



# **EU Strategy for the Danube Region**

## ***The Carpathian Region – a macro-region forming an integrated part of the Danube region***

Inputs submitted by  
UNEP - Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention  
on behalf of the Carpathian Convention  
(Adresse: Wagramerstrasse 5, 1400 Vienna/Austria  
ID number 66757543422-23)

For further information please contact  
Mr. Harald Egerer (Interim Secretary of the Carpathian Convention),  
Email: [harald.egerer@unvienna.org](mailto:harald.egerer@unvienna.org), Tel.: 0043 1 260 60 4545



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## **Introduction**

The following inputs have been prepared by the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention. They are intended to serve as an input for the consultation process on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (duration: 2 February to 12 April 2010). The following inputs have been elaborated taking into account the questionnaire communicated by the European Commission in its scoping paper for the public consultation.<sup>1</sup>

### **1. The Danube Region Strategy – scope of application and topics to be covered**

Although the core of the Danube region is the Danube river with its basin the future Strategy on the Danube region should not put its focus on river-related issues (e.g. navigation) *per se*, as the territorial coverage of the Danube region encompasses also the hinterland of the river and its basin. In particular, the Carpathian mountains are one of the most important sub regions of that hinterland.

The Carpathian region is the largest mountain area in Europe, being shared by seven Central and Eastern European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Republic of Serbia, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine. The majority of these Carpathian countries – being also the Parties to the Carpathian Convention - border the Danube river and its basin. This manifests itself *inter alia* through the following fact: 80% of the Carpathians water drains into the Danube river as pointed out by the WWF Danube Carpathian Programme.

In particular, the major Carpathian tributaries of the Upper Danube Basin are the Morava River with the Dyje River whereas the major Carpathian tributaries of the Middle Danube Basin are the Váh, Hron, Ipel, Juzna Morava and the Tisza, the latter being the largest of all. In addition to this, the Lower Danube Basin encompasses the following rivers from the Carpathian region: The Timok, Jiu, Olt, Arges, Ialomita and the Siret and the Prut.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Document REGIO/E1/EN/NV/OB D(2010), Brussels, 2 February 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Further information can be found in the Carpathians Environmental Outlook (2007), Chapter 3.5 Water Resources, available at [http://www.carpathianconvention.org/NR/rdonlyres/DF8CC9F5-04B1-4DC2-B331-1D3D16AAD0A0/0/CH\\_3b.pdf](http://www.carpathianconvention.org/NR/rdonlyres/DF8CC9F5-04B1-4DC2-B331-1D3D16AAD0A0/0/CH_3b.pdf)



Map of the Danube Carpathian Region (source: WWF Danube Carpathian Programme)



It is therefore recommended that the future EU Danube Region Strategy also encompasses aspects of the Carpathian region taking into account the specific characteristics and the same time weaknesses of these sensitive ecosystems:

The Carpathians – as a youthful range less suitable for larger settlements - belong to the less developed areas, even in the Central European context. The mountain areas are less suitable for agriculture, the Carpathian range is less passable than the Alps resulting in poor accessibility. The situation of the whole area is peripheral, markets and large urbanized centres are far. The Carpathian region is also an area of borders, that pose a hindrance to economic cooperation and integration.

There are different levels to define the Carpathian area. The first one is the proper mountain region with minimum elevation of 600 m and minimum slope of 20°. The second one is the foreland, or the foot of the mountains which are in direct connection to the mountainous area, and where a large part of the services, serving the mountain population are located. The third level is the wider region – including the NUTS3 (in Ukraine NUTS2) level administrative units to which the mountainous areas belong. Most of the statistical data and analyses refer to these latter units. For the purposes of the analysis and strategy building in the Carpathian region, the widest area has been delineated as Carpathian programme area - the so called “Carpathian Space”. This delineated area of the Carpathian Space is significantly wider (470 thousand km<sup>2</sup>) than the area of the Carpathian mountains (190 thousand km<sup>2</sup>).



The Carpathian Countries are developing an overall Strategy for the entire Carpathian Space in the framework of the Carpathian Convention. This work is based on the VASICA (“Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian Area”), which constitutes the first transnational spatial development document for the entire Carpathian Space and a core output of the INTERREG IIIB CADSES “Carpathian Project” (see box below).

The Carpathian Strategy is currently being further developed by the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Spatial Planning, in consultations with regional authorities of the region. One of the overall objectives of the Carpathian Strategy is to ensure that sustainable development priorities of the Carpathian Space are fully included into and addressed by the EU Danube Region Strategy and related high-level EU processes and programmes.

Therefore, the future EU Danube Region Strategy should have a multi-sectoral approach covering various areas, such as energy, environmental protection, tourism and transport, education and awareness-rising, cultural aspects. These fields beside others were also identified as key elements of the future EU Strategy for the Danube Region at the Danube Summit on 25 February 2010 in Budapest.<sup>3</sup> Sustainable development encompasses an economic, social and environmental dimension. This multi-sectoral approach also corresponds to the view of the European Union and was lately reflected by the European Council as well.<sup>4</sup>

To adopt a comprehensive approach is important, especially with the view of facing the challenges in the Danube region, such as the economic crisis, defragmentation of landscape, etc.

The threats and challenges in the Carpathian Space - forming a major part of the wider Danube region – are similar to those characterizing the entire region and multi-faceted as well : Rural population pressure combined with shortage of agricultural land area, climate change, migration pressure, huge economic, social and security gaps along the external borders, to mention a few of them. The Carpathian region after the recent enlargement of the European Union has become the Eastern external border area of the European Union. Whatever policy in relation to the enlargement process will be pursued in the future, securing a political stability requires cooperation with neighbouring countries and to help them to stabilise their economy and to improve the living conditions of their population.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, it would be recommendable - according to main concrete actions and projects in the coming years within the Strategy – that priority will be given to those activities aiming at a comprehensive approach and linking different sectors rather by tackling one specific sector.

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<sup>3</sup> Compare with the Declaration of the Danube summit, Budapest, 25 February 2010, para. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Compare with Presidency Conclusions, Meeting of the Brussels European Council 18/19 June 2009, Doc 11225/2/09 REV 2

<sup>5</sup> See also threats in the Carpathian area, Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian Area (VASICA), pp. 25ff.



## **2. Implementation of the EU Danube Region Strategy – the importance of regional and sub-regional cooperation**

In order to foster the cooperation and coordination and the exchange of good practices in the Danube Region, already existing regional tools need to be allocated and strengthened while taking into account the specific demands of certain regions.

It is out of question that mechanisms of regional and sub-regional cooperation play a crucial role in the wider context of international policies and efforts. Complementarily to ongoing efforts on the international and European level they contribute to the implementation of efforts by addressing specific problems and developing regional solutions to specific regional problems that might differ from region to region.

The Convention of Biological Diversity has put regional cooperation high on the agenda<sup>6</sup>: Its actual programme of work on mountain biological diversity sets out the goal of establishing regional and transboundary collaboration and establishing cooperative agreements in order to implement the objectives and goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The role and, in particular, the importance of sub-regions and linked mechanisms has also been recognized at the international meeting on the elaboration of the European Danube Region Strategy, hosted by the Hungarian embassy in Vienna, 15 February 2010.<sup>7</sup> This view was also reflected at the high –level meeting at the Danube Summit in Budapest as the representatives of the governments of the participating countries made reference to enhancing cross-border, trans-regional and trans-national cooperation and coordination.<sup>8</sup>

In relation to the Danube Region Strategy, existing multilevel international governance mechanisms like the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River and Framework Convention for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians are well suitable frameworks for cooperation. Strategies being defined and implemented within these frameworks of cooperation already contribute to ongoing efforts being undertaken within the wider EU Danube Region Strategy. The Carpathian Convention in particular - with the Carpathian region as the scope of its application - covering a large macro-region within the bigger Danube Region - disposes of already existing instruments and tools for addressing pertinent issues in the context of the EU Danube Region Strategy.

Rather by developing new mechanisms, existing mechanisms of cooperation within the wider Danube Region should be therefore strengthened as these existing tools can contribute to the implementation of the aims and objectives of the Strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> See also Program of Work, available at <http://www.cbd.int/mountain/wopo.shtml>

<sup>7</sup> See also outcome document of the meeting, “Principles, objectives and some critical components of the European Danube Region Strategy based on the criteria of sustainable development” summarised by the Chairman of the meeting

<sup>8</sup> See also the Declaration of the Danube Summit, Budapest, 25 February 2010.



An overall EU Strategy for the Danube Region can also further help to coordinate activities among these different mechanisms of regional and sub-regional cooperation with the aim of creating further synergies.

The added value of the future EU Danube Region Strategy to existing mechanisms of regional and sub-regional cooperation would be to strengthen them and link them to each other with the view of establishing further synergy effects. An overall future Strategy on the Danube Region would facilitate a coordination between these mechanisms, while taking into account the specific characteristics and needs of these distinct regional areas.

### **3. The Carpathian Region and the Carpathian Convention**

The Carpathian Mountains are the Eastern wing of the Great Central Mountain System of Europe, curving on the territory of eight Central and Eastern European countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia). The Carpathians begin on the Danube near Bratislava. They surround Transcarpathia and Transylvania in a large semicircle, sweeping towards the south-west, and end on the southern bank of the Danube near the Iron Gate, in Serbia. The total length of the Carpathians is over 1500 km, and the width of the mountain chain varies between 12 km and 500 km. The greatest width of the Carpathians corresponds with their highest altitudes. The system attains its greatest breadth in the Transylvanian plateau and in the meridian of the Tatra group (the highest range with Gerlachovský štít, at 2655 m in Slovak territory near the Polish border). It covers an area of 190000 km<sup>2</sup>, and, after the Alps, it is the most extensive mountain system in Europe.

The Carpathian region is a European Region, stretching over the area of 8 European countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine). Its total area and population is comparable to that of the Alps. Nevertheless, so far much less attention was paid – in European context - to this area than to the Alps. Since the 1st of January 2007, 6 Carpathian countries out of the 8 are members of the European Union. But even the other two – Ukraine and Serbia - are of key importance for European security and development.

The Carpathian Region is a living environment for millions of people in the heart of Europe, harbouring also a diverse cultural and natural heritage. Still this heritage has to face numerous threats and adverse impacts caused by land abandonment, habitat conversion and fragmentation, deforestation, large scale migration on the one hand, and from industrialisation, pollution and overexploitation of natural resources on the other as already highlighted above. The situation of the area has been peripheral as large sections of the mountain range constitute borders between countries and are far away from urban centres. In addition, the region still suffers effects of transition, aggravated by the recent economic crisis.



To address these numerous challenges the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) calls for cooperation and the development of coordinated spatial planning policies aiming at the sustainable development and the environmental protection of the Carpathians.

It is an innovative instrument that aims at improving the quality of life, strengthen local economies and communities. It also strives for providing conservation and restoration of unique, rare and typical natural complexes and objects of recreational and other importance situated in the heart of Europe through the promotion of joint policies for sustainable development among the Carpathian region.

The Carpathian Convention is at present the only multi-sectoral governance mechanism covering the whole of the Carpathian area, allowing for a cross-sectoral integration and broad participation of different stakeholders coming from different levels (national, regional, governmental, non-governmental, etc.)

The Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention is currently hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme in Vienna on an interim basis. According to its mandate, it supports its implementation and coordinates the meetings of its relevant political bodies and subsidiary bodies (Conference of the Parties, Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee, Working Groups). The Secretariat promotes the development and submission of transnational and national projects aimed at implementing the Convention, such as the Interreg IIIB CADSES “Carpathian Project” or the Alpine-Carpathian Corridor under the Austria-Slovakia Crossborder cooperation programme (for more information see box below)

More information on the Carpathian Convention and its activities can be found on:  
<http://www.carpathianconvention.org>





#### **4. The potential of the Carpathian Convention for addressing pertinent issues in the context of the future EU Strategy for the Danube Region**

The framework of the Carpathian Convention provides a lot of potential for the Danube Region and its stakeholders. In the following the main benefits will be summarized. In addition, particular reference will be made to two projects of transnational cooperation (in the stage of being implemented and under evaluation) that could be considered as flagship projects under the future EU Danube Region Strategy, mainly due to their multi-sectoral approach and their contribution to the main pillars of the EU strategy.

##### **Geographical coverage of the Danube Region**

As already underlined above, the Carpathian Convention covers a crucial part of the Danube basin and its basins, at least 80% of the Carpathians' water drains into the Danube.

##### **Multi-sectoral approach**

The Carpathian Convention aims at sustainable development and environmental protection and focuses on a multi-sectoral approach by calling for cooperation in fields like tourism, transport, cultural heritage etc. , thus addressing issues that were identified as key elements of the future EU Danube Region Strategy.<sup>9</sup>

##### **Existing framework of regional cooperation**

The Carpathian Convention disposes of a huge network (including important actors such as Ministries) and operative framework in areas of importance for cooperation in the Danube Region. The work that is already done in the frame of the Convention, in particular the activities and follow-up undertaken in the context of INTERREG projects, provide potential contribution to the implementation of major parts of the EU Danube Region Strategy.

##### **Existing legal instruments for activities in specific sectors**

The Carpathian Convention as well as a number of Protocols to the Convention devoted to specific sectors (Biodiversity<sup>10</sup>, Sustainable Forest Management, Sustainable Transport etc.) provide the legal framework for activities in various sectors in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development that will be addressed by the future EU Danube Region Strategy.

##### **Existing expertise and practise in the field of project development and implementation**

The Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention as the coordinating body of the Convention and other stakeholders in the Carpathian region disposes of considerable expertise in the field of EU funding programmes and projects, and can share its experiences

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<sup>9</sup> As reflected at the Danube Summit in Budapest, 25 February 2010, see Declaration of the Danube Summit.

<sup>10</sup> The Protocol is about to enter into force soon.



and provide input to projects, especially flagship projects that will be included in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

### **Existing experience and visions for the Carpathian region as a macro-region forming part of the bigger Danube Region**

The VASICA (“Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian Area”) publication is the first transnational spatial development document for the entire Carpathian Region building on the example of the VASAB (“Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea”). It encompasses concrete analysis and recommendations for nine concrete action areas of importance for the implementation of the Danube Region Strategy. It is one of the main outputs of INTERREG IIIB CADSES “Carpathian Project” (see box below) and represents an important background document for a chapter on the Carpathians within the EU Danube Region Strategy.

#### **The Carpathian Project at a glance**

*The Carpathian Project (duration: 2005- 2008) was developed by UNEP Vienna Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention and RTI Polska together with Carpathian Convention Signatories and the broad project consortium of partners from 11 countries. The project built on the intergovernmental cooperative platform of the Carpathian Convention. UNEP Vienna - Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention performed the Lead Partner of the project with the support of the seven Carpathian Convention Parties and Signatories. The Carpathian Project was co-financed by the EU through the Interreg IIIB CADSES Programme.*

*The Carpathian Project developed the Carpathian Convention into an operational and truly transnational platform, allowing for the implementation of the most relevant EU policies across the Carpathian region. The project demonstrated that environmental and developmental objectives can go hand in hand, if the future is built upon the region's advantages and potentials, and typical mountain challenges are addressed in a coordinated manner.*

*Actions under the project covered an area, which had so far not been comprehensively examined by spatial factors, and for which no consistent vision of sustainable development had been created. The long-term objective of the project was to strengthen the protection and to accelerate the sustainable development of the Carpathian region by improving the internal as well as European cohesion of the area and by preserving its natural and cultural heritage for future generations. Besides successful pilot action at the regional and local levels, the project also resulted in the first integrated strategic approach for the Carpathian Space as a whole - the VASICA (“Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian Area”),*

*More information on: <http://www.carpathianproject.eu>*



## **5. The need for transnational programme encompassing the Danube Carpathian Area and a Strategy for the Carpathian Space**

One of the basic outcomes of VASICA was the call for the establishment of a financial mechanism for the “Carpathian Space” within the European Territorial Cooperation Objective, following the ongoing success within the Alpine Space. The Carpathian region forming part of the Danube Region - is divided into transnational EU funding programmes: “Central Europe” and “South-East Europe”. In order to facilitate the implementation of future projects in the Carpathian Region facing the specific needs of the region, future transnational programme should include the entire Carpathian region, or an effective mechanism of coordination of existing financial instruments and programmes to meet the needs of the Carpathians and other macro-regions within the Danube region.

Therefore, the Strategy for the “Carpathian Space” is currently being further developed as a contribution to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region,

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE DANUBE REGION STRATEGY**

- The substantive scope of the Danube Region Strategy – which includes both the Danube river and its basin and the Carpathian mountains (besides other important mountain regions in South East Europe) - should include the priorities of the Carpathian region. Therefore, it should be of cross-sectoral and integrated nature, prominently including issues of environmental protection and regional development. A full analysis of main challenges in demography, agriculture, industry, urban network, cultural and natural heritage, transport, environment, tourism, and recommendations for support and action, can be found in the VASICA;
- The future EU Danube Region Strategy should take into consideration the vast experience and build on the priorities identified within the existing tools of multi-level governance and regional and sub-regional cooperation, such as the Carpathian Convention and the ICPDR;
- The Carpathians are a unique natural treasure of European and global importance. Therefore, the preservation and enhancement of their natural heritage – as a unique strength and key element of regional development – must be ensured in line with EU policies (e.g. improving effectiveness of management of Natura 2000 sites in the Carpathians, application of environmental impact assessments to projects etc.);
- Future EU transnational programmes in this region should be based on macro-regional approaches. This should allow that sustainable development priorities of the Carpathian Space will be addressed through better coordination of existing or new EU programmes. The strategic and programme framework should allow to



address the Carpathians in their integrity, avoiding a split in different programmes or strategies,

- A specific chapter on the Carpathian Space (“Carpathian macro-region”), taking into account the specific features of the area, could be elaborated within the EU Danube Region Strategy.

## **6. Potential flagship projects under the EU Danube Region Strategy**

### **Introduction**

The following are transboundary projects within the frame of the Carpathian Convention that could be considered as flagship projects under the future EU Danube Region Strategy. Due to the involvement of different stakeholders from various levels (governmental and non-governmental) in these projects and their multi-sectoral approach targeting the Danube region they are of particular relevance. Both projects were developed closely following the “men in biosphere” concept, by linking economical oriented objectives with environmental concerns.

### **Alpine Carpathian Corridor (AKK)**

**Funds:** Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Slovakia-Austria 2007-2013

**Budget:** 1,8 Million Euro (1,4 Million Euro ERDF)

**Status:** implementation

**Duration:**

- AKK Basic: December 2008 – June 2012
- AKK Centrope: September 2009 – June 2012

### **Objective and content of the project:**

The objective of the Alpine-Carpathian Corridor project is to safeguard the ecological connectivity between the Alps and the Carpathians, within the Centrope region - that forms part of the wider Danube Region - by especially embedding instruments of spatial planning.

In addition, the project also wants to trigger a sustainable development which considers the requirements of both man and wildlife. The awareness about the importance of undisturbed areas, green zones and a close use of land resource shall be fostered, carrying benefits for people in the targeted areas.

Main causes for the fragmentation of the landscape are also intensive agricultural land-use and an increasing demand for build up land. In the AKK projects these problems will be addressed by specific improvements in sustainable land-use in the course of the Alpine-Carpathian-Corridor and by means of spatial planning (including wildlife-ecological spatial management).



AKK aims at a multi-sectoral approach by addressing aspects of environmental protection, spatial planning and economic development at the same time. This especially manifests itself by its involvement of actors from different sectors (highway companies, NGOs, authorities etc.) By bringing together people from this various fields the “Men in Biosphere” idea shall be followed and realized

### **Specific Value for the EU Danube Region Strategy:**

Project activities will contribute to the implementation of the Danube Region Strategy as they address the main pillars of the Strategy and will be carried out in an area that is forming part of the Danube region.

Cross border collaboration within this project, involving actors from the Austria and the Slovak Republic, is especially in line with one of the main objectives of the Danube Region Strategy, that is to say the enhancement of cooperation and understanding among countries. A Memorandum of Understanding involving various stakeholders from both countries that will be concluded in the final phase of the project, is especially ensuring the long-term perspective of this project.

The AKK project could be used as a model for similar projects in the wider Danube Carpathian region.

### **More information on the project can be obtained from:**

Mr. Harald Egerer  
UNEP – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention  
Email: [harald.egerer@unvienna.org](mailto:harald.egerer@unvienna.org)

### **BIOREGIO Carpathians**

**Funds:** South-East Europe Transnational Cooperation Programme

**Budget:** 2,7 Million Euro (2.125.000 Euro ERDF)

**Status:** Under evaluation

### **Objective and summary of the project:**

The project is aimed to develop, harmonize and implement integrated management plans for natural areas to promote a regional development in the Carpathians and to improve the ecological connectivity in the region.

The Carpathians harbour a unique natural heritage and act as a major ecological link within Europe. Experiences e.g. from the Alpine Space demonstrate that the exceptional natural assets of mountain areas offer considerable potential for a sustainable regional



development by maintaining the biological and landscape diversity as well as their ecological connectivity.

The project promotes the harmonized management of natural assets and protected areas including NATURA 2000 sites in the Carpathians by involving all relevant stakeholders and by building on the existing framework of cooperation of the Carpathian Convention, its Biodiversity Protocol and other related transnational networks and initiatives. Results will be transferred to other mountain regions in the programme area.

The partnership is constituted by 16 partners that have complementary competencies on regional, national and transnational levels. There are partners from all Carpathian countries represented in the integrated project consortium (National and Nature Parks, national and regional environmental authorities, International Organizations, Non Governmental Organizations, Universities, Research centres). The Ministries for the Environment of all the Carpathian Countries are observers to the project

**Specific Value for the EU Danube Region Strategy:**

BIOREGIO Carpathians offers a unique approach in order to develop strategies and instruments for an integrated management of biological and landscape diversity for sustainable regional development and ecological connectivity in the Carpathians.

The project follows a truly integrated approach of cross-sectoral multi-level governance for increasing the attractiveness of the area and capitalizing its outstanding natural assets.

The project addresses already approved international conventions and strategies, in particular the Carpathian Convention Biodiversity Protocol. This innovative approach can be transferred to other areas of the Danube – Carpathian region. It can become a model for the management of natural areas in the region and for the coordination of existing cooperation tools.

**More information on the project can be obtained from:**

Mr. Mircea Verghelet (Lead Partner)  
Piatra Craiului National Park (Romania)  
Tel: +40 730 65 36 99  
Email: vmircea@pcrai.ro