

“Modern Wood Energy Systems and Markets - an opportunity for South East Europe”

**Hotel Timisoara, Romania
16–17 September 2008**

At the UNECE/FAO Joint Working Party for Forest Economics and Statistics (March 2007), both Serbia and Romania asked for support in organizing wood energy seminars in 2007/2008. The UNECE/FAO Timber Section of the UNECE Trade and Timber Division organized a successful seminar in Belgrade, Serbia on 26/27 November 2007 in partnership with UNDP (Belgrade) and the Faculty of Forestry of the State University of Belgrade. This attracted 90 participants but, with the exception of two participants from Romania and six from Montenegro, everyone else was from Serbia. In 2008 UNECE/FAO Timber Section working in partnership with Romsilva and the FAO Forestry Department/ Sub regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe proposes to organize a workshop in Romania for all countries in south east Europe, focusing on improving information and expertise in the field of wood energy policy, practice (production and use) and market opportunities.

Background

Many parts of Europe are successfully reducing reliance on fossil fuels by turning to carbon-neutral sources of energy, such as wood. This achieves two significant policy aims: first it helps to enhance energy security by taking advantage of an indigenous fuel source and, secondly, it helps to achieve a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

In contrast, south east Europe, in spite of having good forest cover and a strong wood burning culture, continues to be heavily dependent on fossil fuel, most of it imported at high cost. In recent years, the situation has worsened as natural gas has begun to replace wood in some areas. Often this has been with the assistance of international donor programmes, which appear largely to have ignored wood's potential, as a clean carbon-neutral energy source, available on the doorstep.

With extensive forests and a strong wood processing sector, Romania has the potential to use wood to a much greater extent than currently for heating and perhaps electricity production. What is holding back this kind of development from happening? In part, it is a general lack of awareness of just how far wood energy has come in the last 20 years, in terms of efficiency and ease of operation. At a deeper level, there is a perception that wood is old-fashioned, dirty and inconvenient to use. It is even possible that some people believe that using wood leads to the destruction of forests. This is a completely false perception in almost all of Europe, where forests are managed sustainably and where both the area of forest and the volume of wood growing in Europe's forests have been increasing steadily over decades.

In the absence of action to persuade governments, local authorities and the public that wood is a realistic option to meet their energy needs efficiently and cost effectively, the chance to open up an important market for wood will be lost. Rural unemployment and poverty, which are significant in many parts of south east Europe will continue to blight the region.

As oil and gas prices have soared, the cost of heating has risen sharply, wood offers an opportunity to provide space heating at an affordable price and to reduce the numbers suffering from fuel poverty. Although wood cannot replace external energy sources completely, it could make a significant contribution to meeting energy needs and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Unless there is a major shift towards renewable energy, including wood, current policies seem destined to leave the countries of south east Europe heavily dependent on sources of energy for which the supply and price lie completely outside their control.

Goals

- To raise both political and forest sector awareness of wood's potential as a clean energy source and of the benefits of modern wood energy technology;
- To encourage transfer of knowledge about wood energy technology, drawing on the considerable expertise in other countries, including those with trading links with south east Europe e.g. Italy and Austria
- To identify strategies and measures that will support the development of wood energy;
- To introduce case studies from countries where wood energy already plays a central role and to highlight the potential to adopt best practice models.

^oNote: Albania, Croatia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have produced energy strategies but these envisage meeting increased energy needs by importing natural gas from Russia, and Africa, via Italy. Turkey too is a potential supplier of gas and electricity.

Expected Outcomes

Exchange of technical information on modern wood energy systems and markets

Increased take-up of wood energy, based on wood industry co-products/smaller dimension trees

Initiating wood energy systems in participating countries

Identifying policies that will promote the development of wood energy

Building networks of expertise at the regional level

Venue and timing

Timisoara, Romania, 2 day meeting including half-day excursion.

Organizers

UNECE/FAO Timber Section in collaboration with Romsilva and FAO SEUR, Budapest.

Participants

The seminar is aimed at politicians and key staff from municipalities located in areas with forest; forest managers, from both private and state sectors, and those who own or manage businesses in sawmilling and other wood processing industries. Staff from relevant Ministries and national authorities. Keynote speakers from other countries and relevant international organizations will be invited to share experience in wood energy.

In all, about 50 participants are expected from the target countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Romania) with keynote speakers from other countries and from international organisations such as UNECE/FAO.

Background reports

Municipalities and others taking part in the seminar will be invited to prepare and submit in advance, a report on the basis of a suggested outline, to be distributed at the seminar. This report would allow the municipalities to describe their current energy provision, their energy supply policies (where they exist), the difficulties they encounter in meeting energy needs and the challenges that they face and for others to identify what strategies or measures may be needed, if wood energy is to play a significant future role in Romania and other countries in south east Europe.

Language

The working languages of the seminar will be English, and Romanian. Seminar documents, including reports, will be in English and Romanian and there will be simultaneous interpretation.

Provisional agenda

Arrival of participants and registration (evening before or in morning)

- Day 1 Morning: Opening by organisers
Presentations – technical aspects of wood energy – energy content, emissions, latest technology for different scale applications,
- Day 1 Afternoon: Presentations - wood's role in energy provision (overview), wood energy markets.
Case studies (best practice examples) – including examples from Romania and surrounding countries.
- Evening: Reception
- Day 2 Morning: Funding possibilities
- Day 2 Late morning Field visit (to be decided and to include picnic lunch)
- Day 2 Afternoon Final plenary – Questions and future steps
- Day 3 Visit to virgin beech forest Izvoarele Nerei Reserve (5000 hectares of untouched forest in the National Park Semenic-Cheile Carasulu)