

Statement

**by Mr Sándor Farkas, Deputy Minister of Agriculture of Hungary at the
handover ceremony of the presidency of the Framework Convention of the
Carpathians**

*6th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Sustainable
Development of the Carpathians
Videoconference, 25 November 2020*

**Madam Executive Director, Mister Deputy Minister, Heads of Delegations, Ladies and
Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Hungarian presidency of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, I would like to welcome you to the 6th Conference of the Parties to the Convention, which, for the first time in its history, is being held on-line owing to the COVID pandemic affecting our region as well. Let me thank you all, but in particular, the farmers and the family farms in our respective countries that keep up the hard work amidst a pandemic. We owe a debt of gratitude to them for the fresh food that they provide for us daily, notwithstanding these hard times. It is important that we should remember them and continue to appreciate their contribution even when these extraordinary times are over.

As you all know, by signing the Framework Convention in 2003 and relying on the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the seven countries concerned entered into an alliance to make all reasonable efforts to protect the Carpathians and develop them in a sustainable manner. These efforts include the protection of the natural values and the cultural heritage of the region, the improvement of the quality of life of those living there and the strengthening of local economies and communities. If we are to succeed, we must adopt an integrated approach and treat the Carpathians and the adjacent regions as one single unit. Cooperation between the Carpathian and Danube regions is particularly important. The Carpathian Mountain range connects us both physically and spiritually.

It is a great honour to welcome, on behalf of the Hungarian presidency and the entire Carpathian community, Ms Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP. We wish to thank

her and express our great appreciation for the interest that she takes in the Carpathian region. Based on the experience we have gained through the 3 years of the Hungarian presidency, it is safe to say that the Vienna Office and Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention headed by Mr Harald Egerer, has worked very efficiently as the small secretariat of the Carpathian Convention.

My colleagues have told me that Mr Egerer and his staff are dedicated to operating the Convention at a high professional standard, ranging from organising working group sessions to preparing projects that are key to ensuring financial resources for cooperation. Thank you for this support, which we hope will continue going forward. We think that it is important to strengthen and support the subregional presence of UNEP, in particular, in the Western Balkans, the ambitions for EU integration of which are supported by the Hungarian Government. We also highly appreciate UNEP's global activity, especially successful preparation for and the implementation of the fifth session of UN Environment Assembly, We also welcome its intention to strengthen cooperation with international environmental protection conventions and wish success in UNEP's COVID-related activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Hungary took over the presidency from its successful predecessor, the Czech Republic at the 5th Conference of the Parties to the Convention held in Lillafüred, Hungary, in October 2017. In addition to continuing the management of on-going projects, we gave high priority among others to elevation of climate change-related activities and promoting issues including education for sustainable development and awareness-raising, protection of cultural and natural heritage, agriculture and rural development, environmental safety and the further development of cooperation mechanisms, i.e. issues which had received less attention under the Framework Convention before. As an agricultural professional, I am personally pleased that Hungary's presidency started by adopting the Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development and amending the Framework Convention with a provision on climate change .

We will be hearing the Secretariat, the individual countries and the cooperation partners talk about the results of the past three years soon. To put it briefly, subject to human and financial resources, major steps have been taken in nearly all areas of cooperation. In addition to the countries concerned, this was attributable, to a large extent, to a large number of participants

including the Science for the Carpathians cooperation forum and those providing funds for the projects.

Although, thanks to the secretariat, we have managed to switch over to on-line communication, the COVID pandemic has prevented us from realising all our plans in 2020.

I also consider important that our efforts that have been made for the EU's joining the Framework Convention, and which have been slowing down due to the epidemic situation, are showing signs of progress. We also thank Executive Director Inger Andersen for her personal intervention in this regard. We think that global visibility and recognition of the Framework Convention have grown over the past years, and its role in the adoption and implementation of global processes and programmes at regional scale is likely to further increase.

Dear Partners,

On behalf of the Hungarian presidency, I would like to thank all my colleagues and partners for their work, participation and support. The 24 draft decisions on the agenda today are the result of long preparation, and the result of the joint effort of the Secretariat and the parties to the Convention.

We hand over the presidency to Poland in the hope that it will continue the work in progress while engaging in new activities as well. We would like to offer our support and, on behalf of the troika, look forward to closer cooperation with Serbia as well, the country to host the 2023 Conference of the Parties to the Convention. I am privileged to hand over the “shepherd's stick”, the symbol of the presidency of the Carpathian Convention – albeit, for the time being, only virtually – to Deputy Minister Czetwertyński in the hope that we will be able to repeat the handover in person at the Carpathian Ministerial Conference planned to be held next year. I wish you success in your presidency.

To conclude, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that European cooperation is neither an abstract notion nor a few remote institutions' business. It is we who constitute Europe and, hence, Eastern and Central Europe as well. We are connected closely through our shared past, present and, hopefully, future. Euphoria over the political changeover 30 years ago made us ignore each other somewhat, and also the fact that friendly relations between neighbouring countries are indispensable for good life and peaceful development. We now

know that we need both good neighbours and good friends, which is true of us and all the other countries in the region. The European Union and the entire continent will be what we make them become. We recommend that we should think of the Carpathian Convention as a means to that end.

I wish you success in your COP6-related discussions and, even more importantly, good health.

Take care and stay safe.

Thank you for your kind attention.