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Seven Carpathian States Adopt an International Agreement for the Sustainable Management of Carpathian Forests

Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (COP3)
25 – 27 May 2011, Bratislava, Slovak Republic

VIENNA/BRATISLAVA, 27 May (UN Information Service) – In line with the this year's United Nations International Year of Forests, the seven Carpathian States have decided to further cooperate and strengthen their efforts in order to protect, maintain and sustainably manage forests in the Carpathians. The legal framework has been established through the approval of the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management to the Carpathian Convention.

On 25 – 27 May, High Level Representatives of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic and Ukraine, as well as representatives from the European Commission and International Organizations met in Bratislava for the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP3) to the Carpathian Convention. The Meeting has been hosted by the Government of the Slovak Republic. "We think that this conference has been able to provide a vital platform for the future cooperation of the Carpathian Member States in order to guarantee an appropriate development of our beautiful region," said Jozsef Nagy, Slovak Minister of Environment.

Carpathian Forests need comprehensive policy support

More than half of the Carpathians are covered by forests, with nearly to 100,000 km² consisting of natural and semi-natural forests. With 3,000 km² of virgin forests, the Carpathians harbour the largest remaining virgin forests in Europe. But there are also large areas with low-level natural forest composition (e.g. spruce monocultures) and even-aged, single storey forests.

The Carpathian forests today are affected by multiple human and natural stress factors: such as pollution, wind-throw, floods, droughts, biotic agents (insects, fungal species), improper management practices, illegal logging and increasingly tourism. The number of hotels has increased by almost 60 per cent in the last ten years and popular destinations are suffering from the phenomenon of mass tourism. Also, since 1990s, the process of re-privatization and restitution process of forest properties to private owners has resulted in a disintegration of forest management and fragmentation of forest coverage.

"We expect that this Forest Protocol will allow us to take wide reaching measures that will help to increase awareness of the multiple functions of forests and the benefits from sustainable forest management in the Carpathians, especially with reference to natural carbon stock, water supply and biodiversity, protection of virgin forests, as well as contributing to rural development," said Harald Egerer, Head of the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention based in Vienna.

Commitment to Sustainable Tourism

At COP3, the member states of the Carpathian Convention have also agreed on the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism, a sector that is of fundamental importance for the development of the region. The adoption of the strategic action plan for the implementation of the Biodiversity Protocol, the commitment to establish an ecological platform for the Carpathians and the launch of the "BIOREGIO

Carpathians” Project, are significant steps towards implementing the Convention. In addition, the Carpathian States have adopted the “Strategic Action for the Carpathian area”, a strategic briefing which calls for consideration of the “Carpathian Space” in the context of existing or planned European Union (EU) cooperation programmes (e.g. such as under the European Union Territorial Cooperation budget for 2014-2020).

Carpathian Convention as a forum for dialogue between all stakeholders involved

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, acknowledged in his opening statement the achievements that have been made by the Carpathian Convention in the recent years: “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.” This has also been underlined by the presence of numerous experts and NGOs that are active in the region. At several side events they took the opportunity to present their work and to raise awareness on issues critical to the sustainable development of the region. Participants addressed issues including education on sustainable development, Carpathian-wide research, accessibility and ecological connectivity, climate change, and the opportunities of EU funding for the region.

Handover of the Presidency to Slovak Republic

The COP3 also marked the handover of the Romanian presidency of the Convention to the Slovak Republic, which will preside over the Convention until 2014. “I am convinced that a strong cooperation among the Carpathian countries is necessary in order to guarantee a comprehensive development of our region,” said Jozsef Nagy. “We will therefore work on the continuation of our successful collaboration and will strengthen further cooperation in the key sectors of the Carpathian Convention, especially in forests and tourism, but also in other sectors.” Referring to the consultations about the permanent seat of the secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, Jozsef Nagy stated: “It would be a great honour if our country should host the Permanent Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention in Slovakia.”

The Carpathian Convention:

The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) was signed by the seven Parties (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine) in May 2003 in Kyiv, Ukraine and entered into force in January 2006. After the Alpine Convention, the Carpathian Convention is the second sub-regional international legally-binding instrument for a mountain region worldwide. Since 2004, the interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (ISCC) is administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the Vienna office and hosted by the Republic of Austria.

The common vision of the Carpathian member states is to pursue comprehensive policy and cooperation in order to guarantee protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians. The Convention provides a framework for cooperation and multi-sectoral policy coordination, a platform for joint strategies for sustainable development, and a forum for dialogue between all stakeholders involved – from the local community and various NGO’s up to the regional and national Governments, European Union Institutions and the United Nations.

About the Carpathians:

The Carpathians are Europe’s largest, longest and most twisted and fragmented mountain chain in Europe, shared by seven Central and Eastern European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic and Ukraine. The region represents a centre of extensive biological diversity and unique and well-preserved cultural heritage. The European Union’s largest populations of brown bears, wolves, lynx, European bison and imperial eagles (a globally threatened species) are found in the Carpathians. They are also home to almost 4,000 plant species, including one-third of those species existing in Europe that are found nowhere else in the World.

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