

**Opening of the COP7 High-Level Segment**  
**Welcome address by Mr. Adam Guibourgé-Czetwertyński,**  
**Deputy Minister of Climate and Environment of Poland – outgoing Presidency**  
**Belgrade, 12 October 2023**

It is my great pleasure to open - together with Mrs. Irena Vujović, Serbia's Minister for Environmental Protection - today's meeting, which has brought together high-level environmental representatives from all 7 signatory countries of the Carpathian Convention. On behalf of the Polish Presidency of the Carpathian Convention, I welcome you all.

We are gathered here today because we share a common vision for the Carpathian region, which is home to some 17 million people in an area of more than 400,000 square kilometers.

Mountain ecosystems are not only a reservoir of natural diversity in its most wild and unaltered form, but also a valuable source of drinking water and other raw materials important to the human economy. Being a valuable cultural and natural heritage, mountain ecosystems foster the development of pastoral economy and tourism.

The goal of the establishment of the Carpathian Convention in Kiev 20 years ago was to improve the quality of life of local communities by strengthening the local economy, while preserving and protecting the region's precious natural assets and cultural heritage.

These goals remain relevant today. The way to achieve sustainable development of the Carpathians is through regional and interregional cooperation and the involvement of members of local communities in the processes of protection and socio-economic transformation of the region.

I am taking part in today's meeting not only as a representative of a state in the Carpathian region, but primarily as a representative of Poland's current, ending presidency of the Carpathian Convention, assumed by Poland during the difficult period of the COVID epidemic, and continuing during the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, during which Poland assumed the presidency of the convention, could not be held in the traditional manner due to the pandemic. Carpathian experts met virtually on November 25, 2020, and it was the first ever Conference of the Parties in this form. These difficulties did not prevent a fruitful discussion and the adoption of a set of 24 decisions, important for the further implementation of the Convention.

We were forced to postpone the ministerial segment. It was held in the form of the Carpathian Ministerial Conference in Rzeszow (November 22, 2022), which debated the natural potential of the Carpathians and opportunities to support Ukraine in reducing the environmental impact of the war. The conference adopted two ministerial declarations relating to the Carpathian Convention's contribution to the implementation of the new Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and to the war in Ukraine. Meeting participants pledged to promote and integrate biodiversity into sectoral and cross-sectoral policies by applying the Carpathian Convention's

integrated approach to sustainable development and its goals. Based on the report on the impact of Russian aggression on the natural environment of the Ukrainian Carpathians, prepared at the request of the Polish Ministry of Climate and Environment, a declaration was adopted to help Ukraine counteract the direct and indirect effects of the war.

Attaching great importance to cooperation in the implementation of the Carpathian Convention with local governments, the Ministry of Climate and Environment organized a ministerial conference together with the local government of the Podkarpackie region. A representative of local authorities, the Marshal of Podkarpackie Voivodeship (Władysław Ortyl) stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation and coordination of activities within the framework of the adopted strategies, which should lead to their synergy and coherence. Growing human pressure is making the effectiveness of strictly protective measures less and less effective. Indeed, among the most important factors in the loss of biodiversity are impacts resulting from the conduct of human activities in various sectors of activity, such as agriculture, forestry, transportation, or industrial and mining activities. That is why biodiversity conservation must become a permanent element incorporated into other policies, since activities aimed directly at nature conservation - whether area-based or species-based - do not and cannot be sufficient in the current reality.

During its presidency, Poland hosted two meetings of the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee: the 12th meeting in Krakow on 18.11.2021 - 19.11.2021, and the 14th meeting in Mszana Dolna on 14.06.2023 - 16.06.2023. At the aforementioned meetings, directions for further activities were determined and progress in implementing the goals of the Convention was assessed. Work was carried out on preparing draft documents and decisions for the current COP 7 of the Carpathian Convention. It is noteworthy that the participants of the meeting of the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee in Mszana Dolna were also representatives of the Andean region for the first time. An interesting debate allowed the exchange of experiences and identification of common problems affecting mountain areas, regardless of their location on the world map.

Poland's three-year presidency of the Carpathian Convention is coming to an end. It was a difficult time, differing in character from previous presidencies. However, the parties to the Convention have met the challenges and strengthened the importance of the Convention in the international arena, as well as in their own countries. The time is right to officially hand over the presidency of the Convention from Poland to Serbia.

I invite Minister Irena Vujović, to whom it gives me great pleasure to hand over this shepherd's staff, which has been the symbol of the chairmanship of the Carpathian Convention for several years.

I wish the Minister that Serbia's chairmanship of the Convention will be successful, and I wish all of us an interesting meeting and fruitful discussion in the rest of the session.