, which are not recognized by states, even in countries such as Kosovo, Albania, Croatia lots of private properties are declared protected areas and national parks, without consulting and agreeing with the legitimate owners.

Communal and private forestry need further improvement of the respective legislation and regulations. Conflictive and incomplete legislation is hampering the sustainable management. Currently complete reforms are required:

- Less bureaucratic procedures to facilitate owners and users;
- Further decentralization of properties and competences;
- Legislative and policy reforms should go on with a broad participation of the interest groups.

Annex 4: Decision of REFORD regarding President

On its General Assembly meeting on 3rd July 2015 in Peja, Kosovo REFORD discussed and reviewed the procedure for election of the President.

In accordance with the Statutes, article 23, 24 and 28 regarding the election of the President, the following is decided:

In case of President Resignation, based on article 23 the assembly has all the rights in the organization. The country holding the presidency has the right to propose a person replacing the president. Following article 24, the Assembly has all rights to re-elect a new President in case of a resignation.

The new President will be elected through majority voting by the General Assembly.

Herewith as decided by the General Assembly, held in Peja, Kosovo, on 4th July 2015,

The President of REFORD

Name, date



Annex 5: Joint statement

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Website: <http://refordcentre.org>

Peja, Kosovo, July 5, 2015

STATEMENT

Local communities, drivers of forest management in the Balkan

REFORD (Regional Centre for Forestry and Rural Development) is a networking organization of private and communal forest owner and user associations from seven Balkan countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Srpska Republic-BiH.

REFORD highly appreciates the initiatives taken by the respective governments of the region and the various donors in developing forests, pastures and protected areas.

REFORD and its members at the meeting held in Peja, Kosovo on 3rd to 5th July 2015 reviewed the developments in forestry in relation to rural people, especially family forests. It shows that the **family forest** has yet remained an issue of concern. Forest degradation from illegal cuttings in the Western Balkan countries has deep roots in history. As long as the basic forest owner and user rights are not provided fully to the people, to sustainable manage their forest and fulfil the basic needs for firewood for heating as minimum to avoid the energy poverty in rural zones, this trend of illegality and degradation will continue. In the long historical battle between local population and forest administration, the final results show that the consequences are in forest mismanagement and degradation and the forest administration failed on the implementation of manifold used slogan on “forest protection”.

Most families living in rural areas in the region are highly depended on forest resources. Legalizing them, with full rights, as owners or users of the forest – which they consider as their family’s forest – provides them the opportunity to fulfil their needs for heating and cooking. It also gives the opportunity to increase their family incomes and guarantees the long term sustainability of forest development. Property rights issues in private and communal forestry, which are not solved yet, and lacking of funding

support for forest owners and users associations for realizing public awareness raising activities, impact negatively in forest preservation, development and sustainable management.

In order to guarantee a long term solution related to family forestry (private and communal forestry), we, the Private and Communal Forest Organizations of the Balkan united in the Regional Network, called REFORD do recommend:

- Acceleration of the reforms related to land tenure, property and user rights in communal and private forests. Solving land disputes and property registration, further decentralisation of competences including support joint forest management with inclusion of local communities especially in degraded land and based on traditional rights;
- Full inclusion of forestry measures and activities within Rural Development programmes and policies in support of family forestry;
- Acknowledgment of and inclusion in policies and regulations of environmental services provided by private and communal forests (family forest) and application of payments for ecosystem services;
- A further enabling environment for family forest in forest and related legislations leading amongst other to less bureaucratic procedures to facilitate forest owners and users sustainable forest management and economic utilization;
- Proper inclusion of family forest (private and communal forests) in protected areas. Ensuring the right and obligations to the rural families and compensation for deprived forest utilization rights in protected areas;
- Support for non-governmental organizations of forest owners/users to further increase their capacities in education and awareness towards communities in rural areas, family forest owners and users.

We express our belief that putting the local communities as drivers of forest management is the right way to get the best solutions for forest development, employment and poverty reduction in rural areas of the Balkan region. We hope that our recommendations will become part of your political and development agenda.

Respectfully,

REFORD Organization (*Regional Centre for Forestry and Rural Development*) and its members;

National Federation of Communal Forest and Pastures of Albania

National Association of Private Forest Owners of Bulgaria

Croatian Union of Private Forest Owners Associations

National Association of Private Forest Owners of Kosovo

National Association of Private Forest Owners of Macedonia

National Association of Private Forest Owners of Montenegro

Association of Private Forest Owners of Srbska Republic