

First informal expert meeting on the cooperation for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathians Ukraine

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MINUTES

(Corrigendum 1)

Agenda item 1: Opening of the Meeting

The informal expert meeting was opened by the representatives of Ukraine, who extended the greetings to the meeting of HE Mr. Kurykin, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources. The meeting elected its Bureau as follows:

Co-chairs: Anna Golubkova-Onisimova, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Ukraine Frits Schlingemann, Regional Representative, United Nations Environment Programme / Regional Office for Europe (UNEP/ROE)

Rapporteur: Harald Egerer, Legal Adviser, UNEP/ROE

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the Agenda

The meeting adopted its agenda as follows:

Agenda item 1: Opening of the Meeting

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the Agenda

Agenda item 3: Introduction by Ukraine: Proposed activities of regional cooperation for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathians, in preparation of the Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", Kyiv, Ukraine, May 2003 Discussion.

Agenda item 4: International Year of the Mountains 2002 in the Carpathians: Opportunity for action:

- UNEP contributions to IYM 2002
- Proposals for action during IYM 2002 and beyond.

Agenda item 5: Identification of needs and issues of regional cooperation for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathians:

- a. Biodiversity Conservation (e.g. Network of Carpathian Protected Areas)
- b. Sustainable economic and social development (e.g., sustainable tourism development)
- c. Sustainable forestry
- d. Sustainable agriculture
- e. Integrated River Basin Management
- f. Cultural heritage
- g. Sustainable transport
- h. Institutional Development, including public participation, information management, monitoring, capacity building
- i. Financial mechanisms

Agenda item 6: Strengthening Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Management of the Carpathians: Available instruments of and possible options for strengthening the framework for cooperation in the Carpathians. Discussion.

Agenda item 7: Next steps / action to be taken / institutional responsibilities

Agenda item 8: Adoption of the report / recommendations

Agenda item 9: Closure of the meeting

Agenda item 3: Introduction by Ukraine: Proposed activities of regional cooperation for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathians, in preparation of the Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", Kyiv, Ukraine, May 2003

The Ukrainian Chairperson appreciated the cooperation with UNEP in organizing the first meeting on cooperation for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathians, which is an important step forward in this process initiated by Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Chairperson emphasized the wide range of activities, which are ongoing in the region, including projects in Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic relating to the protection of the Carpathian mountain ecosystem. Romania has been politically active in hosting successful Summit on Environment and Sustainable Development in the Carpathian and Danube region (29-30 April 2001). Hungary is promoting initiatives aiming at the integrated river basin management as well as the bi- and multilateral co-operation amongst the States of the Tisza river catchment area. The trilateral cooperation between Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine in establishing the East Carpathian Biosphere Reserve is another outstanding example. Various important initiatives are currently implemented through the European Union,

UNEP, World Bank, UNDP, the GEF and other organisations, such as IUCN and the WWF, just to mention the big carnivore's management, the Carpathian Eco-region Initiative by the WWF-Danube Carpathian Programme, and initiatives of further developing the ecological networks in the region.

Possible next steps in this cooperation could be the development of a Carpathian Convention, and/or the programmatic support through projects such as through the GEF or bilateral donors, where the opportunities offered by upcoming International Year of the Mountains should be used. Strong points in the ongoing cooperation are the experienced people involved, already leading a range of activities. A difficult point is the lack of funding, which poses a challenge for the future sound development of the region, such as sustainable tourism development, river basin management, and the conservation of the outstanding Carpathian mountain biodiversity. These are the crucial bricks for further building up the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathian mountain living environment, including their cultural and natural heritage and use of resources in the heart of Europe.

The Chairperson emphasized that a potential Convention for the Protection and Sustainable Management of the Carpathians, would allow for a more coherent, productive and synergetic approach and framework for conducting the various activities,. A possible Carpathian Convention should contribute to the further coordination of the mentioned efforts. Therefore, the present Carpathian Cooperation will be an important regional contribution to the "Environment for Europe"- process, as well as the Conference of Ministers of the Environment, to be held in Kyiv in May 2003.

Agenda item 4: International Year of the Mountains 2002 in the Carpathians - Opportunity for action: UNEP contributions to IYM 2002 and proposals for action during IYM 2002 and beyond

Frits Schlingemann, Director of UNEP/Regional Office for Europe, recalled that the initiative for an arrangement for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathians has been proposed by Ukraine, and is on the agenda for the Kyiv Conference. UNEP had been asked to provide its assistance and to start the activities. In the development of the project, the cooperation with partner organizations proved to be very important, such as with the WWF International - Danube Carpathian Programme.

Mr. Schlingemann emphasized that UNEP is assisting, not leading the process. To the end of facilitating the process, exploratory work has been done, including the present meeting documents. UNEP promoted the initiative in several meetings, and circulated several letters to the countries involved, as well as potential Alpine partner countries. A project proposal, a scoping paper, and draft elements were prepared, and comments were received from Carpathian countries. The present meeting will be crucial in providing an

informal atmosphere for brainstorming, and it is hoped that Governments will benefit from identifying areas for cooperation, providing enough food for thought to Ukraine and all Carpathian countries on how to prepare this item for the Kyiv Conference. Next year will be the UN International Year of the Mountains IYM 2002, which could provide a political and financial momentum to the process.

Dagmar Kubinova, from the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic, pointed out that a general discussion is needed on how to shape the future activities in the targeted geographical area of the Carpathian Mountains. Such activities should not automatically lead to the development of a legally binding instrument, but rather to an "intergovernmental process". Extensive internal consultations with other Ministries at the national level are required, before the support to a legally binding instrument can be generated.

Hungary supported the statement made by the Czech Republic and made a reference to ongoing activities at the regional and bilateral levels. Hungary emphasized that it will be important to improve implementation of ongoing projects and documents.

The Chair emphasized the importance to identify all synergetic effects, also in terms of fundraising and cooperation.

The discussion was followed by a presentation by UNEP on the planned activities at the global, as well as the European level. UNEP/ROE presented in detail the proposed project on "Enhancing the Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Management of the Carpathians".

The UNEP presentation was followed by a presentation of the main project partner, the WWF International - Danube Carpathian Programme, on the ongoing Carpathian Eco-region Initiative.

"Our Home", a non-governmental environmental organisation in Ukraine, reported to have constituted the Ukrainian IYM 2002 Committee.

Agenda item 5: Identification of needs and issues of regional cooperation for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathians

The meeting then considered several potential areas of cooperation, as well as potential benefits and synergies of such cooperation. The discussions were summarized in a table:

The Chairperson summarized the outcome of the brainstorming exercise of identification of the scope for regional cooperation. Several issues would benefit from increased cooperation or an arrangement, many of which are interlinked. Some arrangements could be done within existing fora of

cooperation, such as the PEBLDS or the Forests ministerial process. Some cooperation will be carried out through national focal points, also a "lead country"- approach could be adopted for some items. Some issue might benefit from a stricter approach. There is a need to address the identified areas in the perspective of the protection of mountains. Some areas should remain in a "open window" (e.g. Cultural Heritage, River Basin Management), and be addressed at a later stage if the need so arises.

The question was addressed whether the Carpathian cooperation should mainly focus on biodiversity only, or if there should be a broader focus, controlling various aspects of development and human activities. Ukraine expressed its opinion on the scope of cooperation, emphasizing that issue as infrastructure development, transport, or symptoms related to poverty, are affecting the ecosystem, and there is need to control anthropogenic effects through a regional legal instrument.

Agenda item 6: Strengthening Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Management of the Carpathians: Available instruments of and possible options for strengthening the framework for cooperation in the Carpathians.

It was pointed out by the Co-Chairman from UNEP that considerable progress has been made in developing the future consultation structure. This should allow for a report on results to the next Environment for Europe ministerial conference. The time would show whether the Kyiv Conference would be a starting point of the process, or culminate in the signing of a legal instrument. The result could also be a statement endorsed by the environment ministers, as well as a new structure, to which Governments might designate a coordinating person.

It was suggested by the representatives of Ukraine, that the Minister of the Ecology and of Natural Resources of Ukraine, could consider writing a letter to his colleagues, to inform about the objectives and structure of the initiative, mentioning that there would be a need for more structured cooperation in mountain protection. Core areas where cooperation is wanted should be pointed out, which seem to be close to some issues experienced under the Alpine Convention. The meeting agreed that internal discussions at the national level are needed, including consultations with other ministries, seeking agreement to the identified areas of cooperation. Upon receipt of the replies from other ministries and a mandate for negotiation, the Chairmanship should call for a next meeting, which could aim at suggesting a possible structure for the further cooperation. Therefore, the next meeting participants should be authorized negotiators with the mandate to negotiate a structure for the further cooperation.

Such structure could either confirm existing structures or aim at creating a legal instrument for cooperation. If governments decide to do so, some further thoughts will have to be invested into the design of such structure. Lessons could be learnt on how to adapt and improve the structure chosen e.g. by Alpine countries. The adoption of numerous Protocols might be not always the best solution. The options might also include binding commitments or positive incentives.

The delegate from Poland stated that if the scope of cooperation went beyond purely environmental issues, the process could be complicated by the requirements of coordination between the different ministries. However, the adoption of a broad intergovernmental agreement would be much more useful and effective than non-binding solutions; even so it might be more complicated to negotiate.

The delegate from Czech Republic stated that if a future legal document is going to tackle all the identified issues, all other ministries need to be involved, and the outcome of such consultations with other ministries could not be foreseen at this stage.

The expert from Yugoslavia emphasized that - after the Tisza accident - the Carpathian protection is considered a priority issue in Serbia and FR Yugoslavia. Potentially difficult areas would be energy and transport issues.

Poland stated that a potential legal instrument could be based on the existing declaration of Heads of States, which has been adopted at the Bucharest Summit, some delegations replying that the declaration might be too general. The expert from Yugoslavia urged all participants to bring home to their countries positive reactions from the present meeting, which could facilitate the following inter-ministerial coordination.

Romania reported to have already consulted with other ministries, and has received positive reaction in principle. Another letter by Ukraine would be very useful to get a consolidated mandate, and to get more substantive reactions and positive results in the future.

Hungary mentioned that two documents in Bucharest had been adopted at the Bucharest Summit, the Bucharest Declaration of Head of States and the Report of the Chairman of the Conference of Environmental Ministers. According to this Hungary is especially interested in the development of the co-operation between the five Tisza river basin countries. Hungary mentioned that already at the beginning of the year a first exchange of letters with Ukraine has taken place at the ministerial level and therefore the present initiative had official character. Now other ministries have to be involved and the prospective second letter of the Ukrainian Government might help in starting a formal negotiation process, upon receipt of a relevant mandate.

Agenda item 7: Next steps / action to be taken / institutional responsibilities

The Ukrainian Chairperson proposed to prepare a short paper (2-3 pages) reflecting the areas of cooperation identified, without particular reference to the present informal meeting, accompanied by a letter by the Ukrainian Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources. All participants pointed out the usefulness of such approach.

The informal expert meeting welcomed the ongoing efforts by the United Nations Environment Programme - Regional Office for Europe, in assisting Countries sharing the Carpathian mountain ecosystems in their efforts of strengthening the cooperation for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathian Mountains. The participants invited the United Nations Environment Programme to pursue the promotion of the related UNEP project at the regional and international level, in particular with countries of the neighbouring Alpine Region, and the bodies and processes set up under the Alpine Convention.

The participants expressed their view that the process of cooperation for the protection and sustainable management of the Carpathians should be pursued, and requested UNEP to further facilitate the intergovernmental process, assisting the Government of Ukraine in organizing the intergovernmental process in the light of preparations for the Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", Kyiv 2003.

In its further work in assistance to the Government of Ukraine, UNEP should take due account of the discussion and the outcome of the informal consultations, having identified priority areas of regional cooperation. The government experts welcomed the participation of international and national NGOs in the Carpathian process, such as the WWF International and the Association "Our Home" present in the meeting, and encouraged the ongoing cooperation between the national, international and NGO partners.

The participants welcomed the ongoing support by Alpine countries in the Carpathian project, in particular the interest in the Carpathian cooperation expressed by the Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention in its 19th session. The experts from Poland, Slovakia and Romania thanked the Alpine Network of Protected Areas and the support by the French Ministry of the Environment for their support, which made possible the invitation of Carpathian protected areas managers in the previous working group session of the Alpine Network of Protected Areas, attended by protected areas managers from three Carpathian countries.

The experts recognized the opportunities offered by the upcoming International Year of the Mountains (IYM 2002), and also expressed their view that the present initiative would be supportive in ongoing efforts of European

integration. The initiative also constitutes a follow-up of the Bucharest Summit on Environment and Sustainable Development in the Carpathian and Danube Region.

The importance of involving regions and regional authorities in the process was pointed out, which could also offer additional access to interregional EU funds. Also, opportunities for private - public partnerships in the Carpathian cooperation should be further explored.

Agenda item 8: Adoption of the report / recommendations

Agenda item 9: Closure of the meeting

It was agreed that minutes of the informal expert meeting would be circulated by UNEP. The meeting was closed by the Chair, pointing out the successful brainstorming achieved as well as the importance of ongoing common efforts for fundraising.

Annex

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