Did we expect too much from the government in the last two years?

What does Croatian Forestry Society expect from the future government? This was the title of the Editorial of Šumarski list, issue 3–4 of 2024. The text was published ahead of the parliamentary elections as a public statement outlining what the Croatian Forestry Society, as a professional association, expected from the future government of the Republic of Croatia.

Five expectations were presented with the aim of further improving sustainable forest management and the development of the forestry and wood technology sector: 1) putting back the term "forestry" in the name of the relevant ministry; 2) the establishment of a market system for selling timber products from state forests and the improvement of the status of forestry professionals; 3) strategic and legislative strengthening of the forestry, hunting, and wood industry sectors; 4) restoring the fee for non-market forest functions (NMFF) to the former value and equal distribution of NMFF funds for all purposes; and 5) the suspension of leasing of forest land and control of the existing situation.

Today, two years after the parliamentary elections and the establishment of a new government in the Republic of Croatia, we can assess whether any changes have occurred with regard to our expectations.

The term forestry has been restored to the name of the relevant ministry, which is now called the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. This way the injustice committed in 2012 against a profession that has been managing nearly half of Croatia's land area, which is covered by forests and forest land, for 261 years has been corrected.

A negotiation process between the public forest owner and the Croatian wood-processing industry concerning the establishment of a new model for the sale of timber products from state-owned forests is forthcoming. On the coordination meeting of forestry institutions, held in March of this year, it was agreed that greater emphasis should be placed on a market-based sales model while maintaining a certain level of protection for the domestic wood-processing industry. This would generate higher revenues for the state as the forest owner, for local and regional self-government units, and for the forestry sector itself, which is faced with growing challenges and needs for investment in improving the vitality, stability, and productivity of both high forests and degraded forests, while simultaneously experiencing a decline in interest in the demanding and highly responsible profession that is not adequately paid.

As for the strategic and legislative strengthening of the forestry, hunting, and wood-processing sectors, there have been no significant improvements. Particular emphasis is placed on the necessity of developing the National Forestry Strategy of the Republic of Croatia, as prescribed by the Forest Act, which should take into account all current demands placed upon forests at the national, European, and global levels, as well as the impacts of climate change on forest ecosystems. The need to protect the forestry profession and competencies related to work on forest infrastructure is also highlighted, together with the necessary amendments to the Hunting Act in order to recognize rights acquired through education and professional experience.

No change has occurred regarding the status of the fee for non-market forest functions (NMFF). However, since the demining of the Republic of Croatia has officially been completed, it is proposed to reuse the collected funds for forestry operations in state-owned and private forests. Efforts should be made to increase the allocation rate for non-market forest functions because the forestry sector alone cannot finance the growing costs of forest restoration, regeneration, tending, and protection following damage caused by the increasingly frequent and severe occurrence of natural disasters, pests, and emerging diseases. Positive changes are also desired in terms of the suspension of leasing of forest land and control of the existing situation.

To conclude: apart from the fact that the Management Board of the sole manager of Croatian state forests no longer includes a single forester, very little of the five expectations we listed has been fulfilled.