

: Projections of the European Green Deal into national strategic documents in the Czech Republic: the case of forestry

Petra Palátová

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences, Department of Forestry and Wood Economics, Prague, Czech Republic, palatovap@fld.czu.cz

■ ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the projections of the European Green Deal strategy on the selected strategic and conceptual documents related to forestry in the Czech Republic. According to the chosen methodology, six relevant documents were found, three of them were analysed, namely Circular Czechia 2040, Biodiversity Protection Strategy of the Czech Republic for the period 2016-2025 and the Concept of state forestry policy until 2035. These strategic materials also contain measures directly addressed to forest owners, mostly related to the topic of climate change. The paper is intended to help orientation in the documents and in the key issues that affect the forest management sector in the Czech Republic, including impacts on forest owners, and helps to disseminate information from the Czech strategic documents to the actors of forest practice.

■ KEYWORDS

Forestry, circular economy, sustainability, bioeconomy, content analysis

■ 1 INTRODUCTION

A European Green Deal (EGD) is a document with the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 (Zelená dohoda pro Evropu, 2023). The proposed measures are then mirrored in the *Fit for 55* package, which is a set of proposals for changes to EU legislation. Although these are up-to-date documents, it should be recalled that the principles contained in the EGD build on other international agreements, such as the *Kyoto Protocol* and the *Paris Agreement*.

The European Green Deal covers the following areas: clean energy, sustainable mobility, renovation of buildings, decarbonisation of industry and circular economy, sustainable agriculture, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, zero pollution (Fakta o klimatu, 2023). Actions targeting these areas tend to have an interdisciplinary overlap. Circular economy, biodiversity and ecosystems, and carbon neutrality are primarily related to

forestry. Circular economy is particularly relevant regarding its positive contribution to climate neutrality. In the Czech Republic, non-profit organisations, such as INCIEN (Institute for Circular Economy) or the Czech Association of Circular Economy, also focus on circular economy. Activities aimed at promoting the circular economy focus on reducing the extraction of primary raw materials, mitigating the environmental impact of human activities, and extending the lifetime of materials. All these topics are subsequently considered in strategic documents at the national level. In the Czech Republic, these are topics that fall under the responsibility of several ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

The paper focuses on the analysis of selected Czech strategic documents that thematically address the priority areas highlighted in the European Green Deal.

■ 2 METHODS

The documents included in the paper were selected based on the following criteria:

- direct relevance to the European Green Deal strategy,
- issuance of the document by an authority that has the relevant competences (ministries with subject and sectoral competence),
- document 'in force' (temporal validity of the document over several years, document still valid in 2023),
- public availability of the document.
- The documents were found in Czech language. Documents were then subjected to content analysis, which is a qualitative methodological approach that helps to sort the information in the text with respect to relevant keywords. Selected information with an overlap with the forestry sector is included in the results. A similar approach of the documents selection based on keywords was applied, for example, in the works of Palátová et al. (2022) or Rinn et al. (2023).

■ 3 RESULTS

3.1 Overview of the strategic documents

Overall, six relevant documents were identified that meet the criteria defined in the methods. Abbreviations used in the table refer to the Ministry of Environment (MoEnv), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT) of the Czech Republic. Table 1 gives an overview:

Table 1. Czech strategic documents selected according to the description in Methods

| Guarantor | Original Title (Title in English in brackets) | Year of issue |
|-----------|--|---------------|
| MoEnv | Cirkulární Česko 2040 (Circular Czechia 2040) | 2021 |
| MoA | Strategie ochrany biologické rozmanitosti České republiky pro období 2016–2025 (Biodiversity Protection Strategy of the Czech Republic for the Period 2016–2025) | 2016 |
| MoA | Koncepce státní lesnické politiky (Concept of State Forestry Policy Until 2035) | 2020 |
| MoEnv | Strategie resortu Ministerstva zemědělství ČR s výhledem do roku 2030 (Strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic with a View to 2030) | 2016 |
| MoEnv | Politika ochrany klimatu v ČR (Climate protection policy in the Czech Republic) | 2017 |
| MoIT | Státní energetická koncepce (State energy concept) | 2015 |

Considering that the circular economy is one of the transformation policies of the European Green Deal, since forestry factually falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic, and considering the scope of the paper, most attention is paid to the strategies listed in the three top most rows of the table.

3.1.1 Circular Czechia 2040

Circularity is inspired by natural ecosystems. The Circular Czechia 2040 strategy focuses on three priority areas and a total of ten areas and although the document was published by the Ministry of Environment, a total of five ministries are responsible for the implementation of the strategy. The document is valid for the period 2021 to 2040 (Cirkulární Česko, 2023). Circularity is also in line with the concept of bioeconomy, which is a widely discussed topic at the European level.

In the area of forestry and wood-processing industry, measures aimed at promoting sustainable forestry, sustainable biomass production, taking measures against forest soil degradation and promoting the use of wood as a renewable raw material can be mentioned (Databáze strategií, 2023). The use of wood has been at a low level in the Czech Republic for a long time.

However, circularity is also present in other documents such as the Strategic Framework Czech Republic 2030, which is based on the Agenda 2030. Other documents encompass the Waste Management Plan of the Czech Republic for the period 2015–2024, the State Environmental Policy of the Czech Republic 2030 with outlook to 2050, the Bioeconomy concept in the Czech Republic from the perspective of the Ministry of Agriculture (2019–2024), but also, for example, the waste prevention and secondary raw materials policy.

3.1.2 Biodiversity Protection Strategy of the Czech Republic for the period 2016–2025

The strategy reflects forestry directly in priority 3 (sustainable use of ecosystems). Forest owners are also directly mentioned in objective 3.2. Others are, e.g., ecosystem services (priority 4 - strategic planning and policy, objective 4.2). The strategy includes indicators, deadlines, and responsibilities. The strategy builds on previous Czech strategies and considers European strategies, such as EU biodiversity strategy (MoEnv, 2016).

3.1.3 Concept of state forestry policy until 2035

The Concept of the State Forestry Policy Until 2035 identifies several problem areas, including the reduced resilience and deteriorated condition of forest ecosystems with calamitous occurrence of pests (mostly bark beetle infestation), the low competitiveness of forestry, the complicated and chaotic system and performance of state administration in relation to forestry and the lack of public awareness of the complexity and importance of forests for society in the Czech Republic. The Concept directly lists measures to improve this situation, which, from the perspective of the forest owner, relate to:

- motivation and financial support of forest owners for sustainable forest management and fulfilment of public services;
- promoting the natural proportion of standing timber, logging residues and habitat trees - including incentives for owners and addressing liability in the event of damage resulting from this requirement;
- reducing legislative restrictions on forest management and maintaining public use of forests, including financial support for ecosystem services to owners; aligning the system of support to forest owners;
- improving the level of advisory services to forest owners.

These measures are in the document across all long-term objectives. However, long-term objective “C” also mentions, for example, the circular economy in the context of the use of wood as a renewable raw material. Biodiversity is mentioned directly in long-term objective “B”, as is energy (use of woodchips and pulpwood), and also, for example, the carbon balance of the landscape (MoA, 2020).

The content analysis of the documents confirms that the measures related to the EGD are inter-ministerial not only in their content but also in their impact and, in particular, inter-ministerial cooperation is required to achieve both the sub-objectives and the required synergies. The documents also contain similar or identical keywords. The measures are primarily directed through the ministries, in particular the MoEnv and MoA. In the Czech Republic, MoA is responsible for forestry with several exceptions – national parks/MoEnv and military sites/Ministry of Defence (Zákon o lesích, 1995). The subsequent wood-processing industry belongs under the Ministry of Industry and Trade, as does the energy policy. Based on the analysis of the documents, many of them are created in direct relation to the objectives and requirements of supranational policies, especially European policies.

■ 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The paper dealt with the link between the European Green Deal and relevant strategic documents that have a connection to forestry of the Czech Republic. Three valid documents issued by the MoA and the MoEnv were analysed in more detail. In the Czech Republic, the EGD raises a number of concerns across the lay and professional public. In the public space, the EGD is mainly associated with negative information in the Czech Republic (Kolářová, 2023), however, it should be noted that the debate on the EGD seems to have been influenced by concurrent circumstances such as the impact of the covid pandemic, the energy crisis, the conflict in Ukraine, but also in the Czech Republic by the change of government. EGD is linked to several principles that are also continuously emphasised in the national strategies. For example, circularity, which is part of the strategies already adopted, also applies to biomass cascading in forestry. The use of forest biomass for materials, products and services is also one of the possible definitions of the bioeconomy concept (Hetemäki, 2017). Cascading biomass use has been part of several studies (e.g., WWF, 2016; EC, 2016). The direct link of cascades to agriculture, forestry, livelihoods, energy, and climate change is included in the EU study (EU, 2019). The Netherlands is the furthest along in accepting the circular economy principles (Hrtúsová and Novák, 2020), and Finland is most frequently mentioned as a pioneer country of the bioeconomy.

In the Czech Republic, the principles of the EGD are also linked to the so-called National Recovery Plan (NPO, 2023), which allows the Czech Republic to use funds from European sources - specifically from the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility. The National Recovery Plan aims to reduce the impact of the covid and restart the Czech economy. Forestry is included in the NPO in the context of, among other things, building resilient forests, supporting biodiversity, combating drought, and retaining water in forests.

Although the strategic documents from the EU level are reflected in national strategies (and conceptual materials), the specific content and objectives are, for example, more or less difficult to get into operational practice of forestry companies. The results of ongoing research projects should also help to raise awareness of the activities and measures contained in the strategies. For example, the project on sustainable forest management in small-owner forest estates is intended, among other things, to provide smallholders with evidence to help them improve the forest management practices of their properties. The formulation and validation of the proposed practices is now more urgent, precisely because it should consider not only the emphasis on the (traditional) economic side of the measures, but also the future demands on forest enterprises resulting from long-term commitments at supranational level (including European strategies). Carbon neutrality is also a major challenge for the whole forestry sector, including forest owners.

■ 5 REFERENCES

- // Cirkulární Česko. 2023.[Circular Czechia]. https://www.mzp.cz/cz/cirkularni_cesko (1.6.2023).
- // Databáze strategií. 2023. [Strategy database]. <https://www.databaze-strategie.cz/> (1.7.2023).
- // EC 2016. European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Reichenbach, J., Mantau, U., Vis, M.et al., CASCADES – Study on the optimised cascading use of wood, Mantau, U.(editor), Vis, M.(editor), Allen, B.(editor), Publications Office, 2016, Available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2873/827106>.
- // EU 2019. Evropská unie. Pokyny pro kaskádové využití biomasy s vybranými příklady osvědčených postupů v souvislosti s dřevní biomasou. ISBN 978-92-79-93136-9: 66.

- // Fakta o klimatu. 2023. [Climate facts]. <https://faktaoklimatu.cz/explainery/zelena-dohoda-pro-evropu> (10.7.2023).
- // Hetemäki L. 2017. Future of forest industry in bioeconomy. Lecture at the Managerial economics and business strategy in forest industry course, University of Helsinki, 16 February. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.25828.78727.
- // Hrtúsová T., Novák R. 2020. Cirkulární ekonomika v ČR: Tříditi neznamená recyklovat. Ekonomické a strategické analýzy. Česká spořitelna.
- // Kolářová M. 2023. Mediální diskurz o Green Dealu z hlediska energetiky. Výzkumná zpráva. Sociologický ústav AV ČR.
- // MoA. 2020. Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic. Koncepce státní lesnické politiky do roku 2035. [Concept of state forestry policy until 2035]. <https://eagri.cz/public/web/mze/lesy/lesnictvi/koncepce-a-strategie/koncepce-statni-lesnicke-politiky-do.html> (1.6.2023).
- // MoA. 2016. Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic. Strategie resortu MZe ČR s výhledem do roku 2030. [Strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic with a view to 2030]. <https://eagri.cz/public/web/mze/ministerstvo-zemedelstvi/koncepce-a-strategie/strategie-resortu-ministerstva-1.html> (13.7.2023).
- // MoEnv. 2017. Politika ochrany klimatu v České republice. [Climate protection policy in the Czech Republic]. https://www.mzp.cz/cz/politika_ochrany_klimatu_2017 (13.7.2023).
- // MoEnv. 2016. Strategie ochrany biologické rozmanitosti České republiky pro období 2016–2025. [Biodiversity Protection Strategy of the Czech Republic for the period 2016–2025]. https://www.mzp.cz/cz/ochrana_biologicke_rozmanitosti_strategie (13.7.2023).
- // MoIT. 2015. Státní energetická koncepce. [State energy concept]. <https://www.mpo.cz/dokument158059.html> (13.7.2023).
- // NPO. 2023. Národní plan obnovy. [National recovery plan]. <https://www.planobnovy.cz/> (30.6.2023).
- // Palátová P., Purwestri R.C., Marcinekova L. 2022. Forest bioeconomy in three European countries: Finland, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. *International Forestry Review*, 24, 4: 594-606. <https://doi.org/10.1505/146554822836282518>.
- // Rinn R., Palátová P., Kalábová M., Jarský V. 2023. Forest Bioeconomy from the Perspectives of Different EU Countries and Its Potential for Measuring Sustainability. *Forests*, 14, 33. <https://doi.org/10.3390/f14010033>.
- // WWF. 2016. Mapping Study on Cascading Use of Wood Products. WWF, Mondi. Technical report. Lara Dammer, Catherine Bowyer, Elke Breitmayer, Asta Eder, Silvia Nanni, Ben Allen, Michael Carus, Roland Essel.
- // Zákon o lesích (Forest Act). 1995. Zákon č. 289/19925 Sn., o lesích a o změně a doplnění některých zákonů.
- // Zelená dohoda pro Evropu. 2023. Evropská komise. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_cs (10.6.2023).

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the project "Sustainable management in small-owner forest estates" (project NAZV QK21020371) financed by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic.