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ABOUT BULGARIA'S
FOREST RESTITUTION**

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Will Forest Owners Cooperate? Some Preliminary Observations about Bulgaria's Forest Restitution¹

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This paper presents preliminary observations from an ongoing study of Bulgaria's forest restitution, based on field research conducted during 2000. As such, it discusses the prelude to the restitution since claims had been filed at the time of the fieldwork, but the claimants for the most part had not received their ownership documents. My research so far has focused on the once and future forest owners in terms of the structure of private forest ownership and the extent of planning for future forest management, and thus this paper addresses these issues. In focusing on the perspective of forest owners, I do not mean to deny the legacies of socialist-era forestry, with its management practices which some describe as producing high quality forests, much better than prior to nationalization, while others describe the exploitation using a Bulgarian term that translates as savage, cruel, monstrous, outrageous. Nor do I mean to slight the experience and expertise of people working for socialist-era state forestry enterprises or the effects that the ongoing restructuring of forest exploitation, which has accompanied the restitution, has had or will have on their employment status. But, in talking to forest owners, particularly those taking an active interest in the restitution, their main point of reference was what one person referred to as "cooperative times," in other words, the time before socialism and before the forest nationalization as is explained in later sections.

The paper describes in particular the situation in the central Rhodope Mountains, which are a moderate elevation mountain range located along Bulgaria's southern border with Greece and with peaks reaching just over 2,000 meters in elevation. This region has highest concentration of formerly private forests in Bulgaria, it is one of most forest-rich parts of the country, and forests are particularly important to the local economy due to marginal nature of agricultural production and lack of substantial industry. More than 70 percent of the Chepelare municipality (*obshtina*) is forested, for example, with forests of pine, spruce, and fir being of particular economic importance, and about 70 percent of the forests in the municipality were privately owned prior to their nationalization, with even higher percentages in some communities. These factors are not unrelated and the history is worth repeating here, as it is the reason that the central Rhodope are unique in this regard. In 1911 Bulgaria's

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the International Association for Southeast European Anthropology's conference on the Anthropology of Southeast Europe - Ten Years After: Socio-Cultural Aspects of Transformation in Sofia, Bulgaria, 16 September 2000, and at a conference entitled Representing Anthropology and Anthropological Representations in Eastern Europe in Cluj, Romania, 26 September 2000. Barbara A. Cellarius is a postdoctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, contact:cellar@eth.mpg.de).

parliament passed special legislation authorizing the sale of forests at symbolic prices to local residents of specified communities in the central Rhodope (especially south of present-day Assenovgrad to Bulgaria's then-southern border with the Ottoman Empire) in order to provide them with a source of livelihood. Exploitation of the forests was gaining importance at the time, with the declining feasibility of seasonally transhumant pastoralism and as transportation infrastructure in the region improved, and many local residents bought forests. The law was extended in 1927 to include communities further south (around present-day Smolyan) that were previously controlled by the Ottoman Empire and had become part of Bulgaria only after 1912-13 (Arnaudov 1998: 42-45; Karaivanov 1990; Stefanov 1983).²

Subsistence agricultural production plays an important role in household survival strategies in the region; however, the possibilities are constrained by environmental conditions, and production for sale is largely limited to potatoes, tobacco in lower elevation areas, and milk and meat from livestock. In this context, forests are of value to local residents for a variety of goods that they provide – firewood for relatively inexpensive cooking and heating; wild mushrooms, fruit, and herbs for personal use and cash sale; wild game for local hunters; and last but not least high quality commercial timber. During the socialist era, commercial exploitation of Bulgarian forests was in the hands of the state, although some local residents benefited through their employment in the state forest enterprises.³ With the restitution, as was the case before nationalization, comes the possibility that the owners will again be able to generate income from selling timber and other resources from their private forests.⁴

Under current economic conditions in postsocialist Bulgaria, the forest restitution and specifically the possibility of generating money from the forests thereafter is of considerable

² Actually, this history is somewhat more complicated. Bulgaria's 1904 forest law had claimed as state property "high mountain summer pastures" (*yailats*), which were predominantly located in the central Rhodope, at least some of which were considered by mountain residents as their private property, and which included most if not all of the forests in this region – what might be called the first forest nationalization of modern Bulgaria. Without their forests and with the declining feasibility of seasonally transhumant pastoralism in which the flocks of sheep and goats along with their shepherds spent the winters in the Aegean lowlands and the summers in the Rhodope Mountains, large numbers of people began leaving the region in search of economic opportunities elsewhere. The 1911 Special Law for the Sale of Several State Forests in the Stanimashka Okoliya, in what might be called the first forest privatization by the modern Bulgarian state, was in large part an effort to stop the out flow of population from this strategically important border region (i.e., with the Ottoman Empire) by providing them with a source of livelihood (Arnaudov 1998: 42-45; Karaivanov 1990).

³ See Cellarius (1999) for a detailed discussion of economic strategies and natural resource use in one central Rhodope village.

⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in any detail the way in which the restitution and accompanying forest law affects the local residents' access to and use of non-timber forest products such as mushrooms, medicinal plants, and forest fruits as well as pastures, in part because the laws have not yet been implemented to the extent that their effects are observable. I will note, however, that some forest owners are discussing and have included in draft bylaws for their future forestry cooperatives clauses about the exploitation of such products, some of which are quite lucrative with markets in Western Europe. Elsewhere I discuss the possible areas of conflict between this new legislation and the "traditional" uses of these resources (Cellarius 2001).

interest to local residents and other claimants to forests in this region – as it was in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the last decade, Bulgaria's economy has been plagued by increasing unemployment, rapid inflation, and declining agricultural and industrial production. Pensions and the wages of those who have jobs have not kept up with the inflation, while prices seem to keep going up. Living standards for many have declined, and for some is a struggle even to buy bread and pay utility bills. Rural areas such as the Rhodope have been particularly hard hit by the liquidation of socialist-era cooperative farms and closure of many small socialist-era assembly workshops that formerly provided year-round employment to rural residents. As conditions in Bulgaria continue to be difficult, fewer Bulgarian tourists also mean less tourist business in the central Rhodope town of Chepelare, even when compared to the early to mid-1990s. Many people – including myself – keep thinking that economic conditions cannot get any worse, but they seem to continue to decline. The 1999 potato crop was a good one, for example, but prices for the potatoes produced were low due to the ample domestic supply that year, decreased consumption because of the economic crisis, and reportedly cheap imports from Turkey. During my spring 2000 fieldwork, many villagers were cooking potatoes to feed to their livestock, rather than selling them “for pennies.” Then drought and hot weather in summer 2000 reduced the potato crop to one-third to one-half its normal size, hay harvests were smaller than normal, and there were virtually no mushrooms and medicinal plants for villagers to collect and then sell. All this indicates that the winter of 2000-01 is likely to be another difficult one for these rural residents.

It is within this larger economic context that the forest restitution and interest in forests as a potential economic resource should be viewed. This paper is organized into five further sections in presenting preliminary observations about Bulgaria's forest restitution. The first section provides some general background on Bulgaria's forests and the forest restitution. The second section considers the economic feasibility of forest management by individual owners given the emergent ownership structure and government regulations about the way in which the forests are to be managed. The third section describes the two different forms in which the forests are being restored along with the pre-socialist history of forestry cooperatives. The fourth reports on the nature and extent of planning for future management of the forests. And the fifth and final section poses some questions for further investigation as my research project continues.

Some background about Bulgarian forests and the forest restitution

About one-third of Bulgaria's territory is covered with forests – a figure that has remained relatively stable over the last several decades because aggressive reforestation has balanced substantial exploitation during state socialist times.⁵ Prior to forest nationalization in the late 1940s, about 16-17 percent of these forests were controlled by private individuals, 2 percent by legal persons such as schools and churches, 26-27 percent by the state, and 55 percent by municipalities (Stoyanov 1968:230; Tatyana Andreeva, National Forestry Board, personal communication, 11 January 2000).⁶ Although there were a few large forest holdings in the pre-socialist period, most were relatively modest in size. According to data from 1941-42, for example, 153 private forest owners had forest holdings larger than 500 decares, and more than 470,000 owners had holdings of less than 500 decares (Stoyanov 1968:230).⁷

The National Assembly authorized Bulgaria's forest restitution in late 1997. The forest restitution law (*Zakon za vuzstanovyavane na sobstvenostta vurhu gorite i zemite ot gorskiya fond*, *Durzhaven vestnik*, no. 110, 25 November 1997) – like the agricultural land restitution law before it – basically returns forests and other lands within the “forest fund” (hereafter simply forests) to the pre-nationalization owners, their heirs, or their rightful successors, be they private individuals, legal persons, or in some cases municipalities. The law is being implemented by the same municipal land commissions that carried out the agricultural land restitution, with the addition to the staff of a professional forester. To provide a sense of the magnitude of the restitution process, private individuals have filed more than 250,000 documented claims for about 3 million decares of forests (National Statistical Institute 2000).⁸

⁵ There has been, however, a change in forest structure that has implications for non-timber uses of the forests, such as for pasturing livestock (see Scott 1998: Chapter 1 on scientific forestry).

⁶ Two figures are shown when the sources cited do not agree. Data presented here on municipal forests include forests allocated to municipalities “for use” as well as forests owned outright by them. According to the forest restitution law, forests may be restored to those claimants with full-fledged ownership documents. Some municipalities had purchased or otherwise gained clear title to the forests and thus have such documents. Other municipalities had been granted forests by the Bulgarian state “for use” and consequently lack them. They thus have either not filed claims for such forests or have had their claims refused. (Some municipalities had both kinds.) Bulgaria's parliament is reportedly considering legislation that would again grant municipalities forests for use.

Claims by legal persons are relatively limited in number, although they include a few large claims such as one by the Rila Monastery for several thousand decares of forests in Rila National Park, and the monastery is now the largest single non-state forest owner in the country. In the case of some smaller claimants, such as a school in the central Rhodope town of Chepelare, these legal persons simply owned shares in forestry cooperatives before nationalization, for which they received dividends. The school's current director has been active in claiming the school's forests for the school in anticipation that this will be the case in the future.

⁷ Land area in Bulgaria is typically measured in decares. One decare is equal to one-tenth of a hectare or 1,000 square meters.

⁸ Claims could also be filed for forests for which documentation was not available or incomplete. Once the documented claims have been processed, remaining forests that were known to be private before nationalization will be used in considering these undocumented claims. Such claims are being reviewed by regional committees, rather than by the municipal land commissions that are processing the other claims.

This works out to an average of slightly more than 10 decares per claim. As with the proportion of forests in a given region that are private, there is regional variation in claim size, and claims in the central Rhodope are on average larger than the national average.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the “average” forest owner in Bulgaria will own 10 decares of forests after the restitution. In most cases, the former owner has died in the 50 years since nationalization and thus the restored forests will need to be divided among a number of heirs. For example, one man explained that his paternal grandfather had owned 14 decares of forests. This grandfather had ten direct heirs (families typically had more children in the past), such that 1.4 decares fell to his father, and then his father had five direct heirs, such that his share would be less than 300 square meters. In this case, the heirs had decided that claiming these forests was more trouble than they would be worth and had not filed a claim. Nonetheless, this case is not unique in terms of the extent to which the forest claims must be divided among a number of heirs. One day a village acquaintance and I figured out that he might eventually receive one twenty-fourth or about 4 percent of the forests that had earlier belonged to his grandfather and the grandfather’s brother. In other cases, of course, the owner is still alive or there are fewer heirs than in the more extreme examples presented here. Yet, this does not negate the fact that such divisions among one or more generations of heirs will be of potential importance for future management of the forests in terms of decreasing the size of the holdings owned by a given individual and increasing the number of owners – topics that will be returned to in later sections of this paper.

Meanwhile, the restitution process continues. Although the government missed the 30 June 2000 deadline for approving the documented forest restitution claims, many restitution plans had been approved and the ownership documents had been distributed to many forest owners by the end of 2000 (Cholakova 2000; Ministerstvo na zemedeliето i gorite 2000). Once the owners receive their documents and the borders of the forests are marked on the ground to the extent possible, the forests must be managed according to Bulgaria’s new law on forests (*Zakon za gorite, Durzhaven vestnik*, no. 125, 29 December 1997), which was passed in 1997 alongside the restitution law. Under its provisions, owners are each required to have a management plan for their forests, which must be approved by the government forestry administration, and a licensed forester must be involved in implementing the plan. The plan will specify how much timber can be harvested in a ten-year period, and it is not necessarily legal to clear-cut all the forests immediately in order to turn a quick profit.

Is individual private forest management feasible?

Given the ownership structure that is likely to emerge following the restitution, in terms of holding size, it is useful to consider briefly the compatibility of the rules for forest management with the size of the restored forest holdings and specifically whether it is economically feasible for an individual owner of a small area of forest to manage such property for commercial timber production according to the requirements laid out in Bulgaria's new law on forests – for a ten-year management plan, reforestation after cutting, employment of a licensed forester, protection of the forests, and so on.⁹ According to many forest sector observers I spoke with, commercial exploitation by individual owners of less than 500 to 1000 decares of forests in accordance with the law is not economically feasible. And the majority of the holdings will be smaller, at least at the outset. As someone pointed out to me, with 10 decares of agricultural land one can potentially survive as a subsistence farmer by raising potatoes, grain, vegetables, livestock, hay and so on, while the potential annual income from 10 decares of forest – the average size of forest claims – is rather limited.¹⁰ According to my rough estimates, for example, at the average rate of forest growth in the Rhodope, a management plan might allow cutting about 2 or 3 cubic meters of wood a year from these 10 decares – a few trees at most – which are worth perhaps 120 to 300 DM for the raw lumber at current prices. From this would need to be subtracted the costs for preparing a management plan, hiring a forester, protecting the forests from fire and theft, cutting the trees, transporting the timber, and so on. For this reason, most forest professionals I talked to, along with some owners, suggest that cooperatives or other joint management forms be established to manage the forests – as was the case for many forests in the central Rhodope in the decades prior to nationalization.

Restitution of joint property – a legacy of pre-nationalization forestry cooperatives

In Bulgaria's forest restitution, forests are being restored in two different forms. The first form is as parcels with real borders that can be mapped and marked on the ground – preferably at the same location as the pre-nationalization holdings. This is the kind of property with which we are most familiar, it is the ideal according to the restitution law, and it is also the way in which agricultural land was returned in this region. The owners could, for

⁹ While not the only use or value of the forests, commercial timber exploitation is the one upon which the forest law and most forest claimants place the most emphasis.

¹⁰ This relates to the characteristics or nature of forests as a type of property that is treated as an economic resource. Perhaps most important, the time horizon for forestry is considerably different from that for agriculture. A farmer can harvest a crop or even two each year from a given parcel of agricultural land, while trees might typically be harvested after 50 or even 100 years. Meanwhile ongoing investment is required for protection and care of these forests over this period.

example, go have a picnic there and know that this particular piece of forest was theirs and theirs alone, perhaps identified by a unique rock or spring or other landmark that they remember from visits there before nationalization. The second form in which forests are being restored is as shared or joint ownership – *susobstvenost* in Bulgarian – of a particular forest massif or *revir*. This is not common property in which each person holds an equal share or one determined through some sort of community rules. Rather the future owners will hold different proportions of a forested area or massif ranging in size from a few hundred to a few thousand decares with their particular proportion of ownership depending on the size of their pre-nationalization forest holding. Here the private picnic mentioned above would not work because the borders between and locations of individual parcels are not known.

This second form of property ownership is particularly prominent in the Rhodope where many of the forests were incorporated into forestry cooperatives starting in the 1920s. Turning for a few moments to the past, legislation passed in 1923 mandated that forest holdings below a certain size be managed cooperatively – essentially to improve the economic efficiency of their exploitation – but such forestry cooperatives were most well developed around Chepelare (Karaivanov 1990; Stefanov 1983). With their establishment, ownership of forests changed from decares of forest to shares in a pre-socialist forestry cooperative for which owners received dividends, and the location of the borders between the holdings were largely forgotten with the passage of time. Such cooperatives and the associated dividends played an important role in the regional economy in the 1920s to 1940s at both the community and individual levels. Resources from these forestry cooperatives supported infrastructure development in the region before nationalization, helping to pay for and in some cases even directly providing electricity, roads, water systems, schools, and so on. Similar examples are found at the individual level. One woman explained that her grandmother was widowed at the age of twenty-eight years but was able to raise and educate three children on the dividends from forest shares she inherited from her husband ‘without working a day in her life.’ Consequently, forestry cooperatives have a positive image for many central Rhodope residents. This, along with the problems with managing forests individually, is reflected in the comments heard this summer about forestry cooperatives such as ‘there is no other option [for managing the forests],’ ‘coops are the most sensible form of management,’ and ‘without the coops, there would be no forests.’

In the years prior to nationalization, one could buy or sell shares in a forestry cooperative as a form of investment without necessarily needing to take an active role in their management. As a result of such sales, it was not uncommon for people to have shares in several different cooperatives, sometimes even in different settlements. In one case, for

example, one woman's father-in-law had owned more than 1,000 decares in twelve named locations, including ten in the town and two in surrounding (and in this case Muslim) villages, while her mother-in-law owned about 270 decares in three places – two in the central Rhodope town of Chepelare and one in a different nearby village. Her own grandfather, meanwhile, ended up with relatively fewer forests at the time of nationalization because he had sold some of them to finance the education of his sons abroad, also illustrating the use of forests as a form of investment. My conversations with forest claimants and other data I have gathered on the history of forest ownership suggest that there was an active market for forests in the Rhodope in the first half of the century. One implication of these sales is that some owners did not necessarily live in or have ties to the communities in which they owned forests and thus will not necessarily do so in the future – a factor that may influence the relations between owners of forests in a given community (particularly between the 'locals' and the 'outsiders') in the post-restitution period.

But returning to the issue of joint property and the ongoing forest restitution: Since the boundaries have been forgotten in the intervening years, it is not possible to restore these forests as separate parcels with real borders and thus such formerly cooperative forests will be returned as joint property instead.¹¹ Ownership is not being restored in the cooperatives, but rather in a particular forest massif, in a particular named chunk of forest. In other words, people are not receiving shares in an economic organization, e.g., a coop, but rather shares in a piece of real estate. Following the restitution, all the co-owners of such forest massifs will have to meet together and decide how to manage their shared property. In principle, it might be possible for them to decide to divide up the massif among themselves, into individual parcels with real borders, but this would require arranging and paying for a valuation of the forest massif and then agreeing upon a method for dividing it into individual pieces. And after this, would arise the previously discussed question of the economic feasibility of individual management. No one I talked to saw this as a reasonable option. Even so, deciding how to manage the forests jointly is also likely to be easier said than done in terms of, first, gathering in one place all the co-owners or their representatives of a particular forest massif, and,

¹¹ Newer documents are preferred over older documents in documenting forest claims, since holdings could have been sold or divided in the intervening years. These newer documents most commonly took the form of tax registers or various cooperative documents, which indicate holding size (or number of shares) and general location, but not the specific borders of parcels. And at least some of the deeds from earlier periods described the location of forest parcels in terms of social relations – that is, the owners of neighboring parcels – rather than in terms of identifiable geographic features.

second, getting them to agree on a forest management organization and a group of people to run the organization.¹²

The issue of the number of heirs is relevant here, as is the rural-urban migration that occurred during the socialist period. With the passage of time and generations, this can mean organizing a meeting of many more people than belonged to the original cooperative. For example, a cooperative that once had 300 owners, most of them located in or near the settlement, might now have ten times that number of forest owners, some of them scattered in other parts of Bulgaria or even further a field as a result of the substantial rural-urban migration that took place in Bulgaria during the socialist period. In another, less dramatic case, there are an estimated 250 heirs for the forests once comprising a cooperative that once had 75 members – in other words, more than three times the number of original owners. One forest owner commented that perhaps more than one cooperative would have to be created in a particular community for the simple fact of finding a room large enough to accommodate a meeting of all the people who owned forests there.

Planning for future forest management

This brings me to the extent of activity in planning for future forest management, including consideration of the form this management might take. A number of people I talked with did not seem to have thought much about the restitution and what they would do with their forests thereafter. Potential factors contributing to this are experience with the lengthy time required for the agricultural land restitution, a lack of experience with forestry, and perhaps preoccupation with surviving the more immediate economic situation in Bulgaria. Typical of this attitude is a man I spoke with in September 2000. This retired professional musician lives in a large Bulgarian town, but is from Chepelare and spent part of the summer in his villa there. He is one of five heirs to 100 decares of forests, all of which took the form of shares in several forestry cooperatives in Chepelare. Indeed, the first time I asked about the forest restitution, he said that he did not own any forests, only shares. He had submitted a claim for these forest shares on behalf of the heirs and was waiting to receive the ownership documents. Many others similarly reported that they were still waiting for their documents and thus were not yet forest owners. Some have no idea what they will do with small forest holdings. For example, one young woman in the capital city reported that she and her brother

¹² Unlike some other regions of Bulgaria, postsocialist agricultural coops are relatively rare in the municipality where my fieldwork has thus far concentrated, with only one such coop. One obvious explanation for this is the fragmented nature of the agricultural land holdings and also the steepness of the mountain terrain. But there may be other factors involved as well. In the village where I have spent the most time, desire on the part of some for such a coop is balanced by opposition from others, and one has not been formed.

would get about a decade of forests near the Balkan Mountains via their father. They would have to pay taxes on it, she said, and then the gypsies would steal the trees, and in the end they would be fined because they had not managed the forests according to the required plan (never mind that the gypsies had been doing the cutting outside of the plan, not them). Under the circumstances it seemed that she was asking herself what the point of owning such forests was. Finally, some people have become disillusioned with the passage of time and failure to meet deadlines in the restitution process. They are not sure that the restitution will happen, at least not any time soon.

But in all the three Rhodope communities I visited during summer 2000, I also found some people – mostly larger forest owners, community leaders, or both – who had started to organize themselves to talk about how the forests would be managed after the restitution. These individuals were working on the idea that there would be some sort of joint management of the forests. In the town of Chepelare, which had eighteen forestry cooperatives prior to nationalization, several de facto forestry cooperatives were formed in early 1999 with the goal of trying to speed up the restitution.¹³ The term de facto signals that these cooperatives are not legally registered because the forests are not yet returned and thus there is no property with which to officially constitute them. As well, not everyone anticipated to have forests in the particular massifs has joined the de facto cooperatives. The presidents of some of these de facto cooperatives saw this as a one-time effort that failed to generate the desired forward movement on the part of the government, while others continue to sign up new members, indicating that their presidents see the coops as continuing organizations.

In two villages in the municipality, I also talked to people involved in such discussions about how the future forest management might be organized. In the first community in the country where some people received forest ownership documents, an initiative committee has been formed by the mayor, who is also one of the largest forest claimants in the village, to start organizing for the future forest management, and it has commissioned a lawyer to prepare draft bylaws for three potential management structures specified under Bulgarian laws – a cooperative (*kooperatsiya*), a limited liability association (*druzhestvo s ograničena otgovornost*), and a joint stock company (*aktsionerno druzhestvo*). In the other village, the organization efforts are at an earlier stage, although they were in touch with and observing developments in the first village mentioned. (This village is in the somewhat peculiar

¹³ Rather than being arbitrary units, these new cooperatives essentially recreate spatially the pre-nationalization forestry cooperatives in terms of which rivers or named forest massifs are included in which cooperatives, and they carry the names of the earlier coops – although there are sometimes discussions of consolidating them to create larger units.

situation that the largest owners of forest in the village territory were not actually from the village, and this may affect the speed with which the planning is being organized.)

Several issues are being considered in these planning discussions. A prominent one is the varying requirements for start-up capital of up to 50,000 DM, depending on the organizational form selected, and whether it would be possible to raise such cash from among the owners. Another issue of particular concern is the voting structure associated with such organizations, and specifically whether voting should be based on the number of members (i.e., one member, one vote, as was the case with the earlier coops) or on the number of shares (i.e., one share, one vote). A further question is the number of cooperatives, associations, or companies to create in a given village or town – just one for the community, or several with each cooperative et al. being comprised of one or more forest massifs (perhaps following the spatial organization of the pre-socialist coops). Some people thought it would be easier and less problematic to start with several smaller organizations in terms of ease of gathering all the forest owners for the initial meeting to establish the organization, ease of decision making, and avoidance of the expenses of paying officials; while others saw a single larger organization as having advantages in terms of economies of scale. Another concern is that they not sell raw timber, but rather processed lumber at a minimum and preferably finished products such as furniture. This is seen as providing higher dividends to the forest owners as well as providing much needed employment opportunities for residents of these rural communities with high unemployment. Other concerns included keeping the leadership of the management structures in clean hands and keeping so-called Mafiosi or other rich outsiders unconcerned about community or environmental sustainability from gaining ownership of the forests. This level of concern about the details of the forest management structures serves as reminder that in Bulgarian villages and small towns there are people with the education, experience, or both that will be of use in organizing the future forest management.

In place of a conclusion

This paper has described some issues associated with Bulgaria's forest restitution as it now stands, focusing on the emerging structure of forest ownership, the economic feasibility of individual forest management, and the extent of current planning for future forest management. My research indicates that local forest owners in the central Rhodope see cooperatives or other forms of joint management as having clear advantages, although the way in which these joint management forms will emerge is less clear. In place of a conclusion, I will briefly mention three issues that will receive my particular attention as my research continues.

First, the most obvious issue, once the forests are restored, will be how the owners will organize the management of these forests. Will there be a return of forestry cooperatives in which each member has a vote, or will some form of joint stock company in which voting is based on the number of shares be formed? Will larger or smaller organizations be preferred, and why? Who will be elected as leaders of these organizations and will previous experience in management be seen as an asset or a liability? That is, will distrust of people involved in management and then liquidation of the socialist-era cooperative farms lead to a general desire to not have these individuals in leadership positions in the new forest management organizations? Will the opinions and actions of the forests owners differ between people living in or near the communities where their forests are located, and those living in distant cities or towns or lacking ties to the communities? And finally, what kind of problems and successes will these organizations have further down the line?

The second question concerns regional variation: As described in the introduction, the history of forest ownership and management in the central Rhodope is unique in terms of the extent to which forests were managed by cooperatives prior to nationalization (and consequently the extent to which they will be returned as *susobstvenost*), the high percentage of private forests, and the degree of reliance on forests for local livelihoods. Thus, I am interested in exploring how the restitution pans out elsewhere in Bulgaria, that is, the form that post-restitution forest management takes, and how the situation is similar to or different from that in the central Rhodope.

A third question is the relationship between the commercial timber production orientation of the restitution and associated forest management law, on the one hand, and the other uses that local residents make of the forests as places for collecting firewood, mushrooms, herbs and wild fruits, for pasturing animals and hunting game, on the other hand. The restitution will almost certainly result in changing access regimes to these resources, although exactly how they will change and the way in which local residents adapt or react remains to be seen.

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