



7th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Tourism 18 - 20 May 2015, Aggtelek, Hungary

MEETING REPORT

The Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention with a generous support of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the National Economy of Hungary and great hospitality of the Aggtelek National Park Directorate, organized the seventh meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, held in Aggtelek, Hungary on 18 – 20 May 2015.

Opening of the meeting, election of the Chair, adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Harald Egerer, Head of the UNEP Vienna - Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, opened the meeting and made welcome remarks together with Mr. Oliver Fodor, Head of Unit in the Ministry for National Economy of Hungary. Mr. Balázs Veress, Director of the Aggtelek National Park Directorate, also welcomed the meeting participants.

Mr. Oliver Fodor was unanimously elected as the Chair of the meeting and then the Agenda was adopted with minor changes.

The Chair proposed to concentrate on concrete tasks during the meeting instead of spending much time on administrative issues. He said it is high time to start working on a common website or some other similar “product” that can be presented at COP5 as a clear output of this Working Group.

Following that, Mr. Egerer reported on the status of ratification of the Protocols to the Carpathian Convention with a focus on the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism, emphasizing the recent ratification of the Protocol by Serbia. Please see – Status of Signatures and Ratification attached. Mr. Andriy-Taras Bashta, Institute of Ecology of the Carpathians, was requested to obtain information about the current situation with signing of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism by Ukraine.

Review and finalization of the Terms of Reference for the WG on Sustainable Tourism

The Working Group agreed on the final version of the Terms of Reference for the WG on Sustainable Tourism (WG Tourism). The document will be circulated among the WG Members and the Focal Point with an aim to submit a final version to Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee for its revision.

Review of progress on implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism and of the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians

At Hungary’s proposal the WGST Tourism discussed and clarified the content of the so-far-called “Online Platform” and agreed to use two different terminology in the future in order to divide the different topics: coordination tasks to support the implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism and its Strategy and the preparation of the common website. Accordingly the two terminologies: Coordination Platform and Common Website.

The support mechanism might be called a *Common Sustainable Tourism Coordination Platform* (Coordination Platform) as agreed by the WG Tourism, will provide international implementation support in a structure of an office cooperating closely with the WG Tourism and the Secretariat. Preparation of the Terms of Reference for the Common Sustainable Tourism Coordination Platform was initiated, outlining some of the possible tasks (attached). The detailed ToRs will be elaborated by the Secretariat and with the assistance of ETE if its project on support for the implementation of the Tourism Protocol and its Strategy is approved.

The online platform, most likely called *Common website of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism* (Common Website), will guarantee an online information sharing on sustainable tourism in the Carpathians and among Carpathian stakeholders with the focus on three potential users: 1) sustainable tourism sector - companies, businesses and NGOs working in the field of sustainable tourism, 2) scientific and governmental organizations, 3) potential tourists searching for information on sustainable tourism in the Carpathians. A possible draft content of the Common website was discussed (attached)).

As for now, the Secretariat has received only one official offer regarding the Coordination Platform including the offer for the common website, which was provided by the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland. Romania has submitted a declaration on this matter, but not a detailed offer, which could be compared with the Polish one. Therefore, the WG Tourism decided to launch another call for proposals for hosting the Coordination Platform based on the criteria discussed during the WG Tourism meeting. The call is open for all the Parties and observers and will end on **12 June 2015**. After receiving, the Secretariat will circulate the offers asking for a common agreement on an offer, which will be then submitted, together with a detailed ToRs, to the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee (CCIC) for its consideration. For time reason, CC WGST will request through the Secretariat to make an electronic decision prior to its ordinary meeting in November 2015.

UPDATE : The Secretariat has received offers also from Romania and the Ecological Tourism in Europe/European Wilderness Society. All the offers will be circulated as stated above.

During the meeting Mr. Dawid Lasek, the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland, gave updates on the offer for the Coordination Platform and to the brand CARPATHIA. As was clarified at the meeting, the brand CARPATHIA is an independent project running by the Association, funded by the Swiss Cooperation, and will not be directly related with the offer for hosting the Coordination Platform or the common website, unless the WG Tourism will decide different.

Mr. Harald Egerer gave an update on the development process of the future Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development, which is planned to be adopted at the COP5 in Hungary. He also explained that the elaboration of the Protocol on Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge before COP5 in 2017 is not realistic and will be postponed until next COP, however the work on the Protocol content will continue.

Draft National Report Format on the implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism was presented. It was emphasized that in section "Possible contents and details" the explanation should be detailed in case the implementation of a task "is not achieved". The Parties have time to submit their written comments to the Report Format by **5th June 2015**. Though the official adoption of the Report Format will take place at the COP5 in 2017, the WG Tourism agreed that the first informal reporting would be done before it in order to present the first results at the Conference of the Parties already. It was agreed by the WG Tourism that each COP would revise and amend the Reporting Format, if needed.

Project opportunities and initiatives

Mr. Constantin Serban, GreenTourism Ecological Association, delivered a presentation on the Wallchian Vatra Trail project - holiday villages network, for getting feedback and attracting potential partners as a first step.

Next presentation, made by Mr. Harald Egerer, focused on the Danube Transnational Programme 2014 – 2020 as a potential source of funding for a project implementing the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism and its Strategy. As agreed, the Secretariat will collect views and ideas on this from the Parties and will communicate them to the WG Tourism.

Ms. Maria Napiórkowska stated that it is not possible to implement the Carpathian Convention with the use of the financial resources of the Danube Strategy, in particular the International Danube Programme 2014 2020, as the strategy have completely different goals than the Carpathian Convention. In addition, no any part of Polish territory is covered by Danube Strategy.

In this regard, a requested topic for CCIC is how to mainstream the Carpathian Convention in the financial schemes and programmes and how to raise awareness among other Ministries in the Countries.

Mr. Constantin Serban informed that they, as members of the Working Group for Rural Economic Development of the Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry of Romania, stressed the need to include the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Carpathians in the legislation framework in the new National Rural Development Plan for 2014-2020 in Romania, and also the need of financing all rural tourism activities not only agro-tourism among other aspects. However, none of these were adopted.

Mr. Serban raised the question whether other countries faced the same difficulties in including the Strategy in the legal framework of the new financing programmes.

The Czech Republic presented its ongoing work on the implementation of the Protocol and its Strategy on the national level, aiming at integration of sustainable tourism into local development and spatial plans.

The Czech Delegation and Mr. Michael Meyer updated the WG Tourism on the current status of the possible follow up project on support for the implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism and its Strategy, which has been submitted by ETE for financial support to the German Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation, Constructions and Nuclear Safety (BMUB). As per request of the Czech Presidency, UNEP - SCC circulated a request to the CC-NFPs to support this project. Positive reply has been received from Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine. Romania and Serbia agreed to send letters of support by end of May 2015, which will enable the Czech Presidency to send a positive reply to BMUB. Mr. Michael Meyer explained that time plays important role in the approving process by the German Government. Therefore, support letters shall be sent as soon as possible. Furthermore, he explained that in the event of project approval, the content and budget might need further negotiations in order to pay respect to the delay of project start. The Czech Republic acknowledged the need for a joint project on sustainable tourism on the Carpathian level and appreciated that its comments to the project concept were incorporated by ETE and suggested the other Parties to contribute to the revision of the project concept as well. As Czech Republic requested receiving the full project application in German, the Secretariat offered support in translating the document, if necessary.

As a first step of the project a detailed Term of Reference should be elaborated for the Coordination Platform in a close collaboration with the Parties and the Secretariat which will be followed by the

launch of the Coordination Platform. ToRs will be a matter of online consultation and then discussion during the next WG Tourism meeting in autumn 2015. The consultation process will result in a submission of the ToRs to CCIC taking place in Mid-November 2015.

Following, Ms. Tamara Mitrofanenko, UNEP Vienna – SCC, delivered presentation on innovation in rural tourism in the Carpathians and other mountain areas (all the presentation given at the meeting can be found on the Carpathian Convention website).

The WG Tourism presented ideas for possible Carpathian Trails such as:

- Carpathian Heritage Trail
- Local Gastronomy Trail
- Extension of EuroVelo – the European cycle route network to the Carpathians
- Wallachian Trail
- Via Carpathia Trail

Ms. Klaudia Kuras, UNEP Vienna – SCC, informed the WG Tourism about the idea of launching a Carpathian Day, which will be a celebration of the Carpathian heritage and its uniqueness, at the same time giving a great opportunity to promote and raise awareness about the Carpathians and the Carpathian Convention's activities. The proposed date for the Carpathian Day was 22nd May as it is a date when most of the Parties signed the Convention. Though, this date coincides with the International Biodiversity Day. Thus, the date is still a subject of discussion. Ms. Klaudia Kuras asked the WG members to explore with their governments if there is an interest in organizing such an event, which in theory would take place every year in one of the Carpathian Countries.

Follow up actions needed by National Focal Points and WG Tourism members

- **Explore with the National Tourism Boards if cooperation on a common Carpathian appearance in external relations can be possible**
- **Arrive for the next WG meeting fully prepared with an appropriate mandate for the negotiations**
- **Explore interest to participate in the project development under the Danube Transnational Programme 2014 – 2020. Feedback on this by 12th June 2015**
- **Share a list of the Carpathian stakeholders**
- **Consider possibility of organizing the Carpathian Day**

Venue and date of the next meeting of the WG Tourism

Poland offered to host the next meeting of the WG Tourism in Kombornia, Poland in October /November 2015.

Any other business

The Chair, Mr. Oliver Fodor, emphasised the need of having a clear mandate and position from the Governments while participating at the WG meeting, since it will make discussions more fruitful and successful.

Ms. Maria Napiorkowska, Ministry of Sport and Tourism informed that the next Carpathian Tourism Forum will take place in Rzeszow, Poland from 14 to 16 September 2016. Official invitation to the WG will follow in due time.

The Secretariat will circulate a list of WG Members and current observers.

Closure of the meeting

Mr. Oliver Fodor made the concluding remark and together with Mr. Harald Egerer thanked the participants for their contribution to the meeting discussion.