



National Federation of Communal Forest and Pastures
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MEMO

To:

President of the Republic of Albania
Albanian Parliament Spokesperson
Prime Minister
Minister of European Integration
Minister of Environment
Minister of Agriculture
Minister of State for Local Government
Minister of State for Relations with Parliament
Democratic Party of Albania
Albanian Ombudsman
The World Bank in Albania
Ambassador of EU Delegation in Albania
Swedish Embassy in Albania (Sida)
GEF Albania

From: National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures

Subject: On the forestry reform and draft-law “On Forests and Pastures in the Republic of Albania”

Honored Mr./Ms. _____

National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures, representative of 251 Forest and Pastures User Associations and of 11 Regional Federations, concerned about the problematic situation in the forestry sector, has carried out several meetings at regional level (Korce, Elbasan, Shkoder, Tirana, Kukes, Diber and Divjake), as well as at national level. In these meetings took part traditional users of village’s forest, representatives from LGUs, DFSs, Ministry of Environment, IPROs, CNVP Foundation, Members of the Parliament, EU Delegation in Albania, Swedish Embassy (Sida), Faculty of Forestry Sciences, Businessmen and Civil Society.

The main discussion topics in these meetings were: situation in the forestry sector, the reform and the new draft-law on forests and pastures. Conclusions of the meetings were presented by us to media and Ministry of Environment, but we see with great concern that the situation of the sector continues to deteriorate.

Below we present the main concerning problems and the potential solutions:

- In recent years, around 47% of the forest fund, generally shrubs and degraded forests surrounding villages have been transferred to LGUs ownership, especially for use-ship by the village and rural families. In 251 LGUs there are established Forest and Pastures User Associations (FPUAs) supported by projects of the World Bank, USAID, CNVP, Sida and ILC. But, the transfer process was not accompanied with the needed funds, means, equipment, database, staff etc. Yet the process is in midway, as the forest property has not been transferred to the traditional user (village, rural family), they have neither a document to attest their exclusive use rights and do not have the right to sell forest products to generate incomes.
- With reorganizations under the “reform” by the Ministry, we can say that the forestry sector is totally inefficient. Experienced forest specialists have been fired in mass and are substituted with party militants. Thus, the regional directors of forestry service, more than half of the forest management staff and over 100 employees of the forest inspectorate employed during the last months have no forestry education, they are doctors, music or physical education teachers etc. or just with high school education.
- Massacre and organized contraband in forests is continuing. The last case is registered a few days ago in Librazhd district, where the lives of three forest engineers and two TV operators were endangered by smugglers, just because they dared to film the massacred forest. The forest area and timber volume is significantly reduced, along with severe impacts on the environment.
- In the new draft-law on forests – non-transparently drafted, without analyzing the situation, without an approved platform and without proper participation of stakeholders, which is “sleeping” into drawers – are not reflected several substantial suggestions emerged by consultations done for solving the problem of ownership on forests, dependence of forestry sector, the rights of traditional users of forests and pastures etc.
- Forest specialists are concerned even for the effectiveness of the big projects and large funds spent in forests without serious competent studies and consultations with the respective specialists.
- In the cross-cutting strategy of Environment 2015 – 2020, in the chapter on forests, there is nothing concrete, but it is simply a non-professional translation which serves for nothing.

Regardless the abovementioned problems do exist premises and possibilities for rehabilitation of situation and further development of the forestry sector: The Forest Service has valuable experiences for the preservation and enhancement of forests; many villages and families have traditions in forest preservation and governance (there is not illegal logging, nor forest fires as it happens in state forests). We propose several potential solutions, in accordance to the new territorial-administrative reform:

1. Forestry and pasture sector to be returned under the Ministry of Agriculture dependence, where to be established and operate the National Forest and Pastures Agency as a detached structure under Agriculture Minister’s responsibility. This, because agricultural land, forest and pasture together have always been the base of living conditions for our villager, as well as for a better coordination and governance of natural resources.
2. Country’s forest and pasture area to be divided for each municipality according to territorial boundaries and at each municipality to be established the Directorate of Forestry Service (DFS) with two units: a) for state forests and pastures; and b) for village and private forests and pastures. The activity of DFS within the municipality’s forest and pastures area to be divided into sectors and forest parcels with the respective forestry specialists, where the number of specialists to be according to forest surface as regulated by law.
3. Municipalities in collaboration with DFSs to review the devolution of forests and pastures to villages’ use-ship (for joint or family use according to the tradition) to devolve even other forest areas the village needs, including chestnut forests. We do recommend to remain state property: national parks, coastal protective forest belt from Vlore to Velipoje, protective forests of hydro-powers’

watersheds, protective forests along rivers, lakes and roads, as well as every other forest estimated of particular importance.

4. Forest and pasture parcels of the village to be officially given in use to the user (village, rural family), applying the traditional customary rights and to be registered at IPRO; expenses to be afforded by the state.
5. Traditional users (village, rural families) to have exclusive use rights on forests and pastures given in use, to have the right of exploiting and selling wood and non-wood products derived from the forest and pasture given in use (according to the approved management plan), as well as from state forest and pastures against a certain fee set by the municipality or without fee for the poor families, for mitigation of poverty and increasing incomes, especially in the poor rural areas.
6. When is evidenced that traditional users (village, rural family) properly preserve and manage their forests, devolution from use-ship to ownership according to the set criteria should be done. As well, the village to have its properties by law (forests, pastures, water springs, streams, stones, sand, gravel, fishes etc.).
7. Forest and Pastures User Associations and their respective Regional Federations to be technically and financially supported by the state for qualification and raising awareness of community, for drafting and implementing the sustainable management plans of forests and pastures in use.
8. We propose to be re-established the Forestry Research Institute, as development cannot come without study and scientific research work.
9. It is emergent to be planned and carried out the new inventory of forests, where to be reflected the real situation and defined the measures for their further and sustainable development.
10. The new draft-law on forests and pastures to be revised entirely in line with the territorial changes, where to be reflected the above proposals, with clear roles, responsibilities and competences for management of state, village and private forests and pastures.

The National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures is committed to provide maximal support for enforcement of the needed reforms in the forestry and pasture sector, bringing forests and pastures closer to users, aiming at increasing prosperity, especially in poor rural areas, as well as better protection of environment in Albania, in line with the objective of membership in the European Union.

Respectfully,

National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures