



**Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the  
Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable  
Development of the Carpathians**

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**Mr. Achim Steiner**

Opening Speech at the High Level Segment  
of the  
**Third Meeting of the  
Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (COP3)**

**25 – 27 May 2011, Bratislava, Slovak Republic**

Excellencies, Representatives of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished audience!

It is a great honor to welcome you to the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention. Exactly ten years ago, Ukraine asked the United Nations Environment Programme to facilitate an intergovernmental consultation process among the Carpathian countries with the aim of drafting an international convention on the Carpathian Mountains.

With the substantial support of several international organizations, academic institutions and NGOs, a series of formal and informal negotiations finally led to the Adoption to the framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians in Kiev, 2003. Currently, UNEP provides the administration of the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention based in Vienna, at the request of the seven Carpathian countries and the generous offer of Austria to host the interim Secretariat. Furthermore, UNEP is supporting the implementation of some key activities of the work of the Carpathian Convention through the UNEP Programme of Work – for instance, the development of the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management was supported by UNEP, as an important contribution to the International year of the Forest 2011.

I have to acknowledge the achievements that have been made within the last years by the Convention and its contracting Parties. Implementation efforts on different levels of action have further developed this legal framework into a vital platform of exchange and development of common efforts on different priority subjects of the Convention. We particularly welcome the fruitful cooperation between the European Commission and the Carpathian Convention, in many strategic fields including regional development and climate change adaptation.

In particular I would like to point out the achievements regarding the implementation of the Biodiversity Protocol, the constructive work of the different working groups of the Convention, and the establishment of Strategic Partnerships with other Conventions and Institutions such as the Alpine Convention, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, the Convention on Biological Diversity or the Carpathian Wetland Initiative. Let me also mention the importance of the realization



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of concrete projects and initiatives in various thematic fields that bring the Convention and its goals to the ground and to the people in the Carpathian area.

After the Alpine Convention, the Carpathian Convention is the second sub-regional treaty-based regime for the protection of a mountain region worldwide. Additionally, it is the only multi-level governance mechanism covering the whole of the Carpathian area. I am convinced that the importance of this type of multilateral environmental agreements, which combine concerns about environmental protection and the life of local communities with developmental considerations in a particular geographic area, will substantially increase. At the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya last year, representatives from different mountain regions worldwide expressed the need for undertaking serious efforts in order to foster a more systematic exchange and joining of forces among different mountain regions worldwide.

The process leading to the Rio+20 Earth Summit next year in Rio de Janeiro will be an important platform to present and promote regional Conventions as ideal institutional framework, able to equally combine the improvement of quality of life, the strengthening of local economies and communities, and the conservation of natural values and cultural heritage in mountain regions. Undoubtedly, the Carpathian Convention can be considered as a best-practice example for a successful regional governance mechanism to promote Green Economy in an important European region.

With pleasure I note that two new Protocols, the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management and the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism are supposed to be approved at this Conference. 100,000 km<sup>2</sup>, more than half of the Carpathians, are covered by forests. Out of this, about 3,000km<sup>2</sup> are virgin forests the largest remaining virgin forests in Central and Eastern Europe. The Carpathian forests are not only home to numerous plants and animals, but they are furthermore a vital link between the forests of the north and those of the west and south-west of Europe. In the last years, the unique natural and cultural heritage of the region led to an increase of touristic interest. The number of hotels has increased by nearly 60% in the last ten years. We all agree that this developments call for common policies and action. I therefore strongly encourage all the member states of the Convention to stay on their path of commitment to the Convention and its overall objectives.

Let me acknowledge the contribution of the host country of this Conference, the Government of the Slovak Republic. For the upcoming Presidency of the country I wish strong visions and ideas as well as the necessary patience and commitment to implement them.

Closing, assuring you of the continuous support of UNEP to the Carpathian Convention both cash and in-kind, let me wish you fruitful discussions and a successful Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention 2012.

Thank you very much.