



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

UNEP

Opening speech

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at the High Level Segment

of the

**Fourth Meeting of the
Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (COP4)**

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

Most of us in this room, citizens of the Carpathians, we have the privilege to come from the most unique mountain region in Europe and we all know how important our region is to the European natural and cultural heritage. And we all appreciate the beauty of it.

However, we are also well aware that the Carpathians include some of the least developed regions in the European Union with very specific conditions and needs. To address the specific challenges of this mountain range in a coordinated manner, the Carpathian Convention brings together the seven countries of the region and stimulates their collaboration. It provides solutions to enhancing the sustainable development of local infrastructure and economies while ensuring the protection of biological, landscape and cultural diversity of the Carpathians.

Therefore, I would like to congratulate and thank the Government of the Czech Republic for hosting this Meeting of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention in the historic city of Mikulov and for allowing us to make additional progress on the road to sustainable development in the Carpathians.

Last year, we celebrated together in Vienna the seat of the interim secretariat, the tenth anniversary of the Carpathian Convention. This was also a good opportunity to take stock of the long-term support the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) provided to the development of the Carpathian Convention since the initial idea, when Ukraine requested UNEP to facilitate an intergovernmental consultation process back in 2001.

With the help of Italy and the Alpine States, the European Academy (EURAC), the WWF and several international organizations, academic institutions and NGOs, UNEP Regional Office for Europe serviced the process leading to the adoption of the framework Carpathian Convention, also called Kyiv Convention, in 2003.



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

In 2004, at the request of the seven Carpathian countries UNEP established the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention at the United Nations Office in Vienna. Austria, as the host country of numerous United Nations entities including the UNEP Vienna office, has since then supported the interim Secretariat with financial and substantive contributions. At your request as the parties, we are prepared to continue to service the Carpathian Convention secretariat through our Vienna office.

UNEP has also been supporting the implementation of some key activities under the Carpathian Convention through the UNEP Programme of Work, mainly through its “Environmental Governance” subprogramme and the project focusing on transboundary institutional mechanisms.

We already have more than a decade of great history behind us. Let us now write the next chapter. Today we are here to witness the adoption and signature of important legal and policy instruments that will guide the future work of the Carpathian Convention and lead to concrete action on the ground.

Sustainable transport represents a major challenge for today's rural and urban environments – particularly in sensitive mountain regions of the Carpathians. Underdeveloped and insufficient sustainable transport facilities, paired with growing motorization, create significant negative ecological impacts. The growing number of privately owned cars increases dependency on this mode of transport. Cars fill our streets, green areas, newly developed suburban shopping districts, as well as rural and recreational areas. With the substantial support of several institutions and partners, including the civil society, a series of formal negotiations in the context of the Working Group (technically and financially supported by the European Union Access2Mountain Project) led to the finalization of the Transport Protocol that will be adopted and signed today.

It is my hope that this ambitious protocol soon becomes operational and we of course stand ready to assist the Contracting Parties in its implementation. Green Infrastructure is one of the main issues to be addressed in the future under the new presidency of the Carpathian Convention that is the Czech Republic – as also set as a priority at the EU level. I am confident that with the Transport Protocol adopted, you will have an important tool to further promote green infrastructure measures in the Carpathians, building on the various examples and best-practices that we have already collected, such as the Alpine Carpathian Corridor Project and the BIOREGIO Carpathians project.

I note with great pleasure that important progress has been made towards the future ratification and implementation of the Protocols on Biodiversity, on Forests and on Sustainable Tourism. Besides the many other achievements in various thematic fields (forestry, tourism, climate change etc.), I want to highlight particularly the establishment of strategic partnerships between the Convention with other Conventions and Institutions. These include the Science for Carpathians Initiative (Forum Carpaticum meeting held in Lviv last week), the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (notably in the context of the EU Strategy for the Danube region), the Convention on



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

Biological Diversity or the Carpathian Wetland Initiative. Please let me also express gratitude to the European Union for the constant support provided to the Carpathian Convention, both in the field of environment and adaptation to climate change, as well as for sustainable regional development, by financing a variety of successful and important projects.

Besides the Alpine Convention, the Carpathian Convention is the second sub-regional treaty-based regime for the protection of a mountain range worldwide. The importance of both conventions is continuously reflected at the global level, notably in the context of the UN, such as the CBD Programme of Work on Mountain Biodiversity or the latest UN General Assembly Resolution of Sustainable Mountain Development. Thanks to the strategic cooperation between both mountain conventions – based on the concluded MoU and in close cooperation with the Italian presidency of the Alpine Convention – we were able to bring the Rio+20 mandate related to mountains into life. This work is now culminating in the Joint Alpine Carpathian Statement on Adaptation to Climate Change to be announced at the forthcoming UNFCCC COP20 in Lima, Peru. Also, UNEP's inter-regional mountain and climate change adaptation project, supported by the Government of Austria, is also aiming to share the lessons learned and experiences from the Carpathians and the Alps in the context of climate change adaptation with other mountain regions in Pan-Europe and beyond. In one month time, African leaders will also gather in Arusha, Tanzania at the World Mountain Forum to discuss on transboundary institutional mechanisms for African mountains, drawing also on the experiences of both European Conventions.

The cooperation of the Carpathian Convention and the Alpine Convention and the efforts of their parties was also instrumental to put mountain issues in the focus of current discussions on the Post-2015 Development Agenda/SDGs that led to the inclusion of mountain issues in the recent report of the Open Working Group on the SDGs (in the areas of water and ecosystems).

We thank and congratulate the governments of the Carpathian region for their lasting determination to cooperate and share their common responsibility to protect their common heritage - mountain environment and the people of the Carpathian region. And we are proud and grateful for the trust put into UNEP since more than 10 years now to assist, support and service the implementation of this unique agreement between the Carpathian countries that has become a source of inspiration for other mountain regions worldwide.

Let me acknowledge the excellent leadership of the outgoing Presidency of the Carpathian Convention, the Government of the Slovak Republic, in achieving these successes which we are endorsing today. For the new Presidency, the Czech Republic, I wish strong visions and ideas as well as the necessary patience and commitment to implement them in close interaction with other parties.



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

To conclude, let me assure you of the continuous support of UNEP to the Carpathian Convention both financially and in-kind, including support to negotiations of normative instruments or strategies for sustainable agriculture, transport and cultural heritage.

I am looking forward to our fruitful discussions and a successful Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention. Thank you very much.