

Good Laws for Better Forests

by Peter Herbst, Villach, Austria
Coordinator IUFRO **RG 6.13.00**

The IUFRO 6.13.00 8th International Symposium on “Legal Aspects of European Forest Sustainable Development” was held in Istanbul (Turkey), May 10 - 14, 2006. Forty-nine researchers and practitioners, representing twenty countries, as well as representatives of the World Bank and other international organisations, all active in forest law and environmental legislation in Eastern and Central Europe, used that forum to exchange experiences concerning the formulation, implementation and administration of newly adopted forest and forest related laws and get familiar with the rapidly changing legal situation in that sector in many a European country.

Not unexpectedly, May 2006 in Istanbul, turned out to be a good choice: Negotiations with Turkey on its accession to the European Union had officially started some months ago and reached relevant technical levels by then, and at the same time, the final – though at that stage not yet officially approved – version of the new EU Forest Action Plan was available.

Under that umbrella, the focus was on the balance between forestry and nature conservation at public and/or private property level as well as collision between regulations in forest laws and environment related legislation.

Forest ownership rights and related conflicts have been a real issue in almost all Central and Eastern European Countries during at least the last 15 years. Meanwhile, legislation in most of these countries provides for different forms of non-state ownerships.

Benefiting from non-commercial forest resources in general is part of the public rights in environment and may therefore be perceived as a human right. But: Property rights are protected under the Human



The Organising Committee in front of the venue in Istanbul
(photo by Peter Herbst)

Rights Declaration, too. It will be essential to provide the legal basis and rules on payments for ecosystem services as well as compensation for damages to the forest or for losses due to use restrictions for the public good (social, cultural and environmental functions of forests).

Rapid socio-economic development and drastic deterioration of the ecologic situation during transition to market economy forced many CEE Countries to improve and update their forest related legislation immediately, resulting in low quality laws and contradictions in the broad field of forest and environment legislation.

Bad laws, complicated and time consuming administrative procedures, the non-dissuasive nature of penalties, loose enforcement or even non-enforcement of court decisions – all that has contributed to aggravate the situation.

For more information, please visit the 2006 meeting homepage, www.forest-law.com.

The conference was hosted by the Faculty of Forestry, University of Istanbul, under the auspices of the Directorate of Forests in the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Turkey, and supported by the host organisations, the Association of Turkish Foresters, the Scientific and Technological Research of Turkey, the Forestry Cooperatives Central Union of Turkey, the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, as well as the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Switzerland. The meeting was organized by Prof. Dr. Sedat Ayanoğlu and his staff at the Department of Forest Law (Faculty of Forestry, Istanbul University), including Ass. Prof. Dr. Aynur Aydin Coşkun, Ass. Prof. Dr. Yusuf Guneş, Nimet Veliöğlu and O. Devrim Elvan, as well as Peter Herbst (IUFRO 6.13.00).

The high relevance of this meeting was emphasised by the presence of the Turkish Minister of Environment and Forestry, Osman Pepe.