

The story of environmental protection in Croatia so far unfortunately comes down to attempts to deal with corruption, and the success at this point would be to deal with the current, instead of past corruption, such as this in Croatian forests, and others that occur in areas protected by NATURA 2000.

NATURA 2000 is primarily an ecological network declared at the level of the European Union, and transposed into national legislation. This is not a directive, but a whole series of areas of significant natural importance that are determined by two directives – on birds and on habitats. The Birds Directive aims to protect all 500 species of wild birds in which Europe is a natural habitat, as 32 percent of European birds are “in rather poor condition”, but also birds for which Europe is just becoming a migratory route, as well as wetlands in by which birds rest or nest. The Habitats Directive seeks to do the same with plants, as plants are in the same poor condition as birds, and as Europe is highly biodiverse and as many as 200 habitats are further highlighted as extremely rare, endangered and home to endemic species; which is why it is also subject to special degrees of conservation. So, in short, NATURA 2000 is an ecological network of the European Union made up of natural habitat types and habitats of wild species of interest to the European Union. It covers 36.67 percent of the land territory of the Republic of Croatia and 16.26 percent of the territorial sea and internal sea waters of the Republic of Croatia, ie 29.34 percent of the total area of the Republic of Croatia.

But, as usual, the EU does not prescribe strict provisions on how to do something, but directives consist of general principles that countries themselves develop. Such logic is based primarily on trust in the system and its quality functioning, which is actually politically naive, since we live in a conflict-ridden society that traditionally rests on the exploitation and commodification of nature, not only to extract the resources necessary for human survival but primarily for profit. interest. Vesna Grgić’s report on the causes of deforestation testifies in support of this not at all new thesis, which is as rare as so palpable and visible to the naked eye in large devastated forest areas.

Effective nature protection therefore depends on measures and implementation designed at national level, implies a process that works only on paper, and gives everything to the competence of public institutions for the management of ecological network areas. These public institutions then determine what forms of economic activity may be carried out in protected areas. And in Croatia, it seems, everything can be implemented, even the felling of trees in the rare sandy beaches in the country, to issue concessions for the exploration and exploitation of fossil fuels in the newly declared nature parks. Illegal waste may be illegally disposed of in the areas of the Zrmanja River, legal landfills may be built nearby,

and we can sell the only European glacial rainforest left in Croatia for furniture. All this is possible in Croatia, not only in areas protected by NATURE, but also in nature parks as well as in the National Parks themselves. It is also possible to build gas stations for yachts in the Kornati National Park, protected due to its underwater wealth, and not bare islands. All this, in Croatia, is in accordance with green policies, in accordance with the law.

The idea of NATURA 2000 is to start looking at nature as a partner side of a relationship. Thus, Europe did not want to antagonize the public with new huge restrictions that would prevent general human and economic activity in nature, but tried to teach man to live with nature. The EU has conceived this in such a way that man “cooperates with nature”, perhaps, for example, calculates the carbon footprint, so if someone wants to build in such an area, he must make sure that buildings are environmentally positive a certain number of environmental points must be collected if a use permit is to be obtained – that the workforce is local, or even coming to work by bicycle, that the materials are environmentally processed and not imported from, for example, China, that the building surface must not be irrationally large and leave a large carbon footprint, etc. That the roof cannot be made of tiles imported from Canada, but that it must be a green roof made of local plants, that the sewer cannot be built and connected to the city, but that ecological toilets must be produced (is another). In the Croatian reality, this is not the case, so it is possible to imagine wells in the immediate vicinity of the Dinara Nature Park, and a landfill in the immediate vicinity of a water pumping station that supplies 100,000 people with drinking water.

As the responsibility for the form of protection lies with the state, both for environmental devastation and for ensuring economic benefits, the EU has made at least minimal efforts to provide some sanctions for inadequate implementation of nature protection. Member States are obliged to ensure adequate implementation of NATURA 2000. Areas in this ecological network lose their status if they are deleted from the list of protected areas, and if this happens due to a natural disaster. But areas cannot be deleted from the list if they are the result of decay caused by human activity and the negligence of the state. For the EU, this means that the member state did not take into account the protected area, and the state is responsible for the loss of value. This is considered a violation of Article 6.2. Habitats Directive and areas are considered to be degraded. Thus we already have case law that has ruled in the manner described, such as the case of Cascina Tre Pini in Lombardy.

But it is devastating right at the start to prove the failure of the state to preserve nature with the last option – in court – when the damage has already been done. The real question is what needs to be done to develop this so-called partnership with nature, because that is actually the whole point of nature protection. We depend on it and cannot stop using it, for

food, for shelter, for clothing, and even for medicine or leisure, but we must learn to respect it. This means that our attempts must first be aimed at preventing devastation, and that, unfortunately, means tackling corruption. With corruption in Croatian forests, with corruption in private companies that conduct environmental impact studies, which is a topic that rarely anyone deals with. We must also tackle nepotistic employment in public institutions that need to protect nature, but also restrictions on employment in the public sector because we need various forms of environmental inspectors in the field to monitor nature conservation.

Source: [bilten.org](http://bilten.org)