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The Carpathians as a region of international co-operation

ZBIGNIEW NIEWIADOMSKI

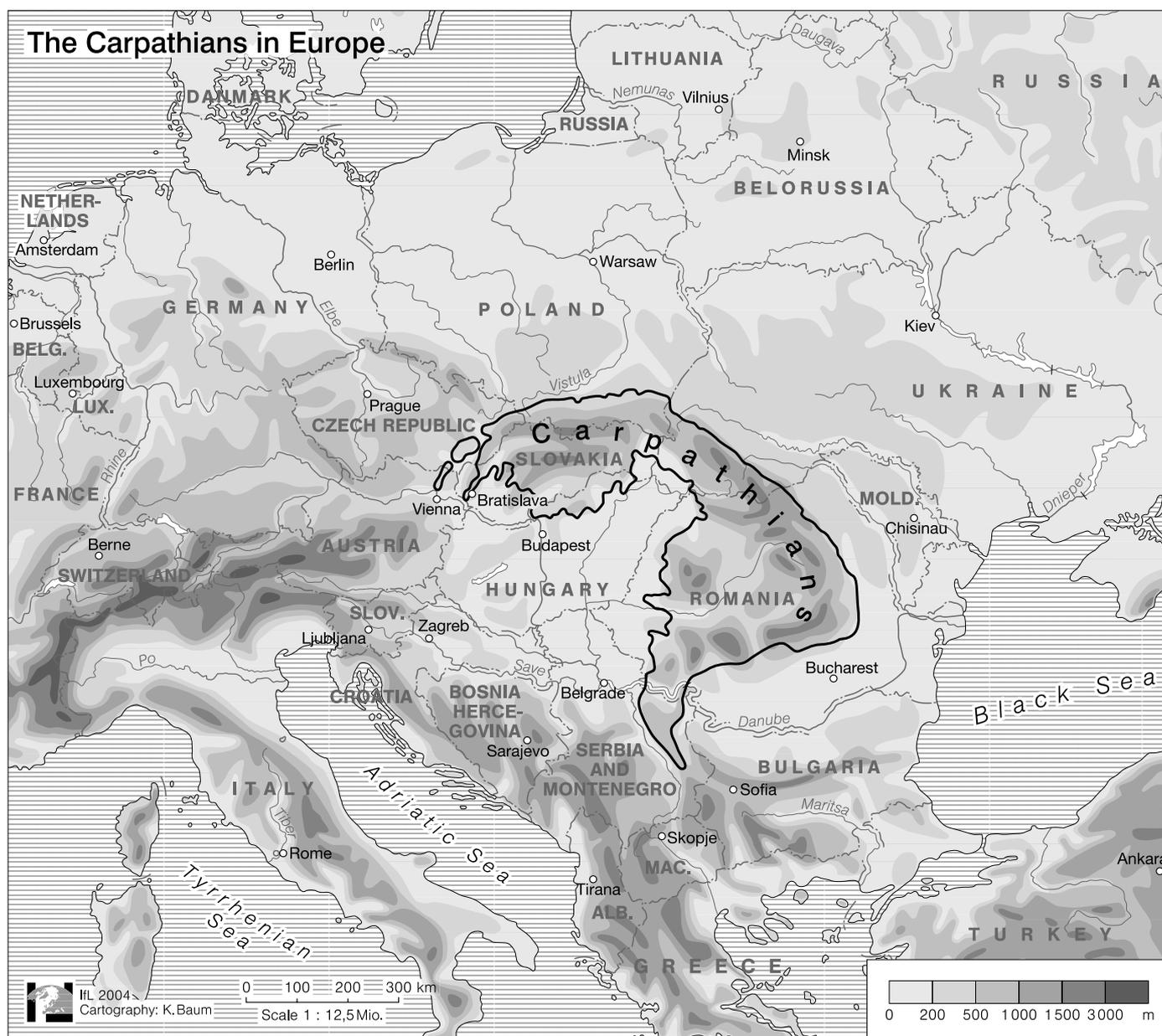


Fig. 1: Location in Europa

Source: verändert nach www.carpathians.org/launch/index.htm, Zugriff 11.4.2005

Introduction

Europe is characterised by its numerous small countries and many borders that cut across ecosystems and areas of high natural and cultural value. State borders usually divide our continent using natural barriers like mountains and rivers. Although political borders may divide an ecoregion,

ecological systems develop beyond these virtual boundaries. Therefore a transboundary approach towards ecological concerns and sustainable development is necessary, both in local and eco-regional scale.

The Alps and the Carpathians – two neighbouring European mountain ranges cover similar area, both stretch

over several countries, are home to many different nations and cultures and represent the best of European natural and cultural heritage. Moreover both share the same challenges – increasing human pressure and loss of biodiversity. In the Natura 2000 implementation process the Carpathians are provisionally being treated as a

part of the Alpine biogeographical region.

The entire length of the Carpathian Arch accounts for some 1,550 kilometres, while the main part between Danube at the Austrian-Slovak border and Danube at the Romanian-Serbian border, stretches over some 1,300 kilometres. The westernmost point of the Carpathians is close to the outskirts of Vienna (Wien), while the southernmost point of the Carpathians, close to the city of Niš in Serbia, is the place, where the Carpathians meet the Balkan Mountains (*Fig. 1*).

The total area of the Carpathian region, including the Pannonian Plain as the inner basin, accounts for 555 thousand square kilometres, while the mountains encompass some 209 thousand square kilometres – which is still more than the Alps, covering only 191 thousand square kilometres. The Carpathians, inhabited by some 17 million people stretch from Austria to Serbia and cover border areas of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine, a significant part of Romania and a major part of the Slovak Republic.

Share of the Carpathians by countries:

- Austria: < 0.5 per cent
- Czech Republic: 3,28 per cent
- Hungary: 3,78 per cent
- Poland: 9,63 per cent
- Romania: 55,19 per cent
- Serbia and Montenegro: < 0.5 per cent
- Slovak Republic: 17,17 per cent
- Ukraine: 10,60 per cent

Most often governments sign bilateral agreements on co-operation in e.g. environment protection, but usually such are too general to facilitate co-operation in particular transboundary region. This is why conventions ratified either worldwide or by several countries of the region proved to be more efficient than any other tools to raise interest of governments in transboundary and international co-operation on regional issues.

Following the pattern of the Alpine countries the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians was signed on 22nd May 2003 in Kiev. Building on the experience and lessons learned in the Alps this Convention, reinforced by rel-

evant thematic protocols, would allow to adapt measures applied in the Alps to the Carpathian conditions and enhance co-operation on a wider regional scale.

The Carpathians – a less favourable area?

Covering mostly border areas the Carpathians may be perceived simultaneously as a less-favoured and a most favoured region of Central Europe: Less favoured from market economy point of view – due to political factors banning development in the past, present political and economical marginality, lack of infrastructure, high unemployment rates and poverty as well as due to natural factors such as topography, low productivity of soils and short vegetation period. Most favoured in biodiversity and cultural heritage terms due to well preserved nature, forests and landscape, water resources, traditional way of life and land-use forms, non-intensive agriculture and limited influence of industry.

The Carpathians support a wealth of biological diversity, which is unparalleled in Europe and a rich cultural heritage reflecting centuries of human presence in the mountains.

Examples of international co-operation in the Carpathians

Local level – the East Carpathians Biosphere Reserve

Based on the inter-ministerial Protocol signed in September 1991 the World's first trilateral Biosphere Reserve has been officially designated by UNESCO. The "East Carpathians" Biosphere Reserve of the total area of 2,132 square kilometres encompasses six neighbouring protected areas in Poland, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

Since the early 1990s economies of the three abovementioned countries are undergoing the process of transition towards market orientation, which means that conservation issues and transboundary co-operation receive less attention in a situation of other competing urgent needs. To solve this problem the idea to establish a permanent financial mechanism was proposed. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (USA) and the World Bank Global Environment

Facility agreed to provide funding for establishment and permanent capitalization of the foundation and the WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature – provided assistance in the design and legal establishment.

The Foundation for the Eastern Carpathians Biodiversity Conservation (ECBC) registered in 1995 in Switzerland as 'the neutral fourth country' with the objective "to encourage, organise, conduct and promote activities serving to protect the overall biodiversity of the Eastern Carpathians Mountains zone" is an environmental trust fund operating in Poland, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine, serving as the permanent financial mechanism for supporting trans-boundary co-operation on nature conservation and sustainable development in the Eastern Carpathians. Since 1996 ECBC supported 40 local projects on nature and historical heritage conservation, scientific research, environmental education, capacity building and sustainable tourism development with the total amount of around US\$ 110,000 involving additional 40,000 matching funds from other sources ECBC initiated direct co-operation on joint management of the East Carpathians Biosphere Reserve and supports common trilateral thematic working groups on wildlife, plants and forests of the Eastern Carpathians.

The Carpathian Euroregion

The Carpathian Euroregion was established on February, 14th 1993, based on an agreement signed in Debrecen by representatives of local and regional governments from the border regions of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine. At present the Carpathian Euroregion embraces border areas of Hungary, Poland, Romania (a member since 1997), Slovakia and Ukraine, totalling for 161,279 square kilometres, inhabited by a population of about 16 million people.

The mission of the Carpathian Euroregion is to facilitate cross-border co-operation among its members as well as to contribute to the comprehensive development of the member regions for the benefit of their inhabitants.

The common expectations were that the Carpathian Euroregion would automatically repeat the success of

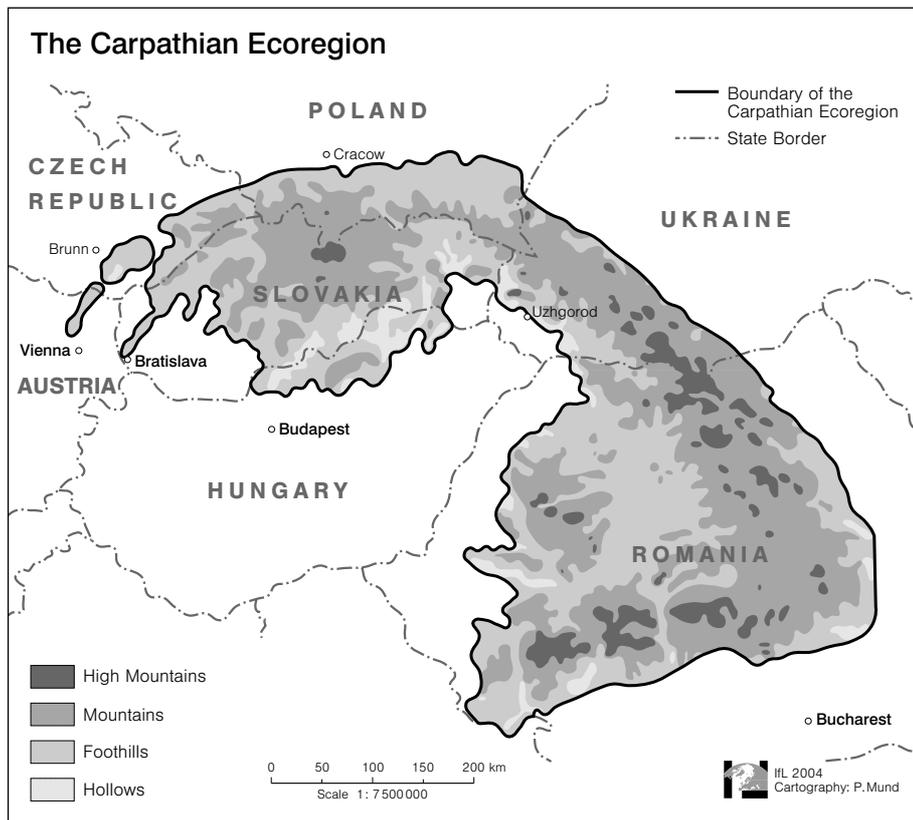


Fig. 2: The Carpathian Ecoregion
 Source: The Status of the Carpathians. A report developed as a part of The Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative, Nov. 2001, S. 2 (www.carpathians.org, Zugriff 11.4.2005)

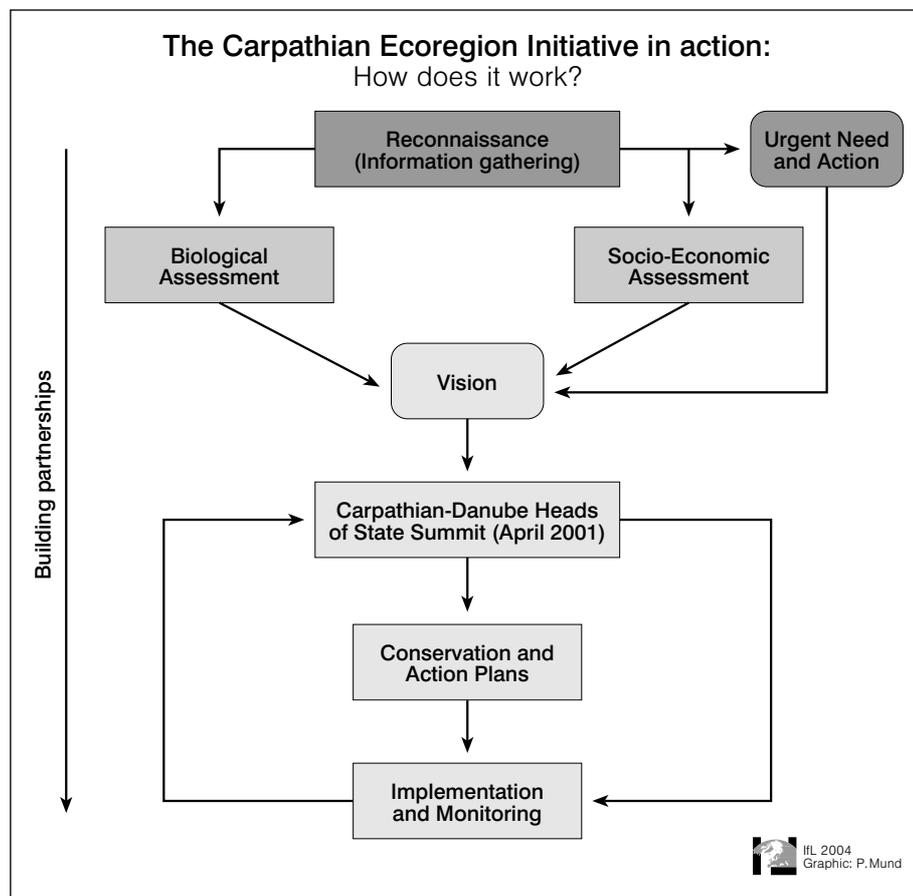


Fig. 3: The Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative in action: how does it work?
 Source: The Status of the Carpathians. A report developed as a part of The Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative, Nov. 2001, S. 11 (www.carpathians.org, Zugriff 11.4.2005)

some other similar inter-regional structures located within the EU, and promote co-operation in economy as the first priority. Different sources¹ admit that the Euroregion has not yet been successful in promoting economic co-operation between member regions, while the co-operation in cultural exchange is the best-developed field of joint activities, e.g. those listed at the Euroregion's website www.carpathian.euroregion.org.

The Carpathian Foundation (www.carpathianfoundation.org), initially called 'the Fund for the Development of the Carpathian Euroregion' was founded in 1994 by the East West Institute with generous support from Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, as an initiative to meet the transition challenges in the Carpathian Mountains by encouraging sustainable democratic, human and economic development. The mission of the Carpathian Foundation is to provide financial and technical assistance to NGOs and local governments. It focuses primarily on inter-regional, economic development, and trans-frontier activities promoting cross-border and inter-ethnic approaches fostering regional and community development in the bordering regions of the Carpathian Euroregion.

Carpathian Scale – non-governmental co-operation

In summer 1999, the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative (CEI) has been launched by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) under the Danube-Carpathian Programme. It aims to combine conservation efforts with actions supporting the local economy and culture and involves some 50 local NGOs from the Carpathians (Fig. 2, Fig. 3). From autumn 1999 to spring 2002 CEI set up 17 thematic working groups, carried out studies and inventories on natural resources, published the "Status of the Carpathians" Report, the Carpathian List of Endangered Species, 17 theme reports, 9 fact-sheets in several languages, identified 30 Priority Areas for Biodiversity Conservation, developed a vision for future protected areas in the Carpathians,

¹ These were opinions of several Ukrainian and Polish 'regional officials'.

funded field projects, organised training, and convened the Carpathian-Danube Summit thus initiating the Carpathian Convention process. In autumn 2003 CEI developed the “Carpathian Project Portfolio” and organised meetings with potential sponsors. From summer 2004 the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative (now abbreviated CERI) developed as an independent international initiative, to be soon registered in the Slovak Republic.

Carpathian Scale – governmental co-operation

From 29th to 30th of April 2001, the “Green Light for Europe” summit on Environment and Sustainable Development in the Carpathian and Danube Region was held in Bucharest [Bucureşti], Romania. One of the outcomes was the Declaration on Environment and Sustainable Development in the Carpathian and Danube Region. Heads of 14 states declared their intention to encourage and support *inter alia* “... Mobilisation of financial resources for environment and sustainable development projects and programmes in the Carpathian and Danube region and the use of existing mechanisms for this purpose, in particular EU funds ...” (Bucharest Declaration, point 4., letter (c)). Furthermore, the Declaration meant also the “green light” for the new Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians.

Carpathian Convention development process:

- April 2001: Bucharest Summit organised by the WWF; Poland officially supports the Ukrainian initiative on the convention; the Declaration on Environment and Sustainable Development in the Carpathian and Danube Region is adopted by the Heads of States;
- November 2001, Kyiv: the first expert meeting on scoping for the Carpathian Convention;
- June 2002, Bozen/Bolzano: Intergovernmental meeting organised by UNEP recommends preparation of a Framework Convention;
- October 2002 - March 2003: negotiations on the Convention text;
- 22nd May 2003, Kyiv: during the Ministerial Conference “Environ-

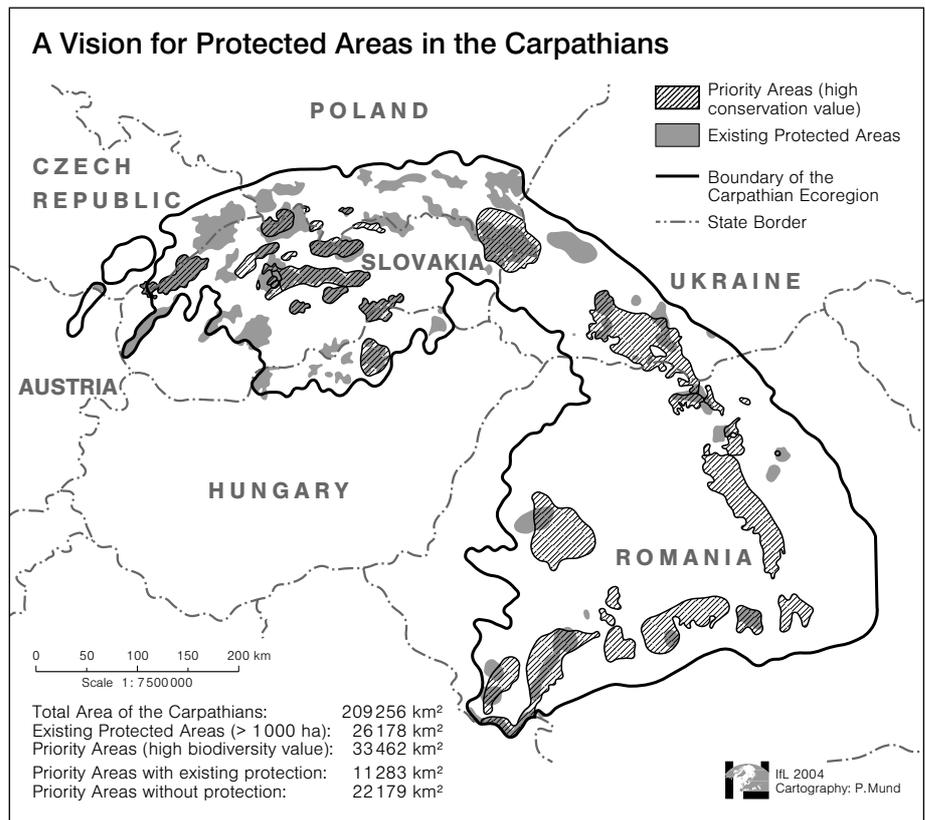


Fig. 4: A Vision for Protected Areas in the Carpathians

Source: The Status of the Carpathians. A report developed as a part of The Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative, Nov. 2001, S. 45 (www.carpathians.org, Zugriff 11.4.2005)

ment for Europe” the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia & Montenegro, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine sign the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (the Carpathian Convention);

- 25th November 2003, Kyiv: Poland signs the Carpathian Convention;
- June 2004, Vienna: UNEP opens the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention.

The overall goal of the Convention is to promote co-operation of the Signatory States for the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians with a view to *inter alia* improving quality of life, strengthening local economies and communities, and conservation of natural values and cultural heritage.

Scope of the Framework Carpathian Convention:²

- Article 3: Integrated approach to the land resources management
- Article 4: Conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity
- Article 5: Spatial planning
- Article 6: Sustainable and integrated

- water/river basin management
- Article 7: Sustainable agriculture and forestry
- Article 8: Sustainable transport and infrastructure
- Article 9: Sustainable tourism
- Article 10: Industry and energy
- Article 11: Cultural heritage and traditional knowledge
- Article 12: Environmental assessment/information system, monitoring and early warning
- Article 13: Awareness raising, education and public participation

Next steps:

- June 2005³: 1st Intergovernmental Committee of the Convention;
- 2004/2005: ratification of the Carpathian Convention (by at least 4 Signatories);
- Autumn 2005: 1st Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention;
- negotiations on thematic Protocols

² These are selected points from the CFConvention Preamble, quoted during the presentation to ‘raise the spirit for cooperation’ among Kraków meeting participants.

³ Currently updated timing for the IGC meeting

to the Framework Carpathian Convention;

- Implementation of the Carpathian Convention.

Networking as a tool for trans-boundary co-operation of protected areas

Protected area networks help to represent their interests towards national, European and international authorities and organisations. By working together as a network, protected areas gain lobbying strength to promote the idea of nature protection as well as of transboundary cooperation (Fig. 4). They establish a common communication strategy and increase public awareness and support for nature protection. Common public relations work is more effective and convincing than individual public relations work. Networks help to build common regional identity and allow a more effective and harmonised management of habitats and species as shared natural heritage as well as joint preservation and promotion of cultural values of the region. Common databases and inventories allow ensuring data compatibility and better planning, jointly designing management and restoration plans, joint work programmes, research and monitoring. Networking allows joint fundraising for conservation projects and contributes to Natura 2000 concept implementation.

A good example of such network is the Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ANPA) created in 1995 as an implementation tool for the Protocol on "Nature conservation and landscape planning" of the Alpine Convention. The ANPA brings together representatives from 350 protected areas throughout the Alps in 8 countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Principality of Monaco, the Principality of Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland. The Network operates in the four alpine languages (French, German, Italian, Slovenian) and English, facilitating communication be-

tween protected areas in different regions.

Concrete examples of the coordinating work done by the Alpine Network are e.g. conferences and workshops for protected area managers (some 20 events per year), staff exchanges and common training, 15 working groups which address specific topics finding solutions for common management or research problems, common European projects (allowing the use of the EU financial tools) and communicating on the activities of the protected areas through a common website, information letters, the ANPA bulletin and transalpine exhibits.

Article 4 para 5 of the Carpathian Convention provides for cooperation of the parties in establishing and supporting a Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA). Between June 2003 and May 2004, building on the experience of the Alpine Network (ANPA), the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas has been prepared in order to:

- allow a more effective and harmonised management of habitats, species and cultural heritage in the eco-regional scale
- allow establishing common databases and inventories ensuring data compatibility
- facilitate joint research, planning, management and monitoring
- allow joint fundraising for joint conservation projects in the Carpathians.

Adoption of the resolution on establishing the CNPA by the 1st Conference of the parties to the Carpathian Convention to be held in 2005 shall allow official launch of this network.

INTERREG as a potential tool fostering regional co-operation under the Carpathian Convention

The INTERREG Community Initiative has a great role in supporting inter-regional co-operation in EU mountain areas, focusing on the promotion of regional products, creation of joint tourism databases and the promotion

of cultural heritage. Successful cooperation has developed among several Alpine regions, building also on experience gained from the implementation of the Alpine Convention.

None of the Carpathian countries has a specifically dedicated national policy for the protection and sustainable development of mountain areas in place. The Carpathian Convention can foster developing such, providing an opportunity to decide what kind of development they want and to determine the level of conservation they want to achieve.

The EU enlargement is a key strategic issue, which has important implications for the political, economic, social and environmental development of the Carpathians. Since one third of the Carpathians entered the EU in May 2004, the voice of mountain areas within the European Union became significantly strengthened.

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