

Moldovan Forest under EU Protection

The Codru forestland in Moldova, which covers the entire central part of the country, is celebrated in songs and folklore. But specialists are sounding the alarm: the forests are in poor health and are degrading; they suffer from lack of attention and funding, illegal logging and crude exploitation. To help resolve at least one of the problems, that of unauthorised activities in the forests, the EU has launched a programme called **Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG)**, which is collaborating not only in Moldova, but also in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine.

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Text and photos by **Dmitri KALAK**

Chisinau – Moldova’s forests are in trouble. Once the stuff of folklore, the area they cover is being whittled down by human action – and inaction – causing irreparable damage. The statistics speak for themselves. According to official registers, the net forest area of the Republic totals 362,700 hectares, or 10.7% of the territory, considerably less than the 15-20% average in most other European countries. And even these scarce resources are under threat. According to official data, from 2000 to 2007 approximately 35,000 cubic meters of timber were logged illegally – a figure experts fear may be just the tip of the iceberg.

“The problem of protecting the forests against illegal logging is quite pressing for many countries and for our region in particular,” says Aurel Lozan, of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). He is national co-ordinator of the EU-funded Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) programme in Moldova, a €6 million regional programme aiming to promote legal and sustainable methods of management in forestry and forest utilisation, including the of illegal activities in the forests. The FLEG project is being implemented by the World Bank in close co-operation with the IUCN and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Lozan recalls that in 2005 an international conference was held in St. Petersburg where 44 participant countries from Europe and North Asia signed the Declaration on Forest Law Enforcement and Governance.

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Each of the signatories committed to the development of an indicative National Action Plan for combating violations of the law and illegal wood-cutting. Moldova approved such an indicative plan in 2009, covering the period until the end of 2011. "Our project, whose timeline coincides with that of the national Action Plan, also supports its implementation," says Lozan.

Timber auctions

By the end of February 2010, the first two open auctions were held to sell harvesting contracts for standing timber to private companies and state enterprises as part of the Moldovan Government reforms. The money collected, over 12 million Moldovan leus (approximately €750,000), will be spent on the development and protection of the country's forest resources. The contribution by the FLEG project to these auctions is the tracking and analyzing of their effects.

Aurel Lozan and his small team of five advisers are also supporting the study of the situation. Four working groups were created to cover various aspects of forest protection and management, including the improvement of legislation, undertaking a study of the market of timber materials and the country's needs for timber, an analysis of the current state of the forestry sector and raising awareness of the population with respect to forest-related problems.

Timber market problems

"We have already prepared the first report on the timber market and the problems in this field based on the results of the first three months of this year," says Andrei Cheresku, Chairman of the non-governmental organisation Silva Meleniu-III, with which the IUCN signed a contract for the implementation of surveys within the FLEG programme. "Many interesting facts, even at the initial stage, were revealed, illustrating the depth of the problem," he says, adding that, "during the exportation of timber, the customs declarations employ quite different systems of measurement: cubic metres, running metres, tons... Naturally, this does not ensure due accounting of the timber that is being commercialised, which creates a loophole to manipulate the volumes of logging." In his words, the local authorities do not maintain the registers of households with gas supply, so it is difficult to define the actual need for fuel timber. "We have already requested all village and district authorities to provide us with the information about the total number of houses and farmsteads having gas supply," says Cheresku.

The problems of refining the legislation and the efficient management of forest resources were discussed at the initiative of FLEG Moldova, which brought together the representatives of various interested agencies, including the government agency Moldsilva, academia, NGOs and private companies.

"The economic activities of timber processing enterprises and the population's need for timber make the problem of conservation and regular reproduction of forests ever more critical," said Dmitri Galupa, Director of the Forestry Research and Management Institute. "Insufficient state funding of scientific research and the implementation of modern mechanisms of forestry management costs money already today, but may lead to even graver consequences in the future. For the EU Member States the conservation of forests is part of state policy. We hope that the ENPI-FLEG programme will become the first step for Moldova in this direction."

Moldova recently held the first two open auctions to sell a number of harvesting contracts for standing timber to private companies and state enterprises.

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Human action, but also inaction, may cause irreparable damage to Moldovan forests.

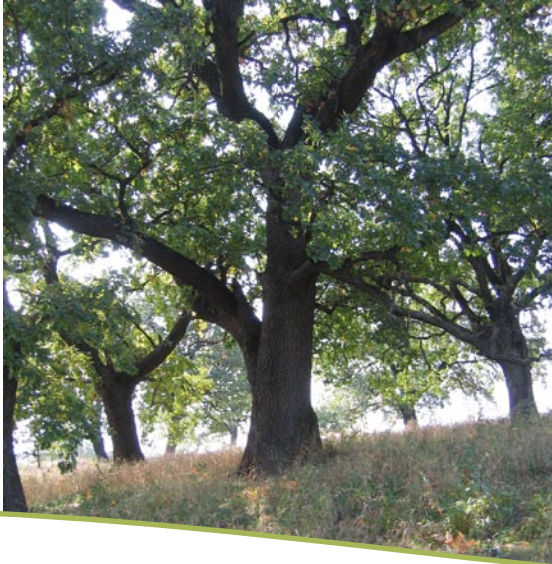
■ Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) project



Forestry Code

“We need a new Forestry Code, which will be harmonised with EU law and provide for efficient mechanisms of management of forest resources and their protection against illegal logging,” said Petru Rotaru, Moldsilva’s Head of Forest Fund Division.

■ Moldovan landscapes



The concept of the new edition of the Forest Code substantiating the need for major amendments has already been drafted under the participation of the FLEG Moldova experts. Alexei Palanchan from the Botany Institute is certain that the forestry law needs a profound overhaul, although this should not be the starting point. “Let us admit that we currently have sufficient levers for ensuring a more cautious utilisation and protection of forests,” he said. He proposes “the EU develops a new programme to make us look at the status of Moldovan forests from a new angle and to get involved in the solution of the accumulated problems. In my opinion, this is the main merit of this project.”

Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG)

Supports governments of participating countries, civil society and the private sector in the development of sound and sustainable forest management practices, including the prevention of illegal forestry activities.

www.enpi-fleg.org

Participating countries

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine

Objective

It aims to tackle the growing problem of illegal forest activities in the Partner Countries by promoting legal and sustainable forest management and utilisation practices and seeks to strengthen the rule of law and to enhance local livelihoods.

The European Commission grant has been provided to the World Bank through a multi-donor trust fund. The project’s implementing partners are the World Bank, the IUCN (World Conservation Union) and the WWF (World Wildlife Fund), ensuring that the public and private sectors as well as civil society are consistently included in the project’s activities.

Timeframe

2008-2011

Budget

€ 6 million

Find out more

FLEG website www.enpi-fleg.org/home.html

Fleg fiche www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=205&id_type=10

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