

Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

The Carpathian Mountains and the Danube River Basin overlap substantially in their ranges. Danube tributaries that originate high up in the Carpathian mountains add substantially to this river, and they form invaluable habitats for animals and plants, but also provide a source of livelihood for people.

As two organisations with a mandate in environmental protection and the sustainable management of natural resources, the Carpathian Convention and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River are almost like siblings. We share a common base and at the same time, we reach into different domains of the environment. As such, the ICPDR and the Carpathian Convention have become mutual observers and more than that, partners in a range of joint activities. Many future challenges open new opportunities to continue and even intensify this partnership.

Most importantly, I would like to highlight recent achievements in the field of sustainable hydropower development. The transposition of energy systems towards renewables is a key challenge for countries today. Next to wind, solar and biomass, hydropower plays an important role in the provision of renewable energy. However, like other forms of renewable energy, hydropower too cannot be considered as sustainable per se. Different potentially negative environmental impacts for example on fish populations, sediment transport or adjacent wetlands, require a balanced approach for the preservation of healthy ecosystems.

In response to these challenges, the Ministers of the Danube countries asked the ICPDR to initiate a dialogue process to develop guidelines for the sustainable development of hydropower in 2010. Activities started in 2011, aiming to find an agreement among stakeholders on how to address problems of existing hydropower, as well as where and how to develop hydropower in the future. An elaborate process eventually resulted in the adoption of “Guiding Principles for Sustainable Hydropower Development” in June 2013. The 2013 ICPDR President Circulated the text of the Guiding Principles to all Environment and/or Water and Energy Ministers of the Danube Basin with a plea to implement them at the national level.

The practical application of the Guiding Principles on the national level is now of high priority. The Carpathian Convention and its contracting parties have demonstrated their commitment to this activity in the past and I look forward to building on this. Whether you represent a national administration, civil society or the private sector here today, these Guiding Principles provide you with an opportunity to contribute to sustainable mountain management.

You are invited to assist in the application of the guiding principles on the national level. Help us to find a balance between sparing sensitive areas from developments and at the same time to utilize the remaining sustainable potential for hydropower in the Carpathian Mountains.

In this spirit and on behalf of the ICPDR, I thank the contracting parties of the Carpathian Convention for their contributions to our joint mandate and wish all success to the upcoming Czech Presidency of the Carpathian Convention.

Thank you for your attention.