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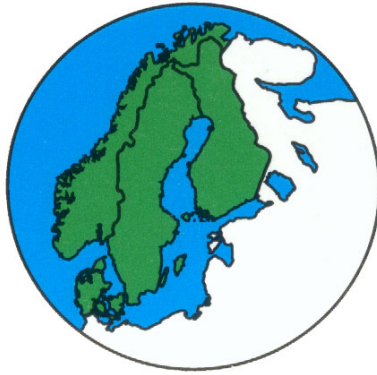
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Model of State forestry administration and media thriller in Lithuania

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Abstract

The first part of the paper reproduces the text that was intended to be published in a Lithuanian professional forestry journal. It first concisely reviews State forestry administrations in the countries of the Baltic Sea region, judging their adherence to the traditional model of bureaucracy versus the model of new public administration. Then it describes the Lithuanian approach in greater detail, providing criticism of inefficiencies caused by an overly bureaucratic administration. Attempts to publish the text led to the closure of the journal. Reflecting on this media turmoil, the second part of the paper discusses the role of a forest scientist. Should s/he be a neutral expert expedient to existing institutional structures, or rather seek to catalyze the desired policy processes? Is it worth to engage in “popular discourses” or better to stick solely to the standard production of peer review articles?

Keywords: State forestry, bureaucracy, new public administration, media, role of science

1. Reform for the country, not for bureaucracy (part 1)¹

After ideas about reforming State forestry reached the Lithuanian Parliament and Government, a lively discussion has been sparked in professional and popular media. A reform involves highly complex and important considerations that do not only affect personal destinies of employees, but also concern diverse group interests. No surprise that emotions often prevail over facts and the latter are “corrected” towards a desired direction. There is a lack of fundamental and

¹ Sections 1.1 and 1.2 were published in Lithuanian language in the professional forestry journal *Baltijos Miskai ir Mediena*, in September 2009. Sections 1.3 and 1.4 could not appear in printed form as intended (cf. Section 2.1). The whole article (Section 1) was placed on the Internet portal of the Forest Owner Association in Lithuania (www.forest.lt).

neutral analyses; whilst the theory of public management is a good point of departure for examining a potential reform.

1.1 A little on public management theory

Already in the beginning of the 20th century, sociologists identified an idealized model of a bureaucracy that enables to seek certain goals defined by politicians. *Bureaucratic* management, also referred to as the traditional public management, rests on the following core principles:

- Hierarchy, i.e. an administration relies on a strict subordination of the personnel. Officers of a lower rank sternly obey to the officers of higher ranks. This principle ensures that the decisions of the top leadership are implemented throughout the organization.
- Functional specialization. The tasks and the means for their achievement are standardised according to positions, areas of responsibility are defined in respective statutes. Forestry administration can be specialised geographically as well as according to functions performed.

Characteristically, the bureaucratic system of management relies on loyal employees who carry out their functions, neatly following instructions and having little freedom of choice. The bureaucratic model is often criticised due to, among other things, lack of flexibility and suppression of employees' initiative. Bureaucratic organisations often turn into entities that are difficult to regulate externally. Sometimes they even become kind of manors or protectorates of the leading officers, where diverse personal and factional interests end up in deep clashes with those of the public.

Efforts to improve the traditional management led to the concept of New Public Administration (NPA) that, since the 1990s, has become the prevailing model for administrative reforms in developed countries. NPA is oriented towards efficiency and is expected to result in: diminishing bureaucracy; inclusion of market mechanisms into public administration; increasing productivity; greater independence of employees, and better service for clients. The management is decentralised along with implementation of new devices for accountability and control.

Reforms might be initiated to genuinely improve the public management, increasing its contribution to a country's welfare. There might also be hidden agendas, for example, certain grouping may try to push through privatisation

without taking any political responsibility. Sometimes reforms are imitated without any tangible changes and trying to retain the “inherent” privileges. Policy science stresses that the success of public administration to a high degree depends on the overall political culture, as well as personal ethics and responsibility. The experience of post-Soviet countries confirms that, in the context of a deeply-rooted bureaucracy and corruption, it is difficult to carry out essential reforms for the benefit of society.

1.2 Features of public administration in neighbouring countries

In reality it is hardly possible to find a forestry administration that would be organised purely according to the bureaucratic or the NPA model. Elements of both models are more likely to be observed. However, it is possible to conduct a comparison revealing which model's features are prevailing in one or another country.

NPA principles are well established in the Scandinavian countries, not only in forestry but also in public management at large. A high regard is given to employee's initiative and independence, tendencies of decentralisation have been prevalent over several last decades. The legal environment in Finland and Sweden traditionally is liberal, State forest enterprises are oriented towards efficient and profitable management.

Our Baltic neighbours Latvia and Estonia carried out radical reforms in 1999-2000, with apparent reorientation from bureaucratic model to NPA. Forest management and policy-making functions were separated at all levels; a single State forest enterprise was formed in each country with a clear mandate to work efficiently. A radical reform always entails numerous challenges. Despite this, the newly established enterprises surprisingly rapidly raised their profits as well as contributions to State budgets. Notably, the enterprises have been structurally organised into divisions by main functions, such as forest management, seed and plant production, nature management, timber trade and marketing, and hunting management. Each division has clear targets of performance; at the same time, they have sufficient operational freedom.

As far as I am acquainted with others countries of the ex-Soviet space, State forestry administration was not reformed (e.g. in Ukraine) or the reforms were deficient, creating an institutional chaos and dissatisfaction by majority of employees (Russia). In these countries, private forest ownership is either illegitimate or insubstantial, while State forestry is steered by distinctly bureaucratic and ineffective administrations. One of their characteristic features is flourishing corruption.

Command style of administration is clearly dominant also in the Polish State forestry. The administrative set-up practically remained unchanged from the socialist times, policy-making and forest management being integrated within one organisation. This is a powerful “State within State”, guided by the principle of self-sufficiency and not providing any noticeable contribution to the State budget. Within this profoundly hierarchic organisation, the loyalty is a much greater virtue than independence and initiative, all core activities are based on detailed regulations. Recently conducted international survey of young forest specialists brought forward a notable dissatisfaction by a considerable share of the Polish respondents. The employment and advancement on the career ladder depends on the employee’s personal contacts (not rarely via family bonds) rather than on her/his competence and productivity. Hierarchic relationships and normative management is detrimental to people’s motivation and initiative.

In Germany, the cradle of the classical forestry, management and policy functions are integrated in the administrations of federal lands (Bundesländer). In time of its heights, the bureaucratic model was well-advanced and considered to be exemplary by many other nations. Nonetheless, State forestry has been ineffective and needed sizeable subsidies already for several decades. One could expect that, taking into account the highly developed economy, high population density and negligible share of forestry in the State’s GDP, subsidising could turn into a politically accepted norm. However, the current federal government seeks to improve the effectiveness of forestry administrations and reduce the bureaucracy, relying on NPA principles. It is worth mentioning that in the Germany’s neighbour Austria State forestry is a profitable venture. Once again, this was achieved due to reorganisation of State forestry according to tenets of NPA. A single State enterprise, stock company “Austrian Federal Forests” was established in 1997.

How does one or the other model affect the welfare of the country and its citizens? Does it satisfy, as currently is fashionable to say in Lithuania, the public interests? In the forestry context, the public interests can be traditionally divided into ecological, social and economic. As regards ecological and social needs, it is safe to claim that the countries of the Baltic Sea region are satisfying them quite successfully. The only exception with some reservations is Russia. In the latter, large forest areas are not utilised, some other forests are overutilised, their regeneration is insufficient and of bad quality. All other aforementioned countries pursue principles of sustainability, in theory as well as in practice. Forest areas are increasing, cuttings are considerably below the increment, the network of protected areas is quite elaborate and is being further

expanded, and increasing attention is devoted to silvicultural measures oriented towards enhanced biodiversity. Assessing at large, it is not possible to observe any correlation between the model of forest administration and the social and environmental performance.

On the other hand, there is a clear connection between the management model and the contribution to the economic welfare. In countries with prevailing bureaucratic model, State forestry usually relies on self-sufficiency, i.e. forestry's contribution to the State budget is absent or negligible. In other words, a huge resource of a country is used by the State forestry institutions "free of charge". Such wasting of resources is hardly justifiable, especially in the countries that face the difficulties of the period of economic and social transition.

1.3 Management model in Lithuania

After re-establishing the independence, the socioeconomic environment changed radically. After transition to the market economy, State Forest Enterprises (SFEs) had to learn to work independently. Timber processing units were gradually dismantled, but enterprises remained in charge of the whole forest management cycle from seed to forest logging. Considerable share of activities, especially in connection with logging and planting, was contracted to private companies. The average area of forest under management of an SFE was halved due to forest restitutions and currently makes up around 20,000 ha (totally there are 42 SFEs). At large, SFEs activity during the first years of independence can be assessed positively. In times of rapid economic transition accompanied by privatisation that at times was dirty and predatory, SFEs ensured stability and sustainable forest management, more or less successfully adapting to operations under market conditions. Then again, the economic model was based on the self-sufficiency and the major share of revenues stayed within the forestry branch, with little contribution to the State.

The chosen "evolutionary" path has conserved the institutional set-up. The economic and social environment changed radically, while the State forestry administration avoided any substantial changes internally. The most visible reform was the establishment of the Directorate General of State Forests (DGSF) in 1996, in order to separate functions of forest management and policy-making. The goal is commendable but its pursuance was quite unfortunate. First, the decision was taken in a hurry, at the onset of change of governing coalition, without any deeper analysis or consultations with representatives of the sector. This was one of the reasons for the ongoing conflicts between DGSF and the Forest Department under the Ministry of

Environment. Even worse, there were no systemic prerequisites for a more effective management. DGSF simply became a kind of SFEs' penthouse with a foggy mission of coordinating the SFEs activities. The nature of the reform and the mentality of its implementers predestined a predominantly bureaucratic profile of DGSF, with the increasingly obvious role of SFEs' controller.

There have been some alterations of the ministerial subordination and the status of SFEs, but they did not bring about any significant changes in the administrative set-up or in SFEs' activities. Although SFEs have the status of State enterprises since 2001, their legal rights are considerably curbed at the expense of DGSF. The latter does not have the status of an enterprise but it takes over part of SFEs' rights without taking on clear responsibilities.

One can claim that the persons in charge missed a good chance for carrying out a rational reform of forestry, following the NPA tenets. It is obvious that the current administration and especially its top entities match most features of the bureaucratic model:

- The management system lacks internal incentives for rationalising its performance, seeking more efficient use of resources and attaining higher contribution to the country's welfare. Activities are steered by command management and short-term conjunctures rather than by a clear vision for development of the sector.
- Forest management activities are based on petty regulation, different kinds of plans, norms, detailed and compulsory provisions for people at SFEs, as if there is no trust in their professional competence. This is a core issue of forestry, conditioned by the bureaucratic model of the administration.
- Coordination of SFEs' activities by DGSF is the most authentic example of a command-based public administration. Much manpower is wasted on all kind of reporting, audits, etc. One of the newer and more exciting examples: each SFE has to report to DGSF on public outreach activities and publications in the national media every three months.
- Loyalty is valued more than competence and results of work. Even though the performance of a single SFE to a large degree depends on the competency of its director, there is no evidence that DGSF would effectively use its right to assign SFE directors with due consideration of their competence.

- Innovations are coming slowly, for example, the level of IT applications is quite low at some SFEs.
- In informal conversations a significant share of employees of lower ranks express discontent with the current situation. Their motivation is restrained by the excessive bureaucracy that, among other things, leads to increasing workload. Despite heated discussion on the reform, such opinions are rarely reflected in the public space. Even the long-standing professional journal “Musu Girios” is short of critical contributions and generation of ideas, in contrast with the pre-war traditions and partly even the Soviet era. These could be indications of lacking freedom of expression.

Finally, the GDSF itself officially maintains the position that forestry administration should be organised by example of Poland. This confirms the value orientation towards further bureaucratisation.

SFEs’ directors and other staff have ended up in a weird situation. Working under market conditions, they should at the same time fight against windmills of bureaucracy or become faceless screws of the administrative machinery.

1.4 Future alternatives

Assessing the situation at large, two major scenarios may be envisioned for improving the State forestry administration:

Scenario A: To retain current administrative set-up but diminish the bureaucracy, first of all by decreasing the influence of the central bureaucratic apparatus on SFEs.

Scenario B: To carry out a radical systemic reform, applying NPA tenets.

Scenario A would be a minimalistic scenario that would not bring about substantial changes but still create prerequisites for more independent work by the main forest management subjects, the SFEs. Less manpower would be required for the bureaucratic routine. Both the policy science theory and the practical experience of the Lithuanian reforms are showing that already existing organisations attempt to preserve the *status quo* by all means. Any organisation attempts to increase its power and resist the external pressure for reform. Thus, in the overall context of deeply bureaucratised public management, Scenario A

would easier break through the hindrances that are being continuously erected by influential interest groups.

Scenario B is more difficult to implement, but would bring more benefits for the State. Taking into account experience by countries in the region, it would be rational to establish one enterprise. Its form could be a stock company, with all shares belonging to the State. The enterprise would be responsible for management of State forests on all levels with a clearly defined mission to work efficiently, providing sustained ecological, social and economic contribution to the State's welfare and having in place an adequate management structure and principles. The policy-making and control functions could be performed by a consolidated State forest service that could assume supervision of both State and private forestry.

Under various occasions, the opponents of the reform have argued that establishment of one enterprise will create a monopoly, the country will be overwhelmed by Scandinavian capital, State forestry will be privatised by forest industries, etc. It is hard to say whether these are the real fears or just frightening of the less informed people. Already in 2006, a scientific report from the Lithuanian University of Agriculture pointed out that SFEs are not sufficiently large to balance out the influence of the largest timber processing companies on the market. In addition, a monopolisation of the whole forestry branch is simply impossible due to private forestry that is gradually gaining in strength. I would not see a "severe problem" if a foreign capital should be invested in Lithuania under conditions that are favourable for the country. However, I cannot grasp how the new enterprise would condition a sudden inflow of foreign capital. In Latvia, the course of events was opposite. Before the reform, a part of State forests were leased to foreign companies under excessively benevolent conditions. When the stock company "Latvian State Forests" was established in 2000, such leasing practices were immediately ceased. Meanwhile some Lithuanian media feature disinformation, as if the reform in Latvia was made to satisfy the Scandinavian interests.

One could be more wary of domestic industrial groups, particularly when recalling the cheeky attempts to introduce timber quotas under "special" pricing in the last year. To this end, backstairs influences and corruption can be avoided if the reform is carried out transparently. After enterprise is established, its resistance against such influences would primarily depend on the professionalism and ethics of its leadership. The same is of course valid for the current GDSF and SFEs.

I have no doubts that a strong and NPA-aligned State forestry would bring a sustained long-term contribution to the country's welfare, at the same time

ensuring good working conditions for its workforce. Therefore the employees of the current SFEs should not be afraid of a radical reform. Competent and diligent specialists would certainly be needed for the new enterprise.

What about the alternatives that have been lately discussed officially? Confer the following citation from the legal decision by the Committee on Environment Protection of the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas)*:

After debating, it was decided by a common agreement to suggest to the Government:

“Without radical rearrangements and changes of the current legal status of State forest enterprises and the set-up of forestry administration, to enact provisions in the Forest Law, the State and Municipal Enterprise Law and other legal acts, enabling the transfer of part of revenues (3%) of State forest enterprises and part of their functions related to organisation of the timber trade and human management to the Directorate General of State Forests;

[...]

To enact the provision that attestations of State forest enterprises are carried out every five years, taking into account the results of auditing, and to legally define the criteria of evaluation.”

After getting acquainted with the actual public discussion in the parliamentary committee**, such text of the decision is astonishing. Was it formulated by members of the committee, or just copied from the drafts by GDSF? Assessing according to the theory and practice of NPA, the suggested alternative would be a big step backwards. The partial transfer of functions to GDSF would further reinforce the bureaucratic penthouse, while SFEs would be pressed even more, adding five-year attestations to the already ample regulations, audits and reporting. The suggestion to reinstate the Soviet practice of a centralized forest fund sounds particularly socialistic. According to representatives of GDSF, part of the fund's assets would be utilized to even out the revenues of SFEs due to difference in forest management conditions. Such egalitarian measure might sound ideologically nice but in practice it incites hidings of revenues and diminishes motivation to work effectively. And where are the guarantees that,

* Translation by the author of this article.

** A detailed description of discussion at the meeting is available on Internet (www.forest.lt/go.php/lit/Seimo_AAK_antrasis_rytmetinis_valsty/2320), in Lithuanian only.

in addition to the management conditions, the loyalty to GDSF's leadership will not become an important criterion?

It is rather difficult to evaluate other suggested alternatives as the discussion is focused on the desired number of SFEs. One cannot disagree with scientists stating that the area of an SFE is an important factor as it comes to the efficiency of management. Unfortunately, the subject of the management model usually evades the discussions. In my opinion, the size of an SFE is an important but secondary issue. It is possible to establish one enterprise by changing the facade but without essential changes in the administrative system. One can expect a corresponding result: an ineffectively functioning enterprise. The reform must be essential and well prepared. Otherwise it is not worth wasting effort and bothering the people.

I wish to encourage foresters on all management levels to be active, express their opinions and defend their civic position in the media. Everybody has the right to submit proposals for improvements of the State forestry administration to the Governmental Sunset Commission, every input is important for shaping the common professional future. Those in charge of the reform need to listen not only to foresters, but also to people independent of the current administration, including lawyers, policy scientists, economists, biologists, representatives of non-governmental organisations, experts of timber industry and other areas.

In the end, the outcome of the reform will depend on politicians in the Government, Parliament, and President's office. We can only hope that the final decisions will be shaped by those for whom the country's welfare is more important than some political fraternities. If not, we can await one more sunset of a reform with regrettable results.

2. Media turmoil and the role of scientist

One could wonder why a text intended for a professional forestry journal in Lithuania is translated into English and reproduced with identical contents in proceedings of an international scientific conference. An academic reader can easily see differences between the reproduced essay and a conventional scientific publication, not least within the tradition of natural sciences. The language is plain to convey the message clearly; yet colourful to emphasize the line of argument. The essay lacks references and does not follow the accustomed structure of a scientific paper. It is more an exposure of the author's tacit understanding of the subject, rather than a thorough examination of research hypotheses.

Though requiring considerable effort, the models of State forestry administration could certainly be a subject of rigorous scientific inquiry. This is, however, not the aim of my current writing. The paper rather intends to expose the media turmoil that the text has caused. The reader is provided a possibility to judge the turmoil (Section 2.1) against the original text in unaltered shape (Section 1).

2.1 The aftermath: a media thriller

In August 2009, the professional journal “Baltijos Miskai ir Mediena” (Baltic Forests and Timber) accepted the original article (Section 1). Taking into account the topic’s urgency, the whole text was placed on the journal’s website on the day of submission. Due to considerable length, it was agreed that the paper would be printed in two subsequent issues of the journal. The first part came out in September.

The second part should have appeared in the October issue, but the plan failed due to an unexpected media thriller. The editorial office of the journal faced some threats “from above”. These were not just empty words: the director of the journal was laid off a few weeks after the first part of the article appeared in print. Besides, it was informally explained that, in case the second part is published, the journal would be “allowed” to go bankrupt. The outcome is understandable: the article disappeared from the cyberspace, and the publication of the second part went ashtray.

Despite survival efforts, the journal had to be closed down in October 2009. Without going into details, the reason was that the major share of the journal’s budget was funded by a private forest trade and management company that recruits significant amounts of timber from State forests. Not a surprise that the secure base of raw material was considered more important than “democracy games”.

This is a truly sad outcome as the forest branch lost the only periodical with broad coverage, targeting the sector’s professionals and wider public, and encouraging diversity of opinions. In January 2010, the ex-team from the Baltijos Miskai ir Mediena managed to start-up a new monthly magazine in a similar format. With one major difference - the funding of the revived journal to a large extent depends on subscriptions or direct support from the State forestry. This can be seen in the journal’s contents as “a due respect” is given to State forestry organisations. Such internal censorship produces certain lines of “truths”, which, in my eyes, is a major setback for forestry media and the sector’s transparency.

2.2 Author's self-reflection: motivation and role of a scientist

The unexpected turn of events forced the author to cogitate further about the state of affairs in high forestry echelons and the role of scientist in this connection. First, why to engage in such uncomfortable writing? There could be many good reasons not to do so. A popular science paper takes time to produce but does not bring any tangible rewards in today's academic world of "publishing or perishing" where publishing almost exclusively refers to peer review journals. Second, a straight criticism of a powerful State forestry administration is quite probable to create influential adversaries and might even affect the professional career.

Further reasons could be added why a similar publication by domestic Lithuanian scientist(s) is highly unlikely. First, forest science in ex-socialist countries is heavily focused on silvicultural-ecological aspects, research in forest policy is quite recent and meagre. Further, forestry research primarily relies on the national tradition, little is known about the state of affairs in foreign countries; even more so in such complex subject as forestry administration. A still weightier reason is the tight and hierarchical institutional networks, where all members of the forester community are expected to work for "the system" and a fair part of research funding comes from State forestry organisations. To give an example, in the late 1990s a group of Lithuanian scientists prepared a study that outlined deficiencies of State forestry administration and suggested probationary privatisation of commercial forests in selected SFE(s). The leader of the study was discredited publicly. Such politically inappropriate report and even the whole forest research institute were condemned on the Ministerial level. Since then Lithuanian researchers tend to avoid "sensitive" topics outside the permissible space of comfort by the leading forestry authorities.

Then again, why the "heretic" writing (Section 1)? The foremost reason presumably is the "burden of knowing". To the author with nomadic background and supranational perspective, substantive inefficiencies of State forestry administration in Lithuania have been apparent. The current situation favours just a few people in the leading positions, while the branch could give a weightier contribution to the struggling national economy.

Another reason is an intriguing possibility and a moral imperative to take part in debate on an issue of great practical importance. This can feel more fulfilling than devotion to exclusively producing peer review papers read by a marginal audience preoccupied with producing such papers. At this point, it is the right time to ask: what should be the guiding roles of a forest scientist and in particular a forest policy scientist?

Every researcher of course chooses according to her interests and capabilities how to allocate the working time, what to publish where, etc. On the other hand those interests are heavily steered by (dis)incentives prevailing in the academic environment. It is not novel or pretentious to claim that the bulk of academic staff in most European countries spends increasing amounts of time on chasing external funding and that the pressure to produce peer review papers is directing their behaviour and the way of doing research. The peer review system of course has its own virtues, attempting to secure high research quality through impartial assessment. But, in combination with today's research funding, it also creates systemic biases:

- Most scientists would recognise the inherent pressure to *chop the research output into pieces* that are easily publishable. Taking the forestry administration model as an example (Section 1), it is indeed intricate to produce a thorough and inclusive international comparison of forestry administrations that would fit the format and space limits of a standard peer review paper, especially within forestry-related journals that typically follow conventions within the natural sciences.
- *Certain topics and methodologies are easier* to put on peer review conveyor with appreciable impact factors. In this respect, social science-oriented forest research is at disadvantage compared with the traditional natural science-oriented forest research. Researchers tend to avoid topics that are not easily converted into peer research publications, irrespective of their societal importance. The increasing dependability on external funding also reduces chances that a scientist would take up a meta-critical research challenging prevailing powers and fashions.
- Driven almost exclusively by peer review production, the system of merits *discourages a scientist from taking up an active civic role*, from contributing to actual debates with an informed opinion. What should then be the societal role of the academic expertise? Exemplifying by the topic of Section 1, should a researcher be a neutral expert expedient to existing institutional structures, or rather seek to catalyze the desired policy processes?

Being embedded in the conventions of natural sciences, forest research traditionally cherishes the “value neutrality” as a key precondition and intrinsic virtue of science. Such stance has been questioned by increasing cohorts of social scientists. Without reiterating their arguments, I just will point out that the answer to the last question in itself is a value choice. Choosing to wear the mask of neutrality may serve to justify indifference to actual societal discourses, but it is hardly instrumental for increasing the relevance of science to practice.

2.3 Epilogue

The text about State forestry administration intended to provide a critical opinion and instigate discussion, without ambition to tell indisputable truths. DGSF’s reaction was stern. The author was furnished with colourful epithets at a national forestry conference. Several remedy publications appeared in various media, not hesitating to employ false facts. For example, commending the performance of the Lithuanian State forestry, an article in a national daily newspaper labelled forestry in neighbouring Latvia unsustainable, as “*Latvia probably is the only European country where harvesting during the last several years has exceeded forest increment*”. This is not just a slight exaggeration as, according to the official statistics, the average annual harvest/increment ratio during the last decade was 68%. At the peak of harvesting in 1999 the ratio constituted 84%. In reality, the average ratio presumably was much lower (in the range of 35 to 45%) as the official Latvian statistics had grossly underestimated the level of increment.

This kind of sweat lies fitted well the established patterns and was not surprising. What shocked was the ruthless treatment of a free-standing journal. Despite the regrettable outcome the media thriller has its merits. First, by acting repressively DGSF boldly proved the appropriateness of the critique in the original text, as regards the adherence to excessive controls and lack of transparency. Such overreaction could also be a sign of vulnerability and misjudgement. Slanders about the thriller have likely been more harmful than any unsettling media contribution.

Incidentally, the institutional struggles seem to be on the rise as, in March 2010, the National Audit Office of Lithuania delivered a rather critical assessment of the performance in State forestry. The Lithuanian Government currently is considering measures for increasing the effectiveness of State-owned enterprises in all sectors, including forestry.

Concluding on the role of scientist, an emerging topic in academic forums is the need for balancing research, teaching and “the third task”, i.e. the civic

role of embedding the scientific knowledge into social surroundings. Meanwhile, what most academic staffs experience at their workplaces is an ever increasing emphasis on chasing external research funding and augmenting peer review production with the corresponding degree of prestige. The peer review system is there to stay and hopefully to be perfected. But what is important, the academic meriting should not be confined to counting papers and citations, but rather give a more versatile weighing to academic engagements. This fair wish is heard daily in academic corridors. There is a dire need to bring the message out into the public space.

The media thriller in Lithuania constitutes an example of a “skewed” engagement. All complications notwithstanding, it has been an enriching experience. More thrillers are likely to follow in due time.