



VASICA

Visions And Strategies In the Carpathian Area

DISCUSSION BACKGROUND

for the territorial development strategy for the Carpathian Region

**within the Working Group for Spatial Planning
of the Carpathian Convention**

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Introduction

The document entitled “VASICA”¹ will draw together the work of the Carpathian Project² regarding spatial development and management for the Carpathian Region³. It concentrates on issues relating to joint working practices as a dimension of spatial development planning. It aims to create – for the seven countries – the necessary conditions for determining priorities for the effective functioning of regional-scale actions, as well as for planning the physical development of land. It also indicates the manner in which these priorities can be achieved, as part of a successful integration of functional and spatial planning for the regions as demanded by the needs of a united Europe. Because of the sizeable volume of spatial planning activities and spatio-functional issues analysed, VASICA is being prepared in stages, based on a jointly organised programme. Partial coordination regarding the substance of VASICA will be ensured by joint sessions of the appropriate working group of the Carpathian Convention⁴.

It is, however, the first document which has focused on aspects of spatial planning and development based on an deep socio-economic analysis of regional and national development factors. During its preparation the GIS databases and appropriate technologies were used to provide VASICA with maps and other cartographic material, which were published on the Carpathian Geoportal⁵. For the first time ever, interactive maps of development issues for the entire Carpathian transnational region (at a scale of 1:2 000 000) have been prepared jointly for the whole area. Another unique feature of this document is that it takes into account the joint development potentials for cross-border areas, arising from external linkages to a broader European territory, which after the several stages of the EU enlargement have set a new development framework for the region, providing new opportunities and setting new challenges.

At present most of the Carpathian countries are reaping the first benefits of their accession to the EU. In this way there is an opportunity for faster technical and socio-economic stabilisation and better development potentials for the transnational region. Consequently, attention should be focused on the fact that these border areas have become one of the EU’s internal problem regions. This must bring about a change in goals and strategies for development, which shift the transnational region from the role of a peripheral area to a much more engaged one. In this process all programme and financial opportunities resulting from a full EU membership must be considered.

¹ delivered as the separate document: VISIONS AND STRATEGIES IN THE CARPATHIAN AREA (VASICA)

² developed in the framework of the INTERREG IIIB CADSES Programme, see www.carpathianproject.eu

³ see chapter: Territorial extent of VASICA

⁴ about Carpathian Convention see: www.carpathianconvention.org

⁵ www.carpathianproject.eu

VASICA do not intend to replace any of the national nor regional development documents. It is the complementary strategy, which focuses on the added values for the regional development which can stem from the more intensive and coordinated transborder cooperation within the Carpathian area.

The benefits and practical consequences of this joint strategy should help in particular in the decision-making processes of national and regional administrations. VASICA should help coordinate actions, especially those regarding cross-border areas, and also promote inter-regional projects. Benefits are also expected in the form of intensified international cooperation at the multilateral and bilateral levels.

As a tool supporting spatial development and planning functions in the transnational border region, VASICA and its accompanying documents contains above all:

- information available to each country about major spatial problems and phenomena in its neighbour;
- shared analytical and conceptual inputs for updating national and regional strategies, development plans and other development projects at the regional level;
- an integrated cartographic representation of the situation of the transnational border region, as inputs and discussion material capable of being used for the planning of more detailed tasks and actions;
- a systematic set of development goals for the Carpathian Region;
- proposals for joint actions to be taken by organisations in the transnational border region or by international teams, as part of European projects.

As a document with an international character, VASICA intend to form a basis for negotiations and decisions at this level. It is a proof of the long-standing continuity of mutual coordination efforts in the transnational region and, consequently, may constitute a strong argument for:

- raising support funds from EU sources;
- introducing innovative conservation and development measures requiring agreement by many stakeholders;
- formulating regional development strategies for relevant governments, ministries, regional and local administrative authorities, Euro-regions, other associations or bodies in the Carpathian Region;
- international negotiations around spatial development concepts for this part of Central Europe.

VASICA, being prepared over a period of three years, with full cooperation of the governments' representatives and respecting each party's decisions, will constitute:

- a guarantee of conformity of the adopted goals and actions with relevant national and regional development strategies;

- a proof of the organisational, procedural and substantive willingness to undertake international cooperation in the field of spatial development planning in the Carpathian transnational region;
- a pilot document for more detailed studies prepared elsewhere within the area;
- a methodological basis for transnational policy documents.

Carpathian Region within the European space

The enlargement of the European Union has changed the geography of European territorial integrity. Within the boundaries of the European Union there are now territories which are of key importance to social, economic, and territorial integrity. Till now though these territories were of marginal importance in these respects. One of such territories is the Carpathian Region, which after the EU enlargement process became a potentially important area of international co-operation and support with instruments of political integrity. At present the international co-operation in these territories does prevents the use of these instruments to their full potential.

This is why it is crucial that steps be taken in order to specify the role of the Carpathian Region in the new European space and as a result open it up to the tools of European Union policies. The co-operation of all of the nations of this territory is crucial. This is the basis for forming a common strategy for developing this region and would prove the necessity of undertaking joint investment projects. The Carpathian Project's spatial development strategy (VASICA) identifies common goals and expectations of all the partners from countries participating in the Carpathian Convention.

Because of the process of widening the borders of the European Union, the Carpathian Region may become one of the more important regions of international co-operation in the fields of economic, social and spatial development policies. This is a region at the meeting point of six Central Eastern European countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine - lying directly next to Austria and Serbia.

In geographical terms, the Carpathian Region is very similar to the Alpine Region. However, until it comes to the achieved level of development and the intensity of transnational cooperation for its benefit - it is a periphery of Europe. At the same time, its internal potential, the merits of natural and cultural heritage and geopolitical location make the region's effective development possible. This region may become, in the extended European Union, a region of cooperation to the benefit of development, analogous to that which is happening in other mountaineous regions of Europe. Even the current slow rate of development of the Carpathian Region may become advantageous to the implementation of a new, sustainable model of growth which would be using the considerable merits of the natural environment linked with the local social structures.

Carpathians are a region on which, over the next few years or decades, the process of integration will be crucial: the region combines new member states of the last two enlargements and countries which will join the European Union in the foreseeable future. Hence, this is a region which combines in it all of the problems of cohesion - and this is one of the key elements of European Union policies.

Because of their transnational character, the problems of the Carpathian region cannot be solved without trans-national cooperation. For most of the countries in question, the mountainous region of the Carpathians - in the context of their entire territory - constitutes peripheries, regions delayed in development, very often backward. From the point of view of a single country, it is difficult to see a place and potential function which the Carpathians, in all its geographic potential, can play in a wider European context.

This specific and traditional lack of cooperation should be broken through. Only through joint action of all interested states, the Carpathian Region may enter the path of systematic growth - using its unique values, including its multi-national character. In order to do so, it is necessary to assess the potential, needs and social preferences which could become the basis of development programming. Such an assessment could allow for the formulation of consistent or even joint investment projects of the private and public sectors, and investment from the common European Union funds. The cooperation of public authorities – state, regional and local - will influence the private sector which will play a decisive role in the development of the region.

The work concerning the transnational development strategy for the Carpathian Region starts with the definition of common development targets. In the economic structures of each of the states involved this region plays a different role. Different, often mutually competitive, are the ideas concerning investment plans which would ensure regional development within the framework of single countries. Without intruding on the autonomy of any of the countries in choosing the course of action in the region it is still possible to decide on a group of actions, which – undertaken co-operatively – could give an added value to the development of the Carpathian region. Co-operative projects also have a greater chance of obtaining funding from the European Union as part of the political integrity framework.

Common goals and the scope of transnational undertakings can only be defined through a process of information exchange and broad discussion in a group of interested people and institutions. The Working Group on Spatial Planning within the Carpathian Convention structure would enable the discussion of potential areas of spatial development in the region while maintaining the rules of sustainable development using the organizational potential of territorial self-governments.

The detailed characteristics of the Carpathian region is contained in the separate booklet: **“Socio-economic analysis of the Carpathian area”** delivered by the Carpathian Project.

The brief SWOT analysis

The strategic approach of VASICA is to utilise and enhance the strength of the area, to reduce its weaknesses, to exploit the opportunities and – as far as it is possible - to avoid and prevent the threats.

What follows below, is a sketchy SWOT analysis of the Carpathian area. One of the tasks of the actions of the project is to elaborate on the specifics and details of the particular items of the SWOT analysis.

The strengths of the Carpathian area

- The Carpathian mountain range is 1450 km long, and its area is around 200 000 square kilometres. Its height is substantially lower than that of the Alps: the highest peak of the Carpathians, Gerlachovka (2655 m), is only the 28th among European mountain peaks. Not only the Alps, but also the Sierra Nevada, the Etna, the Pyrenees, the Rhodope, the Apennines and the Olympus are higher than the Carpathians. Lower height, however, might be even advantageous from the point of view of human activity and movement.
- There are several places in the Carpathians having well equipped and relatively easily accessible recreation and winter sport facilities. The most important of them are Zakopane (PL), Tatranská Lomnica, Starý Smokovec, Štrbské Pleso (SK), Sinaia, Azuga, Predeal (RO);
- The Carpathians are rich in medicinal mineral water sources and spas. Major spas are Krynica in Poland, Piešťany, and Teplice in Slovakia, Borsec, Sovata, Băile Tuşnad, Covasna, and Băile Herculane in Romania.
- The Carpathian Mountains are stretching to the area of 8 European countries (the largest number in the World) and it is situated in a politically, economically, environmentally and from the point of European security important place in the middle of Europe. Even its situation calls for more attention and for more effort to deal with its problems.

The weaknesses of the Carpathian area

Unfortunately, the weaknesses of the area are – at least at present – more numerous than its strengths.

- From geological point of view the Carpathian area is – like the Alps – a geologically youthful mountain range. Youthful ranges are less suitable for larger settlements and are poorer in mineral wealth. Some oil and other resources were found rather at the foot of the mountains, where the plains and mountainous areas meet. While ancient mountain areas are often attracting population and economy, youthful ranges have in many cases a “repulsing” effect. The Carpathian area belongs to the less developed areas, even in Central European context. Mountain areas are less suitable for agriculture, arable areas cannot reach to areas higher than 600-700 metres.
- Despite of being lower than the Alps, and mainly for historical, and economic reasons, the Carpathian range is less passable than the Alps. The mountain range is 1450 km long and there are only 12 railway lines crossing the mountain range (5 of which are on the Czech-Slovak border). There is no motorway crossing the Carpathians. Because of the poor accessibility, tourism is also in a low level, the tourism potential of the area cannot be exploited.
- Agricultural endowments of the area are poor. Despite of these unfavourable conditions, agricultural population density was relatively high, surpassing the carrying capacity of the area. The result was poverty and high emigration from the area in the last hundred – hundred fifty years. The Carpathian area was one of the regions with the highest emigration in Europe in this period. But agricultural overpopulation caused also other unfavourable developments in the area. The area, suitable for efficient and large scale plant production is small; steep slopes are more exposed to erosion and many areas are already eroded.
- The situation of the area is peripheral. Markets and large urban centres are far and their access is costly and difficult. There are no significant mineral resources.
- A large part of the Carpathian region is border area where crossing the borders is difficult and time consuming both from technical and administrative point of view. These types of borders are serious hindrances of economic cooperation and integration. For centuries, the large part of the Carpathians was peripheral and neglected border area. One part of it (between Slovakia and Poland) is still border area. The other parts are now inside the countries of the Ukraine and Romania, but the new situation caused other problems. In the Ukraine, Transcarpathia the area, isolated by the mountain range from the other parts of the country, became even more peripheral than before. In Romania, the country is divided into two parts by the Carpathians and the mountain range remained in some sense – an obstacle of full national integration.
- During the last century, state borders in the area changed many times, in some areas even the ethnic composition of the population changed substantially. In the former Soviet Union border areas were deliberately not developed and not industrialised. Political factors were among the causes of economic underdevelopment. political conditions were also unfavourable in the area. The promotion of the development of the Carpathian area was not enhanced by the

circumstance that in most countries it was not inhabited by the titular nation, but by ethnic minorities. In the pre-World War I Hungary Carpathians were inhabited by Slovaks, Rusyns and Romanians. In post-World War I Poland and Czechoslovakia a large part of the Carpathians was inhabited by Ukrainians and Rusyns, in Romania some parts by Hungarians.

- The consequences of communist-type economic system still can be felt, up to the present day. Smaller and medium size cities at the foot of the mountain range have lost their important market function as places of exchange and processing of products from the mountains and from the plain. Small and medium size enterprises are missing. Many small and medium size cities are “one-factory” towns economically depending fully on one single industrial plant in the town
- Nearly forty years of communist centrally planned economy caused substantial damage to the Carpathian area. The system of central planning did not consider the specificities of the mountainous areas, they applied uniform methods by setting planning targets as in other parts of the respective countries. Serious deforestation took place in the Ukraine and Romania in this period. Collective farms were organised in areas, where conditions are unfavourable for large scale farming. In some mountainous areas in Romania, collectivising was not carried out, but agriculture in these areas did not enjoy any state supports. Industrialisation was implemented in the Slovak Carpathians and in some parts of the Romanian Carpathians (Brasov), but a large part of it represented arms industries. The mountainous areas could offer opportunities for tourism, but tourism was not a preferred sector in the socialist economy. International tourism was rather restricted in some countries hermetically isolated from the outside world.

Opportunities of the Carpathian area

- The Carpathian area is one of the very few regions in Central and Eastern Europe where the number of population is still growing. It is a huge reservoir of educated, skilled (cheap) and relatively young European labour force.
- The area has a huge potential for tourism. Winter sports facilities are confined to a small number of places, mainly in the Western Carpathians (Zakopane PL, Poprad SK). There are much more suitable places for winter sports. There are huge hardly touched areas of natural beauty. There are large national parks with relatively few visitors.
- The Carpathian area is one of the regions of Europe, where old rural architecture and different rural arts and crafts have been best preserved. They can be one of the attractions of tourism. On the other hand, their products – if adequately organised and marketed – can be sold to a wider interested public.

- The Carpathian area is rich on forests. It has special importance in Central Europe where a rather small share of surface area is forested (e.g. 60 percent of all forested area of the Ukraine is in the Carpathians). This could form the basis for a competitive wood-processing and furniture industry. Competitiveness could be enhanced by cooperation of enterprises in the different Carpathian countries and by coordination of their strategies.
- The Carpathian area is rich on rivers, which are suitable for the generation of hydroelectric power. Regarding that most river basins are stretching over state borders, this developments require transnational coordination.
- One of the important opportunities is the revival of the medium size cities along the “market line” at the internal and external edges of the Carpathian mountain range. These towns were the centres of the exchange of products from the mountains and from the plains. The decline of this function in the past decades was partly due to the communist economic system, but also to the holocaust (a large part of the merchant class of these cities was of Jewish origin). The cities of the external “market line” were Uherské Hrádisté, Zlin, Vsetin, Novy Jicin, Tešín-Cieszyn, Bielsko Biala, Novy Targ, Novy Sačz, Krosno, Sanok, Przemysl, Drohobič, Strij, Ivano-Frankivsk, Cernivtsi, Rădăuți, Suceava, Tirgu-Neamt, Piatra-Neamt, Onesti, Bacau, Focșani, Rimnicu Șarat, Ploesti, Tirgoviste, Rimnicu Valcea, Tirgu Jiu and Orsova. The cities along the internal “market line” were Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra, Levice, Lucenec, Rimavská Sobota, Miskolc, Eger, Gyöngyös, Kosice, Uzhgorod, Mukaceve, Hust, Bistrita, Targu Mures, Sighisoara, Sibiu, Oradea, Cluj-Napoca, Alba Iulia, Resita. Many of these cities are now in a critical situation because some of the industries located there during the centrally planned economy are declining. Trade, processing and marketing of the products of the mountain areas (like mountain foods) could constitute an important part of the economic base of these towns.

Threats in the Carpathian area

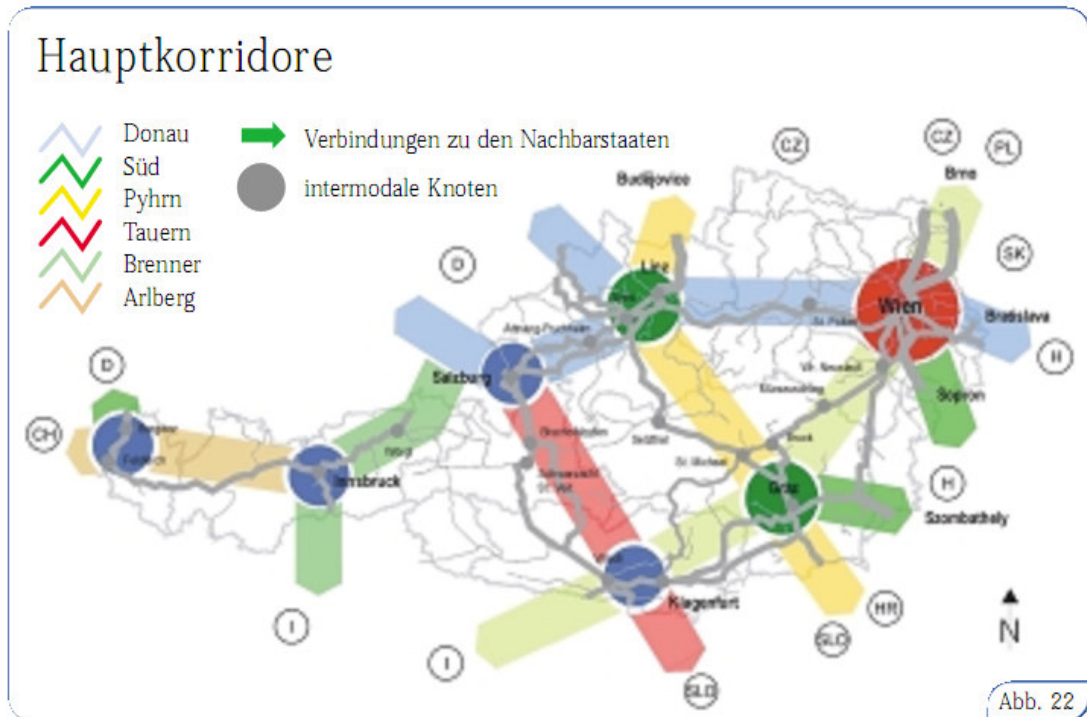
- Rural population pressure and shortage of agricultural land area together imply the threat of deforestation, of overgrazing, of inadequate use of mountain slopes for agricultural purposes. These practices are increasing the hazard of flood, landslide and land degradation.
- Climate change, without preventive measures, could also cause the growing threat of floods and the radical decrease of winter sport opportunities
- A certain level of migration from the Carpathian area is unavoidable and may have even some beneficial impacts on the economic and social situation (lower rural population pressure, income transfers, etc.). In absence of economic development

and improving accessibility, however, emigration can take excessive dimensions, spoiling even the future possibilities of economic development.

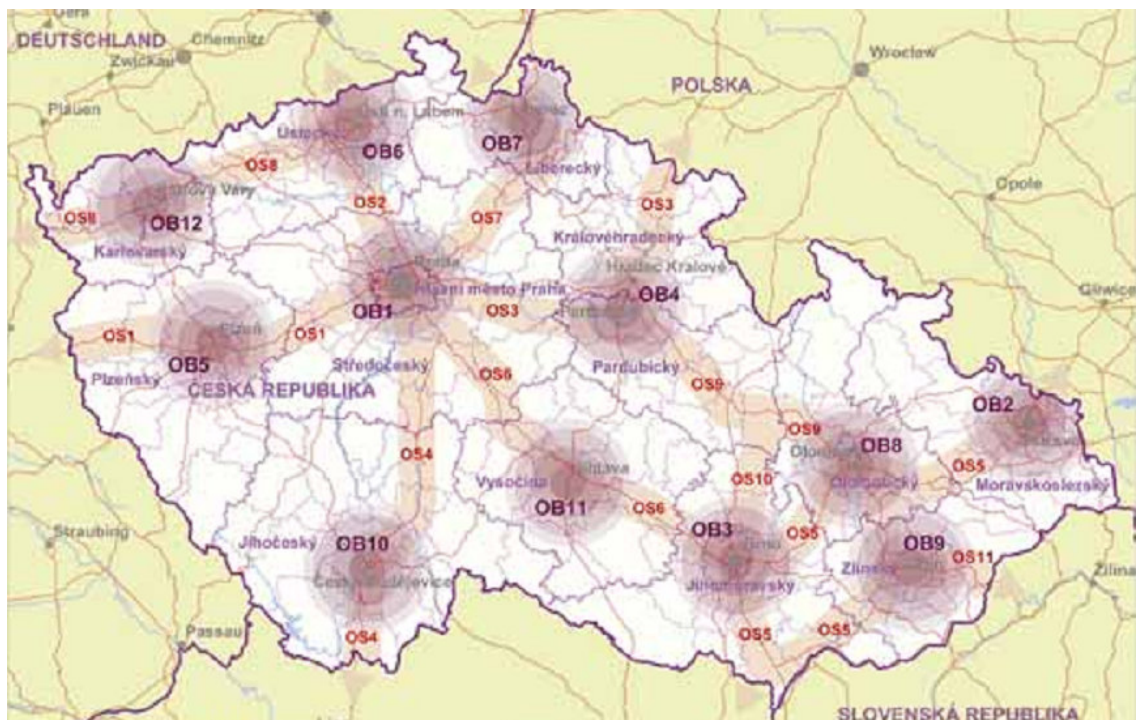
- Huge economic, social and security gaps along the external borders of the EU could give rise to different semi-legal or illegal activities on the two sides of the border: Illegal employment, smuggling of people and commodities, huge price difference in the provision of services, cross-border service provision, environmental dumping and export of waste materials, etc can cause increasing tensions in the border area which hampers integration.
- Even now, in some border areas a fairly large part of the population makes its living from small-scale illegal or semi legal activities (smuggling of fuel and other commodities, unregistered employment). Prosperous settlements are only those where this activity takes larger dimensions. The earned money is invested not in productive activities but in the construction of huge apartment houses, which is a form of money laundering. All these developments give rise to adverse income distribution, based not on work but on illegal activities.
- In the Carpathian area – especially at the edges of the North Eastern and Eastern Carpathians – lives a large part of the European Roma population. The living conditions of a large part of this population have deteriorated in the last one and half decade. Social tensions, caused by these developments are already substantial. If no, or only insufficient measures will be taken to change this situation, then serious conflicts could emerge in this area.
- Besides the Roma population there are other ethnic minorities in the area. Their status has improved in the last decade, but it cannot be regarded as stable. Nationalist parties can any time come to power in any country of the region (because there exist such parties in all Carpathian countries) and such events can generate serious tensions in the region.
- The Carpathian region is now the Eastern external border area of the European Union. The future of the enlargement process of the European Union is still uncertain. But whatever policy will be pursued concerning enlargement, the securing of political stability requires to cooperate with neighbouring countries and to help them to stabilise their economy and to improve the living conditions of their population.

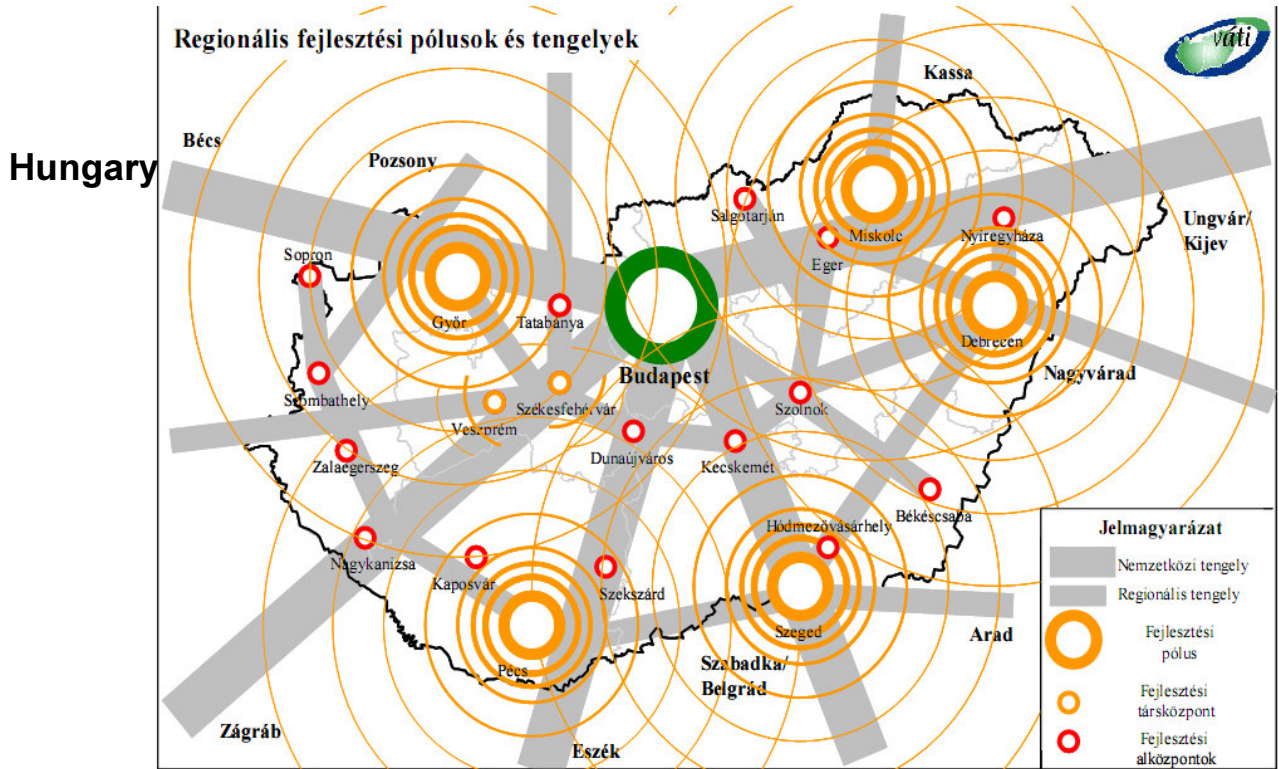
National spatial policies

Austria

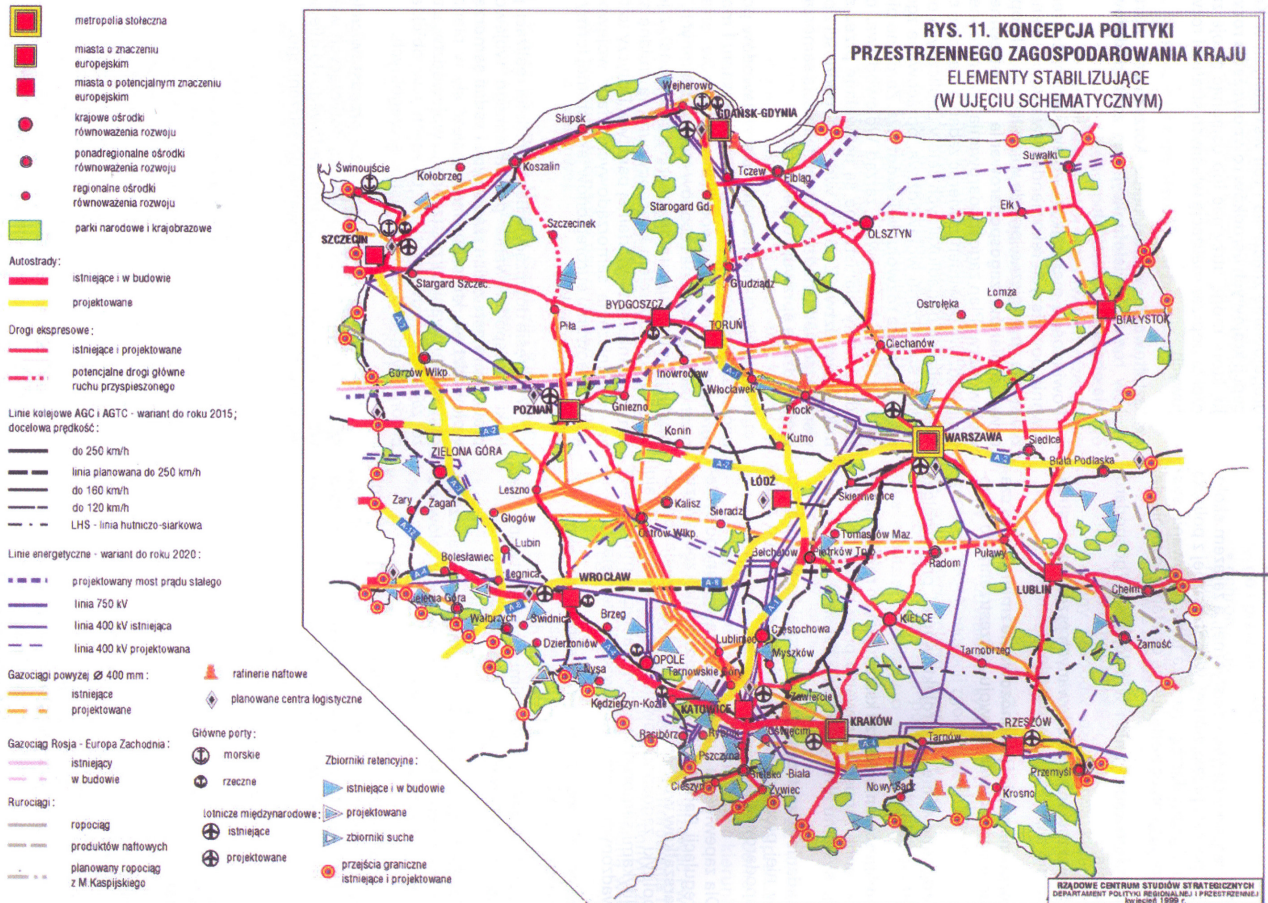


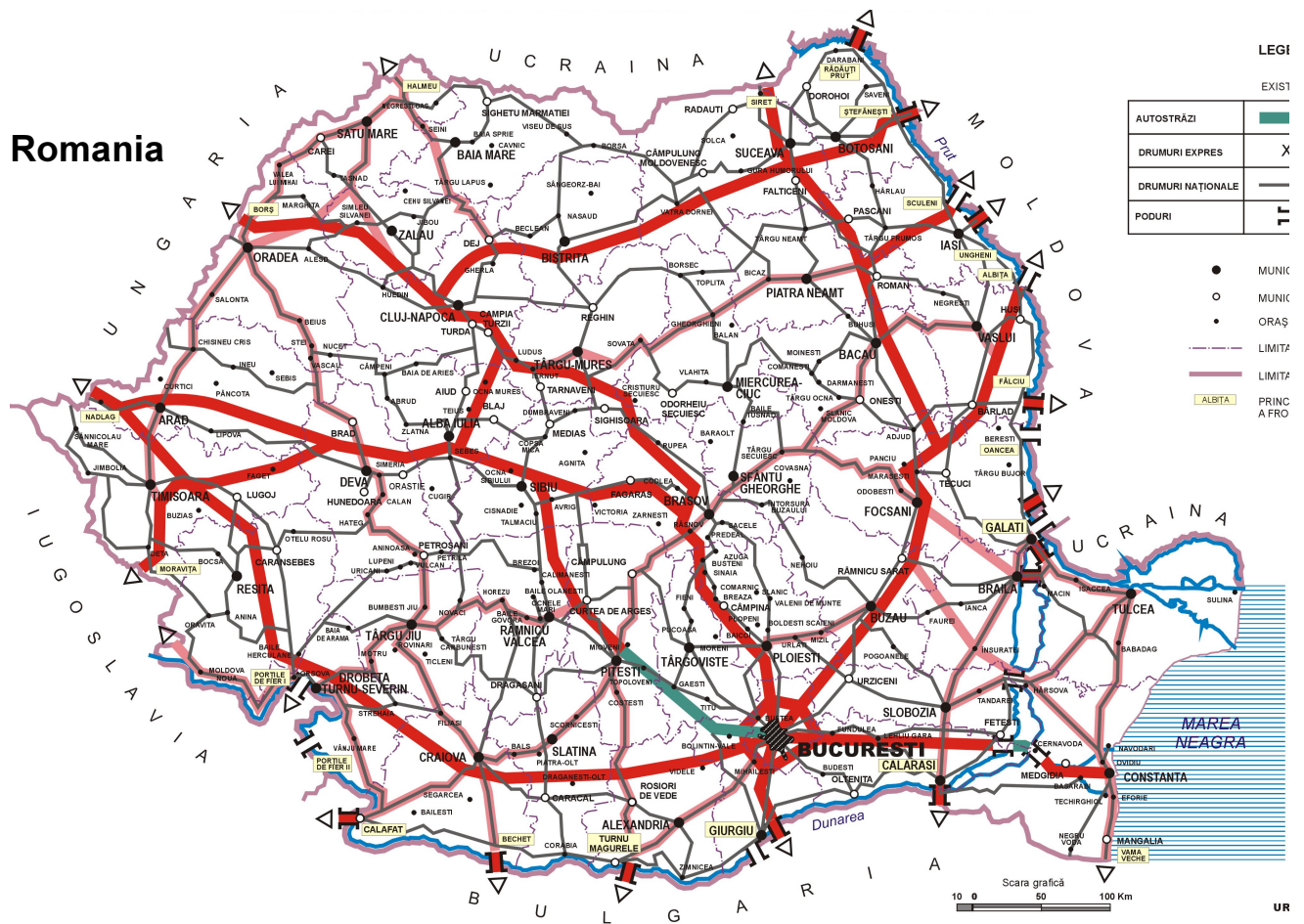
Czech Republic



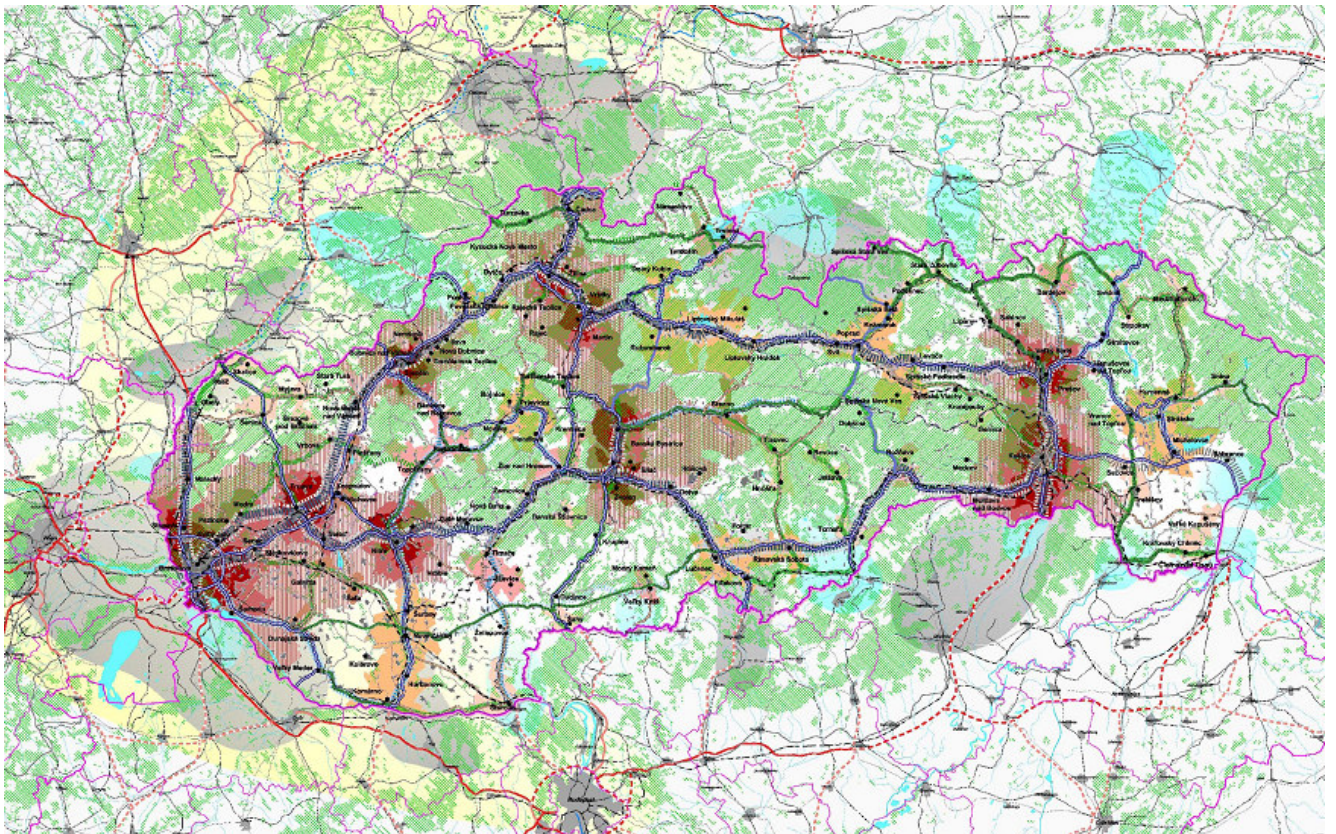


Poland

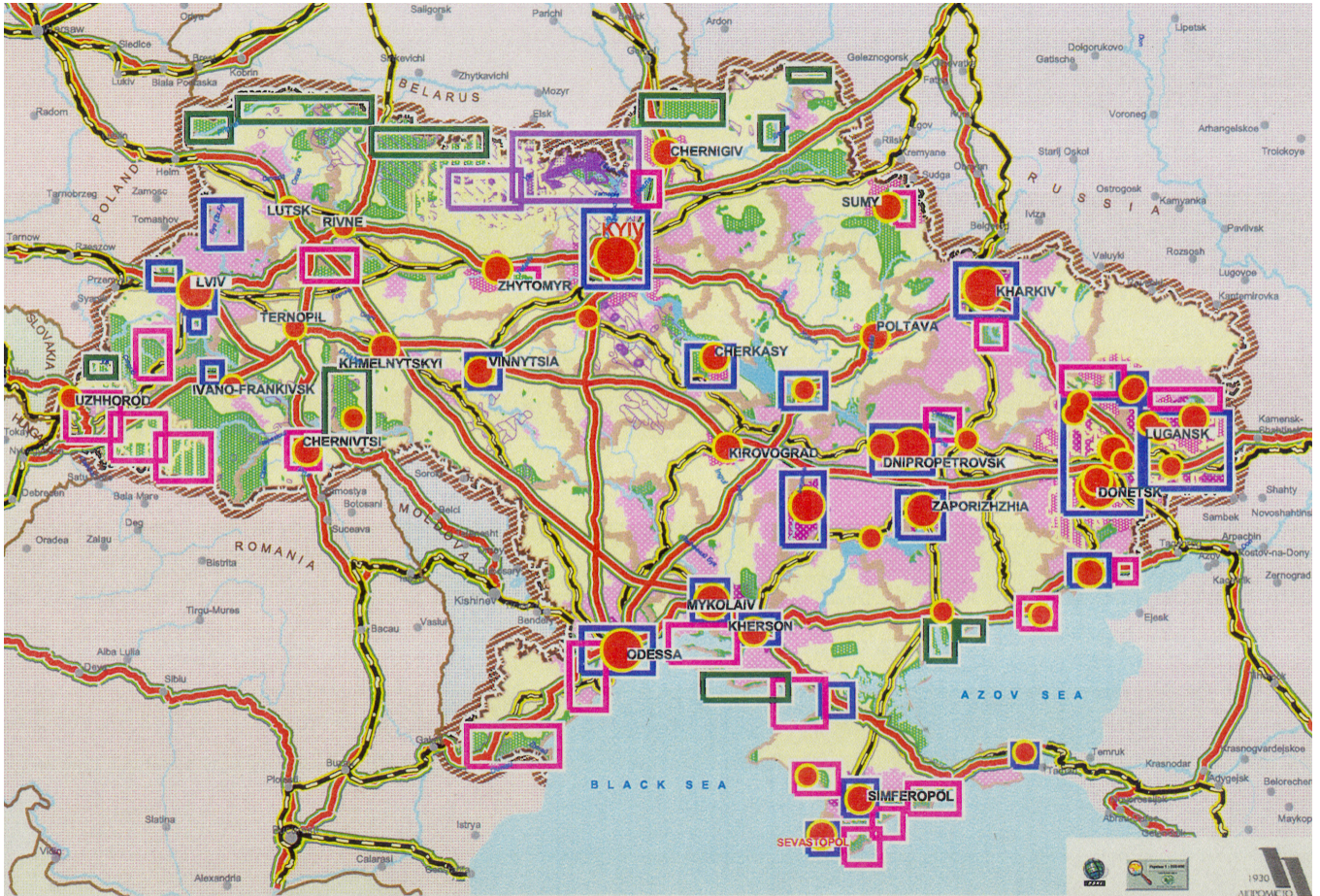




Slovakia



Ukraine



Strategy

VASICA as the strategic document

The incorporation of VASICA, as the joint planning document, into the territorial development and spatial planning systems of the Carpathian countries is guaranteed by the participation in the successive stages of its preparation – and its later positive assessment – of the spatial planning authorities at various levels of each country – signatory of the Carpathian Convention. This also ensures agreement with the methodology adopted and with the hierarchy of policy goals for spatial development to be pursued by all the participants.

Nevertheless it has been necessary to resolve certain differences between approaches to the territorial planning in each of the Carpathian Countries. It can be assumed with some degree of certainty that divergences between the national specific approaches are not so disparate that no acceptable compromise can be reached. Consequently it is not possible to create a structure for a shared document which can be incorporated directly into the planning systems of these countries. However this document identifies shared ideas and goals in relation to a range of specific issues. Hence the draft joint document does not propose any formulation of planning policies or objectives according to the practices of either country, but it is based on the expected evolution of planning systems and methods to accommodate relevant EU policies.

Thus the areas development needs have been grouped as follows:

- conservation and restoration of the area's natural and cultural resources – the factors related to the protection and enhancement of the area's heritage;
- promotion of the area's internal cohesion – the factors affecting the area's operation as a coherent cross-border region, including overcoming the area's underdeveloped economy and society;
- promotion of the area's external cohesion – the factors related to the area's participation in global and continental development processes, including the creation of regional growth centres.

The proposed headings will be presented to and discussed at a session of the Working Group for Spatial Planning, operating within the Carpathian Convention. The methodology will be discussed and approved by representatives of the countries.

It is believed that the headings correspond to the expected evolution of EU policy directions and thus form a basis for the preparation of plans for the border areas which can be used to access funds set aside for the achievement of EU goals and policies for the region. This is why, at this – synthetic – stage of the work, proposals from the preparatory documents have been reformulated in line with the headings spelled out above. The headings were further sub-divided, although the authors tried to avoid the forced use of methodologies from either of the existing national practices. The factors

under individual headings were characterised in terms of their focus on transnational issues. The aim was to create the basis for the easy identification of tasks which can be performed in a better way or with less effort, with supranational coordination, as opposed to tasks carried out by one side only. Factors with no supranational or cross-border aspects have been largely eliminated or designated as 'background only' for joint actions. It should be borne in mind that this strategy should be read in conjunction with the national documents and, only as such, do they constitute a fully comprehensive tool for pursuing development policies at the regional scale and at the local scale.

Territorial extent of VASICA

The delineation of the project area, where the socio-economic situation was analysed and for which development proposals will be prepared is not quite the same as the area delineated for the Carpathian (environmental and natural protection) Convention. The reason is partly that socio-economic data are available for different territorial divisions than for environmental and natural protection purposes. The other reason is that social and economic development measures have spatial impact on a larger area than environmental ones. In this analysis, data for NUTS3 regions will be analysed. Data for those NUTS3 regions will be considered, where at least a part of the region belongs to the Carpathian mountain area. The reason for it is that many developments in the surrounding area can have a significant impact on the mountain area proper, and vice versa.

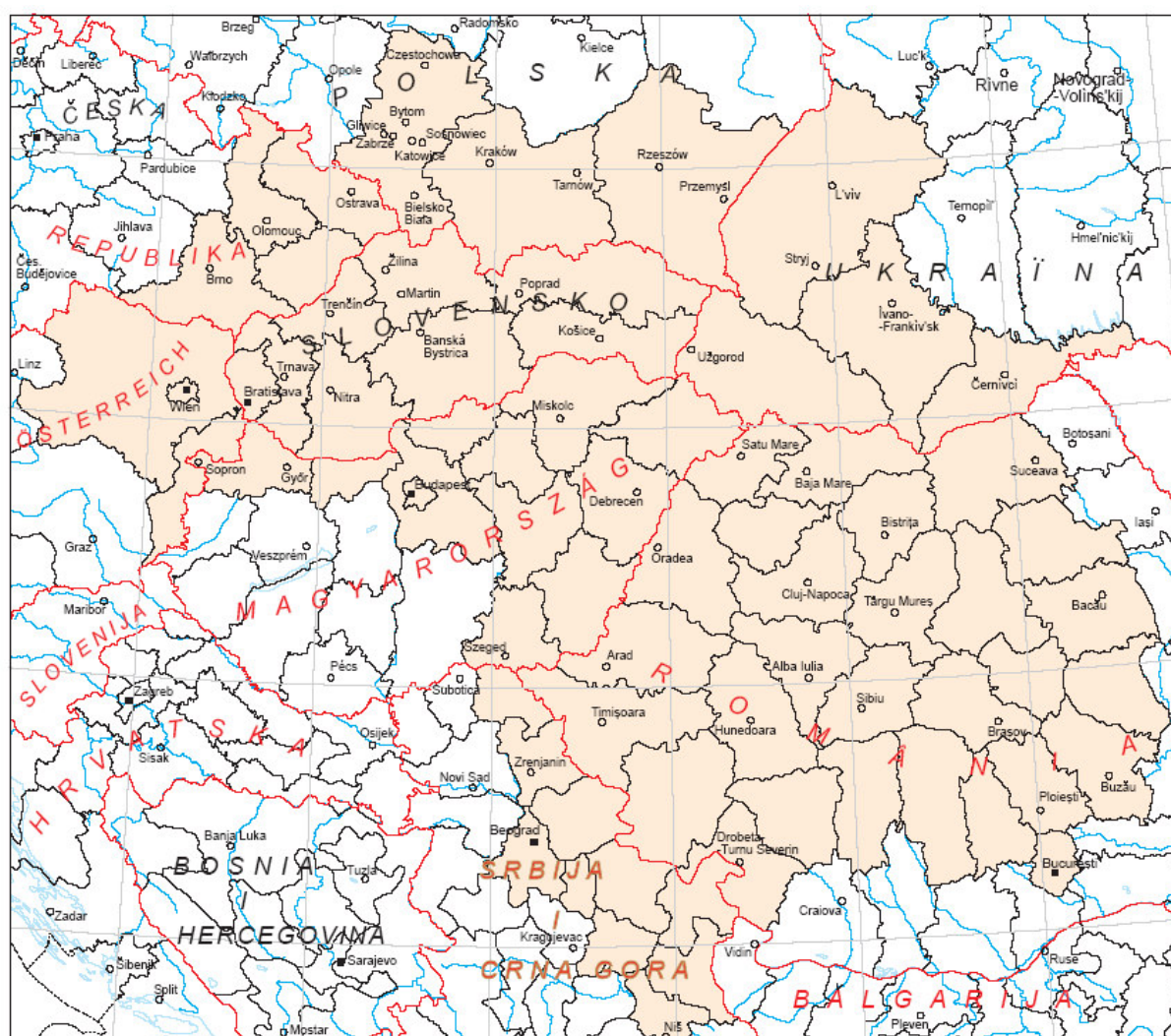
This delineated area comprises much larger area (470 thousand km²) than the area of the Carpathian mountains (190 thousand km²). It covers also the fore-lands of the mountain chain. Furthermore, it is delineated according the administrative regions of the Carpathian area (NUTS2 regions in Austria, Poland and Ukraine, NUTS3 regions in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Serbia) in order to have a larger data base for analysis and to enable the participation of regional governments with their whole administrative area in the project. According to this delineation, the whole territory of Slovakia is regarded as part of the Carpathian region.

This larger area has a population of nearly 53 million, which is comparable to the population size of Britain, France and Italy in Europe. It is about 7,6 % of the European population, and somewhat less than 5 % of the European territory.

Though the area as a whole will be analysed, development proposals will be focussed mainly on those areas, where economic and social problems are extremely severe and where transnational solutions for them are required. These areas are mostly in the North-Eastern and Eastern Carpathians, where the borders of five Carpathian countries meet (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the Ukraine) and where the level of economic development is the lowest and unemployment the highest in the whole Carpathian area.

The breakdown of the Carpathian Region according to countries

Country	Carpathian area km ²	Carpathian population thousands	As a percentage of the		As a percentage of the	
			country's area	country's population	Carpathian area	Carpathian population
Austria	23558	3373	28,1	41,6	5,3	6,3
Czech Republic	21723	3632	27,5	35,6	4,9	6,8
Hungary	54322	7286	58,3	72,9	12,2	13,6
Poland	45514	10138	14,6	26,3	10,2	18,9
Romania	165013	13920	69,5	62,1	36,9	26,0
Serbia	31567	3568	35,7	35,2	7,1	6,7
Slovakia	49034	5379	100	100	11,0	10,1
Ukraine	55895	6217	9,3	12,8	12,5	11,6
Total	446626	53513	28,4	34,9	100	100



Strategic goals

VASICA aims at identifying common ideas and priorities for cooperation in spatial development and planning in the Carpathian Region, but not at establishing any precisely specified compulsory development principles or objectives for the transnational region. This approach is justified by the fact that this document deals with spatial development concepts; specific policies and projects are subject, in each country, to statutory regulations and processes.

In practical terms, VASICA aims to assist regional and interregional administrations in their decision-making processes. As the strategy is also expected to become a basis for initiating coordination activities in the Carpathian Region area, particularly in relation to the establishment of a consistent policy basis for development, the preparation of planning documents for the border areas, and the formulation of development programmes for individual areas (regions). At the same time, VASICA can form the basis for the preparation of plans and programmes for the use of funds to support the aims of EU policies.

This current document has a new format which takes account of the future expected evolution of planning systems and methods, and which is a result of the need to align these systems with relevant EU policies. Consequently this document discusses cross-border issues and tasks which have a particular influence on development in the shared border areas as well as the issues and tasks which may be addressed by means of supranational cooperation.

The following are regarded as the primary goals for development in the Carpathian Region areas:

1. conservation and restoration of the area's natural and cultural resources – the need to protect and enhance the area's heritage;
2. promotion of the area's internal cohesion – this goal refers to the area's functioning as a coherent cross-border region, including overcoming the area's underdeveloped economy and society;
3. promotion of the area's external cohesion – this goal refers to the area's participation in global and continental development processes, including the creation of regional growth centres.

Goal 1 – conservation and restoration of natural and cultural resources

Problem definition:

The Carpathian Region is particularly rich in natural environment assets. However, the use of such resources, especially during the last 50 years, has in many cases upset the balance of nature, and now action is needed to restore it. A concern for the natural environment improves the quality of spaces, creating better conditions for living and for certain business operations. This can be one of the factors generating positive social

change, e.g. the reversing of depopulation. The cultural environment in the border region is also very rich. Its resources are made up of the historical heritage of former epochs, as well as the cultural contribution of the generations of settlers, who frequently came here from entirely different regions. Such a mixture of cultures can form a basis for a completely new situation, generating additional development momentum – provided it is properly researched and taken account of in adopted development policies.

Major challenges:

The value of protecting and conserving natural and cultural resources derives the characteristic features of the area. The natural environment of the Carpathian Region is the heritage of the entire European Community, and so its protection should be a priority task, performed with support (funding) from the entire Community. However, environmental assets can also form a basis for developing certain types of economic activity (e.g. tourism) in a given area. This will be successful if the unique nature of the heritage is preserved. This is why protection and actions aimed at restoring value to environmental assets can also be considered in economic terms, as in the long run the border community can achieve quantifiable gains from this. The major challenges in this area include:

- protection of valuable natural resources;
- protection of undeveloped areas constituting an irreplaceable component of the natural environment;
- conservation of multi-culture heritage;
- regeneration, preservation and restoration of biodiversity (including reintroduction of extinct species);
- protective actions and reclamation, renewal and maintenance in areas with particularly valuable resources;
- integrated water management.

Potential cooperation areas:

- strengthening of the existing natural environmental linkages;
- supplementation of the nature conservation programmes;
- actions aimed at raising the class of protection for the most naturally precious regions;
- prevention of the urbanisation of the open countryside;
- protection of cross-border rivers against pollution and the improvement of water quality in the catchment basins of rivers, crossing the border;

- monitoring of the border sections of watercourses and groundwater flows, quantitative and qualitative protection of water basins, e.g. by strengthening the legal effectiveness of the protection;
- coordination of actions regarding the use and protection of hydrogeological structures which cross the border, including restoration of hydrogeological balance in areas with disrupted water systems, and protection of areas in which both ordinary underground water and mineralised water occur;
- cooperation in assessing the impact on the natural environment and living conditions of spatial development decisions in the Carpathian Region;
- integrated monitoring of air quality;
- pursuing the sustainable management of forests, and increasing woodland cover;
- studies assessing the capacity to reclaim and redevelop industrial and degraded land, and preparation of joint reclamation and redevelopment projects;
- restoration of land degraded by industry and mining;
- strengthening and conservation of regional architectural traditions;
- raising of social awareness and education for natural and cultural environmental protection;
- revitalisation of the cultural landscape in rural areas;
- promotion of and tourist use of the heritage assets of the old industry;
- organisational and technical efforts aimed at protecting cultural heritage.

Carpathian Project's input

1. Carpathian Environmental Outlook
2. Water management and risk prevention
3. Forestry and timber industry
4. Carpathian identity
5. Cultural heritage for the future development
6. Local „Agendas 21”
7. Financing the sustainable development

Goal 2 – strengthening internal cohesion of the Carpathian Region

Problem definition:

The Carpathian Region has a developed settlement structure, but local geographical conditions, e.g. mountain ranges, make linkages between its individual components difficult, especially across the state borders. The vitality of the settlement network is also weak, because of the weakness of its components, especially the villages and small towns. During the 50 years of communist rule, its municipal infrastructure and housing stock significantly depreciated. A long-term division arising from an inflexible administrative border, with an insufficient number of crossing points, weakened the socio-economic links between localities across the borders. The restoration of former cross-border linkages, both with regard to usual communication infrastructures and to social and economic matters, is of paramount importance to the reversal of the tendency of the area's peripheralisation and to the stimulation of its endogenic capacities. A basis for the region's internal cohesion is a developed settlement structure, made up of centres performing relevant functions and a system of linkages between them. Such a network enables provision of proper services to the area's inhabitants and can be conducive to the diffusion of comprehensive and progressive development processes into the entire area.

Major challenges:

Internal cohesion is a goal which can be pursued on the basis of close transnational cooperation and should result from the engagement of the local authorities in these processes. The regions' complementary, primary strategies can help them find appropriate solutions. Such cooperation should be based principally on the results of an analysis of local development prerequisites. Such prerequisites include: location within relevant networks, and the predispositions and policies of other centres. Also of some importance are the aspirations of the local inhabitants and authorities. The VASICA strategy focuses on territorial cohesion, the major challenges for which in the transnational region include:

- increasing the number of communication linkages and improving their quality;
- developing the links between individual elements (nodes) of the settlement structure, including both technical infrastructure and cooperation between businesses;
- promoting the development of small- and medium-sized settlement centres and a multi-axis (polycentric) development of the border region;
- redeveloping and improving the material assets of towns and cities;
- developing social capital, boosting employment, especially when based on the service sector;
- counteracting social exclusion, developing human resources and reversing depopulation;
- developing local and regional communications and telecommunications infrastructure;

- developing renewable energy sources;
- raising the level and flexibility of the education system, expanding the offer of secondary schools and universities, especially in areas with a low level of qualifications;
- encouraging municipalities in the mountain areas with a high, but unrealised, tourist potential;
- supporting small- and medium-sized businesses in the tourist industry.

Potential cooperation areas:

With reference to the settlement structure:

- formulating common strategies for development zones (related to the settlement structure);
- establishing, strengthening or promoting the transnational cooperation between towns and cities across the borders;
- exchanging information and experience between small- and medium-sized towns relating to urban development and renewal;
- integrated management of nodal and strategic areas affecting the development of the entire transnational region.

With reference to communications, infrastructure and flood prevention and control:

- construction and modernisation of expressways in the border area, including projects to link the north and the south;
- formulation of strategies for improving lower-level communication links, in the context of a possible signature of the Schengen Treaty and the expected future EU enlargements;
- identification of new border crossing opportunities and joint projects for the alternative use of border crossings after the signature of the Schengen Treaty;
- modernisation and expansion of regional railway links;
- formulation of coherent plans for the location, modernisation and connection of regional airports and the use of smaller airports for international transport;
- introduction of cross-border public passenger transport networks between the neighbouring parts of the Carpathian countries to strengthen micro-regional linkages, to promote tourism and to facilitate commuting;
- joint preparation and implementation of tele-information and telecommunications capital investment projects;
- formulation of joint cross-border projects for improving the water and sewage management systems;

- exchange of information regarding surplus electric and thermal energy, waste disposal capacities, sewage treatment etc.;
- preparation of joint proposals for the use of renewable energy;
- joint formulation of flood control schemes for river catchment basins;
- incorporation of existing multi-use water reservoirs into the region's flood protection systems;
- expansion of the flood monitoring system.

With reference to economic activity and tourism:

- identifying and strengthening cross-border economic sector clusters;
- identification of and cooperation between economic development zones, including the creation of cross-border investment zones;
- promotion of small- and medium-sized enterprises;
- strengthening of production and service functions of micro- and subregional growth poles;
- support for the creation of integrated production and service businesses with the ability to share work in the border regions;
- reclamation of the large areas of derelict land following the extraction of natural resources, as well as former military grounds, to be used for new economic initiatives;
- strengthening of research and development, and the transfer of know-how;
- cooperation in the area of spa services, sanatorium treatment and caring for the elderly;
- integration of tourist routes – walking and cycle routes;
- promotion of the Carpathian transnational tourist areas and routes;
- support for the development of direct work contacts, and the exchange of information between corresponding local and regional administrative authorities across the borders.

Carpathian Project's input

1. Geoportals as an information resource and as a teaching tool
2. Socio-economic analysis of the Carpathian Area
3. Cultural heritage for the future development
4. Transport networks
5. Forestry and timber industry
6. Human settlements
7. Lessons learned
8. National spatial development strategies and plans
9. Information society
10. Local brand development
11. SMEs' support
12. Tourism infrastructure development
13. Tourism professional skills

Goal 3 – strengthening external cohesion with the European territory

Problem definition:

The Carpathian Region has an advantageous geographical location – in the East of EU, not far from some major European urban centres, and at the potential crossing of important transport routes. Despite this, it is peripheral in character and does not fully utilise the potentials offered by such a position. The goal of protecting natural and cultural resources and the goal of promoting internal cohesion (i.e. the other two goals) do not ensure adequate dynamics for growth in the long run. The border region will develop properly only if advantage is taken, in an optimum way, of all the existing external aspects of the region. Any neglect in this respect may lead to further peripheralisation and socio-economic decline of the region.

Major challenges:

The improvement of the area's external cohesion is a goal which can ensure the linking of the border region with its external environment to make growth (development) processes permanent. Permanence is understood here as the ability to support positive processes, even after any external resourcing (financing) is stopped. Thanks to this, the region may develop autonomously, without being dependent on any external aid. The major challenges include:

- stimulation of the development of linked growth centres inside and outside the transnational region;
- improvement and creation of new external links, becoming part of the functional and spatial linkages of the continent; of which most importance will be communication links, focusing chiefly on the transport infrastructure;
- preparing of minor urban centres for participation in global and European development processes and development of their linkages on a national and supra-national scale (this refers to a variety of linkages, but mainly the flow of knowledge and innovation and the development of corporate links between businesses);
- growth of selected economic sectors at the main urban growth centres, based on innovation and new technologies.

Potential cooperation areas:

- the strengthening of communication links between the Carpathian Region and the Pan-European Transport Corridors;
- connection of the Carpathian Region with European waterways;
- a significant improvement of the links of the border region with international airports;
- the strengthening of cooperation between supra-local urban centres in the Carpathian Region, especially with reference to the transfer of technology and research;
- the inclusion of the mountain tourist border belt in the international structure of the tourist areas and its active international promotion;
- integrated actions aimed at attracting new economic investment projects, especially in the field of new technologies;
- the development of an information society on the basis of integrated systems of state-of-the-art telecommunications infrastructure;
- the creation of strong functional region connected with European communication systems;
- investments into businesses, their fixed assets, infrastructure, development of innovation and new technologies.

Carpathian Project's input

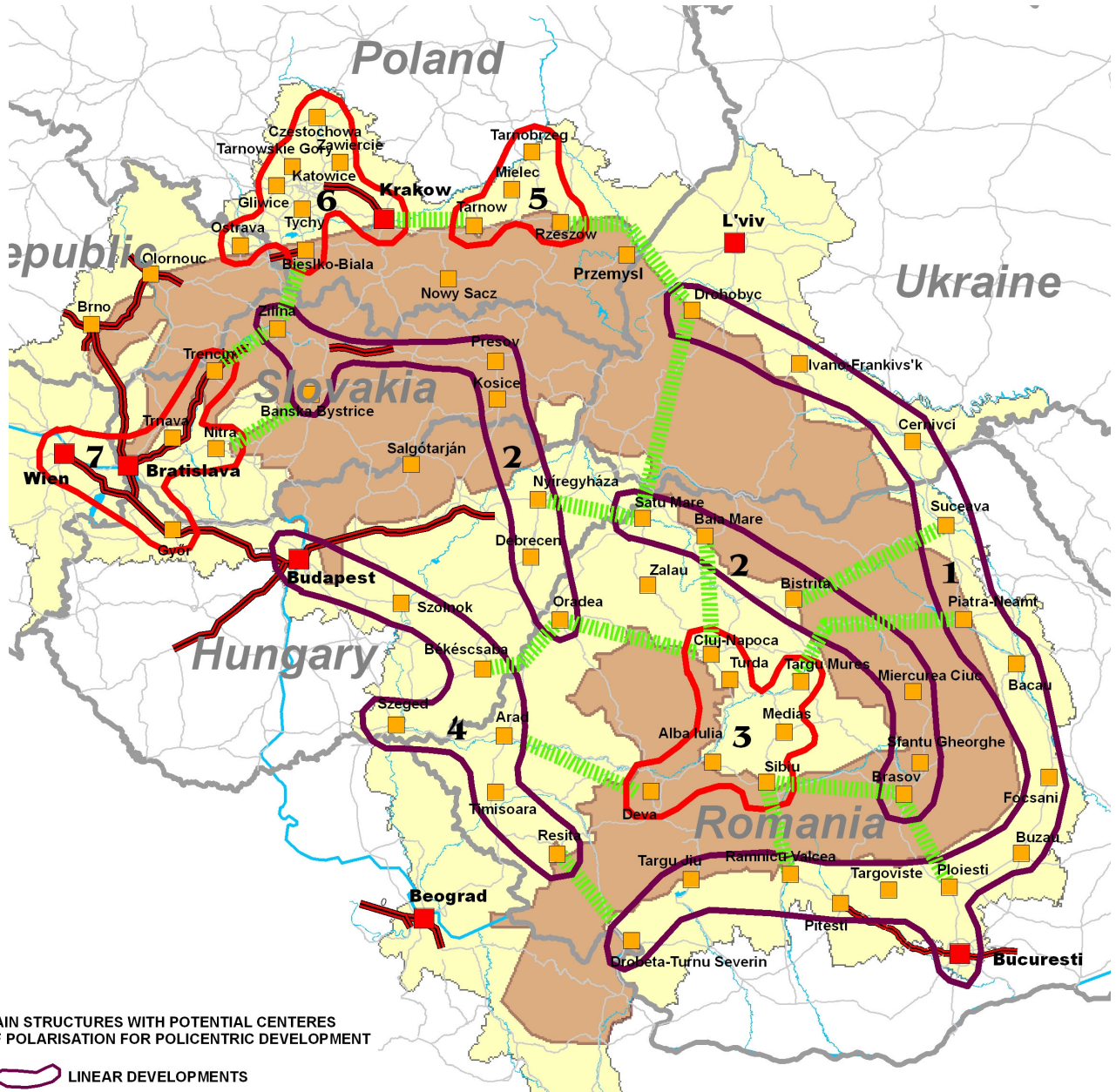
1. Carpathian geoportal as the promotion media
2. Transport networks
3. Standing follow-up platform

Spatial coordination

Conflicts between natural protection and human activities



Polycentric development



Transport networks

