

Carpathian Convention COP7, High-Level Segment,
12 October 2023, 11:45 – 13:30

BACKGROUND NOTE

For the High-Level Panel Discussion - 20 Years of the Carpathian Convention: Assessing Progress, Inspiring Action and Shaping the Future in times of triple planetary crisis

The Carpathian Mountains provide essential ecosystem services to millions of people who reside in the area and beyond, contributing to the health of diverse landscapes. In addition to being the home to the headwaters of major rivers, the region is a biodiversity hotspot in Europe, harbouring some of Europe's last remaining virgin forests and the largest populations of large carnivores: lynxes, brown bears and wolves.

The Carpathian Convention, a multinational environmental agreement, unites the 7 Carpathian countries—Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine—in a unique partnership to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathian region while promoting sustainable development. The Convention provides an open forum for discussion between various stakeholders, a framework for transnational cooperation across sectors, and a platform for developing and implementing transnational strategies, programmes, and projects for the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathian region.

This year, the Carpathian Convention is celebrating 20 years of implementation at the upcoming 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (Carpathian Convention COP7) in Belgrade, Serbia. Since it was signed and adopted in 2003, the Convention has adopted notable Protocols, mobilised dozens of projects and developed key partnerships for ensuring the well-being of Carpathian ecosystems and communities.¹ As the Convention reflects upon its 20-year implementation journey, the Carpathian Convention COP7 will envision pathways forward for mobilising future actions.

Punctuating this need for inspiring action is the fact that **human actions are driving the triple planetary crisis** of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, threatening the planet's functioning and ability to support life and the future of humanity. Additionally, **conservation actions are often uncoordinated and unmonitored**, and environmental and development policies remain siloed due to a lack of a scalable and cross-sectoral framework. This leads to an imbalance between human well-being, ecological health and economic efficiency.

¹ Consult the Annex for more information on adopted Protocols, strategic partnerships and projects.



Toward this end, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted by 188 governments at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in December 2022 to stop and reverse biodiversity loss through ecosystem restoration and protection of nature. Member States are responsible for translating and scaling the overarching global goals and action targets into meaningful social, economic and environmental development actions. As all Parties of the Carpathian Convention are signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the GBF provides an opportunity to align global and regional objectives, while simultaneously contributing to the achievement of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. The Carpathian Convention is well-positioned to coordinate such efforts for the region.

Thus, a Carpathian Biodiversity Framework, to be adopted at the Carpathian Convention COP7, translates the GBF into relevant actions for the Carpathians and ensure joint efforts for living in harmony with nature by 2050 in the region. The Carpathian Biodiversity Framework is an innovative approach to further implementing the Carpathian Convention and will serve as a strategy for addressing the triple planetary crisis through cross-sectoral partnerships in the Carpathians.

The primary objective of the High-Level Round Table Discussion on 12 October 2023 will be to assess the Convention's progress and identify needed actions to implement the Convention within the context of addressing the triple planetary crisis.

Annex: Reaching Milestones, Raising Awareness and Mobilising Actions

Reaching milestones

Since 2003, the Parties adopted 5 Protocols to the Carpathian Convention: biodiversity, forest management, tourism, agriculture and transport. While the Framework Convention contains more general provisions, Protocols contain specific obligations. The Protocols are the most important means to completing and facilitating the implementation of the Convention's general principles. Thus, they are one of the greatest tools the Convention yields to tangibly address the triple planetary crisis.

- **The Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity** seeks “to enhance the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity of the Carpathians.” Adopted in May 2003, the Protocol requires Parties to coordinate their efforts on several activities: conserving, maintaining and sustainably using natural and semi-natural habitats; securing habitat continuity and connectivity; restoring degraded habitats; conserving and sustainably using species of Carpathian flora and fauna, particularly conserving endangered or endemic species and large carnivores; enhancing partnerships within Carpathian ecological networks and across sectors; and developing biodiversity indicators and monitoring systems. One such activity to emerge was the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA), encouraging the protected area administrations to cooperate through this network.
- **The Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management** seeks “to promote the sustainable management and protection of Carpathian forests.” Adopted in May 2003, the Protocol requires Parties to cooperate on maintaining and protecting forests, especially virgin forests; sustainably using forest products and services; restoring close-to-nature forests; strengthening forest governance to combat illegal activities; improving the social and ecological benefits of forests, especially for cultural heritage, rural development, climate change mitigation and ecosystem services; exchanging best practices and research; and promoting local community participation in forest management.
- **The Protocol on Sustainable Tourism** seeks to enhance cooperation “to maximize the positive [co-benefits] of tourism to biodiversity, ecosystems, and economic and social development...while mitigating negative ecological, environmental and socio-economic impacts from tourism.” Adopted in May 2003, various cooperative activities include marketing and managing the Carpathian region as a tourist destination for the benefit of local economies; managing the environmental, socioeconomic and cultural impacts of tourism; enhancing tourism's contribution to biodiversity, agriculture, forestry, cultural heritage and public awareness of sustainability; and promoting transboundary cooperation for sustainable tourism infrastructure and monitoring. One such activity to emerge was the establishment of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform in May 2017 to enhance implementation of the Protocol.
- **The Protocol on Sustainable Transport** seeks enhance cooperation for developing “sustainable freight and passenger transport and related infrastructure in the Carpathians...while avoiding, minimizing and, where necessary, mitigating and compensating

negative environmental and socio-economic impacts of transport and related infrastructure development.” Adopted in September 2014, it requires Parties to consider biodiversity by avoiding habitat fragmentation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting green infrastructure.

- **The Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD)** is the newest Protocol, adopted in October 2017. It seeks “to maintain the management of land, traditionally cultivated in a sustainable manner,” through integrated land resource management. This incorporates “environmental concerns into agricultural policies while improving quality of life, strengthening local economies and communities, and conservation of natural values and cultural heritage. One flagship initiative was the Foundation of Transhumance Pastoralism, which organizes sheep migration as a tourist attraction.

Raising awareness

Partnerships and public participation are key priorities for bridging together science, policy and practice for sustainable development and healthy ecosystems and communities. Both are important for not only carrying out the Convention's activities, but also for cross-sectoral synergies, which are necessary for combating the interlinked crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and ultimately influence the direction of development and environmental protection.

Toward this aim, [the Carpathian Convention has developed key partnerships](#) in ecological, scientific, and educational and outreach networks. These partnerships span intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, EU entities and other conventions. However, more progress could be made in developing partnerships across sectors among the networks for better information exchange, public engagement and balanced outcomes.

Public participation is integral to sustainable development and conservation, but education, awareness, and access to information are key determinants of how meaningfully the public is involved in decision making processes. Thus, the Convention is keen to connect local and regional actors so that lifelong learning and global education approaches are integrated into the Convention itself.

Mobilising actions

Dozens of projects have been realizing the objectives of the Carpathian Convention, bringing its implementation closer to the people of the Carpathian region. These projects are funded, facilitated and sometimes initiated by the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention. Because these projects have delineated timeframes, it is vital that the Convention continues to cultivate partnerships and public engagement with its activities so that project outcomes can be long lasting.

Some recent notable projects include:

- [SAVEGREEN](#): safeguards transnational ecological corridors in the Danube basin
- [ConnectGREEN](#): restores and manages mountainous ecological corridors as green infrastructure in the Danube basin
- [TRANSGREEN](#): improves green and grey infrastructure planning in the Carpathians



- [Centralparks](#): builds management capacities of Carpathian protected areas for the integration and harmonization of biodiversity protection and local socio-economic development
- [Central Mountains](#): improves governance models in the Alpine-Carpathian Mountain areas, emphasizing transboundary cooperation for solving common sustainable development challenges
- [LECA](#): introduces effective conflict prevention measures and monitoring approaches on large carnivores in the Carpathians
- [NaturaConnect](#): supports a resilient ecological network of conserved areas across Europe for nature and people