



Regional Centre for Forestry and Rural Development

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POSITION PAPER

Strengthening the role of family forestry in Balkans

REFORD (Regional Centre for Forestry and Rural Development) is a networking organization of private and communal forest owner/user associations from 7 Balkan countries; Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Monte Negro and Srpska Republic-BiH. REFORD highly appreciates the initiatives taken by the respective governments in the region and the various donors in developing forests and pastures.

However, despite the progress and development, as a result of discussions of REFORD members at the meeting held in Tirana, on 28 October 2014, so far the long tradition of strong forest administration and forest state enterprises dominate in most of the Balkans. The main challenges remain the rural poverty and constraints for traditional use of coppice forest leading to the illegal logging and forest degradation. The interest of forest owners/ users is mainly in the hands of the state forest administration. This situation does not comply with democratic political systems.

We think that forest planning through participatory approaches and common systems of management will contribute to the social, economic and ecological functions of the forest. Common forest management systems with the involvement of local communities and the implementation of silvicultural works (for the rehabilitation of degraded forests and shrubs) will improve the lives of the local communities. This can provide employment opportunities for them (because the unemployment in rural areas is very high) but at the same time it will reduce the illegal cuttings.

Therefore, we would strongly recommend you:

- Acceleration of the reforms related to the property issues in communal and private forest. Property registration in the cadastre, decentralization of competences and forest fragmentation remain concerning issues.
- Improvement of legislation and relevant regulations related to communal and private forestry. Non-supportive legislation for private forest owners/ users and conflicts are impeding the sustainable management. Legislative and policy reform should proceed with a process of broad participation of stakeholders.
- Recognition of the role of Forestry in the context of rural development. Financial support for forestry measures in this context for private and communal forests.
- Support for nongovernmental organizations of private forest owners/ users to further increase their capacities in education and awareness.
- Acknowledgement of environmental services provided by private and communal forests and applying payments for ecosystem services. In countries like Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro forest land in the ownership/usership of local people is declared protected area or national park without consulting them.
- Less bureaucratic procedures to facilitate forest owners/users
- Encouraging forest certification to achieve sustainable forest management.

We think family forestry in Balkans is the right way to improve and achieve a sustainable management of forests and pastures and we hope that our recommendations will be part of your policy agenda.

With respect,

REFORD (Regional Centre for Forestry and Rural Development)