

Carpathian Memorandum

The Carpathians are an important part of Europe's regional heritage. That area has enormous social, cultural and natural resources and at the same time it is one of the poorest and most neglected regions, which requires coordinated support under the framework of European policy.

The Carpathians have a number of important assets. First of all, they extend beyond the current borders of the European Union, uniting areas of strategic importance: from the very core of Central Europe, i.e. Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, through Ukraine to the Balkans, Romania and Serbia. Secondly, it is a land of unique environmental value, forming the "green backbone" of Central and Eastern Europe. Thirdly, it is a culturally and socially significant region with almost 20 million inhabitants.

However, the Carpathians are also a problematic area. Its main weaknesses are infrastructural shortcomings, both when it comes to transport and environmental safety, lack of due care to ensure sustainable development and social problems, including high unemployment areas. Unless we take coordinated development actions, the economic and social problems of the Carpathian region are going to worsen.

That is why we believe that efforts of individual states, the European Union and regional authorities should be united in order to work out a common strategy for the Carpathians, which would make use of its assets in order to overcome its weaknesses.

Such a strategy, inspired by the Baltic Sea and Danube strategies, should first and foremost rely on the synergy between the existing initiatives and actions in the region, thus forming an added value without creating new structures, regulations or institutions.

We want to coordinate our efforts to find funding for Carpathian initiatives, so that the funds – especially granted from the EU budget – are not dispersed, but strategically directed towards joint Carpathian projects. The mechanism used for financing joint initiatives for the sustainable development of the Carpathians could be based on models taken from current macro-regional EU development strategies or initiatives such as the European *Alpine Space* programme.

The number of good practices and initiatives already in place in the Carpathian region is a proof that – with an appropriate strategy – we may relatively quickly reach the desired, measurable effects of the new initiative, whether it be in the scope of academic ("Carpathian University"), environmental or infrastructural cooperation or under the interregional "Carpathian Horizon" project. Such cooperation will serve, in particular, to tighten relations between EU member states and Ukraine, accelerating that country's integration with the European structures.

The first step which could serve as a symbolic, but also practical proof of European engagement in the Carpathian region, would be EU's accession to the Carpathian Convention, whose present signatories are individual states. The EU was granted such powers in the Treaty of Lisbon and it should use them for precisely such initiatives.

Our common goal is a new European macro-regional development strategy to be established already under the future financial framework for 2014-2020. This may be possible with the support of the main actors of European politics, both at the level of subsequent Presidency states, the European Commission and the European Parliament. We urge for such involvement.

The Carpathians are worth a European strategy.