

THE NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMME OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC: AN INTRODUCTION OF THE 1993–2010 DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

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Since the 1992 UNCED Conference in Rio de Janeiro, National Forest Programmes (NFPs) have been attracting a worldwide attention as a voluntary participatory-based policy instrument to support the sustainable forest management at the country level. This paper reports on the 1993–2010 development of the Czech NFP. During this time, four NFP-related processes have taken place: first, the 1995 NFP drafted by the National Forestry Committee (a non-governmental document); second, the 1998 Forestry Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture (a ministerial document); third, the 2003 National Forest Programme of the Czech Republic (a governmental document, abbreviated as NFP I); and fourth, the 2008 National Forest Programme for the Period until 2013 (a governmental document, abbreviated as NFP II). The reasons are introduced which led to initiation of the respective processes; drawn up is the process chronology. Each process is scrutinised with regard to process design, with a special focus on process participation and intersectoral cooperation. Document analyses, exploratory expert interviews and participant observations were applied to reconstruct the development of the Czech NFP.

National Forest Programme, forest policy, Czech Republic

1. INTRODUCTION

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (UNCED) boosted international forest-related debates, further organised particularly within the UN forest forums¹, which identified the National Forest Programme (NFP) as an appropriate policy instrument for a support of the sustainable forest management at the national level. This idea has further been taken up within the process of Ministerial Conferences on the Protection of Forests

in Europe (MCPFE) and gained support also within the EU. The internationally drawn NFP concept, as abbreviated within the MCPFE definition², emphasises the process character of the NFP, calling for an application of the participatory, intersectoral and iterative approaches within national forest policy planning. The NFP has been proposed as a voluntary instrument for the implementation of international forest-related commitments, supporting countries in revision of their national forest policy documents.

1 Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF, 1995–1997), Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF, 1997–2000) and United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF, since 2000).

2 “A national forest programme constitutes a participatory, holistic, inter-sectoral and iterative process of policy planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation at the national and/or sub-national level in order to proceed towards the further improvement of sustainable forest management” (MCPFE, 2003).

In the Czech Republic, the idea to elaborate the NFP appeared at the beginning of 1990s, as the implication of the expert discussions on the future development of the Czech forests and forestry within the new socio-political situation after the change of the political system after 1989, significantly affected also by the international debates on the sustainable management of forests. In 1993, the expert discussions became institutionalised for the first time, when the National Forestry Committee, a non-governmental panel of forest experts, identified the elaboration of an NFP as its priority task.

This paper reports on the 1993–2010 development of the Czech NFP, which can be further subdivided into four distinct processes. Reasons are introduced which led to initiation of the respective processes; drawn up is the process chronology. Each process is scrutinised with regard to process design, with a special focus on process participation and intersectoral cooperation as significant process characteristics.

2. METHODS

The study presented here has applied several qualitative research methods which are well established in the social sciences. Document analyses, exploratory expert interviews and participant observations were used to reconstruct the development of the Czech NFP. The documents analysed were official governmental and ministerial texts, minutes from the meetings, published comments and position papers, conference papers, and journal and magazine articles. In order to complete and anchor the information gained through the document analysis, a few experts engaged within the different phases of the NFP were asked to provide their comments on the NFP development. Finally, monthly meetings of the Coordination Board of the National Forest Programme for the Period until 2013, established in February 2009 as a coordination body for an implementation of the NFP II document, have been observed since April 2009, in order to gather further information, especially on the ongoing NFP II process.

3. The 1993–2010 development of the National Forest Programme in the Czech Republic

3.1 The NFP draft of the National Forestry Committee (1995)

The first impetus to the elaboration of the Czech NFP raised the expert discussions, organised within a preparation of the national report for the 1993 Helsinki Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Vinš, 1995). Those discussions led to the establishment of the National Forestry Committee (November 1993) – a non-governmental expert panel, consisting of experts of various forest-related fields – which declared the NFP elaboration and further cooperation on the NFP implementation as its priority aim (Anonymous, 1995; Anonymous, 1998).³

The Committee understood the NFP as a document, identifying the actual priority forest-related issues to be solved with respect to the sustainable forest management principles, but also as a continual process providing ministries with expert bases for their decision-making concerning forests and forestry. An initiation of the interministerial (and in that respect intersectoral) cooperation on the NFP constituted a focal point of the Committee activities.⁴ The NFP was proposed as an intersectoral programme covering the period 1994–2000, being periodically updated and drawing up a list of priority projects to be solved each year (Kinský, 1994; Kinský, 1996). To support a coordination of all the NFP activities, the Committee intended to establish an intersectoral ‘Board of the National Forest Programme’. Further, the expert involvement within the formulation and implementation of the NFP and a search for consensus as a fundamental procedural principle were emphasised.

Since 1994, the *ad hoc* established team of Committee’s experts had been working on the NFP draft, finally consisting of 5 so-called ‘main projects’⁵, each further structured into a number of subprojects. In May 1995, the National Forestry Committee submitted the NFP draft first to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment, with a call for cooperation on its

3 The National Forestry Committee associated up to 100 members, particularly forestry and nature conservation experts coming from the research institutes, universities, state administrations and state enterprises, but also some non-state forest owners. Its members were organised within 8 working groups established according to the thematic areas of the NFP. Further, various temporal expert teams were established in order to work on actual issues getting priority in the course of time (e.g. legislation amendments or diverse expert papers). The Committee was governed through an elected board of 21 members.

4 The basic ambition was to initiate particularly a cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment, as both ministries have the most forest-related competences, but the engagement of other sectors in the NFP issue, namely of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Finance or Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, was also emphasised.

5 The main projects as introduced in the 1995 NFP draft of the National Forestry Committee (Kubík, 1993; Kubík, 1995): formulation and optimisation of forest and forest-related law, formulation and optimisation of ‘institutes’ and institutions, formulation of economic instruments, formulation of methodical forest management bases and instruments, and formulation of research bases.

further elaboration, while offering the Committee's expert capacity and coordination facilities in order to proceed towards the further NFP improvement and implementation.

Although the Minister of Agriculture welcomed the Committee's NFP draft and imposed the ministerial Forestry Department to get engaged into the NFP issue and to further elaborate the NFP draft (Vinš, Kupka, 1999), it took the next two years to launch an elaboration of a conceptual forest policy document, inspired from the NFP draft (see chapter 3.2.). Concerning the Ministry of Environment, already in spring 1994, the National Forestry Committee discussed an integration of the NFP draft to the 'State Environmental Policy' with the ministerial Forest and Landscape Protection Department (Vinš, Kupka, 1999). However, the finally approved 1995 State Environmental Policy did not contain any reference to the NFP, and the Ministry did not respond even on the repeated Committee's calls for a cooperation on the NFP issue.

Thus, despite of the Committee's continual awareness raising activities, the intended initiation of intersectoral cooperation on the NFP draft was not achieved in this step. As for the Ministry of Environment, in the light of freshly adopted forest and environmental policy documents (i. e. the 1994 State Forest Policy Principles and 1995 Forest Act; 1992 Nature and Landscape Protection Act and 1995 State Environmental Policy), the NFP was long perceived rather as a redundant expert activity and a kind of high-flown project.

3.2 The Forestry Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture (1998)

The 1995 NFP draft of the National Forestry Committee has been an effort to significantly boost the application of sustainable management principles in Czech forests. It constituted the initial impulse for the elaboration of the Forestry Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture (VŮLHM, 1998), constituting a sectoral forest policy document identifying actual forest-related problems and suggesting concrete measures to be taken within the forest policy instruments. The Forestry Section of the Ministry of Agriculture launched the elaboration of the Programme in 1997 and it authorised the sectoral Forestry and Game Management Research Institute Jíloviště-Strnady to establish the Programme expert team and to coordinate its activities.

In May 1997, the ministerial Forestry Development Department invited selected forestry organisations (among others the National Forestry Committee) to make comments to the very first draft of the Forestry Programme (Vinš, 1998), drawing up the Programme 'main projects'. In September 1997, the Research Institute established a cross-disciplinary expert team, involving almost 50 experts associated in 11 working groups.⁶ The document structure of the Forestry Programme corresponded to the Committee's NFP draft, while identifying 12 'main projects', finally comprising more than 50 subprojects. Concerning the guiding procedural rules, all the outcomes were discussed and agreed within the whole expert team, and on request, diverging opinions were listed.

The Research Institute developed the Programme concept, which comprised for example an annual update of the Programme projects and subprojects or a definition of long-term competencies of the expert team (concerning e. g. the annual actualisation of Programme projects, project coordination and assessment, impact assessment or collection and assessment of relating research outcomes), and it emphasised the engagement of other subjects into the discussions on the Forestry Programme. The Forestry Programme concept was thus largely derived from the NFP concept as proposed by the National Forestry Committee.

However, as seen in the light of the latter development, the 1998 Forestry Programme finally turned out to be a one-shot project. Instead of a further systematical elaboration of the projects and subprojects proposed and annual updates of the Forestry Programme, the Forestry Section of the Ministry of Agriculture focused on elaboration of the forest policy conception, as required by the Ministry of Agriculture at the turn of 1998 and 1999, in a context of the upcoming accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union.⁷ The relation between the forest policy conceptions and the forestry programmes was in that respect introduced as follows (Vašíček, 1999): The forest policy conception introduces a general vision of a future orientation and development of forests and forestry, whereas the forestry programme lists concrete activities, which are planned in a shorter period of time, getting priority according to the present conditions of forests and forestry.

As one of the main principle, the Forest Policy Conception, approved in 2000, declared "*to use the National Forest Programme as an instrument to*

6 The majority of experts came from the state institutions – particularly from the research institutes, forestry faculties, state forest and nature protection administrations and state enterprises. However, their engagement was not based on their institutional occupation, but on their expert knowledge. Almost two thirds of experts were members of the National Forestry Committee (Vinš, 1998).

7 The Forest Policy Conception constituted a part B. of the 'Conception on sectoral policy of the Ministry of Agriculture for a period before the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union', adopted in the Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic No. 49 of January 12, 2000. The 2000 Forest Policy Conception thus superseded the previous conception – the 1994 State Forest Policy Principles.

*implement the State Forest Policy*⁸, in order “to analyse selected problems of the State Forest Policy and suggest concrete measures to be taken” (Anonymous, 2000). The Conception further acknowledged the Programme concept, as developed within the 1998 Forestry Programme (i.e. the Programme coordination through a forestry research institute, a facilitation of stakeholder discussion, confrontation of forest expert opinions with other subject, or assessment of Programme implementation).

3.3 The National Forest Programme of the Czech Republic (2003)

In 2000, the Government declared an intention to formulate the NFP as a governmental resolution “developed by the Ministry of Agriculture in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment” until the end of 2002 (Vláda ČR, 2000). It is worth pointing out that that commitment meant an explicit shift as regards the institutionalisation of the NFP concept in the Czech Republic – the NFP became a governmental resolution elaborated in a cooperation of the two ministries with the most forest-related competences (in contrast to the 1995 NFP draft of the National Forestry Committee, constituting an expert paper, and the 1998 Forestry Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, which represented a ministerial document). A significant impetus boosting the NFP elaboration constituted the accession process of the Czech Republic to the European Union (Zahradník, 2003).

The NFP process passed two phases – a formulation phase (2000–2002) and an implementation phase (2003–2006). A short implementation phase was proposed because of the anticipated accession of the Czech Republic to the EU; hence emphasised was the initiatory character of the NFP I and its subsequent actualisation after 2006 (Zahradník, 2003). Both phases were coordinated with the Forestry and Game Management Research Institute Jíloviště-Strnady – a sectoral research institute of the Ministry of Agriculture – and supervised by the Coordination Board.

Within the formulation phase (2000–2002), six key issues, later constituting the NFP chapters, were identified with respect to the national and

international forest-related documents. For each issue, a coordinator was nominated and expert team established, working independently under the auspices of the Coordination Board. The Coordination Board, as the interministerial body supervising the NFP I formulation, comprised of six representatives of solely state institutions and organisations.⁹ A public participation was limited to an invitation of 32 state and non-state organisations to make comments on the NFP draft. The NFP I, as approved by the Government in January 2013, introduced altogether 72 proposals for action.

Within the implementation phase (2003–2006), those proposals for action were further prioritised and each year a number of projects was elaborated within the *ad hoc* established expert teams. Elaborated expert papers, which were discussed within the Coordination Board (enlarged by further experts coming from the state institutions and organisations, but also by representatives of non-state organisations which applied for that), suggested amendments of legal regulations, economic measures, research programmes, or educational and awareness raising activities.¹⁰ However, within the four-year implementation period, the annually produced expert papers (59 in total) did neither pass an interministerial debate nor wider expert discussions. They were implemented only to a limited extent, particularly due to the postponed amendment of the Forest Act, which was finally not the case.¹¹ Instead, the Government called the ministries to initiate the elaboration of the succession document for the period after 2006, as recommended in the governmental resolution on the NFP I (Ministry of Agriculture, 2003).

3.4 The National Forest Programme for the Period until 2013

Thus in September 2005, again at the Government's request, the Ministry of Agriculture launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment the elaboration of the second NFP of the Czech Republic (NFP II), although a missing evaluation of the NFP I implementation became a matter of criticism of various organisations.¹² The Government intended to approve the NFP II

8 In this context, the term State Forest Policy constitutes a synonym to the forest policy conceptions, i.e. 1994 State Forest Policy Principles and 2000 Forest Policy Conception. However, the term is often used also while referring to the general forest policy framework (an actual mix of forest policy instruments).

9 Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment, two forestry faculties, state forest enterprise and national park administration.

10 In order to coordinate the NFP I implementation within concerned ministries, a so-called. ‘Intersectoral Board’ was established, involving representatives of other ministries which were imposed to take the NFP I into account while implementing their sectoral policies, as listed within the NFP I resolution (Ministry for Regional Development, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports). However, the cooperation within the Intersectoral Board and implementation of the relevant NFP I proposals for action within the other ministries was finally lacking, as the ministries often perceived those proposals for action as an encroachment on their competences (see Morávek, 2007).

11 As in June 2010, the several times postponed amendment of the 1995 Forest Act is still pending.

12 A report assessing the implementation of the NFP I proposals for action was introduced first in December 2007 (see Morávek, 2007).

for the period 2007–2013 at the beginning of 2007, corresponding to the upcoming financial planning horizon of the EU. Considering the international requirements on the NFP process, the Ministry required a bottom-up development of the Programme (Vašíček, 2007), and committed a sectoral institute – the Forest Management Institute Brandýs nad Labem – with a coordination of the NFP II elaboration, as the Forestry and Game Management Research Institute Jíloviště-Strnady was lacking the personal capacity.

The formulation phase of the NFP II took finally almost three years. At first, as the basic mission of the NFP II was to update the NFP I, the *modus operandi* and the document structure already developed in the NFP I formulation phase were applied. Seven coordinators were nominated in order to establish and coordinate expert teams, working independently on issues largely derived from the NFP I. Later on, the document structure was modified according to the EU Forest Action Plan approved in June 2006.

The bottom-up approach consisted in a discussion of the NFP II draft with interest organisations at a working meeting in April 2006 and at a public seminar in June 2006; further on, the draft was open to public comment (via the web portal at www.uhul.cz). Nevertheless, an insufficient integration of received comments and insufficient involvement of interested stakeholders in the process led to a latter refusal of the final NFP draft. Thus, in order to develop a generally accepted NFP document, the working approach was changed completely. The Ministry of Agriculture established a single ‘Working group on the NFP II elaboration’, involving 21 institutions and organisations addressing forest issues, and both ministries acting as observers. The Working Group met first in January 2007 to discuss a general concept of the NFP; further 11 one-day sessions were held from March till June 2007. The negotiations were led by an implicit search for consensus, as the moderator insisted on achievement of unanimous consent among present stakeholders. Explicit diverging opinions were listed on request and stakeholders’ attendance at the meetings was accepted as the only option to influence the discussion outcomes. At each meeting, a so-called ‘consensual decision’ was agreed, compiling the final NFP text. At the end, stakeholders committed themselves orally to respect the NFP draft in future negotiations.

The subsequent intra- and interministerial negotiations about the NFP draft took long, particularly due to the reopening of the proposals for action concerning the game management, which finally suffered change, as the Ministry of Agriculture did not agree with the consensual stakeholders’ opinion. The Government approved the NFP II, consisting of 109 proposals for action ranked in 4 objective areas and 17 key actions, in October 2008 (see Ministry of Agriculture, 2008).

The implementation of the NFP II was launched in February 2009, when the Ministry of Agriculture established the Coordination Board of the NFP II, as the ministerial advisory body for the NFP II implementation. In June 2010, the Coordination Board consisted of 26 institutions and organisations, nominated by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment on the basis of parity, including the ministries, this time acting as the active members.

The fundamental task of the Coordination Board is to recommend ministries how to implement the single proposals for action, i. e. to suggest concrete measures in legislative, financial, awareness raising and information instruments. The background papers for the Coordination Board’s decision-making are produced within 17 expert groups, i. e. each key action has its own expert team, consisting of experts nominated through the participating organisations and institutions and experts invited through the expert team coordinators.

Although a search for consensus still constitutes a fundamental procedural principle, unanimous consent on recommendations within the Coordination Board has not yet been reached, as the operationalisation of the NFP II proposals for action demands a concretisation of actions to be taken which increases a conflict potential. A voting procedure has thus been developed, which identifies a degree of consent reached within the stakeholders. As for June 2010, after 14 meetings, 4 of 17 key actions were closed.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Significant for the development of the Czech NFP became the expert-driven effort, represented through the activities of National Forestry Committee in 1990s, which was continually challenging the forest-competent ministries to launch the NFP elaboration as an intersectoral, iterative and expert-driven project of forest policy planning. However, despite of the Committee’s awareness raising activities, which partially took effect in the activities of the Ministry of Agriculture, the interministerial (and in that respect bisectoral) cooperation on the NFP issue was initiated first in 2000, boosted by the international attention the NFP concept got in the late 1990s.

The fundamental mission of the Czech NFP has remained the same, as promoted through the National Forestry Committee since 1993, consisting first of all in identification of forest-related problems and actions to be taken particularly within the forest policy instruments, in order to support application of sustainable forest management and forest-related decision-making. However, various interpretations have arisen with regard to the position of the NFP within the Czech forest policy. The relation between the NFPs and the forest policy conceptions, and also the recommending versus binding nature of the NFP have been questioned continually.

In that respect, the NFP II resolution refers to a recommending character of the NFP, as the Government imposes the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment to take the NFP II into account while preparing the Act on Forests and the Act on State-owned Forests, and further imposes those and next four ministries to take the NFP II into account while implementing their medium-term policies and preparing related legal regulations (see Ministry of Agriculture, 2008; Vláda ČR, 2008). On the other hand, as the last forest policy conception was approved already in 2000, the NFP II, as the only up to date concept document on the forestry field, tends to be called as the forest policy conception.

Concerning the process design, the NFP concept, as developed within the National Forestry Committee, laid solid foundations to the later processes. For example it introduced the 'institute' of the intersectoral Coordination Board and drawn up its competencies, emphasised a search for consensus as the basic procedural rule or a cross-disciplinary expert engagement (in order to boost up an inclusion of expert opinions into the forest-related decision-making), but also a necessity to gain a broad support for the NFP among the concerned stakeholders and (professional) public.

The most distinct changes concerned the process participation. Within the formulation phase of the NFP II, the previous expert-oriented participation switched to the participation of (organised) stakeholders, as the process became open to all organisations and institutions interested in the NFP formulation. It meant a milestone, as especially the non-governmental organisations (non-state forest owners, environmental NGOs) were given a chance to directly influence a shape of the NFP discussions and their outcomes, but also regarding the working approach, which introduced the round table meetings where all interested (and within NFP II implementation phase 'invited') stakeholders are able to voice their interests. However, the public as such has never been systematically involved within the NFP processes, as the expert knowledge and interest representation constituted the

preconditions for participation. A public discussion forum, where anybody could make a comment to the NFP elaboration, was operating just within the formulation phase of the NFP II, however, without any considerable response.

To sum up, since 1993, four different NFP-related processes have taken place in the Czech Republic, identifying actual problems of the Czech forests and forestry and – with a different level of detail and consistency – drawing up measures to be taken especially within the forest policy instruments. The 1995 NFP draft of the National Forestry Committee and the 1998 Forestry Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture run at the non-governmental level, challenging the idea of the NFP elaboration as an intersectoral project of the governmental and interministerial significance; the 2003 NFP I and 2008 NFP II were developed as interministerial projects, challenging particularly the modes of process design, especially with regard to a process participation. However, despite of extensive experience with the formulation of the Programmes, their implementation was either not launched (as in case of the 1995 NFP draft of the National Forestry Committee or the 1998 Forestry Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture) or launched in a very limited extent (NFP I; the implementation of the NFP II is still in process). In the light of this experience, the Czech NFP has appeared to be dominated by a search for its shape rather than by an emphasis on its implementation and practical impact. As many sources have been spent to develop the processes and their outcomes and the NFP II attracts more attention on the side of (professional) public, large expectations now exist concerning the NFP II implementation which necessarily challenges amendments of forest-related law (particularly of the Forest Act and Act on State-owned Forests). In that respect, the process and finally extent of NFP II implementation will very likely constitute a milestone, which decides on a future development and shape of the NFP in the Czech Republic.

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