

Wolves in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are on the move. Populations, which in eastern Poland and western Soviet Union (including present Belarus) survived organized eradication post-1945, have in the recent two decades made a spectacular come-back colonizing, first, western Poland, then Germany and recently Austria and Denmark. However, while expansion of wolves to western Poland practically did not involve social conflicts, in Germany migrating and then breeding wolves caused high level of controversies. Surprisingly, socio-political dimensions of this large-scale migration and underlying socio-political interactions have been hardly investigated yet. This refers both to the factors which made the come-back possible and to the social mechanisms which influenced the response of humans to the returning wolves. Although wolves are usually perceived in biological and ecological perspectives, their presence and migrations are very strongly determined by the social context in which these biological processes take place.

The project will answer following questions: (1) What are the mechanisms of interaction between migrating wolves, beliefs and activities of interested social groups, socio-political breakthroughs (such as democratisation in Poland in 1989 or unification of Germany in 1990), and a wider cultural context? (2) What are the reasons for different attitudes and policy responses to wolf presence in Poland, Germany and Belarus? (3) If and how do the beliefs, rules and actors from the European Union level influence wolf policy-making in an “old”, a “new” EU country, as well as in a non-EU country?

The project’s goal is to elaborate a theoretical model which would explain factors influencing changes in wolf policy in three neighbouring countries: Poland, Germany, and Belarus, which share the same continuous wolf population. The model would also explain different reactions to the migrating wolves. It will consider (1) activities of social groups (e.g. hunters, foresters, farmers, scientists, NGOs) influenced by wolf policies and influencing these policies, (2) beliefs and values of these groups, (3) the impact of socio-political events on wolf management, (4) the impact of natural processes such as breeding and migrations of wolves.

The results of the project will be published in international scientific journals and presented during scientific conferences. They will be also published in a more accessible form to inform social groups involved in wolf issues, including policy-makers in respective countries and at the European level. This will hopefully contribute to more effective management decisions and better conflict mitigation.