

[CANDID CAMERA / DOC] Forest Traffickers

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On the black market, the right of lease of one hectare of woodland is sold for up to 30,000 euros. The sellers are racketeers who between 2008 and 2012 succeeded in concluding leases with Moldsilva. RISE Moldova infiltrated among the forest traffickers and present the scheme used by them to get millions of lei from transactions with state property. One of them, Moldsilva employee, through an intermediary proposed to us 4 ha of woodland for 75,000 euros.



In August 2012, the Moldsilva Agency that is responsible for managing the forest stock announced suspending the leasing of woods for an undetermined period. This happened after a parliamentary commission had found severe infringements of the Forest Code. Meanwhile, some of the contracts have been terminated and most of them for non-payment of the lease fee. Nonetheless, over 6,700 ha of woodlands remain in the management of the lessees for other 20 to 40 years in exchange for an annual fee of 4,025 lei per hectare.

Thus, the apparently noble intention of the authorities to stop the forest disorder led to the appearance of a new business – **sale of the leasehold right**.

The scheme is rather simple. With Moldsilva's agreement, the lessee assigns the leasehold right to a company founded by him that he later puts up for sale. The change in the company's founder is the only indicator that the right of woodland leasehold had been trafficked. This happens provided that the law forbids "the sublease, redemption and assignment of the right of possession of woodlands."

The racketeer does not want any money for the ceding of the company as it is in fact a wall behind which the transaction takes place. The bulk of the business is the forest for which the

trafficker asks tens of thousands of euros. He prefers cash. For bank transfers, the trafficker proposes concluding fake agreements to justify the transaction.



The meeting with the businessman Anatolie Babără

Forest for sale near the president's residence

3 June 2015. At a terrace in the center of Chişinău we meet with a man beyond 50 who has put up for sale 4 ha of woodland. To the meeting with the potential buyers, two reporters undercover, he came with the entire set of documents to prove that in an unhindered manner he can do the transaction with the woodland leased across the president's residence in Condiţa.

The seller's name is Anatolie Babără and he is retired police officer with farming businesses. To find clients, he published an announcement: "4 ha of land for sale. Flat land with connection to international road, convenient location. For a recreation area." He accepted to meet with us without thinking much.

With sunglasses raised up on his head and dressed in a summer shirt unbuttoned wide open, allowing a golden necklace be seen hanging around his neck, the former police officer presents his goods like in a front shop, sure that "his forest" is the best in the area.

Anatolie Babără: "You have enough small glades there where it is not necessary to cut down anything and you can do whatever you want, The flattest land, with no deeps, is mine. European road ... (Chişinău-Leuşeni –editor's note)"

The man leased in the 4 ha of woodlands for 30 years in the summer of 2009. Five years later, he assigns the leasehold right to BP Green SRL, a company founded also by him.

He requests 20.000 euros for assigning his leasehold right. After the negotiations, the former police officer is willing to go down to 16,000 euros if we stroke a bargain on the same day. He says he wants to invest the money "from the forest" into his farming business that he had started in the north of the country. We can pay him in cash or by bank transfer. In case of a transfer, the seller suggests us concluding a fake agreement with one of his companies.

100,000 euros for 10 ha

Several hours later, on the same terrace, we negotiate another transaction. The seller is the businessman Nicolae Bulat. He laconically describes his “product” on an ad website: “Ltd, 10 ha of woodland for recreation in the region of Dumbrava.” He is as discreet at the meeting with the potential buyers. Suspicious and slightly nervous, at the beginning he avoids giving us too many details. He wants 100,000 for the 10 ha. *“I’m selling the company that owns the forest. Everyone does so. What do you want to negotiate? Believe me, it’s not so much. I know the prices on the market,”* the racketeer says.

It is related to the price and we hardly manage to get a 10% discount. *“90,000, I can go down only that much. No discount if you pay in installments. Like at the bank. The object is important, 5 minute drive away from Chişinău,”* Bulat negotiates.

We get into a Mercedes Sedan with a leather seat cover and we head for the Durleşti forest. The proposed land plot is located right under Chişinău, on the Balcani Road. He stops the car on a recently asphalted road in the forest that leads to an imposing construction, recently erected. *“You can do anything if you have money. They’ve raised this construction right on the hilltop. Concrete foundation. It’s connected to water and sewerage pipes. You have anything you want here. The sewerage crosses my forest,”* the seller claims. We go out of the car and take on an adjacent road that strikes into the forest. We walk for about 200 meters until we arrive in the middle of a glade. *“It’s 10 ha. Can you imagine how much this is?”* ironically asks the forest trafficker.

Same person, different offer

We make it clear that we want a smaller land plot and we receive another offer. *“I have other 4 ha elsewhere, on a different company. If you are interested...,”* the seller proposes. We get into the car again and head towards the village of Hruşova, located at about 10 km distance away from the capital city. The proposed forest rises on a hill at the village outskirts, right next to the Sky Land Pension, located on a leased woodland plot.

Nicolae Bulat owns the two woodland plots through two companies. Tirvesttrans SRL manages three woodland plots with the total area of over 4 ha near the village of Hruşova while the 10 ha from Durleşti are leased in by Megavox SRL.

His brother, Anatolie Bulat, also manages 2 ha of woodland near the village of Coloniţa. The racketeer signed the lease agreement with Moldsilva in 2008, right on the New Year’s Day, for a 30 year term.

Several weeks later, an ad for the sale of the 10 ha of woodland in Durleşti appeared on the website of a real estate agency. This time, the price went down to 85,000 euros, with the possibility of a barter or even credit-based purchase.

60,000 euros for 3 ha

9 September 2015. We are waiting for another seller next to an office building from Veronica Micle Street in Chişinău. He appears at the wheel of a silver field Toyota, remotely opens an iron gate, and urges us to follow him. His name is Alexandru and he is the young man with whom we spoke on the phone about the 3 ha of woodland put up for sale. Upstairs we are met by a man beyond 50, dressed casual. *“He is Alexandru Jr., I’m older,”* he starts jokingly and invites us to his office.

The man's name is Alexandru Tatarciuc and he is the father of Alexandru Jr. In August 2009, Alexandru Sr. signed with Moldsilva a lease agreement for 3 ha of land in the forest near the village of Sociteni, district of Ialoveni, for 30 years. Five years later, Alexandru Tatarciuc founds the company Tadcotur SRL and assigns to it the management of the forest for the following 25 years. **Details [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)**

With a strong Russian accent, he recounts how he wanted to build a pension there: *"I thought my children would bring me grandchildren (he looks at his son and smiles – editor's note). I wanted to get out of the city. To go there and each of us to have a little house."* Now he is ceding his leasehold right on the forest for 60,000 euros, a price that also includes the company procurement costs and the notary's fees.

Land 'inspection'

The day following the meeting with Tatarciuc we went with Alexandru Jr. to see the 3 ha of woodland. We leave the city via the Hâncești Road, cross the Ialoveni junction and, a few minutes later, turn to the right on a stone road.

We drive by an experimental plot of the Agrarian University of Moldova and climb a hill, alongside the forest boundary. We can see through the trees a number of constructions surrounded by iron fences with tall gates. Angry dogs growl from behind them.

Oaks mainly grow in the forest proposed by Tatarciuc. Overgrown with shrubs and weeds, the plot has numerous broad little glades with holes full of ashes and randomly thrown wastes. Here and there one can notice traces of tires and strange humps. However, Alexandru Jr. assures us that the forest is in the condition in which he got it from Moldsilva.

The forest businessman

After we finish the 'inspection,' we call Andrei Țîntari, a businessman who was among the first to build a house in the same forest. We had his number from Tatarciuc Sr. who recommended Țîntari as consultant for forest constructions. *"Țîntari is among the first neighbors who made a construction in the forest. He built a house and a sauna. It is not built as a temporary construction but decently,"* Tatarciuc recounts.



Initially, Țîntari avoids a meeting but finally accepts, for the following day, 11 September, at the premises of his company Algu Construct SRL. Specialized in building wooden houses, the company has its premises in the building of the Fashion House of Chișinău. He is late and we meet with him at a terrace one hour later. He comes to the meeting driving a field car. He steps hard, no hurry, then sits down and lights up a cigarette, displaying his coarse hands, accessorized with two rings, a watch and a bracelet.

After we tell him that we want to buy the forest leased by Tatarciuc and that we intend building a number of constructions there, the racketeer starts listing the drawbacks of the land and proposes to us a plot of 2 ha that his neighbor is selling. Asked how long obtaining a construction authorization lasts, he answers short: *“It depends on how you are doing financially. It lasts but this is it. We all have been through this. But it gets solved.”*

He suggests we speak first with a designer and recommends Vlad Șeremet: *“You must meet with the designer because he sees such situations every day. About 12 institutions must put their signatures. I don’t think there would be problems at the district level. Then only the Ecology and Moldsilva are left.”*

The designer, with relations at Moldsilva

On the same day we contact Vlad Șeremet, director of the design company Arhgrup SV. We tell him that we are calling at the recommendation of Andrei Țîntari and he accepts to meet with us without hesitation on the following day, 12 September.

Arhgrup SV has its premises in a student dormitory of the Technical University of Moldova (TUA) on the Studenților Street. We climb up the dark stairs of the dormitory until we reach a door supervised by a video camera. After we enter, Șeremet cautiously locks the door after us.

“Ninety percent of the forest constructions were designed by me,” Șeremet boasts, showing us on his computer and smartphone a number of wooden villas and restaurants that he had designed for forest lessees. Șeremet however reminds us that our intention of having a house in the forest, in an ecologic area, is worth all the money: *“In the forest – nature, ecology. While in the city, a land plot near the University (TAU – editor’s note), where we also got a plot after having taught at the university for many years, is sold for 100-120 thousand euros.”*

We make it clear that we have not decided yet what woodland we want to buy and the designer offers to help. At a point, he even proposes to sell to us the 2 ha woodland leased by him in Durlăști, not far away from the forester’s house. He asks 30,000 euros for a hectare.

For other offers, he gives us telephone numbers, posing as real estate agent. He also calls a Moldsilva employee and addresses him in a friendly manner: *“Igor, here is such a matter. I have people in my office now who want from 2 to 5 ha. Can you prepare some land plots? They want it to be closer to the city, to build a small restaurant and some houses. Do you understand what they are looking for? It should be a picturesque, interesting area. Ok, bye!* After the phone conversation ends, Șeremet explains: *“He is a chief from Moldsilva, engineer, many things depend on him, trees to be removed, controls.”*

On the following day we go again to Șeremet. He waits for us with four offers that he tells us he has from “Igor.” One of them is a plot in a birch forest on the Chișinău-Leușeni Road, near the village of Nimoreni. The architect tells us that the Moldsilva engineer is in charge of selling this plot. *“There are people who go to Moldsilva and say that they give up the respective plot. They keep it and, if someone comes up, they sell it,”* Șeremet explains how certain staff of Moldsilva come to intermediate forest transactions.

We pretend we like the birch forest and we ask about the price. In our presence, Șeremet calls again the forest engineer and speaks with him in a codified manner: *“Hello, Igor! Look, the wood (the forest – editor’s note), the birch one, for how much do you sell it? 75 (thousand euros – editor’s note). How many cubes (hectares – editor’s note) are there? 4. Ok, thanks Igor!”*

Later on, we get “Igor”’s number from Şeremet. The same number also appears in an agreement for the lease of a woodland plot signed by Igor Mocanu, presented on Moldsilva’s website as forest lease engineer. We contact Mocanu on 18 September 2015.

RISE: *Good afternoon Mr. Igor?*

Igor Mocanu: Yes, yes.

RISE: *I have your number from Mr. Şeremet. I’m calling you in connection with the hectares from Nimoreni. Can we meet to discuss the details?*

I.M: We are now leaving the city but I’ll call you when I’m back and we can make an arrangement. I don’t know exactly when I’m back. It will be 5 or 6. If it doesn’t work out today, I’ll call you tomorrow.

On the following day, however, Moldsilva’s engineer never answered our calls or text messages. A few days later, contacted from another phone number, Mocanu made it clear that he had changed his mind regarding the Nimoreni land plot. *“I’m abroad ... There, my brother told me that he wouldn’t do anything anymore and he would be the one to develop it...”* The architect Şeremet tells us the same thing: *“The issue related to the ... respective object, he (Igor – editor’s note) is gone abroad on purpose because someone wants to help him financially, I don’t know how exactly, either he will become partner in the company that has (the right to lease – editor’s note) there and they will be the ones to build.”*

The confrontation at Moldsilva

26 October 2015. We got to Moldsilva for an interview. When we introduce ourselves as journalists, Igor Mocanu tells us that he knows Şeremet but denies having helped him identify the four woodland offers.

Igor Mocanu: *I know Şeremet. He is an ordinary lessee. He didn’t ask and I didn’t identify anything. Whoever Mr. Şeremet called, it’s his business (...) If you believe me, two or three people may call me every day and ask me different things about the lease. I can’t remember everyone, who asked me what.*

At the same time, the Moldsilva’s engineer remembers the phone discussions with the undercover journalists but claims having understood something else. At the same time, when asked if his brother had a land plot in Nimoreni, he answers: *“Yes! My cousin.”*

Igor Mocanu: *I know you called me earlier. How could I ask money for the hectares if the hectares are not mine! What did you ask me? I understood it was about something completely different. A land plot, near Nimoreni, 6 ares, with one house. This is what I understood. I haven’t spoken with anyone about four hectares. In general, I wouldn’t speak on the phone about something like this.*

27 October 2015. Igor Mocanu contacts Vlad Şeremet and invites him to his office at Moldsilva for a talk, in the presence of the RISE journalists. In the institution’s hall, without realizing we were journalists, the architect asks us: *“Have you found what you needed?”*

A few minutes later, in Mocanu’s office, Şeremet admits having called the Moldsilva engineer to get information about the lessees who wanted to terminate the contract: *“Being (the forest – editor’s note) on the company, you could buy the company. This is what we talked about, Mr. Igor!”* Later, the architect denied having obtained the four offers he had presented to us from the Moldsilva engineer and that he had given us Mocanu’s number by mistake.

Vlad Șeremet: *“We are not talking now about this Igor. If I open my phone contacts – “Igor forest” there are many of them. If I gave you his number (and looks at the engineer – editor’s note), then it was a mechanical mistake. I’m sorry.”* He, however, refused to show us under what name Igor Mocanu appeared in his telephone.

The story of the 4 ha of birch

The 4 ha woodland plot in Nimoreni was leased in 2008 by Ecoradix Grup SRL for 30 years. The contract was signed by Valentin Butnaru, the company’s manager and only founder (**Details, [HERE](#)**). One year later, he files a request with Moldsilva and requests that the lease be assigned from his company to his individual name, arguing “the company was facing a financial-economic crisis.” The agency accepts the request and, in September 2009, the delivery-receipt act for the forest lease is signed.



Five years later, on 20 May 2014, Butnaru founds a new company, Eșantion SRL (**Details, [HERE](#)**). Exactly in 10 days, he signs a new additional agreement with Moldsilva and assigns his leasehold right already from his individual name to the company. In one month, the new founders of Eșantion SRL become the brothers Boris and Ion Stratan.

Igor Mocanu: *I know those from Eșantion. I know everyone. I don’t have a special relation with Stratan.*

We contacted Valentin Butnaru pretending we wanted to buy the forest. “I got rid of it (of the forest – editor’s note) two years ago. I ceded the company, gave it to another person, without any price without anything, I simply gave it away,” he told us.

Mocanu, Șeremet’s neighbor in Durlești

The Moldsilva engineer and the architect are neighbors in the Durlești forest. Mocanu has been leasing in a plot of 15 ares since 2011, while Șeremet, since 2009 has been managing the 2 ha he offered to give us for 60,000 euros. In the same zone, on an area of nearly 300 ha, over 70 persons, including civil servants and businesspeople, own woodland. However, in the land registration office, all the plots appear under the same registration number. The plots are located right near the forester’s house and the premises of the Durlești Forest Range.

Radu Grosu, Moldsilva's lawyer, also holds a plot of 15 ares. Both of them concluded the lease agreements on the same day – 22 November 2011.

Asked whether he was leasing in woodland from the institution he was working for, the Moldsilva lawyer initially denied it. Later, though, he admitted managing the 15 ares but noted that the plot appeared in fact on the name of a company. The land registration documents contradict him. The land still appears on his name.

The assignment – illegal

In the report of the Parliamentary Investigation Commission for Verifying the Management of the Forest Stock, the deputies underline that assigning of the leasehold right is expressly forbidden by law: “We also find additional agreements under which the individual who initially signed the lease agreement with the Agency assigns his rights and obligations to a legal entity. According to pt. 11 of the Government Decision 187, the sublease, redemption and assigning of the possession right on woodlands shall be forbidden.”

Ion Platon, Deputy General Director of Moldsilva, says that the assigning of the leasehold right between individuals and legal entities is not considered assignment but changing the organizational-legal form of the lessee.

At the end of September 2015, the Ministry of Environment announced its intention to make amendments to the Regulation on the Lease of the Forest Stock, approved in 2008 by Decision 187 because “the filth and lapse of some lessees could not be tolerated anymore.” Thus, point 11 will have the following content: “The holder of a lease right shall be forbidden to sublease woodland, redeem it or assign the leasehold right to other individuals or legal entities, regardless of their form of organization.” **Details, [HERE](#)**

Ion Platon: With the approval of the amendments to Decision 187 all of these things will disappear... It would be good for such situations to not appear, to make a contract clause by which to forbid any assignment. We observe all the rules set by Decision 187, to the extent possible.

BUSINESS CARDS

Anatolie BABĂRĂ, former police officer. [*Forest trafficker*] – He is the manager and only partner in the company BP Green SRL (**Details, [HERE](#)**). The company has its premises in an apartment of 223 sq m in Chişinău. Anatolie also manages the real estate company Aghena BP that has an office and a farmland plot in the village of Rediul-Mare, district of Donduseni. **Details, [HERE](#)**

The businessman is a former police officer with his domicile registered at 12 Calea Ieşilor Street, where the Buiucani Police Station is located.

Nicolae BULAT, businessman. [*Forest trafficker*] – is partner in the companies Megavox SRL and Tirvesttrans SRL, both beneficiaries of 14 ha of woodland leased in from Moldsilva.

In 2010, as representative of Trans Ager, Nicolae Bulat donated 39.5 thousand lei to the Democratic Party of Moldova for the election campaign related to the republican constitutional referendum of 5 September 2010. **Details, [HERE](#)**

Anatolie BULAT – together with his brother Nicolae Bulat controls the companies of international cargo transportation to Europe and CIS: Trans Ager SRL and Trans Ager Com SRL. **Details, [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)**

He is the only partner of the company Concord-Maxima SRL (**Details, [HERE](#)**). In 2014, the company obtained from the Energy Regulator a license for “supplying electric power at non-regulated tariffs” for a period of 25 years. **Details, [HERE](#)**

Ivan BULAT, another brother of Nicolae Bulat, is manager at Trans Ager Com SRL. In 2010, the Acting President Mihai Ghimpu awarded him the “Civic Merit” medal. **Details, [HERE](#)**

Alexandru TATARCIUC, businessman. [*Forest trafficker*] – The only partner at Tadecotur SRL, the company with the leasehold right over 3 ha of woodland. He controls 42.5% of the share capital of the company specialized in the sale of farming equipment WT Agroprofi SRL and a share of 50% (4.6 million lei) at Transicom SRL, specialized in the cargo transport, Alexandru Tatarciuc also appears as partner with a share of 46.5% (6 million lei) in the company Wetrade SRL, specialized in the grain trade. According to its 2012 financial report, Wetrade collected 212 million lei from sales. **Details, [HERE](#)**



(s) Alexandru Tatarciuc at a field meeting with the former minister of agriculture Vasile Bumacov (in the middle)

Andrei ȚÎNȚARI, businessman. [*intermediates the client-architect relation*] – Partner in the construction companies Bregotrans SRL and Algugrup SRL. Țîntari manages the company Algu Construct SRL, specialized in building wooden constructions. At the 2014 parliamentary elections he transferred 40 thousand lei as donation to the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova. **Details, [HERE](#)**

Vlad ȘEREMET, architect. [*Forest trafficker. Intermediates the client – Moldsilva relation*] – Holds 50% in the design company Arhgrup SV. **Details, [HERE](#)**

Igor MOCANU, engineer. [*Intermediates the forest trafficker – client relation*] – responsible for the lease of the forest stock within Moldsilva. Previously worked as engineer at the Ministry of Environment. Married to Ludmila Mocanu, internal auditor at the Main State Tax Inspectorate. **Details, [HERE](#)**

Nicolae CUȘCHEVICI, Olga CEAGLEI, Iurie SANDUȚA