

## NATURE 2000 NETWORK AS AN INSTRUMENT OF REALISING ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION POLICY AND BALANCED DEVELOPMENT ON THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

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*Grzebyk B. Nature 2000 network as an instrument of realising environment protection policy and balanced development on the european level*

*The main objective of the study is to assess the process of creating and functioning areas Nature 2000 on the European and Polish levels. The essential reference for the undertaken deliberations is the policy of environment protection within maintaining European biological diversity. In Poland, the Nature 2000 network arouses controversy especially among local authorities who perceive it as a possible barrier to economic development. Moreover, 1/3 of Nature 2000 areas are farmlands which constitute 2,3 million hectares and 14% of the whole area. This is the reason why creating the network Nature 2000 must tightly combine with appropriate financing these areas within agricultural politics, so as not to become only a rigorous concept of European diversity protection.*

**Key words:** *Nature 2000, environment protection, balanced development JEL Classification: O13, Q01, Q57.*

**Introduction.** Natural resources of Earth were regarded as fully sustainable goods until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Income derived from their exploitation was treated as a component of development of states and societies. The maxim coined by Marx in the first volume of *Capital* claiming that “A civilised man similarly to a wild man has to struggle with nature in order to satisfy his needs...” was a classic approach in perceiving environmental conditions of economic development. Therefore, flourishing countries of rich North used to develop their economies with no inhibitions; they were propagating a consumerist lifestyle at the expense of natural environment and poorer part of world population (Symonides 2008) [5, p. 59].

In 1992 the European Union proclaimed so-called habitat directive which, together with previously legally binding so-called bird directive, constitute legal bases to create the European Ecological Network Nature 2000 (ESE N2000) – coherent transcontinental system of the most valuable naturally areas which would be connected by ecological corridors. The objective of the network is, most of all, to maintain biological diversity. On the one hand, through protecting and restoring rare habitats and species, on the other hand, through maintaining characteristic and still existing natural systems which are recognised as valuable all-European public interest. That is why, it covers both endangered areas and areas typical for nine so-called biogeographical regions: alpine, Atlantic, boreal, Black Sea, continental, Macaronesian,

Panonian, steppe and Mediterranean (Bołtromiuk, Kłodziński 2011) [1, p. 78].

The study presents the process and stages of creating areas Nature 2000 in the EU and Poland together with its institutional solutions. Being a permanent component of rural areas, the ESE N2000 will be a long-lasting factor of their development. This is why, in the process of analysing the undertaken issue we focused on answering the question whether ESE N2000 is an adequate instrument of realising nature conservation politics and balanced development of rural areas? The analysis makes use of the external documents bearing the prescriptive and informational character (data published by the European Commission, the General Directorate for Nature Conservation and the Central Statistical Office) and results from the research conducted in the NCN<sup>1</sup> grant.

### **European biological diversity – protection and future intentions**

Institutional actions of the EU aimed at withholding loss of natural wealth of the continent are expressed in the proposed “Schedule of activities in favour of keeping biological diversity”<sup>2</sup> from 2001, which was preceded by the “Eu-

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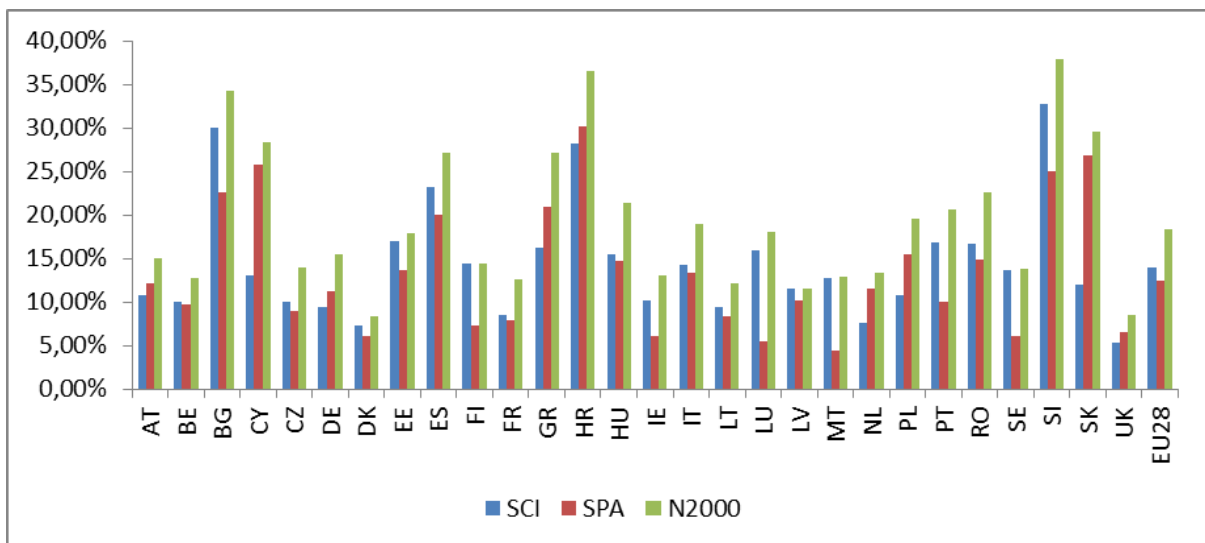
<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Biodiversity Action Plans in the areas of Conservation of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Fisheries, and Development and Economic Cooperation. EC COM 2001, 0162 final.

ropean strategy of biological diversity” formulated in 1998. The European Commission charted a demanding plan of withholding, within a decade, a gradually occurring disappearance of biological diversity and restoring the initial condition of habitats and ecosystems. Despite great efforts these intentions have not been achieved. That is why, in 2010, the European Council for environment proposed new long-lasting goals in this respect. According to this, the year 2020 was declared the final one, by which diversity will have stopped reducing and degraded habitats will have been restored to the natural condition (Bołtromiuk, Kłodziński 2011) [1, p. 80].

Although determining and endorsing areas of network is a difficult and long-term process, their number and surface area are gradually on the increase. According to available details there are already 5315 “bird” areas which cover 11,4% of the EU territory including 700 marine areas. There are 23268 „habitat” areas which cover about 13,7% of the EU territory including 1429 marine areas. Similarly Poland, the total number of Nature 2000 areas in the EU is small-

er than the total amount of “bird” and “habitat” areas. The reason is that numerous areas overlap totally or partially and presently there are 26087 areas including 2491 marine areas [7].

According to the latest data of the General Directorate for Nature Conservation of the European Commission (of January 2011) Nature 2000 areas cover 751 thousand km<sup>2</sup> of the EU territory, and the medial percentage of covering by these areas (including both types of areas) equals to 17,5% of the territory. With the amount of 19,5% Poland as one of 13 EU countries is placed above the European average. Nevertheless, if the area of Nature 2000 areas is considered, Poland with its 61 thousand km<sup>2</sup> is the third on the list after Spain (137 thousand km<sup>2</sup>) and France (69 thousand km<sup>2</sup>). Such countries as Slovenia and Bulgaria are the most covered by Nature 2000 areas (35,5% and 34,0%), and countries the least covered by the network of Nature 2000 areas are Great Britain and Denmark (7,2% and 9,0%). Simultaneously they are the only two countries where the participation of such areas is smaller than 10% (pic. 1).



**Pic. 1. Percentage of land area in EU countries covered ESE N2000 in 2013.**

Source: Author’s study based on data by Nature 2000 barometer. Nature 2000 European Commission Nature and Biodiversity Newsletter, no. 29/2014.

Nature 2000 areas cover various ecosystems. Forests are dominating (about 51% of their total area in the EU), the second place is for ecosystems of agricultural farmlands (24%), and then, there are grass ecosystems (10% - meadows and grazing lands altogether), swamp ecosystems (9,5%). The share of ecosystems varies in

different countries; in Poland farmlands dominate.

**The place of Nature 2000 in balanced development of rural areas in Poland**

Poland committed itself to follow bird and habitat EU directives without any transition periods since the first day of its membership, that

is, from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004 by incorporating them to its domestic regulations in the act on nature conservation. In the following years state administration has been clearly intensifying legislative actions and has created a new institutional structure which deals with nature conservation management including the Nature 2000 network.

In 2011 there were 144 restricted areas of bird protection spreading over 56 thousand km<sup>2</sup>,

of which 49 thousand km<sup>2</sup> are land areas (15,7% of the territory of Poland). There were also 823 special areas of habitat protection spreading over 38 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, of which 34,5 thousand km<sup>2</sup> are land areas (11,0% of the territory of Poland). Since both types of areas overlap in 37%, the Nature 2000 network covered 19,7% of land territory of Poland in total. The range of ESE N2000 equalled to 6,2 million hectares in the middle of 2010.

Table 1

**The structure of land usage in the Nature 2000 network according to types and forms of land cover following the CORINE Land Cover classification of 2010**

Type of land cover	Forms of land cover	Area	
		hectares	%
Anthropogenic areas	Urban development	39513	0,64
	Industrial, commercial and transport areas	3130	0,05
	Mines, excavations and building sites	4021	0,07
	Urban green and recreational areas	3381	0,05
Agricultural areas	Farmlands	1038158	16,77
	Permanent cultivation	3238	0,05
	Meadows and grazing lands	824377	13,32
	Areas of mixed cultivation	381408	6,16
Forests and semi natural ecosystems	Forests	3302761	53,35
	Tree and shrub vegetation complexes	130812	2,11
	Open areas devoid of vegetation or with rare vegetation	11884	0,19
Marshy areas	Inland marshy areas	78010	1,26
	Seaside marshy areas	-	-
Water areas	Inland waters	285853	4,42
	Sea waters	84365	1,36
Total		6190911	100,0

Source: GDOS.

The arrangement of Nature 2000 areas in Poland and its provinces is uneven. This is the result of different state of keeping biodiversity balance. On the national level almost 1600 rural and urban-rural communities, which constitute 72,5% of all such units, possessed in their territories larger or smaller Nature 2000 areas.

Following the regulations, Nature 2000 should not cause a barrier to balanced development of rural areas. The concept of network regards a man as an integral component of nature and assumes positive interactions of these two important environmental constituents. However, results of the research conducted in two provinces of podkarpackie and swietokrzyskie indicate the negative perception of established network among local communities. The research

conducted in 2013 among 602 respondents from two provinces – podkarpackie and swietokrzyskie. They were farmers and entrepreneurs from districts and communities possessing and not possessing Nature 2000 in their area (table 2).

In the province of podkarpackie where Nature 2000 covers almost 30%, this form of nature conservation associates with extending the time of realising new investments and additional costs for 73% respondents. For 58% respondents it associates with uncertainty as for current regulations and determined limitations connected with a particular area. These answers were also appointed by the majority of respondents from the province of swietokrzyskie where Nature 2000 covers 13% of the general area.

Table 2

**How do you perceive a new form of nature conservation – Nature 2000?**

Detailed list	Province	
	Podkarpackie	Świętokrzyskie
	% indications	
1. Extending the time of realising new investments and additional costs	<b>72,52</b>	<b>56,33</b>
2. Lack of directives on allowed kind and range of economic activities	40,07	43,33
3. Difficulties in running and developing farming production	40,40	41,33
4. Uncertainty as for current regulations and determined limitations connected with a particular area	<b>57,95</b>	<b>55,00</b>
5. Weak institutional and financial preparation of the process of implementing a new form of nature conservation	33,11	30,33
6. Guarantee of biodiversity protection in rural areas	<b>18,87</b>	<b>26,33</b>
7. A new form of nature conservation, as a result of which, financial resources go exclusively to the General Directorate for Nature Conservation (GDOŚ) and ecological organisations, but not to districts and communities (landowners)	24,17	17,67

\* Respondents may choose 3 answers.

Source: Author's own research.

High percentage of respondents who chose these answers indicates that after 10 years of introducing a new form of nature conservation to the Polish legal system, Nature 2000 is still perceived unfavourably in society. A reason for that may be ineffective informative action, real, factual limitations encountered both by farmers and entrepreneurs during their activities.

Moreover, respondents indicated that Nature 2000 makes not only a barrier to development but also a financial burden for those who run their business in these areas or in their neighbourhood. Where the network Nature 2000 is established, the state administration cannot expect local farmers, entrepreneurs and communities take over the costs of its functioning. It is a European ecological network and if European biodiversity is concerned, the EU ought to prepare appropriate institutional and financial solutions applicable in the whole EU. The concept of ESE Nature 2000 still entails more problems than benefits in Poland. Such state of affairs may be blamed on state administration which solely concentrated on costs

of maintenance and functioning the Nature 2000 network but forgot about any kind of compensation for local communities, of which protection it is obliged to take care.

**Conclusions.** Nature 2000 is a European ecological network established with the purpose of maintaining biological diversity by means of protecting and restoring rare habitats and species which are recognised as a valuable, all-European public property. The necessity to undertake such actions results from regulations of the Convention on Biological Diversity [3].

As a member of the EU [7] and receiving European funds, Poland is obliged to obey accepted regulations on establishing and functioning ESE N2000 in its territory. However, the experience over the last several years has proved that local self-governments and communities have developed a negative attitude to this form of nature conservation. It means that more intensified accommodating activities are required in order to suit protective, social and economic functions better.

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