



"Conservation of Natural Heritage for Life in Ukraine"
ConNaturLIFE Ukraine; 101148569 — LIFE23-PRE-CZ-ConNaturLIFE Ukraine

Project Final Conference Press release

Project: Conservation of Natural Heritage for Life in Ukraine

Programme: LIFE Programme of the European Union

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LIFE Ukraine Project Final Conference Held in Prague

Prague, 12 February 2026 – The Final Conference of the LIFE Ukraine project ("Conservation of Natural Heritage for Life in Ukraine", LIFE23-PRE-CZ-ConNaturLIFE Ukraine) took place at the National Agricultural Museum in Prague. The conference brought together representatives of Czech and Ukrainian institutions, international environmental organisations, research institutes, donor agencies, and policymakers to present key results of the project and discuss future cooperation in biodiversity protection and EU environmental alignment.

The event served as a platform to reflect on two years of intensive work supporting Ukraine's approximation to the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and the future development of a Natura 2000-type network.

During the opening session, Michal Servus, Senior Director of the Nature and Landscape Protection Section at the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic; Vitalii Usatyi, Minister-Counsellor of the Embassy of Ukraine in the Czech Republic; Yuliia Ovchynnykova, People's Deputy of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, online); Igor Zubovych, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine; and František Pelc, Director of the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic, addressed the participants of the conference. They emphasised the strategic importance of environmental reform in the context of Ukraine's European integration process and post-war recovery. They highlighted the value of the LIFE Ukraine project as a practical instrument for strengthening institutional capacity, aligning legislation with EU nature directives, and building long-term cooperation between Czech and Ukrainian conservation authorities. The speakers underlined that biodiversity protection remains a shared European responsibility and that sustained international partnership, expert dialogue, and legislative progress are essential for successful implementation of EU environmental standards in Ukraine.

Session 1: Achievements and Key Outputs

During the first session, project partners presented the core achievements of the LIFE Ukraine project.

David Lacina provided an overview of the Agency's work within the project, emphasising effective coordination and strategic cross-border cooperation.

Dmytro Skrylnikov (EPL, online) presented the results of WP2 on legislative alignment. He highlighted the preparation of the comprehensive Table of Concordance (61 pages for the Habitats Directive and

40 pages for the Birds Directive), the analysis of 120 EU court cases for the first time in Ukraine. He also outlined draft legislative amendments on the Emerald Network, species protection, and the proposed establishment of a dedicated Agency for Nature Conservation in Ukraine.

Solomiia Baran (EPL) highlighted structural imbalances in Ukraine's biodiversity governance system, including limited staffing, funding disparities, and fragmented responsibilities that hinder effective implementation of the EU Nature Directives. She emphasized that establishing a dedicated Agency for Nature Conservation of Ukraine would provide a clearer division of powers and strengthen implementation capacity in line with EU standards.

Anastasiia Drapaliuk (UNCG) focused on practical preparation for implementing the Habitats and Birds Directives, presenting proposals for adding species and habitat types to the annexes and assessing Ukraine's capacity to meet future monitoring and reporting obligations. She also addressed gaps in the current derogation mechanism and outlined options for transforming the Emerald Network into a Natura 2000 system aligned with EU standards

Nataliia Matushkina (UNCG, Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University) presented the details of the First All-Ukrainian Bioblitz, which resulted in over 105,000 biodiversity records and demonstrated strong civic engagement.

Session 2: Foreign Assistance and International Experience

The second session focused on international cooperation and experience sharing.

Anna Kuzemko (UNCG) presented the Action Plan for the conservation and restoration of perennial calcareous grasslands and steppe habitats (E1.2), including its pilot implementation in Buzkyi Gard National Nature Park. She outlined practical restoration measures such as controlled grazing, biomass removal, stakeholder engagement, and the development of a Theory of Change model to improve long-term management of Emerald Network sites

Kateryna Polianska (EPL) and Oleksii Vasyliuk (UNCG) introduced the sustainable outputs of the project, including the Natura 2000 Toolkit, a university course on nature conservation, and a comprehensive publication on protected areas of European importance in Ukraine. The 400-page bilingual book, richly illustrated with photographs and infographics, provides an in-depth overview of the Emerald Network selected areas in Ukraine and is designed to support professionals, policymakers, and conservation practitioners both in Ukraine and internationally in understanding its structure, values, and management context

International experience was presented by:

- Artemis Margaritidou, Natalia Guranda, and Vasiliki Chrysopolitou (LIFE RENATA – Moldova) presented the LIFE RENATA project, which supports Moldova's future transition from the Emerald Network toward Natura 2000 through a comprehensive Roadmap 2030. They outlined legal alignment measures, scientific and GIS-based site assessments, phased implementation steps (pre-accession, accession, post-accession), and capacity-building tools

designed to ensure systematic and EU-compliant establishment and management of Natura 2000 sites

- Peter Kullberg (Finnish Environment Institute – SYKE) presented the Ukraine–Finland Environmental Monitoring (UFEM) project, an institutional cooperation initiative aimed at strengthening Ukraine’s environmental monitoring capacities in line with EU standards. He outlined key components including upgrading surface water monitoring under the Water Framework Directive, developing biodiversity conservation status assessments aligned with the Birds and Habitats Directives, and introducing remote sensing tools to support data-driven environmental governance
- Miroslav Kandrata (Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation) presented the “Partnership for Ukraine” initiative (#P4UA), a program supporting sustainable and resilient recovery through internships, study tours, and a network of over 200 Ukrainian local leaders. He highlighted the transfer of Central European transformation experience, capacity-building activities, and preparations for launching the Ukraine Partnership Foundation to strengthen long-term environmental governance and local partnerships

Panel Discussion: Lessons Learned & Future Cooperation

The panel discussion, moderated by Tomáš Růžička (NCA CR), gathered representatives of Ukrainian and European institutions to reflect on lessons learned and opportunities for continued cooperation.

Panelists included:

- Igor Zubovych (MEEAU)
- Anastasiia Drapaliuk (UNCG)
- Olena Kravchenko (EPL)
- Josipa Krizanovic-Cimesa (Umweltbundesamt, Austria)
- Andreas Beckmann (WWF CEE)
- Miroslav Kandrata (Environmental Partnership Foundation)

During the panel discussion speakers highlighted the importance of sustained international partnerships, institutional reform, and long-term financial instruments to ensure successful implementation of EU environmental standards in Ukraine.

Participants openly addressed the practical and emotional challenges of continuing cooperation under wartime conditions. Several European partners recalled that when the full-scale invasion began, they

were uncertain how cross-border cooperation could realistically continue. However, seeing their Ukrainian colleagues persist in implementing project activities, meeting deadlines, and solving complex tasks despite extraordinary circumstances, they chose to focus on sustaining cooperation rather than allowing the war to paralyze joint work.

European speakers acknowledged that wartime conditions — including power outages, heating shortages, damaged infrastructure, limited technical capacity, or even destroyed premises — inevitably create delays and unforeseen obstacles. They noted that these risks are understood and consciously accepted, recognising that maintaining professional collaboration is itself a form of meaningful support for Ukrainian partners.

Ukrainian participants expressed deep appreciation for the continuity of cooperation with European institutions. They emphasised that while the war remains a severe and tragic reality, it cannot become a reason to suspend most ongoing projects, as restarting them later would be significantly more difficult. Continuing to work, they noted, provides stability, purpose, and a sense of normalcy amid uncertainty.

Both Ukrainian and European representatives stressed their shared determination to work together on the restoration of Ukraine's natural heritage after the war ends, emphasising that rebuilding ecosystems, protected areas, and biodiversity will require sustained and deepened partnership between Ukraine and Europe in the years to come.

Steering Committee Meeting

Following the conference, a Steering Committee meeting was held with project partners and nominated members from supporting institutions, including representatives of the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Ukrainian research institutes, and civil society organisations.

The Steering Committee reviewed project progress, discussed sustainability measures, and confirmed continued cooperation beyond the formal completion of the project.

The LIFE Ukraine Final Conference confirmed that the project has laid strong legal, institutional, and educational foundations for Ukraine's alignment with EU environmental legislation.

The event demonstrated broad international support for Ukraine's biodiversity protection reforms and reaffirmed the commitment of Czech and European partners to continue cooperation in strengthening nature conservation governance.

Participants of the Conference

Czech Republic

- Michal Servus – Senior Director of the Nature and Landscape Protection Section, Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic
- Vladislav Smrž – Director General for Nature and Landscape Protection, Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic
- Alena Doering – Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic
- František Pelc – Director, Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic
- David Lacina – Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic
- Tomáš Růžička – Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic
- Marta Vacková – Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic
- Jindřich Chlapek – Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic
- Petr Roth – Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic
- Oleksandra Rieznyk – Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic
- Miroslav Kundrata – Environmental Partnership Foundation (Nadace Partnerství)
- Martin Hyťha – NESEHNUTÍ
- Petr Drbohlav – People in Need
- Jan Pejřil – Czech Aid
- Nataliia Isayeva – Czech-Ukrainian Scientific Society (CZUSS)
- Mariia Gladys – Czech-Ukrainian Scientific Society (CZUSS)

Ukraine

- Yuliia Ovchynnykova – People's Deputy of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine) – online
- Igor Zubovych – Deputy Minister, Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine
- Maksym Zhelezniak – Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine
- Bohdan Semenenko – Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine
- Vitalii Usatyi – Minister-Counsellor, Embassy of Ukraine in the Czech Republic
- Oleksii Vasyliuk – Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group (UNCG) – online
- Anastasiia Drapaliuk – Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group (UNCG)
- Anna Kuzemko – Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group (UNCG)
- Nataliia Matushkina – Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group and Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University
- Olesya Petrovych – Senior Expert on Biodiversity Protection, Recovery and Reform Support Team at the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine
- Serhiy L. Mosyakin – M.G. Kholodny Institute of Botany, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine – online
- Vitaliy O. Kharchenko, DrSci., Dr. Hab. – I.I. Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine – online

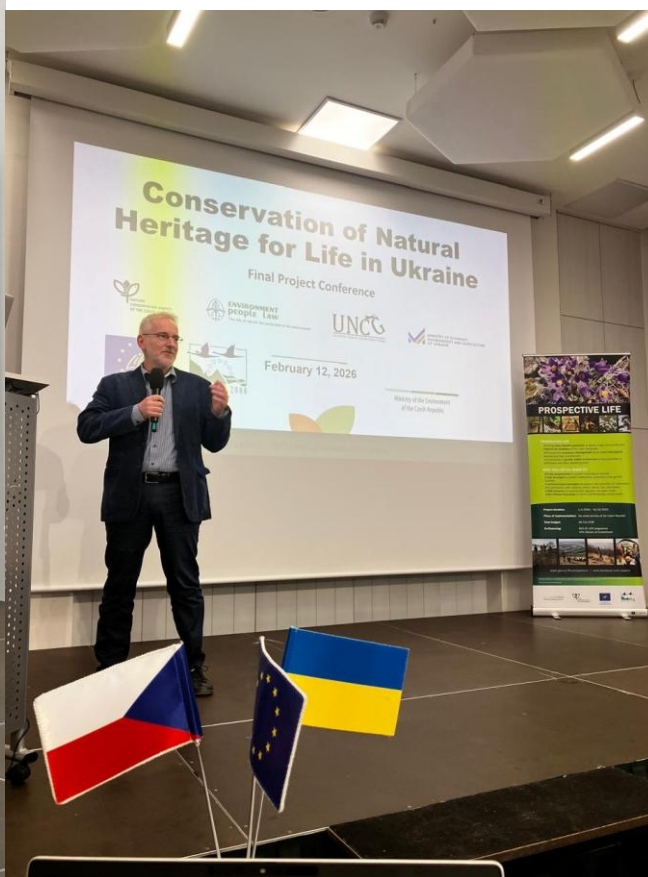
- Vasyly Sehin – National Interest Advocacy Network (ANTS) – online

International Organisations and Partners

- Andreas Beckmann – WWF Central and Eastern Europe (WWF CEE)
- Tetiana Rabokin – WWF Ukraine
- Michael Hošek – EUROPARC Federation
- Josipa Krizanovic-Cimesa – Umweltbundesamt (Austria)
- Fritz Kroiss – Umweltbundesamt (Austria)
- Artemis Margaritidou – LIFE RENATA Project
- Natalia Guranda – EcoContact
- Vasiliki Chrysopolitou – Environmental expert (Moldova - Greek LIFE project cooperation)
- Peter Kullberg – Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE)
- Oksana Nekrasova – I.I. Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology (IZAN)
- Yuliia Kutsokon – I.I. Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology (IZAN)

Photo report







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