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Preparatory Meeting for the Swiss Contribution to EU Enlargement

*at the Vienna International Centre
18 February 2008*

The preparatory meeting in connection with the opportunity to access funds provided through the Swiss Contribution to EU Enlargement, was held at the Vienna International Centre on 18 February 2008.

The following persons participated in the meeting (in alphabetical order):

1. Ladislav Ambros, Slovakian Ministry of Environment, CBD Focal Point
2. Peter Baláž, Department of Management and Implementation of Financial Mechanisms, Slovakia, National Coordination Unit
3. Mike Baltzer, WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, Vienna, Director
4. Andreas Beckmann, WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, Vienna, Deputy Director
5. Andrea Bucur, UNEP ISCC Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention
6. Harald Egerer, UNEP ISCC Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention,
7. Gabor Figezky, WWF Hungary, Conservation Director
8. Pierre Galland, Consultant in Environmental and Development Affairs
9. Ditta Greguss, Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Water, Deputy CBD Focal Point
10. Alena Gustafikova, UNEP ISCC Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention
11. Anna Guttova, CERI Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative
12. Bozena Haczek, Polish Ministry of Environment, CBD and Carpathian Convention Focal Point
13. Jiří Hodík, Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic, Centre of Foreign Assistance Programming, National Coordination Unit
14. Jan Kadlecik, Velka Fatra National Park, CNPA Steering Committee Member, 2012 PA4LP Steering Group Member
15. Piotr Krzan, Tatra National Park, 2012 PA4LP Steering Group Member
16. Hildegard Meyer, WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, Vienna, 2012 PA4LP Project Management Team Member
17. Ireneusz Mirowski, EcoFund Foundation Poland
18. Zbigniew Niewiadomski, Poland, CNPA Steering Committee Member,
19. Pier Carlo Sandei, UNEP ISCC Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention
20. David Strobel, WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, Vienna, 2012 PA4LP Project Management Team Member
21. Lajos Szabo, Department of Management and Implementation of Financial Mechanisms, Slovakia, National Coordination Unit
22. Jana Vavrinova, Czech Ministry of Environment, CBD and Carpathian Convention Focal Point
23. Juraj Vyšoky, WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, Slovakia, Forest and Protected Area Officer
24. Małgorzata Zalewska, Polish Ministry of Regional Development, Department for Aid Programmes, National Coordination Unit

OBJECTIVE

Each country identifies two to three priority areas in which to allocate the funds announced by the Swiss Government. Ideally, countries engage in building common priority areas which could lead to joint projects, e.g. in transboundary areas.

[10:10 – 10:40]

Welcome and general introduction to the Swiss Contribution to EU Enlargement

Mr Andreas Beckmann from the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme as facilitator of the meeting welcomed all participants and handed over to Harald Egerer as host for initiating the meeting on behalf of the UNEP Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, and his welcome towards all participants.

Subsequently, Mr Pierre Galland introduced himself. He pointed out that the official title of the programme is “The Swiss Contribution to EU Enlargement”, not “Swiss Cohesion Fund”, calling the attention of the participants to keep the appropriate title in mind for correct use in the future. It must be underlined that the Swiss contribution is not EU money, and thus can be considered for co-financing EU projects. Furthermore, he indicated priorities for the Swiss IUCN national committee related to the Swiss Confederation’s contribution to EU enlargement, which are

- Environmental protection and biodiversity
- Close cooperation with NGOs and the civil society, as well as high transparency and strong links in concerted activities between these two players
- Environmental sustainability of all projects (including infrastructures, etc.)
- Initiation of cross-border opportunities

The Carpathian convention offers a very favourable framework for projects corresponding to these requirements.

Mr Galland stressed the general flexibility of fund allocation, i.e. on an area, national or international level, as well as through e.g. bilateral or multilateral cooperations, provided that recipient countries clearly express corresponding needs. From the Swiss side, it is strongly welcomed to tailor individual sets of projects in the countries with adapted project scopes and time lines. It must be noted that no separate fund is allocated for transboundary activities; the financing of such activities has to be taken from the respective country block. The Swiss enlargement scheme does not currently apply to Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria. However, according to Mr Galland, it is probable that in the near future similar funds will be made available by the Swiss Confederation for the two most recent EU members in the Balkans, Romania and Bulgaria.

Afterwards, the participants presented themselves.

Andreas Beckmann provided the overview of the agenda upon which the participants agreed.

After this, Mr Galland added some remarks, e.g. the Swiss Confederation’s awareness about shortcomings related to processes linked to Norwegian Funding with a very broad range of target countries and eligible themes. It was pointed out by Mr Galland that the call for proposals is targeted in a focused way, and that the Swiss Confederation reserves its right to veto. At the same time, it neither pushes forward nor influences procedures and schedules, once funds are allocated to a selected topic and geographic areas. Typically, one to two areas per country are defined as project focus, however this remains open to priority

setting, regional conditions, etc. within each country. Any specific or further information regarding the overall concept of the Swiss Contribution to EU Enlargement is accessible on the official website under <http://www.erweiterungsbeitrag.admin.ch/index.html?lang=en>

Mr Galland points out that Switzerland has foreseen a demand driven programme; quality, soundness and transparency of the project proposals are key to eligibility for fund allocation. The first step towards this would consist of the submission of project outlines which should comprise not more than five pages. The second step consists of the proposal itself; a first package should be finalized roughly until August/September 2007.

[10:40 – 11:40]

Brief overview of ongoing projects in the Carpathians related to the CBD PoWPA

In the following sequence: Czech Republic – Slovakia – Poland – Hungary, ministerial representatives from these countries gave a brief overview of past activities related to the Swiss Contribution to EU Enlargement. All country representatives, unanimously, referred to their signing of the framework agreement on 20 December 2007 in Berne, Switzerland, indicating the respective percental amounts allotted per country.

Ms Jana Vavrinova from the Czech Ministry of Environment commented, in terms of possible project priority areas, that there may be some options regarding tourist management, although a stronger focus would be on development-related activities, closing with the statement that in any case, further discussions are required before designing project outlines.

In a similar way, Mr Peter Baláž, Director of the Slovak Department of Management and Implementation of Financial Mechanisms pointed out that in Slovakia a preparatory document has to be produced before starting on the call for proposals – most likely in May 2008.

Ms Malgorzata Zalewska from the Polish Ministry of Regional Development indicated that already four regions in South and Southeast Poland have been identified, which will receive 40 percent of the funds, and in this context, a team has been formed with special work focus on the Carpathians. Presently, a corresponding application is being prepared that will be subject at a follow-up meeting with Swiss partners in March 2008. Activities linked to the call for proposals are envisaged for May/June 2008.

Subsequently, five presentations were held, providing background information on activities and frameworks in the Carpathians.

The series of presentations started with Mr Harald Egerer, head of the UNEP Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, depicting the development of activities related to the Carpathian Convention, in particular after the First Conference of the Parties (COP1) in Kyiv, Ukraine, in December 2006 (Annex I). He stressed the necessity to adopt integrated approaches for sustainable development, and the need to access new funds as follow-up to the Interreg IIIb Carpathian Project which will come to a close with the end of August 2008. He briefly describes ongoing work of and challenges for Carpathian Convention Working Groups, specifically:

- The CC Working Group on Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge
- The CC Working Group on Sustainable Agriculture, Rural Development and Forestry
- The CC Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Infrastructure and Energy

- The CC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism
- The CC Working Group on Spatial Planning

Mr Egerer showed a follow-up platform of funding possibilities, and emphasized the need for the creation of a Carpathian space by using existing networks, as well as an experience transfer and exchange linked to the Alpine Ecoregion, thereby opening possibilities to strengthen the concept of the Alpine-Carpathian corridor. Mr Egerer closes with a set of project ideas which include e.g. the Carpathian Opportunity, an approach specifically aiming at cooperations with the private sector to promote sustainable development, the Via Carpatica, a hiking trail along a large part of the Carpathian mountain range, and several others.

Thereupon, Ms Anna Guttova from the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative (CERI) presented the role of CERI in the Carpathians (Annex II). The main features of her presentation included the biodiversity focus of CERI, CERI's project 'Development of a Carpathian Ecological Network' supported by BBI-Matra, NL, which comprises increasing the capacities of NGO's active in the region, strengthening the organizational structure of NGO's and other players that are committed to sustainable development in the Carpathians; and to assist in the implementation of relevant EU and international policies.

Ms Guttova reviewed briefly activities from 2005 on, indicating e.g. improved and extended land coverage of GIS-based data, and the first draft of a pressure map of urbanisation on biodiversity. Furthermore, she described a draft interactive map with data on zonation and management recommendations based on biodiversity data, which will be an important output of the BBI-Matra project expected in spring 2009.

After that, Mr Jan Kadlecik from the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic provided an overview of the aim and goals of the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA), as well as past activities and milestones during the process of establishing the CNPA (Annex III). In addition, Mr Kadlecik indicated the operational structure of the CNPA, key activities which should be incorporated into the future CNPA work programme, and priorities for cooperation. He concluded the first part of his presentation with an outlook of preparations for the Second Conference of the Parties (COP2) and the First CNPA Conference to be held in Braşov, Romania, in September 2008.

The Carpathian Wetland Initiative (CWI) was subject of the second part of his presentation. Mr Kadlecik delineated the coming into being of the CWI, its mission and objectives, and, as conclusion, emphasized which key points should be developed by the CWI for the time horizon until 2011, in order to comply with its objectives.

Subsequently, Mr Ireneusz Mirowski from the EcoFund Foundation Poland gave a presentation on the foundation's work in the Carpathian context (Annex IV). The foundation receives funds from donor countries such as the France, Switzerland, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the USA. The major part of funds is allotted for projects related to nature conservation and climate change mitigation. Within nature conservation, the four main fields of activity are:

- Wetlands conservation
- Endangered species
- Nature conservation in National Parks
- Implementation of Natura 2000

Mr Mirowski briefly described ongoing projects running from 2006 to 2009, out of which eight are located in the Carpathians. He pointed out that out of the Carpathian projects, reforestation, as well as meadows and pastures management, form action pillars of EcoFund. In this context, educational projects and technical assistance are provided to partners at the local scale.

Ms Hildegard Meyer afterwards briefly outlined the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme's activities in the Carpathian project region, which are carried out under the funding by the MAVA foundation (Annex V). Main components of WWF's engagement in the Carpathians include:

- The development and implementation of the Carpathian Protected Areas Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool, which is already completed and currently made available for protected areas for implementation. This tool will be further advanced by making it accessible online. Besides, it will be correlated to the goals of the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA), thereby allowing conclusions regarding the responsiveness towards these goals.
- The development of a Carpathian Clearing House Mechanism, i.e. an online platform, principally for protected area practitioners, but also for the general public, which at the general level provides information about the Carpathians and its protected areas, and, on the practitioners' level, serves as a communication and information exchange device, in order to promote and facilitate management activities based on lessons learned in other protected areas within the Carpathians.
- The development of a train-the-trainers programme which aims at building capacities of protected area practitioners in the seven countries of the Carpathian Ecoregion over the long term. This activity is strongly linked with stakeholder management and the design of sustainable solutions that integrate protected areas into the broader landscape. In this respect, as well as towards internal protected area contacts, a multiplying or trickle-down effect is envisaged which will professionalize dealings with stakeholders and institutions, and contribute to viable and sustainable solutions.
- Assessments of goods and services originating in protected areas will also contribute to this target. For this, three model protected areas are currently in the process of being identified. In these, detailed assessments will provide a quantitative overview which will be later used to demonstrate the long-term advantages of sustainable resource use, in contrast to random unplanned activities which are predominantly practiced until now. The findings and recommendations resulting from the final report will be subject of discussions when addressing relevant stakeholders, in order to reach a common agreement which would define – as a test project – the joint implementation of a sustainable management scheme in one of the three assessed protected areas.

[12:10 – 13:40]

Analysis of needs in the Carpathians related to the CBD PoWPA / Proposed objectives provided by the countries

As an introduction to the countries' input regarding the needs related to contributing to the goals of the CBD PoWPA, Ms Hildegard Meyer presented the results of WWF DCP's Project Management Team's (PMT) needs gap analysis (Annex VI), which were derived from 4 different sources, namely Carpathian Ecoregion Workshop for the 2012 Protected Areas Programme in Petronell, Austria, April 2006, 'Strengthening the Capacity of Governments to Implement Priority Activities of the CBD PoWPA' - Eastern Europe Regional Workshop, Isle of Vilm, Germany, June 2007, Scorecards for Measuring Progress on the CBD PoWPA within the 2012 PA4LP, December 2007, and RAPPAM (Rapid

Assessment and Prioritisation of Protected Area Management) in Czech Republic and Slovakia in 2004. Numbers in brackets refer to CBD PoWPA goals.

PA management

- Build capacity for planning, establishment and management of PAs (3.2) and for planning and management of Natura 2000 sites
- Involvement of local communities in PA planning, establishment, governance and management (1.4, 2.2)

Socio-economic aspects

- Assess the economic and socio-cultural costs, benefits and impacts arising from the establishment and maintenance of PAs (2.1, 2.2, 3.1)
- Identify and foster economic opportunities and markets at local, national and international levels for goods and services provided by PAs

Sustainable Financing

- Build capacity for sustainable financing in protected areas/ protected area systems (3.4)

Subsequently, the countries provided their view on key objectives that would have to be addressed in order to achieve progress on the CBD PoWPA goals.

On behalf of Hungary, Ms Ditta Greguss indicated the strengthening of activities related to protected area management as priority objective.

Ms Jana Vavrinova pointed out that in the Czech Republic protected areas are to 90 per cent covered by Natura 2000 sites, however there is a lack of staff and capacities to manage the sites. Apart from that, there are language barriers as soon as dealings require cooperation on the European or on a country-to-country scale. Work overload often hampers staff to keep up with the requirements to ensure management effectiveness. An overarching critical issue is sustainable financing.

Mr Jan Kadlecik outlined presently developed project proposals in Slovakia, which are aiming at monitoring and management of key species such as brown bear, cormorant, and other bird species, with several proposals within the wetland context. Mr Kadlecik at the same time stated that, as in other countries, little has been done to make management more effective. As a key point, he stressed that there is the strong need to continue with already existing work on scorecards and the WWF Rapid Assessment and Prioritization of Protected Area Management (RAPPAM) tool, which was carried out in 2004, however not conclusively finalized or followed up. Although strategic planning is well advanced, high budget restrictions limit in-field implementation substantially.

On behalf of Poland, Ms Bozena Haczek regarded the institutional base for Polish protected areas in mountain regions as well established however, she sees the need to link Polish institutions better to European frameworks. Besides this, in her estimation, it remains a challenge to create transboundary protected areas and harmonize cross-country regulations for them. As in other countries, effectiveness in site-level management is a serious obstacle.

The following discussion was opened by Mr Zbigniew Niewiadomski expressing the need for a landscape and biodiversity protocol within the Carpathian Convention, in order to set off a Carpathian cross-country action plan. In addition, he sees the requirement for agreements as starting point for common activities,

and – despite financial shortages – the triggering of initial implementation activities with the funds available.

Mr Galland expressed again the flexibility of fund allocation in terms of time, as well as in terms of different sectors, within the main topics defined in the framework agreements and providing that needs are clearly expressed by the recipient countries.

Mr Egerer called for defining the core areas of activity.

Mr Baláž pointed out that fund allocation should be orientated at the requirements as delineated in the respective documents of the Swiss Contribution to EU Enlargement, not necessarily at the Carpathian Convention's framework conditions.

Mr Jiří Hodík from the Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic emphasized to avoid double funding with already existing European funding sources.

Mr Egerer stated that the majority of European funding schemes aim at development activities which are economy and infrastructure focused, therefore, with the Swiss Contribution to EU Enlargement, there would be the opportunity to target other fields such as biodiversity or ecotourism.

[14:40 – 17:00]

Identification of action priorities in country groups / Plenary discussion on identified action priorities, coordinated projects and next steps

After lunch break, the participants gathered to start their elaboration of possible priority areas in country group working sessions.

The identification of priority areas / priority action which will be elaborated in the group work sessions brought forth the following results:

Slovakia (Mr Jan Kadlecik)

General

- Protection and regeneration of natural environment and landscapes, primarily in the geographic focus area with a special attention to Natura 2000 and the Carpathian Convention
- Monitoring and research of forest ecosystems

RAPPAM / CBD aspects:

- Communication with local communities
- Capacity building
- System of research and monitoring of protected areas and Natura 2000 sites (socio-economic development)
- Wetlands management – restoration plans for underrepresented ecosystems
- Transborder areas
- Biodiversity task force – under a leading role of CERI

Czech Republic (Ms Jana Vavrinova)



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- Not necessarily focus on the Carpathians within the Czech Republic (Carpathians make up 7% of the entire Czech territory)
- Necessity to have a clear procedure and a clear outcome when elaborating a project
- The implementation of actions which target biodiversity conservation must become a priority across all policies
- The Ministry of Environment would have to lobby partners to get their support and cooperation for exploring ways how to make use of the Swiss funds
- Projects would have to be in line with international conventions
- Need to further check priorities with colleagues in how far the funds from the Swiss Contribution to EU Enlargement could contribute to overarching national policies

Poland (Ms Bozena Haczek)

- Focus on the contents of the CBD PoWPA and the Programme of Work on mountain biodiversity
- Taking the Carpathian Convention as orientation for prioritizing action foci
- Habitat protection, maintenance and restoration and species conservation
- Biodiversity monitoring and establishment of a comprehensive information system
- Institutional cooperation as prerequisite for project planning
- Projects should contribute to the strengthening of an ecological network (CNPA)
- Environmental damage prevention
- Future projects will have to be brought in line with the EC biodiversity action plan and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (policy harmonisation)

Hungary (Ms Ditta Greguss)

- Tisza river basin management (joint planning and implementation)
- Habitat management and restoration, e.g. sustainable management of forests and dry grasslands
- Strengthening of transboundary forest reserves
- Agrobiodiversity: conservation of Pannon landscapes and traditional plant varieties
- Development and operationalisation of a GIS database
- Ecological monitoring
- Adequate protection of Natura 2000 species and sites
- Measures targetting awareness raising

In the following discussion, Mr Egerer stressed to keep a broad perspective in mind when conceptualizing projects, i.e. looking at the regional scale and relevant frameworks.

Mr Beckmann suggested two possible ways of prioritizing projects if considering the regional context:

- 1) Each country has a certain set of national thematic project fields and some that would be open to being addressed in cooperation with a third country
- 2) Each country has a certain set of national thematic project fields and some that would be open to being addressed under the responsibility of a third country

Mr Lajoš Szabo from the Slovakian Department of Management and Implementation of Financial Mechanisms commented on this that potential cooperation between two or more countries would have to be brought on the way with considerable planning time prior to the envisaged implementation.

Mr Beckmann proposed three levels on which projects could be elaborated / implemented:

- 1) International
- 2) Coordinated national
- 3) Specific national

He further delineated that typically there are some common overarching aspects which should be handled by every country, and coordinated by the UNEP ISCC, and other aspects which should be handled on the country scale or lead by certain countries, e.g. on behalf of other countries. This process could for example be steered by the CNPA Steering Committee members.

Mr Egerer added that the Carpathian Convention focal points of each country could take over an active role as well. Alternatively, these could also nominate persons who will push the process forward.

Thereupon, Ms Vavrinova and Ms Greguss stated that from their respective ministerial sides no commitment or assurance for technical implementation could be provided in this context.

Mr Beckmann concluded that there is a strong need to create transparency in terms of roles and responsibilities among all involved players, as well as in terms of the scope and themes of potential projects. Furthermore it remains to be defined, to what degree the projects should be linked to existing frameworks.

Mr Galland pointed out that at the current stage, the most crucial point is to define broad, common themes which are coherently important in every of the four countries.

According to Mr Baláž, it would be necessary to define the overarching aspects first with a representative from the Swiss Government, going subsequently into follow-up sessions to discuss and refine these aspects jointly with the four countries.

After that, Mr Egerer emphasized the need to identify opportunities specific to the Carpathians.

[17:00]

Wrap-up and closure of the meeting

Mr Beckmann closes the meeting, resuming that with this meeting a first step has been taken to sensitize the participants to the issue as a whole, as well as to the needs, priorities and goals of the other participating countries. Although priority fields have been named by representatives from all countries, it remains that they are further narrowed down to a few common themes, before being able to develop project proposals which, incorporate these cross-cutting issues.

Mr Mike Baltzer, head of the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme concluded by thanking all participants for their participation and contributions. He expressed that through this meeting awareness was built to take the process forward, and expressed his confidence for positive outcomes at following meetings with hopefully equally high participation as in this meeting.



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OUTCOME

The representatives participating at the meeting agreed on the continuation of the process, following an intermediary period, in which internally at national level, the priority-building process would be pushed forward, in order to have a clearer base to work from at the next convention, and to eventually draft the proposals.

Further clarification from the Swiss authorities is required regarding the following points:

* Basically, all activities could be financed by EU funds. Clarification is needed, however, regarding the eligible topics and areas, e.g. Natura 2000 is mentioned in some of the framework agreements, though there is financing from Brussels.

* The conditions for co-financing with other international initiatives should be better defined (EU, GEF, and other projects).

* If countries agree to do so, could they designate UNEP or another international body as coordinators (and under which conditions)?

* Regular meetings of the National Coordination Units (NCU) with the Swiss representative are wished, in order to discuss specific issues related to the organization of transboundary activities, which are not foreseen in the framework agreement, in particular.

* Broad, open NGO meetings should be organized in the geographical focus areas. It has to be defined who would be leading this.