

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (COP7)

Empowering the Carpathian Vision 2050

We, the Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland, Romania, the Republic of Serbia, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine, being responsible for the implementation of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (hereinafter referred to as the "Carpathian Convention") and having met in Belgrade, Serbia on 12 October 2023, on the occasion of the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention;

Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the signing and adoption of the Carpathian Convention, which took place on 22 May 2003 in Kyiv, Ukraine, when our countries momentarily came together with a shared vision to protect the remarkable natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathian region, recognizing the importance of its unique ecosystems for not only their intrinsic value but also their vital role in maintaining ecological balance, providing livelihoods, and enriching the lives of our communities;

Commending the impressive progress made in realizing the objectives of the Carpathian Convention and its Protocols during the past two decades, and expressing appreciation for the unwavering commitment and endeavors of all individuals and organizations that have played a pivotal role in fostering the achievements of the Carpathian Convention;

Recognizing, nonetheless, that the Carpathians, like the entire planet, are confronted with the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, which demands decisive and transformative action to tackle these increasingly complex environmental challenges;

Recalling the Ministerial Declaration on Carpathian Commitments for the implementation of the new post 2020 global biodiversity framework adopted on 22 November 2022 in Rzeszow, Poland at the Carpathian Ministerial Conference;

Calling for renewed commitment to achieve the **Carpathian Vision 2050**, where by 2050, the Carpathians is a thriving and sustainable region, where people live in harmony with nature. The biodiversity and natural beauty of the Carpathians are conserved, restored, and wisely used, providing a healthy environment and essential ecosystem services for all people of the region and beyond.

Have declared the following:

We welcome with appreciation the adoption of the *Carpathian Biodiversity Framework*, which shall facilitate the regional implementation of the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*, as a vital instrument to comprehensively implement the Carpathian Convention and its Protocols while contributing to the attainment of global biodiversity goals and targets, and in this respect, we call for undertaking collective effort to implement it.

We welcome the development of the *Inventory of Virgin Forests of the Carpathians*, a critical step towards fortifying the protection of some of Europe's few remaining primary forests, and encourage extending the Inventory to encompass other Carpathian forests with varying degrees of naturalness, especially quasi-virgin forests to better safeguard Europe's most invaluable forested areas.

ADOPTED

We welcome the Assessment of climate change risks and adaptation options for the Carpathian forest ecosystems and their services along with the recommendations provided, and we strongly urge the full implementation of these recommendations to bolster resilience and sustainability of Carpathian forest ecosystems, enabling them to effectively withstand and adapt to the interconnected array of impacts and risks related to climate change.

We recognize the need to address air, water and soil pollution in the Carpathians, and we call for specific actions on combating plastic pollution in the watercourses of the region. In this regard, we advocate for implementation of pertinent measures by various stakeholders to effectively mitigate this issue.

We highly welcome the establishment of the Transboundary Ramsar Site Iron Gates Natural Park – Djerdap along the Danube River, which spans the border between the Republic of Serbia and Romania. In light of this accomplishment, we emphasize the importance of fostering enhanced collaboration, particularly with assistance of the Carpathian Wetland Initiative, to ensure and bolster the effective conservation and sustainable use of wetlands in the Carpathian region.

We recognize the essential role that protected areas play in strengthening social, economic and ecological resilience in times of environmental crisis and conflict, thus we call on the management of protected areas to enhance their participation in the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA), which serves as a crucial framework and tool for promoting transnational collaboration among protected areas across the Carpathian countries and enabling a pursuit of joint efforts aimed at addressing mutual concerns.

*Acknowledging the importance of ecological connectivity for halting biodiversity loss and ecosystems degradation and the fact that Carpathians form a natural bridge between western and eastern Europe for species migration and genetic exchange, we acknowledge the progress made in the implementation of the *International Action Plan on conservation of large carnivores and ensuring ecological connectivity* and also encourage an active engagement of the Parties, stakeholders and relevant initiatives, such as the CNPA, in establishing a Trans-European Nature Network, as a coherent network of protected areas throughout Europe, one of the strategic actions outlined in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.*

We acknowledge the vital role that regional and interregional collaboration plays in tackling environmental challenges, especially those at transboundary level. Consequently, we encourage implementing appropriate measures fostering exchange of knowledge and best practices among adjacent areas, including the Western Balkans, the Alps, and other mountainous regions of the world on topics relevant for sustainable mountain development.

Further, we highly welcome the recently renewed Memorandum of Cooperation between the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention, which seeks to enhance collaboration among these Conventions, with a specific focus on effective implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework within the Alpine and Carpathian regions, as well as fostering the exchange of exemplary practices with other mountain regions.

We recognize the significant role of the Carpathian Convention as a regional mechanism for facilitating and reinforcing the implementation of European environmental policies in the Carpathians, and supporting integration of European environmental standards in the European Union candidate countries. In light of this, we reiterate the invitation to the EU to become a signatory to the Carpathian Convention. Concurrently, we advocate for intensified collaboration between the Carpathian Convention and EU institutions, aimed at supporting concerted efforts to address the urgent challenges of biodiversity decline and ecosystem restoration, which shall yield mutual benefits for interrelated processes and the well-being of people and the environment across the Carpathian region and Europe.



ADOPTED

We acknowledge the remarkable achievements of Ukraine in environmental protection, especially evident in the expansion and designation of protected areas, including the substantial enlargement of the Synevyr, Uzhanskyi, and Zacharovanyi national nature parks in the Carpathians during 2019, and the new designation of Boykivshchyna national nature park in the Lviv region.

However, we *remain* attuned to the challenges posed by the ongoing war in Ukraine, which hinder the provision of nature protection services and cause direct and indirect negative impacts on the environment and local communities, and thus *recalling the Ministerial Declaration of the Carpathian Convention on the impact of war in Ukraine on the environment and the need for cooperation and assistance* adopted on 22 November 2022 in Rzeszow, Poland, we *urge* for a unified and substantial effort to assist Ukraine to address the environmental consequences of the direct and indirect impacts of the war in Ukraine on the Carpathians, with possible support of international instruments and projects to ensure the necessary and effective management of vital protected areas within the Ukrainian Carpathians holding immense ecological value in the context of transboundary and national conservation efforts.