

Statement by the representative of regional authorities –
Mr. Władysław Ortyl, Marshal of the Podkarpackie Region of Poland
delivered at the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian
Convention, 25 November 2020

I would like to cordially welcome you all, thank you very much for inviting me to this virtual meeting. I want to say that the sun is shining in Podkarpacie today, but of course we are expressing our sadness that we cannot meet here personally. Rzeszów is situated at the foot of the Carpathians and from here, from this meeting room, you would see our beautiful Podkarpackie Bieszczady Mountains.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Podkarpackie Region is largely covered, in 40% by the framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, and I am thinking here of the Carpathian Convention. That is 67 municipalities in our region, all of which are environmentally valuable and attractive for tourists, and of course have specific challenges and great development opportunities. We use, obviously, the Podkarpackie Region Strategy for the development of our Bieszczady Mountains, but also, of course, we have a detailed strategic programme for the development of the Bieszczady Mountains and a strategic programme for the 'Blue San'/ 'Błękitny San', which includes one of the most beautiful and the largest rivers, which has its begin in the Carpathians, flows out from Bieszczady Mountains. We have been constantly implementing many international projects for the Carpathians, for the benefit of our mountainous areas, we have been developing the road infrastructure, we have been supporting local governments through EU funds under the Regional Operational Programme, but also under the Poland-Slovakia and Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Programmes. We have been doing all these things while waiting for the future Carpathian Strategy and for the future road that is going to open up the Carpathians, i.e. the Via Carpatia expressway.

Thank you very much that we can work very closely with the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention. I do believe that this cooperation will continue to expand due to the fact that one of the priorities of the Polish Presidency is to strengthen cooperation at regional and local levels. We want to cooperate and lobby for the creation of the next macro-regional Carpathian Strategy, and we also want to support the activities of the Convention so that the European Union joins the Carpathian Convention. I do all these things as a Marshal of the Podkarpackie Region, but also as a member of the European Committee of the Regions and as a Chairman of our special Carpathian Group.

Apart from the Board and the Marshal, this cooperation also involves the members of the Podkarpackie Regional Assembly, who have formed a special Carpathian Commission, and have made a decision on Podkarpackie Region accession to Euromontana, an international association that supports mountain areas. The Podkarpackie Region still maintains its willingness to establish the Permanent Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention in Rzeszów, if such a decision of the Ministers responsible for the Carpathian Convention is taken. We have been maintaining this will since 2013.

We are very sorry and, at the same time, we are taking various measures to reverse the decision of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism Committee on canceling our funding for the project *Carpathian route - exploring, promoting and protecting the richness of the cultural and natural heritage of the Carpathian Region*. We are taking a number of actions here, and we are, of course, also asking for support in these matters.

And now, at the end, I would like to invite you to a film, for such an unusual journey through the Podkarpackie Region. I would like you to see the most beautiful tourist attractions in our region, to know how to spend your leisure time, to know where to find delicious and traditional cuisine, and to see what you will not see, and I would like this to encourage you to come to Podkarpacie, to make you miss Podkarpacie and to ensure that our declared meeting can really take place. Thank you very much and I invite you to Podkarpacie.

Władysław Ortyl, Marshal of the Podkarpackie Region, Poland