

Statement of Mr Piotr Otawski, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of the Environment, Poland

on the occasion of the 4th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties

to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians

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The Carpathian Convention is a key instrument of international cooperation in the Carpathian Region between Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania and Serbia. The cooperation is pursued not only at the governmental level, but also involves parliamentarians, representatives of self-governments, institutions and non-governmental organisations. More than 10 years of successful cooperation made a good progress in the protection of the Carpathians natural and cultural heritage and brought many achievements on the way to the sustainable development of the region. Implementation of the Convention contributed to the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals and will be an important regional instrument for implementation of the Post 2015 Agenda. The Convention helps to integrate economic, social and environmental interrelated dimensions of sustainable development to ensure protection and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services, promotion of green economy and improvement of living standards.

Based on the experiences and lessons learnt from the Alpine Convention, Carpathian countries developed their own ways and means how to reach the goals and objectives of the Convention. Three meetings of the Conference of the Parties, held so far, adopted several important decisions, being implemented by the Parties. In order to precise general provisions of the Convention, three thematic protocols have been developed: Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity, Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management and Protocol on Sustainable Tourism. This COP adopts a next one – Protocol on Sustainable Transport. Those instruments should be ratified as soon as possible by all Parties to the Convention. Remaining protocols should be prepared, for more efficient and streamlined cooperation in diverse areas of the Convention.

Looking at different sectors and areas of interest covered by the Convention, it seems that most of all work has been done so far on nature protection issues. It is understandable, because biodiversity is a necessary condition for and underpins all aspects of sustainable development. Good progress have been already made in this regard, including establishment of the Carpathians Network of Protected Areas and preparation of the Carpathian red lists of habitats and species and the list of invasive species in the Carpathians. A lot of additional work should have been done in next years, taking into account necessity of halting biodiversity loss by 2020 and reach twenty Aichi Targets, developed in the frame of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Carpathian Convention can't be implemented only by environmental sector. Other sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, water management, tourism, transport, spatial development, culture, education, industry and energy, should be involve to the same extend. Only common efforts of all sectors could bring anticipated results. The Convention should be implemented in a harmonized, balanced way in all its aspects. Ambitious but realistic decisions should be taken in all areas of the Convention interest. Full involvement of all relevant stakeholders is another challenge for the Convention. Special role should be given to self-governments and local communities, who best knows local needs and conditions. They should be supported by capacity building and awareness raising activities, giving know-how, best practices and lessons learned from other regions.

It should be underlined that an important role in the implementation of the Convention play various projects, financed mainly by the EU funds. But the EU is essential for the Convention not only for money it provides for the region. If the EU is a Party to the Convention, Carpathians problems would be more visible and understandable at European level, so further efforts should be undertaken in that regard.

The Convention now is much more visible at international level. Thanks to many activities run by the Interim Secretariat, including participation in international events and signing memoranda of understanding with other organisations and international agreements, "the rest of world" is much more familiar with the Carpathian Convention. The Carpathian Convention is perceived as important regional instrument, integrating Carpathian countries, both EU and non-EU members in common efforts towards better future.

We note with appreciation the on-going work of the Interim Secretariat located in Vienna. But the expansive Carpathian Convention needs a stable, solid Permanent Secretariat, located within the Carpathians, which should guarantee performing all functions assigned by the Convention. Poland is ready to host such a secretariat in Rzeszów, the capital of Podkarpackie Region, where a strong tradition meets power of modernity.