



Dear readers, friends

This special issue contains selected articles from The Nature Conservation Journal CZ from the previous year, 2023, and is published in May. It marks 20 years since the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union. The year 2004 saw the largest enlargement of the EU with the accession of 10 new members. The Czech Republic celebrated its geopolitical return to its rightful place. This event brought significant benefits in various fields such as economy, freedom of movement, and the sharing of democratic and cultural values with developed European countries. While a few may hold a different opinion, let me present some reflections on these historical events from the perspective of nature and landscape conservation.

During this time period, thanks to high-quality mapping of nature habitats and monitoring of animal and plant species, we established the European Union's network of protected areas, Natura 2000. Currently, our database contains over 34,000,000 items, which is crucial not only for nature conservation but also for the effective environmental impact assessment of various development projects and land-use/territorial plans. We also strengthened the modern governmental institutional system of nature conservation, represented by the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic and national park administrations responsible for managing Specially Protected Areas of national or supranational importance.

Another positive benefit of our EU membership is connected to higher financial funds allocated to the management of our natural environment and landscape. Of course, the challenge lies in achieving higher ecological and economic efficiency, especially through more robust adaptive measures in our landscape, including the renaturation and revitalization of our larger rivers and their basins (catchment areas), as well as the more robust development of nature-based forestry (which covers more than 1/3 of the territory of the Czech Republic).

The partly surviving historical socialist land use of agriculture (with huge field blocs), climate change, and the long-term problematic EU agricultural policy, including the subsidy framework (approximately 31% of the total EU budget is allocated there), have led to lower biodiversity and ecological values in the landscape, as well as a reduction in potential productivity. The push for a more ecological level of agricultural policy is facing pressure from a significant portion of farmers. This pressure has also weakened the new European nature restoration law.

The global and European biodiversity strategy, among other objectives, aims to allocate 10% of state territories to strict nature protection and 30% to nature and landscape protection. Achieving these ambitious targets will not be easy for some countries due to varying ecological conditions. However, the Czech Republic possesses favourable conditions, and I believe we will be able to approach these goals.

We are living in difficult times, with Russia's aggression against Ukraine resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths and economic turmoil on both sides. This tragic conflict poses a threat not only to Ukraine but to all European countries. It also jeopardizes the implementation of the Green Deal policy. Russia heavily relies on the export of raw materials, including fossil fuels, and it is predictable that the goals of the Green Deal are not in its interests.

In the upcoming European subsidy strategy, there should be a greater emphasis on the defence of countries, education, science, transport, and other common infrastructure, as well as transboundary environmental phenomena such as climate change and biodiversity. Climate change poses significant risks to the functioning of landscapes and ecosystems, highlighting the need for a more dynamic and integrated interpretation of natural habitats, with a focus on better Natura 2000 network management.

Wishing you interesting reading

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