

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



Chamber of Regions

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Sustainable development of mountain regions and the experience of the Carpathian Mountains

Committee on Sustainable Development
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Summary

The importance of mountains in the European landscape is often undervalued. The Congress reaffirms the need for a special and integrated approach that delivers sustainable solutions to the structural challenges of mountain regions as outlined in its draft European Charter for Mountains.

Indeed, mountain regions are important homes of natural and cultural heritage, they also provide crucial ecosystem services for the entire population. Sustainable economic development is a priority for these regions but a balance has to be found between economic development and environmental protection.

Economic and social cohesion should be at the heart of mountain policies, as they require measures which are compatible with the protection of, and respect for, the environment and which take into account the human and democratic rights of mountain residents. For these policies to be effective and coherent, they should apply to the entire mountain massif and rely on transfrontier and regional cooperation.

The Carpathian region is emblematic of the diverse and specific difficulties facing mountain regions. Its environment and natural resources are under increasing economic pressure which is putting the ecological, economic and social balance of the region in danger. The region therefore deserves a strong and dynamic local and regional governance and to receive special attention from the international and European community.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
NR: Members not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



A. DRAFT RESOLUTION²

1. The various mountain regions in Europe offer many advantages that benefit the entire continent. However, they face specific challenges which require appropriate policies, implemented in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity with effective local self-government, to meet the needs of their citizens.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe reiterates its belief³ that European policies must take into account the structural and economic challenges inherent in mountain regions. With this in mind, the Congress supports the call of the Committee of Regions⁴ to put in place a truly integrated European policy for all mountain massifs whilst respecting their diversity. These policies should recognise the diverse contribution and crucial role of local and regional authorities in the field of sustainable development of mountain areas.

3. Indeed, the majority of mountain regions in Europe are peripheral territories with difficult natural conditions which require particular integrated holistic development policies to guarantee the populations of mountain regions the right to live and work in the mountains, the preservation of their living environment with living conditions comparable to the more favourable conditions in rural and urban regions.

4. These policies need to have social cohesion at the heart of their concerns to meet the challenges posed by maintaining employment and access to essential services as well as by demographic changes. Additionally, considering that European mountains constitute an exceptional cultural and linguistic heritage, it is important that these policies defend and foster their development by ensuring that social and cultural identities and traditions are respected and preserved.

5. Furthermore, as most mountain ranges lie in border regions, the Congress believes that these policies need to be applied to the entire massif to be effective and coherent. Indeed, each mountain massif should be viewed as a macro region. Mountain policies should be implemented coherently on both sides of the border. It calls for a reinforced transfrontier and interregional co-operation which will apply the principles outlined in the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (ETS No. 106) and in particular, its new Protocol No. 3 concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (CETS No. 206).

6. The Congress considers that any mountain policy should rely primarily on the authorities closest to the territories, citizens and problems of mountain regions, and this in full respect of the subsidiarity principle as laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy. It is appropriate to encourage cooperation between these authorities and to support any initiatives they may take.

² Preliminary draft resolution and preliminary draft recommendation approved by the Committee on Sustainable Development of the Chamber of Regions on 27 September 2010.

Members of the Committee :

V. Kadokhov (Chair), *I. Linge (Vice Chair)*, *C. Abela Baldacchino (alternate : F. Cutajar)*, *R. Bayrak*, *L. Beauvais*, *MA. Caronia (alternate : G. Marmo)*, *Z. Cholewinski*, *D. Cukur*, *L. Dellai*, *N. Dudov*, *P. Jansen*, *M. Kichkovskyy (alternate : A. Langner)*, *J. Mattei-Fazi*, *S. Neeson (alternate : J. McCartney)*, *C. Nicolescu*, *P. Receveur*, *A. Stoilov (alternate : D. Ruseva)*, *E. Szucs*, *B. Toce*, *E. Villaroja Saldana*.

N.B. : The names of members who took part in the vote are in italics.

Secretariat of the Committee : *M. Moras*, *N. Howson*

³ Recommendation 130 (2003) on the European Charter for mountains.

⁴ For a green paper – towards a European union policy for upland regions: a European vision for upland regions (CoR 23/2008).

7. The implementation of good regional governance can offer effective solutions to economic, social and environmental challenges in mountain regions. It should promote greater transparency and accountability and promote citizen participation in the decision-making process and in the implementation of policies which impact on their lives. In general, regional authorities need to strengthen the trust between public authorities and citizens.

8. The Congress stresses the fundamental role of local and regional authorities in creating specific sustainable development policies for their mountain regions and in the conception of territorial planning programmes to improve the competitiveness and attractiveness of these regions.

9. As an example of the challenges facing mountain regions, the Carpathian mountain range covers seven countries,⁵ it is home to around 17 million people and exceptional natural and cultural wealth. This region faces major environmental and socio-economic challenges (depopulation, unemployment, pollution, flooding and land/mud slides) which must be addressed.

10. The Congress takes note of the final declaration of the international conference 'Sustainable development of the Carpathians and other European mountain regions' held in Uzhgorod, Ukraine (8-9 September 2010).

11. It also considers that the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) constitutes an important basis for the future of the region. Local and regional authorities in the region should play a key role in its concrete implementation and reinforce the cooperation and exchange of good practice.

12. *The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe invites local and regional authorities and in particular those in the Carpathian mountains:*

a. to practise good regional governance with a shared vision of the future of the massif which transcends administrative and geographic boundaries and respects the subsidiarity principle;

b. to encourage the participation of the local population in the decision-making process, in particular, as regards territorial planning, protection and use of natural resources of the mountains;

c. to recognise that ecological stability and sustainable development of mountain regions cannot be achieved alone but require increased and closer, formal and informal, transfrontier and interregional cooperation.⁶ Regional authorities should favour transfrontier cooperation and synergies to benefit from expertise and best practices in this field;

d. to implement specific policies to combat social exclusion in these sparsely populated areas and which respond to the problems of migration, in particular of youth, as well as the maintenance of essential services;

e. to revitalise the economy and improve employment through encouraging and investing in the development of activities which make sustainable use of the natural resources found in mountain regions such as sustainable tourism and renewable energy sources;

f. to make full use of the potential of information and communication technologies to maintain local services of proximity including administrative, educational, health and social services.

⁵ Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

⁶ Recommendation 270 (2009) and Resolution 286 (2009) on transfrontier co-operation in Europe.

13. *The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe invites the local and regional authorities of the Carpathian Mountains:*

a. to reinforce transfrontier and interregional cooperation through the creation of informal and formal networks of local self-government authorities of the Carpathian regions and to actively engage in the work of the 'Carpathian Euroregion';

b. to support the elaboration of a strategy for the Carpathian region within the framework of the Carpathian Convention and be proactively involved in the implementation of the Convention's provisions and projects.

14. Finally, *the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe invites the Committee of the Regions of the European Union* to continue its undertaking for a European mountain policy, with a particular attention to the Carpathian regions and to promote cooperation between those regions in the European Union and those which border it.

B. DRAFT RECOMMENDATION⁷

1. The importance of mountain areas in the European landscape is often undervalued. They are important homes of natural and cultural heritage and they also provide crucial ecosystem services for the entire population. Their economic development is a priority that requires actions compatible with the protection and respect for the environment.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe reiterates its commitment to an integrated and specific approach to the development of mountain regions which are facing particular structural challenges, notably in environment, transport and socio-economic development. It reaffirms the principles contained in the draft European charter for mountains.⁸

3. It also recalls that regional authorities should be mobilised into undertaking an active role in the management of the mountain massif. An integrated sustainable development strategy is required to conserve these regions' natural resources in the face of such problems as pollution, unplanned development and the unsustainable use of natural resources.

4. Strategies for the development of mountains need to have social cohesion at their heart to meet the challenges posed, in particular, by high unemployment, depopulation and population aging. Respecting and preserving the cultural heritage and linguistic diversity of mountain populations also needs to be taken into consideration.

5. A perspective of territorial cohesion needs to be brought to these integrated policies with a need to renew multi-level governance and to reinforce cooperation between different levels of governance, international, national, regional and local. Territorial cohesion will be strengthened through cooperation and solidarity links between towns, peri-urban zones and rural areas in mountain regions.

6. Furthermore, as almost all Europe's mountain regions have transnational boundaries, these policies should take into account the entire massif and should be implemented at macro regional and international levels

⁷ See footnote 2

⁸ Recommendation 130 (2003) on the European Charter for Mountains.

7. The Carpathian mountain range covers seven countries,⁹ it is home to 16 million people and possesses exceptional natural and cultural wealth. This region faces particular environmental and socio-economic challenges which are exacerbated by the isolation of the region. Indeed, some parts of the mountain range are border areas which are poorly connected to urban centres in the lowlands. The total population and area are comparable to other European mountain regions and the position of the region is strategic within the European continent. Therefore, the Carpathians should receive much more attention and appropriate support from the European Union.

8. The Congress congratulates the signatory member states of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) for the work already achieved and the steps that have already been taken towards the conservation and sustainable development of the mountain range, through initiatives such as the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA).

9. Nevertheless, the Congress is convinced of the important role that local and regional authorities have to play in the implementation of the Carpathian Convention. It calls, in respect of the principle of subsidiarity and of multi-level governance, for their better integration from the very definition of projects.

10. The Congress fully supports the call of the Ministerial Declaration¹⁰ for the creation of a stand-alone 'Carpathian Space' in the programme of the European Territorial Cooperation Programme, such as exists for the 'Alpine Space', to support the general objectives of the Carpathian Convention and of other stakeholders engaged in the region. Indeed, the 'Alpine Space Programme' has given rise to many projects, networks and tools on territorial spatial development and economic development for the Alpine regions. This experience and knowledge could be of direct benefit to the Carpathians.

11. The Congress welcomes the consultation process currently underway for a European Union strategy for the Danube Region and believes that a chapter of the strategy should be devoted to the Carpathian Region. Local and regional authorities should be mobilised to take an active role in the implementation of this strategy bringing it to the level closest to the citizens.

12. *Consequently, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe ask member states, in particular, member states from the Carpathian region:*

a. to integrate sustainable development in mountain regions into national and regional policy-making and development strategies through mountain-specific policies and involving local and regional authorities in their design and implementation;

b. to recognise that for mountain-specific policies to be effective they have to be applied throughout the massif and in a transversal manner; high-level meetings, involving various ministers (environment, social cohesion, regional planning, energy for example), as well as local and regional authorities and civil society should be organised to coordinate macro regional actions in the massif;

c. to ensure that the management and implementation of special policies and programmes for mountain regions are carried out in the most decentralised manner possible and to ensure that the powers and financial resources of local and regional authorities are strengthened in order to promote these policies;

⁹ Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

¹⁰ Ministerial Declaration from the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (17-19 June 2008, Bucharest, Romania).

d. to sign and ratify Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (CETS No. 206) in order to actively encourage transfrontier cooperation and to enable local and regional authorities to enter into agreements and develop concrete actions;¹¹

e. to improve the sustainable development and management of mountain regions through appropriate policies which respect the “polluter pays” principle and promote the use of renewable energy, the creation of sustainable tourism and sustainable forest management.

13. *The Congress also urges the member States signatory to the Carpathian Convention to increase the participation of local and regional authorities in the implementation of the Convention.*

14. *The Congress furthermore invites the European Union:*

a. to pay particular attention to the challenges faced by the Carpathians in the forthcoming Danube Strategy and ensure the involvement of local and regional authorities and their communities;

b. to create a ‘Carpathian Space’ in the European Territorial Cooperation Programme to support the objectives and implementation of the Carpathian Convention throughout the entire massif including in countries that are not members of the European Union.

C. EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

I. Introduction

1. Mountain regions constitute an exceptional and diverse cultural and natural heritage. They form an essential element in the balance of the planet’s ecosystem and can be considered an invaluable asset which belongs to everyone. However, many mountain regions face poverty and difficulties in maintaining employment which in turn lead to economic migration. Economic development is a priority for these regions but a balance has to be struck with the protection of the rich environment that is their home.

2. The Congress has continued to pay close attention to the sustainable development of mountain regions since it adopted Recommendation 130 (2003) on a European Charter for mountain regions. It regrets that the Charter did not become a binding legal instrument as mountain regions still lack economic and social cohesion. The lack of cohesion is directly linked to the handicaps facing mountain regions due to their inaccessibility, difficult terrain and low demographic density.¹²

3. An integrated sustainable development strategy is required to conserve European mountain regions’ natural resources and enhance their balanced development. Policies need to address a whole range of issues including: management of natural resources, in particular water; development of sustainable agriculture and forestry; a carefully planned reinforcement of transport infrastructures and the maintenance of services of general interest; not forgetting the preservation and nurturing of cultural heritage and traditions.

4. The majority of Europe’s mountain areas straddle national boundaries and have a tradition of autonomous and locally-based initiatives. This means that for sustainable development policies to be effective they should take into account the entire massif and be elaborated and implemented at inter-regional and international levels.

¹¹ Recommendation Rec(2005)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and inter-territorial cooperation between territorial communities or authorities.

¹² Recommendation 225 (2007) and Resolution 245 (2007) on challenges and opportunities for peripheral and sparsely populated regions.

5. The experience of the Carpathian Mountains is a particular example of the challenges facing mountain regions. It is a major trans-boundary mountain range stretching over seven countries,¹³ five of which are members of the European Union. The total population and area are comparable to the Alps but they have received less European attention and support. The Carpathian Mountains offer an exceptional store of natural and cultural heritage but some areas are also facing socio-economic problems and severe environmental damage including uncontrolled depletion of natural resources and industrial pollution. The sustainable development of the Carpathians was discussed by local and regional authorities at a conference held in Uzhgorod, Ukraine (8-9 September 2010).¹⁴

6. The diverse and particular challenges facing mountain regions require strong and dynamic local and regional governance to develop specific integrated policies which meet the needs of citizens and promote the sustainable development and enhancement of the environment.

II. The important role of mountain regions

7. The various mountain ranges in Europe play an important life-giving role for the entire continent and can directly influence the impacts of climate change. At the same time, local and regional authorities need to maintain territorial cohesion and surmount the often difficult mountain conditions to ensure citizens can exercise their right to live and work in the mountains, enjoy living standards comparable to more favourable conditions in rural and urban regions while preserving their environment.

8. Awareness needs to be raised on the fragility of mountains' ecosystems which are globally important, notably as the major source of the Earth's freshwater. In Europe, mountains provide a direct life-support base for over a third of the population as well as essential goods and ecosystem services to the rest of the population. Many of Europe's most impoverished people live in mountain regions, consequently there is a need to ensure the ecological health and economic and social improvement of these regions in a sustainable manner not only for the sake of mountain inhabitants and people living in lowland areas, but also to safeguard this natural resource.

9. Mountain biological and ecological diversity is particularly fragile and sensitive to climate change. The sensitive ecosystems in mountains provide an early indication of global climate change through phenomena such as a decrease in biological diversity, the retreat of mountain glaciers and changes in seasonal runoff. These phenomena may impact on major sources of freshwater in Europe and highlight the need to take action to minimise the damage. This is another problem that does not stop at borders and solutions need to be found at international level.

10. The population living in the lowlands are generally unaware of the ecosystem services that mountains freely provide. These services support, directly or indirectly, the quality of life of the European population through services such as food, clean air, water, fuel and materials for building as well as regulating services such as air quality, climate, flood prevention and water purification. Cultural services should not be forgotten, despite being non-material, there are direct benefits of aesthetic enjoyment and recreation from mountain landscapes.

III. The particular example of the Carpathian mountains

A mountain range of exceptional natural and cultural wealth

11. The Carpathian mountains are a twisted, fragmented mountain chain, spread over 200,000 km², making them Europe's largest mountain range. The situation of the whole region can be considered to be peripheral, far away from large urban centres and markets. A great deal of the Carpathians remains untouched in comparison to other mountain ranges in Europe. Consequently it is important to

¹³ The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

¹⁴

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1671117&Site=Congress&BackColorInternet=e0cee1&BackColorIntranet=e0cee1&BackColorLogged=FFC679>

pay particular attention to the question of sustainable development in the Carpathians and to its economic development to ensure that it does not become overtaken by environmentally damaging industry and tourism.

12. When we refer to the 'Carpathians', we refer also to the foreland, or the foot of the mountains, where most of the services for the mountain population are located. Around 17 million people of different nationalities, ethnicities, religions and social status live in the Carpathians. Although divided by borders, linguistic barriers and socio-political circumstances, they are nevertheless united by the severe living conditions and bound by unwritten laws of neighbourliness and mutual help, crucial for stability and safety.

13. The Carpathians have always been a contact point of different cultures and ethnic groups. Many traditions, artefacts and monuments have been preserved and there are 28 UNESCO world heritage sites in the region. The cultural heritage is extremely rich and varied with a creative tradition of craft work. Mountain culture is an invaluable part of our shared heritage and is increasingly threatened by the encroachment of globalised lifestyles. Respecting and preserving the cultural heritage and the linguistic diversity of mountain populations needs to be a central pillar in sustainable strategies for mountain regions.

Numerous environmental challenges and opportunities

14. The Carpathians offer an exceptional store of natural wealth, for example they are a bastion for large carnivores, home to over half of the continent's populations of bears, wolves and lynx and to one third of all European plant species, including 481 endemic species. However, they also face severe environmental damage including loss of wetlands, floodplains and forests – notably the last remaining virgin forest in Europe – toxic contamination and ecological disturbance to the balance of the rivers, unsustainable agriculture and uncontrolled pollution from industry. Since 2006, the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA)¹⁵ has been working to conserve national resources in the Carpathians, even so, the 'Carpathians Environment Outlook'¹⁶ has stressed that the 'next 15 years will be as crucial as the last 30 for shaping the future of the environment' in the massif.

15. The Carpathians have a vital role to play in ensuring Europe's freshwater supplies as the mountains receive twice as much rain as the surrounding areas and feed the Danube, the Vistula and other major rivers that flow into the Black and Baltic seas. According to the WWF, the Carpathians have some of the cleanest streams on the continent but also some of the most polluted. Moreover, flooding is one of the major environmental hazards in the Carpathians and in recent years, the frequency and extent of floods, landslides and mudflows in the region has risen dramatically. The resulting negative economic and environmental impacts are felt across frontiers and in the region as a whole. Flood defences require transborder cooperation and long term planning and investment as was seen in the sustainable flood prevention development in the Tisza river basin.¹⁷

16. Another cause for increasing concern in the Carpathian region is waste management. There is a low awareness amongst the population of the need to preserve the fragile ecosystem and fly tipping is a frequent occurrence. In many places, waste dumping is left uncontrolled as refuse dumps are full and opposition to siting new dumps near to local communities increases. The management of sewage waste in some remote mountain communities also needs to be improved as water contamination is a serious problem. At a local level, steps need to be taken to decrease the amount of municipal waste and investment is needed to improve sewage and recycling systems.

Major economic and demographic challenges

17. Economic development is a priority issue for many mountain regions, however, economic and environmental imperatives should be considered as complementary and not contradictory to each

¹⁵ <http://www.carpathianparks.org>

¹⁶ United Nations Environment Programme: Carpathians Environment Outlook 2007 (KEO)

http://www.carpathianconvention.org/NR/rdonlyres/C6CDF61B-4F53-4EB9-99F4-F08233B33910/0/00_prechapter.pdf

¹⁷ http://www.icpdr.org/icpdr-pages/tisza_basin.htm

other. Examples of sustainable solutions which can also foster the regional economy include the development of renewable energy production capacities, promoting high-quality low-yield agricultural production and developing responsible tourism and recreational and leisure activities through careful spatial planning.

18. Developing renewable energy production in mountain regions can have a triple benefit. It can increase the amount of clean, reliable energy available from sources provided freely in the region, (wind, hydro and solar). It will ensure a provision of energy in the mountains where the cost of providing traditional energies is often very high and can create employment opportunities.

19. The seven Carpathian countries may share a similar history but they have a more varied present. The countries are in various stages of transition from planned to free market economies, and the differences in the socio-economic and environmental policies vary greatly between the five European Union member countries and Serbia and Ukraine.

20. The economic development of the Carpathians has been shaped by a long tradition of sheep farming, mountain agriculture and forestry. The recent financial crisis has hit mountain regions hard, reducing profits and increasing unemployment, which has added to the massive migration of labour. There is still great potential for sustainable tourism in the region, and the specific regional features of the mountains, their cultural identities and heritage can find their place in a competitive world thanks to good regional governance.

21. Young people are leaving mountain regions to find work and study in cities and urban areas. This migration, combined with an aging population and lack of population growth, is also leading to an irreplaceable loss of traditional knowledge, livelihoods, practices and values. New policies for sustainable development should take into account these issues and be prepared to slow and reverse this trend. Innovative tools such as e-learning, e-working, decentralised universities and specialised training centres linked to the local economy, offer new opportunities. In addition to this, some regions could consider support measures for young people who wish to return home after completing their studies elsewhere.

22. Population ageing is a phenomenon touching the entire European continent, however, many mountain regions are experiencing population ageing at an even greater rate than more central regions. They are also finding it particularly difficult to respond to the specific needs of an ageing population as efficiency thresholds are not reached for the provision of public and general interest services. Investments need to be made and innovative solutions found for the challenges posed by aging populations to transport structures and general services.

IV. Some strategies for the development of the Carpathian region

Promoting good governance

23. In most Carpathian countries, the mountains are not only far from the capital city and urban centres but often far from the preoccupations of central government. Each country's existing sustainable development strategy covers the whole of the country but does not focus specifically on the mountain region. Only one of the seven countries in the Carpathian mountain range has a mountain specific policy (Romania). At the European level, the Committee of the Regions of the European Union has called for a European policy on mountain regions similar to the policy on maritime regions.¹⁸

24. The Congress for its part has developed instruments which aim to promote territorial cohesion. The European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS 122) and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy provide local and regional authorities with opportunities to develop self-

¹⁸ For a green paper – towards a European Union policy for upland regions: a European vision for upland regions (CoR 23/2008).

governance and to consolidate the implementation of policies that allow mountain regions to solve some of their specific problems.

25. Good regional governance can offer an effective interface between national issues and the local concerns of citizens. If the economic, social and environmental challenges in the Carpathians are to be solved, local and regional authorities need to strengthen their capacities and practices and build greater trust between public offices and citizens.¹⁹ Good regional governance should promote greater transparency and accountability, and citizens should be able to participate in the elaboration and implementation of policies which impact on their lives.²⁰

26. Good regional governance in the Carpathians also means building bridges between regions in neighbouring countries. Transfrontier cooperation can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services through the sharing of facilities and services. It can also contribute to the economic development of border regions through the development of clusters and the exchange of innovative ideas, whilst jointly funded research will help reduce disparities between regions by promoting regional economic growth and territorial and social cohesion. The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities and Authorities (ETS No. 106) and its new Protocol No. 3 on Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (CETS No. 206), offer a cooperation framework for inter-regional development, environmental protection and the improvement of public services.

27. Transfrontier cooperation projects²¹ already exist in the Carpathian regions, nevertheless, they deserve to be multiplied and strengthened. In this respect, the 'Carpathian Euroregion' should be particularly mentioned, it was established in 1993 and currently has 19 member regions in 5 countries (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine). An effective Euroregion can provide a platform to strengthen social and economic cohesion throughout the massif and promote the sustainable use of resources as well as encouraging cultural cooperation and exchange. The Carpathian Euroregion needs to be consolidated and expanded to a larger number of regions. They should play a more active role in the definition and implementation of projects bringing them to the level closest to the citizen.

28. The local and regional authorities of the seven countries forming the Carpathians need to make further efforts to work together in partnership to tackle the specific challenges facing their regions to achieve greater stability, prosperity and security of their populations. They should take a proactive approach to establishing networks and to implementing concrete transfrontier cooperation projects. Further exchanges of experience in this respect could be envisaged with the Congress Committee responsible for interregional cooperation.

Reinforcing international cooperation

29. Intergovernmental organisations and NGOs have taken an active role in developing transfrontier strategies to reinforce cooperation for sustainable development in the Carpathian region. The United Nations took the lead and was instrumental in the creation of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) which was adopted by all seven Carpathian countries at the 2003 Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" held in Kyiv (Ukraine). The Carpathian Convention calls for cooperation and the development of coordinated spatial planning policies aiming at the sustainable development and environmental protection of the Carpathians.²² The Congress fully supports its work and encourages local and regional authorities to be proactively involved in its concrete implementation.

¹⁹ Recommendation 265 and Resolution 283 (2009) on good governance: a key factor for the sustainable economic development of regions.

²⁰ Recommendation 182 (2005) on public participation in local affairs and elections.

²¹ - In the Lviv region of Ukraine a joint Ukrainian-German project for mountain districts' spatial planning named "The Carpathian Taxon" has been successfully developed to improve road and transport infrastructure, tourism and recreation sites location etc.

- Ukrainian and Slovakian experts worked on a plan of spatial development for their border territories.

²² <http://www.carpathianconvention.org>

30. Further coordination would be gained through the creation of a 'Carpathian Space' in the European Territorial Cooperation Programme. This would enable a more cohesive and holistic approach to the sustainable development and protection of the entire mountain range. The Congress supports the call of the Conference of the Parties²³ to the Carpathian Convention for a stand-alone 'Carpathian Space' programme following the successful example of the 'Alpine Space' programme.²⁴

31. Moreover, by the end of 2010, the European Commission will have prepared a European Union strategy for the Danube region.²⁵ It is essential that this strategy include a specific chapter on the Carpathian mountain region and the particular challenges it faces. Indeed, it makes up a large part of the Danube region and 80% of the mountain water drains directly into the Danube. It is important that the sustainable development priorities of all the Carpathian countries be fully incorporated and addressed by the EU Danube Region Strategy and related high-level EU processes and programmes.²⁶

32. Since the last enlargement of the European Union it has become increasingly important that all the countries in the Carpathians and their local and regional authorities be involved in strategies and programmes for the mountain range and not just those who are members of the European Union, to provide greater coherency and a shared approach to the development of the region.

V. Conclusions

33. This report has reiterated the need for specific, integrated policies for the sustainable development, planning, management and environmental protection of mountain regions. These policies should be oriented towards the creation of sustainable mountain regions where people want to live and work, both now and in the future.

34. The capacity of local and regional governance is reliant on the skills of elected representatives, it is essential that there is a continuous programme to build up the institutional capacities of local and regional authorities in mountain regions, which will give them concrete skills to undertake projects such as developing environmental policies and transfrontier cooperation agreements.

35. Social cohesion in mountain regions is increasingly under threat from high unemployment, depopulation and demographic trends, in particular population ageing. Local and regional authorities must guarantee access to essential services and to infrastructures, including in areas of low population density, as a response to these challenges. The Congress is convinced that the delivery of essential services in rural mountain areas can generate sustainable economic growth and job creation in those areas traditionally suffering from highly limited job and training opportunities and promote territorial cohesion.²⁷

36. Globalisation has had the effect of launching regions as actors in the global arena while challenging the role of nation states as regulators of the economy. In most situations the global integration of mountain regions is to a high degree based on their capacity to export raw materials and natural resources. The opportunities for mountain regions are closely linked to their potential to act in the global context. Therefore, effective local and regional self-government is indispensable for mountain regions to ensure that they are fully participating in the sustainable management of their natural resources to best benefit the local people and economy.

²³ Second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (17-19 June 2008, Bucharest, Romania)

²⁴ The call for the establishment of a Carpathian Space Programme was one of the major outcomes of the "Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian Area" (VASICA) produced under the Carpathian Project (former INTERREG IIIB Cadses).

²⁵ Countries concerned: Austria, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Romania, Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

²⁶ EU Strategy for the Danube Region – The Carpathian Region – a macro-region forming an integrated part of the Danube region. Inputs submitted by the UNEP – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention on behalf of the Carpathian Convention.

²⁷ Recommendation 235 (2008) and Resolution 252 (2008) on services of general interest in rural areas, a key factor in territorial cohesion policies.

37. The many environmental and socio-economic challenges facing mountain regions do not stop at borders which is why cooperation networks between regions and across borders are essential for the effective implementation of mountain-specific policies. These policies need to be coherent and applied to the entire massif to be effective.

38. Concerning the particular case of the Carpathians, to a great extent the future rests on the strength and capability of its regions. A strong, proactive region can implement good governance practices which will increase economic development without sacrificing environmental, social and territorial cohesion. The countries which form the Carpathian mountains are still in the process of economic development and this report has outlined some approaches and policies to encourage that this development be done in the most sustainable manner possible, not only to protect the exceptional Carpathian environment but to protect the future of the people who live there.

39. Finally, mountain regions are a vital source of natural and cultural pleasure in Europe, they should not be taken for granted but should be valued and protected. However, it is not a question of turning them into museums, they are a living home to people whose right to live and work should be protected and developed. Local and regional authorities of mountain regions need to be mobilised and be innovative in their approaches to ensure economic and social development whilst limiting its environmental impact.