

## *Carpathian Convention and the EU accession*

The Carpathian Convention, a multilateral environmental agreement on protection and sustainable development of the Carpathian region, was signed in 2003 by seven countries (5 EU Countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and 2 non – EU Countries: Serbia and Ukraine), and entered into force in 2006.

The Carpathian Convention unites seven Carpathian countries in a unique partnership, providing a transnational framework for cooperation and multisectoral policy integration, an open forum for participation by stakeholders and the public, and a platform for developing and implementing transnational strategies, programmes and projects for protection and sustainable development of the region.

**The Carpathian Convention provisions and its Protocols, consistent with the EU legislation, facilitate the implementation of the EU policies in all the Parties to the Convention and, therefore, the Carpathian Convention plays an important role in the framework of the EU environmental and regional policies. Furthermore, the Carpathian Convention strengthens regional cooperation between the five EU Member States in Central Europe and, at the same time, facilitates the integration process of strategic non – EU countries such as Ukraine and Serbia.**

The Carpathian region faces many challenges which are of the European importance and, therefore, addressing them require better cooperation at the EU level. The accession of the European Union to the Carpathian Convention, as it is the case for other regional conventions, such as the Alpine Convention or the Danube River Protection Convention and other, would allow for **better and more substantial cooperation in terms of preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, climate change and sustainable transition of the Carpathian region.**

In this respect the Carpathian Convention Parties would like to reiterate their strong desire of the EU's participation to the Carpathian Convention, and engage in discussion with the EU institutions on the relevance of the Carpathian Convention for promoting sustainable development and protection in Europe, giving an excellent example for regional cooperation at the European but also international level.

Formally, the invitation for the EU to join the Convention has been expressed, inter alia, in numerous official letters and COP's Decisions starting from COP1 in 2006 and is still maintained. Currently, the Parties to the Convention are in consultation with the Secretariat regarding the **next steps for the EU accession process** (see the Road Map towards the accession of the European Union to the Carpathian Convention below).

The accession to the Carpathian Convention by the European Union would contribute to raising the profile of the Carpathian region and its environmental challenges, supporting green and **sustainable future of the region for the benefit of both, the Carpathians and the European Union.** At the same time, the Carpathian Convention can play an important role as a **regional instrument for strengthening implementation of global and European policies,** and a model for **mainstreaming biodiversity into other sectors.**

Support of relevant actors, such as the Parties, especially the Ministries responsible for the Environment and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, other EU Member States, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions, UNEP and other institutions, in this process will be instrumental for bringing it to successful conclusions.

## **Road Map towards the accession of the European Union to the Carpathian Convention:**

- Consultation between the Parties, especially the Ministries of Environment and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and the Secretariat regarding the EU accession to the Convention and related further steps to be undertaken – led by the Polish Presidency (online on regular basis)
- **6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (COP6) - 25 November 2020, online meeting**
  - The COP reiterates the invitation for the EU to accede to the Carpathian Convention, and adopts relevant decisions in this respect
  - Poland officially announces that the EU accession to the Carpathian Convention is the Presidency priority
- Elaboration of a background document facilitating the EU accession to the Carpathian Convention – coordinated by the Secretariat
- **Meeting/s of the Ministers responsible for the Environment at the margins of the EU Environmental Council** – organized and led by Poland with support of Hungary (date tbc)
  - The Carpathian Ministers are invited to inform the Commissioner for Environment about the political will for the European Union accession to the Carpathian Convention, asking for consideration of this issue and inviting the Commissioner for the Ministerial Conference of the Carpathian Convention in 2021
- Establish a dialog with the EU Commission regarding the EU accession to the Convention
  - EU Commission is invited to designate a focal point in this respect
- **Ministerial Conference of the Carpathian Convention - 2021, Poland (tbc)**
  - official request (tbc) for the accession of the European Union to the Carpathian Convention made by the Heads of Delegations (in a form of a declaration or a letter) ideally in the presence of the Commissioner/other EU representative
- **EU Environmental Council - 2021/2022**
  - official request made by the Polish Presidency of the Carpathian Convention to the EU Environmental Council for the accession of the European Union to the Carpathian Convention