

Summary

In the Czech Republic, poppy is grown on nearly 60,000 hectares of fields, and the area is going to further increase in the coming years. Even today, the Czech Republic ranks first in the poppy production in Europe as it has exceeded the production of its main competitor, Turkey. Thanks to the sophisticated large-scale technology, the Czech growers are able to succeed on foreign markets to such an extent that it is they who set the price for poppy seed. Approximately ninety per cent of their production is exported. Apart from the neighbouring countries, which are traditional customers, Czech poppy is starting to penetrate the markets in the Russian Federation, the United States, the Scandinavian countries etc.

The transformation of the centrally-planned economy within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (MEA) to a market system without more significant international integration links forced the Czechoslovak Federative Republic and then the Czech Republic to change the structure of its agricultural sector. After 1990, the agriculture received almost no state assistance and was forced to supply cheap products to the market. At the same time, subsidized agricultural production surpluses from the EU started to be imported. There was a substantial decrease in the volume of animal production, leading to a decrease in the feeding crops production as well. On the other hand, oil-bearing crops (including poppy), which can be exported without any restriction, benefited extraordinarily from this situation.

The unrivalled profitability (more than 140%) of poppy is partly due to the profit from the sales of poppy straw, from which the alkaloids for the production of pharmaceuticals are extracted. In the Czech Republic, poppy-head is processed exclusively by the Zentiva joint stock company.

It is the presence of alkaloids that brings both benefits and problems arising from possible poppy abuse. The “raw opium” season lures more and more drug addicts as it gives them the opportunity to obtain the drug or the raw material for its production free of charge. Apparently, this opportunity is welcomed by a considerable number of people who set out to the fields with a clear goal in mind. Countries respond to this by legislation which, though fully within their competence, is becoming more and more influenced by the international cooperation; soon it will be hundred years since the first international “opium agreements” were signed.

Even today, the legislative conditions for poppy growing differ in different countries. It is completely prohibited in most post-Soviet republics; in some countries, such as Germany and Poland, only varieties with a low content of morphine can be grown, whereas in other

countries poppy growing is allowed as long as certain more or less stringent legal requirements are met. In the Czech Republic, this issue is provided for by the Addictive Drugs Act, which imposes the reporting duty as well as other actions in connection with the poppy-head registration and handling.

The UN International Drug Control Committee calls upon the poppy-growing countries to adopt a similar licence system as e.g. Australia, France, or Turkey. It has recently addressed the Czech Republic as well. The search for a compromise between the poppy growers' interests and the protection of the society against drug use thus remains high on the agenda.