

The People Behind the Projects

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No political boundaries for forests



■ Alexei Grigoriev

Only 100-200 kilometres away from the boundaries of the European Union, there is a prima facie plain Russian remote forest area which has been endowed by nature with high quality woods although its population remains rather poor, at least if compared with neighbouring EU Member States. It is important for this difference not to be so drastic, says **Alexei Grigoriev**, an expert from the Europe and North Asia Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (ENA-FLEG) project which is funded by the European Union.

Q: *Why have Russia and the European Union decided to co-operate in this field?*

Alexei Grigoriev: The European Union, which is a very large importer of wood products, is illustrating the ever-growing public interest in the ecological and social consequences of timber-felling in those countries from which it imports these items. Russia is one of the EU's largest partners in the timber industry. We must admit, however, that there are cases of illegal cutting in our country. It is also apparent that there are serious problems in the context of forest management, including corruption. Both Russia and the EU are interested in the settling of these problems.

Unlawful cuttings – is this the main problem your project will be concerned with?

No. Although it will be an important one within our activities. It is necessary to find the reasons in order to minimise the violations of forestry law which are the result of not only a deficient legal framework but also of the arrangement of the state system of forestry management. This field has witnessed major changes in the past years.

The old system of forest utilisation which was oriented, first of all, upon tree cutting, has virtually collapsed. As compared with the Soviet period, the volume of wood-cutting has decreased by several times. A great number of settlements of wood-cutters, as a result, have nothing to do.

Currently, hundreds of kilometres of forests have no permanent population – they have just turned into wildlife areas.

It will be very important to ensure the openness of the information

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in the field of forest management. We were surprised when we discovered that in most cases it is impossible to find any information on the internet about the activities of state authorities in the field of forest management in the regions of Russia. We will rely upon the Law of Russia of 19 February 2009 on Ensuring Access to Data Concerning the Performance of State Authorities and Local Self-Governance Bodies. We will be monitoring and promoting the observance of this Law.

Do you have to get over the resistance of functionaries as well?

There are such functionaries, too. But there are also a great number of splendid managers and specialists, especially in regions, with whom we have already worked and will work in the future as well. We need openness and publicity in the forestry field, the rights of the local population should be regulated normally and we must help the population and small business in the development of traditional (wood harvesting) and alternative modules of forest management.

The forest is not only the trees which are cut. It also implies wildlife, natural foodstuffs such as mushrooms and berries, recreation, hunting, fishing and many other things. We will also rely upon the already existing and currently growing experience of our neighbours: Belarus, Latvia and Estonia.

My personal goal within the framework of this project is to promote the improvement of the life of the inhabitants of forest settlements; to minimise the difference between the Russian territory and that of the neighbouring EU states. A border should only be a line on a map and not another "iron curtain," be it economic, legal or cultural.

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

Timeframe

2008-2011

Budget

€6 million

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.

Find out more

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

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