

Natura 2000 and Tourism Development

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В статье обобщен опыт внедрения в Болгарии европейской экологической сети NATURA 2000. Приведен перечень экологических проблем, которые возникают в ходе освоения туристических ресурсов страны. Даны рекомендации странам Балканского региона в связи с будущим присоединением к Европейскому Союзу.

This paper analyses the achieved results of the establishment of NATURA 2000 in Bulgaria, as well as the problems arising from the connection of the network with the tourism resources in the country. Some recommendations are made intended for the countries of the Balkan peninsula in regard with their future accession to the European Union.

Ключевые слова: NATURA 2000, Директивы о птицах и Директивы о местообитании, экологическая сеть EMERALD, Берлинская конвенция

Key words: NATURA 2000, Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, EMERALD ecological network, Bern Convention

NATURA 2000 is an ecological network of protection areas. It is an instrument of the European Community aiming at conservation of natural habitats and species that is of great importance for the EU. The establishment of this ecological network is an obligation of each member-state, implemented in conformity with the Birds and Habitat Directives.

The contribution of NATURA 2000 in the process of biodiversity conservation is achieved through measures, leading to minimization and prevention of degradation, fragmentation and destruction of natural and semi-natural habitats, as well as habitats of rare and endangered species. As an ecological network NATURA ensures a free geographical dissemination of species, genetic exchange and migration.

Through it the establishment of the other ecological network called EMERALD takes part in the European Union, it is set up in conformity with the Bern convention. The latter encompasses the territory of the whole European continent and several North African countries.

The Birds Directive was adopted 02.04.1979 and came into force in 1981. It is designed with the aim to undertake measures, preserving populations of wild birds in the European Union member-states as well as to conserve valuable species and habitats. This objective is to be achieved through establishment of special protection areas, effective management of habitats within the boundaries of these areas,

restoration of affected and damaged biotopes as well as establishment of new ones. Rare, vulnerable and endangered species (the ones, enlisted in Appendix 1 of the Birds Directive) and all migratory species are subject to special nature conservation measures in terms of their habitats. This results in an obligation to set up Special Protection Areas (SPAs), where measures against pollution and habitat deterioration are taken.

The activities, concerning the migratory birds are aiming at protection of their nesting beds, wintering places and migration along their migratory routes. The wetlands of international importance (the Ramsar sites) are also of importance. Similar measures are intended to be undertaken for those of the migratory species, which are not enlisted in Appendix 1. Special protection areas are set up for the periods of their nesting and migration.

Directive 92/43 of the European Union for the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna was adopted 25.05.1992. The member-states have the obligation to implement all necessary activities aiming at transposing the directive requisites in their national legislations. The main objective of this international initiative is to contribute to preservation of biodiversity, recognizing local economic, cultural and regional characteristics. It is considered that this directive contributes to the implementation of the concept for sustainable development.

The essence of the directive represents its part, concerning conservation of natural habitats of species. There are six supplementary appendices to the directive. The first one contains information on all natural habitats of the Community interest, conservation of which requires an establishment of Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

Appendix 2 and Appendix 4 include lists of plant and animal species, protection of these species requires creation of territories of special protection regime.

Appendix 3 comprises the selection criteria of these areas, which meet the requirements for special regime of protection. They are divided in two sections – of national and of the Community importance.

Appendix 6 contains information on the methods and tools for wild bird hunting and killing as well as prohibited means of transportation.

Subject of protection in the scope of both directives comprises over 140 natural habitats and over 600 plant and animal species important for the Community. The member-states, as well as the acceding countries have the obligation to determine the locations of their natural habitats together with the species subject to protection.

NATURA 2000 preliminary process comprises the following obligations, which are to be implemented by each candidate state until the date of accession in the European Union:

- Compliance of the national legislation in harmony with that of the European Union, in particular the Birds and the Habitat directives.

This activity resulted in adoption of the Law on biodiversity protection in Bulgaria. In accordance with the law, ecological network, consisting of protection zones and protection areas is to be established.

- A comprehensive list of all proposed areas important for the Community, in conformity with Appendix 3 of the Habitat directive. All applying data is to be presented to the European commission.

- Selection of Special protection areas, with the information on their status of protection and with the data applying to the National list of Special Protection Areas in the European Community.

The average cover of the protection zones and habitats in the European Union is 12% of the overall territory of the member-states. The cover percentage complying with the Birds directive is 9,6%.

In Bulgaria 114 areas for wild birds protection are adopted, covering 20,3% of the country, as well as 228 zones for natural habitats protection, covering 29,5% of the country. Their proclamation as protection areas is done with the decision of the Council of ministers. Up to date the total number of the protection zones under NATURA 2000 in the country is 332, covering 33,89% of the area of its overall territory. Ten of all the areas have common boundaries. The proclamation of the protection areas according to the Birds directive was initiated with the promulgation of the list in Bulgarian State Gazette, while habitat adoption is possible only after the list of sites is reviewed and approved by the European Commission. For this purpose special biogeographical seminars are organized.

It must be taken into consideration that there is a big discrepancy between the existing protected areas in the country (1998) and the protection sites, designated according to the Law on biodiversity protection (2002). Despite the directive regulation on the establishment of the European ecological network NATURA 2000, designation of such zones (protection areas according to the national legislation of Bulgaria) in member-states is to be done on the basis of relevant scientific data as well as the information, included in Appendix 3 of the directive (article 7 of the Law on the protection of biodiversity). The network NATURA 2000 does not aim at just creating strict natural reserves, where any forms of human activities are prohibited. The emphasis is placed on the ecological, economic and socially sustainable management of these territories in the future which complies with the conservation purposes of the protection areas. In lots of cases the existence or revival of traditional activities and ones, having positive influence is of essential importance for biodiversity preservation, especially in agricultural regions and forestry enterprises.

In accordance with the regulations of the Law on protection of biodiversity, the orders for protection zones proclamation are subject to mandatory public discussions before being officially adopted. The Ministry of the Environment and Water is obliged to ensure access to all the information of public interest.

All plans, programmes, and investment projects dealing with NATURA 2000 protection areas require special assessment in terms of their relevance to the subject and purpose of conservation, the latter serving as a basis for decision-making. In the process of evaluation, complying with the directive regulation on habitats some

exclusions are permitted concerning projects and investment proposals. The latter is possible even if there are proofs that their implementation will lead to significant deterioration of the subject of protection. The key precondition for their acceptance is the existence of reasonable grounds of first public importance and lack of alternative solutions.

The regulation of NATURA areas will be an obligation of the owners and land-users in Bulgaria in conformity with plans specially developed for the purpose Management for each protection area. Their management will be coordinated and controlled by the Ministry of Environment and Water. The long-term conservation of significant habitats and species in the areas will be encouraged by agricultural, recreational and forestry practices, which protect or keep habitat types and species in good condition. Activities, connected with NATURA 2000 will be funded by the Operative program «Environment». Under this programme development of Management plans, intended for NATURA 2000 areas will be funded, as well as different activities designated for implementation, ecological-investment projects, information campaigns, tuitions and etc.

It is important to emphasize that at the initial stage of selection of NATURA 2000 protection areas within the territory of Bulgaria, very negative public reactions arised on behalf of economic organizations including tourism businesses. The reasons for the escalation resulted from the fact that the territories which are parts of Pirin National Park, Rila National Park, Central Balkan National Park, Pomiric lake, Ropotamo complex and many others areas, which are subject to investment interests, were included into NATURA 2000. The latter are the subject to massive overbuilding on some of their territories where high-rated resort complexes are erected.

According to wide spread public speculations any kind of building and economic activities will be minimized in such areas. The fact that sustainability is one of the basic principles concerning the assimilation of NATURA 2000 protection sites, including all tourism activities, is totally neglected. This means that all the activities planned, development of tourist infrastructure, its functionality and marketing value have to be considered from ecological, social, cultural and economic view as for the criteria for sustainability.

In terms of the tourism sector the aim of sustainable ecological, economic and social de-

velopment of the protection areas, included in NATURA 2000 could be achieved by means of balanced management of different tourist activities within the boundaries of these zones. The latter implies strategic planning and management of any tourism activities in the established eight tourism regions in Bulgaria.

In conformity with the plan of tourism regions establishment within the country, the following eight tourism regions are to be created – Danube region, Region of Stara Planina, Sofia region, Region of Rila and Pirin, Rhodope region, Old Bulgarian capitals, Thrace region and Black Sea region. Within their territories subregions, microregions and tourism centres are to be established. The latter will represent the main structural units for tourism planning and management of the regions.

Despite their tourism product profile, each region and special protection area on their territory, as well as all activities aiming at natural habitats and /or animal species conservation, require that the level of tourism activity should be measured according to ecological standards and their long-term sustainability. In particular this means that tourist centers' design and establishment in the regions and the key tourism destinations within their boundaries and visit places have to be located outside the special protection areas. It is of key importance in accordance with the fact that tourism centres and destinations are subject to massive building tourism complexes and special super- and infrastructure. Furthermore they are usually places of highest tourist concentration and feature intensified level of tourism activity.

The intensity of recreational and tourism exploitation is to be in designated limits within the framework of the special protection areas. In accordance with this fact, it is strongly recommended to take into consideration in the process of Management plans preparation (fig.). The map includes all the special protection areas, located within the boundaries of the eight tourist regions.

On the basis of the above analysis, the following conclusions could be made:

- 1) Development of alternative tourism forms is one of the most effective ways for assimilation of the most significant natural tourism resources as for their natural scientific value. The special protection areas are very appropriate for this purpose, they combine the opportunities for economic and conservation activities;
- 2) Any tourism activities can be implemented within the boundaries of the special protected

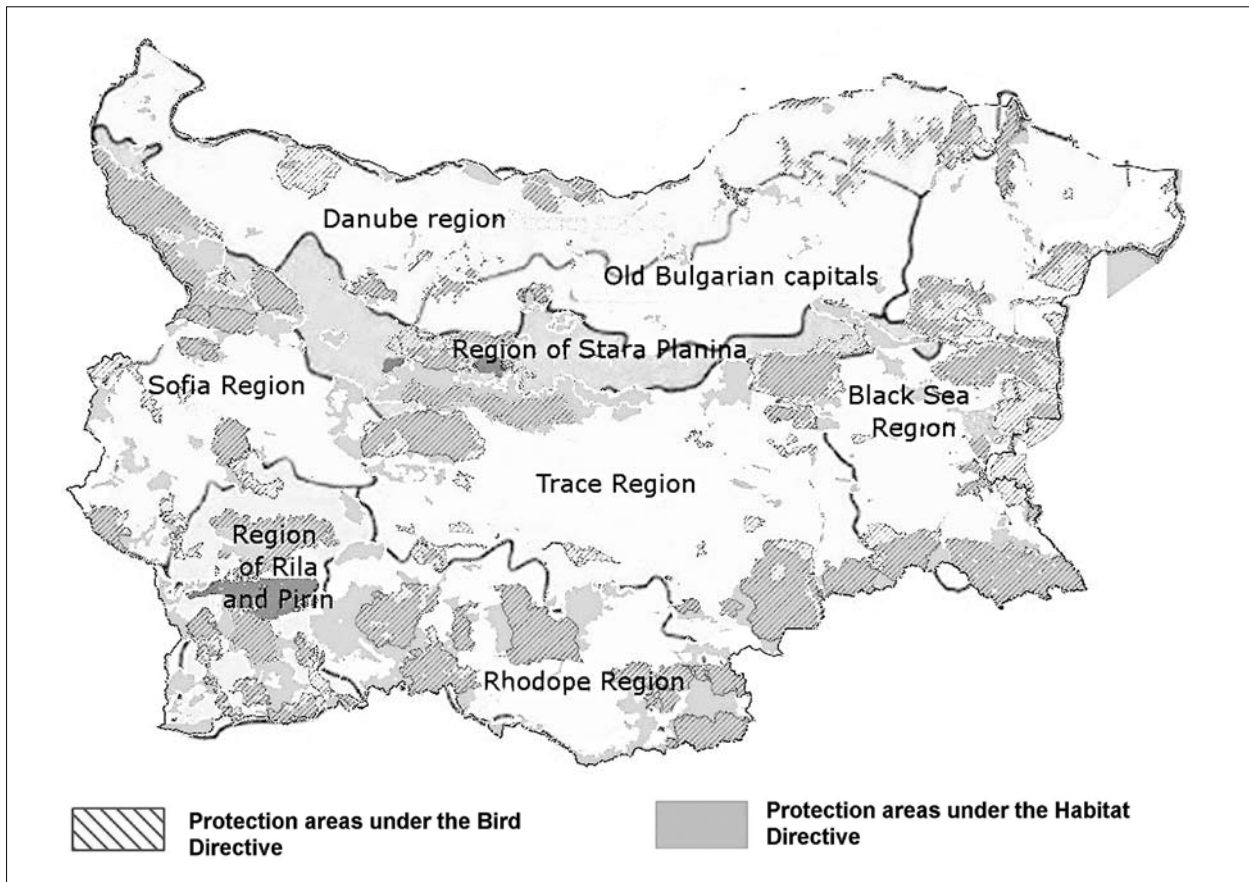


Figure. NATURA 2000 Special Protection Zones located within the territory of the eight tourism regions in Bulgaria

areas on condition that their scale and level of impact meet the sustainability standards;

3) In order to ensure higher level of management effectiveness there is a need to undertake activities aiming at harmonization of different categories of protected areas in conformity with the IUCN classification (1994). This is valid for the countries in the Black Sea region;

4) Dissemination of good practices in the process of planning and establishment of systems of protection areas is also needed. They should draw the attention of the countries joining the European Union in the future. Bulgaria and Romania could exemplify the process of establishing NATURA 2000 and EMERALD protection sites.

5) It is also required to establish an inter-governmental controlling body for biodiversity protection of in the countries of the Black Sea region. It should be responsible for abiding Management plan requisites;

6) Universities and research institutes are to be involved in NATURA 2000 activities through development of specially designed programs for exchange of academic lectures, participation in joint projects and partnerships with the controlling bodies under this international initiative.

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