

EUROPEAN UNION'S ACCESSION TO THE CARPATHIAN CONVENTION – BRIEFING NOTE AND RATIONALES

The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (hereafter “the Carpathian Convention”) is the only international legal framework for cooperation and multi-level governance mechanism covering the entire Carpathian region. In addition, it is the second sub-regional treaty-based regime for the protection and sustainable development of a mountain region worldwide, the first being the Alpine Convention.

The Carpathians, Europe's largest mountain range constitutes an important biodiversity reservoir and a recreational and living ecosystem in the heart of Europe. It spans across seven countries and forms an arch shape, which starts in the north-east of the Czech Republic and extends through the Slovak Republic, Poland, Hungary as well as the east of Ukraine and Romania all the way to Serbia.

The Carpathian region is widely considered to be an area of outstanding natural and cultural heritage with many traditions, cultural practices and historical monuments, which have survived to this day. In terms of ecological characteristics, the Carpathians host numerous prized ecosystems, including virgin forests and grasslands. Such environments comprise biodiversity hotspots, serving as habitats for large carnivores, including bears, lynx and wolves. Moreover, the Carpathians serve as a crucial supplier of freshwater to the three major rivers in the wider region: The Danube and Dniester, which flow into the Black Sea, and the Vistula, flowing into the Baltic Sea.

At the same time, the Carpathians are one of the least competitive regions in Europe. The region covers some of the poorest countries of the European Union and its neighbourhood; it requires investments in environmental protection, transportation, support for local entrepreneurship, as well as support for job creation and improvement of the citizens' quality of life.

At the Summit on Environment and Sustainable Development in the Carpathian and Danube Region, held in Bucharest, Romania, in 2001, the participating Heads of State and High Representatives declared their support to *international and regional co-operation with a view to maintaining and rehabilitating the natural assets and to improving the state of environment in the Carpathian region and the Danube River basin*.

An international multilateral agreement – the Carpathian Convention - was signed by seven countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine) in 2003 and entered into force in 2006.

The Carpathian Convention unites seven Carpathian countries in a unique partnership, providing a transnational framework for cooperation and multisectoral policy integration, an open forum for participation by stakeholders and the public, and a platform for developing and implementing transnational strategies, programmes and projects for protection and sustainable development of the region.

The importance of the Carpathian Convention as an instrument to enhance the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathian region has been recognised, however, it requires stronger political support, especially at the European Union level.

In this respect, already in 2004, the 11th Meeting of the Ministers of Environment of the Visegrad Group Countries adopted the Joint Statement (Siófok, Hungary May 2004) inviting the European Union to join the Carpathian Convention and support its implementation (Annex 1), similarly as in the case of the Alpine Convention. Furthermore, the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group signed a letter to the European Commissioners for Environment and for Regional Development, inviting the European Commission to consider the European Union's accession to the Carpathian Convention and to support its implementation through the existing and the future financing mechanisms (Annex 2).

At the 12th Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries in Białowieża, Poland, 6-7 June 2005, the Visegrad Group Ministers adopted a Joint Statement reconfirming their earlier common position to invite the European Union to join the Convention and to support its implementation (Annex 3).

The First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (COP1), held in Kiev in December 2006, in its Decisions expressed interest in the development of an operational programme by the EU, supporting the sustainable development of the Carpathian Space, following the successful example of the Alpine Space programme, and requested the Secretariat to support the process in close cooperation with the Parties and the appropriate EU institutions. Finally, the Conference of the Parties invited the European Union to accede to the Carpathian Convention.

The Ministerial Declaration of the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, strengthened the requests of the COP1, stressing the importance of the development of the Carpathian Space *as an area of economic, social and environmental progress and sustainability in the heart of Europe, building on the region's advantages and potentials, and addressing the challenges of mountain regions in an innovative and coordinated manner*. Furthermore, the Ministers recalled the invitation to the European Union to join the Carpathian Convention and support the protection and sustainable development of the "Carpathian Space" through relevant instruments and programmes.

Succeeding Meetings of the Conference of the Parties have further recalled the invitation to the European Union to accede to the Carpathian Convention and promoted the "Carpathian Space" concept in the existing or planned EU cooperation programmes (e.g. ETC).

Moreover, the invitation of the COP3 (Bratislava, 2011) by its Decision 3/10 to the EU to become a Party to the Carpathian Convention prompted strong support from the participants of the 21st Economic Forum (Krynica, 7-9 September 2011). The Carpathian Memorandum, issued at the Forum, stressed that the EU's accession to the Carpathian Convention would be a symbolic step in acknowledging the engagement of EU policy in the Carpathian region.

Furthermore, Poland, in its capacity of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, made another attempt in this respect, formally proposing the EU accession to the Carpathian Convention at the 3139th Council meeting of the EU Environment Ministers in December 2011. It was expected that based on this information the EU institutions would consider and propose the accession of the EU to the Carpathian Convention.

Further efforts were made by the Slovak Presidency to the Carpathian Convention (2011 – 2013) seeking stronger cooperation with and support from the European Commission for initiating negotiations on the EU accession to the Carpathian Convention. The following Czech Presidency to the

Carpathian Convention, submitted the official note to the 3342nd Environment Council meeting in 2014, informing the Council about the successful meeting of the COP4, which called for strengthening cross-border and transboundary cooperation in the region and closer cooperation with the European Commission,

Despite the efforts made and the political will repeatedly confirmed by the Carpathian States on various occasions, many stakeholders expressed concerns that the Carpathian region has not received enough attention nor appropriate support from the European Union.

Only a joint effort of governments, local and regional authorities, civil societies of the Carpathian countries and involved international organizations will offer opportunities for effective promotion of the Carpathian interests in the European forum. Therefore, the Carpathian Convention would like to seek support of the relevant stakeholder in order to increase the importance of the Carpathian region in the EU discourse, which subsequently shall bring clear benefits for the region in terms of funding and other political instruments. The accession to the Carpathian Convention by the European Union, as in the case of other regional Conventions existing in Europe, like the Alpine Convention, Danube River Protection Convention or the Helsinki Convention, shall be the most reasonable step in that direction, giving better recognition and support to the sustainable development of the region.

Main points advocating for the accession of the European Union to the Carpathian Convention:

- The Carpathian natural environment constitutes a part of the European heritage and, in order to better protect it, the EU should accede to the Carpathian Convention as a party.
- The Carpathians are a region not only of ecological, but also of economic importance on the European scale. Providing support to sustainable development of the Carpathians may serve as a stimulus to the EU growth.
- Accession to the Carpathian Convention by the EU will significantly improve its implementation at the national, regional and local levels and will increase the potential of regional cooperation in the Carpathians.

The Carpathian Convention provisions and its Protocols, consistent with the EU legislation, would become part of the EU acquis. This could enhance the technical participation by all Parties to the Convention in further implementation and enforcement of the EU policies. For example, the Protocol on Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape diversity to the Carpathian Convention, which is in line with the Biodiversity Strategy and the Birds and Habitats Directives, conjointly ensure protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services of one of the most precious ecosystems in Europe. Furthermore, the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management of the Carpathian Convention is the first legally-binding instrument on sustainable forest management in Europe and can be considered a successful model for a Pan-European legally binding instrument on forest, which is currently under negotiation.

The accession will allow the European Union to join other thematic Protocols to the Carpathian Convention, such as the Protocols on Sustainable Tourism and on Sustainable Transport, and the recent Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development.

- Additionally, it will support further development of the normative framework; legal instruments providing policy guidance on a range of strategic topics relevant for the European Union, such as soil, sustainable transport, sustainable agriculture and rural development.
- EU membership would contribute to raising the profile and visibility of the Carpathian region and its environmental challenges and giving it a more prominent role both in Europe and internationally.
- The European Union participation to and in the implementation of the Carpathian Convention will contribute to increasing public awareness and participation in the region.
- The provisions of the Carpathian Convention forms part of EU involvement in the international activities on the protection of the environment, expressed in the 7th EU Environment Action Programme to 2020.
- Environmental issues are subject to EU's shared competence with its Member States, according to a number of precedents of EU's participation in the international environmental treaties (Alpine, Danube, Helsinki Conventions); as such, the EU has been expected to become a party to the Carpathian Convention as well.
- By joining other regional conventions, the European Union has brought clear benefits in terms of the political and financial support to the respective regions, which is also expected by the Carpathian region.
- More active participation of the European Union in the Carpathian Convention would bring benefits for other partners as it would ensure the active involvement of the European institutions. Furthermore, it could facilitate the direct dialogue on environmental and regional development matters and bring better coherence between regulatory and financial actions at the European level.
- It would also support direct engagement with the relevant financial instruments, which can facilitate better consideration of and increased supportive action to the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathian region, potentially creating new financial sources for the Carpathian region and other instruments.
- The Carpathian Convention has demonstrated a positive role and strong involvement in EU strategic frameworks, including its contribution to strengthening territorial cooperation in Europe at different levels. For example, it plays an important role in the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in its reference geographical area (the Carpathians).
- Since the accession to the EU, the Carpathian States have been participating to different European projects, which confirms their strong motivation in the field of integration and cooperation. They have been particularly proactive in cross-border and transnational projects.

Since 2006, the Carpathian region belonged to the CADSES (Central European, Adriatic, Danubian and Southeast European Space) programme area. Starting from the programming period 2007 – 2013, the Carpathian area has been divided in to the separate cooperation areas: Central Europe (including Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia) and Southeast Europe (including Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine). The division continues in the 2014 – 2020 period in the framework of the Central Europe and the Danube Transnational Programmes.

The division of the Carpathian area into two programmes has resulted in limited possibilities for the implementation of comprehensive Carpathian projects and participation of all the Carpathian States in relevant projects. Therefore, there is a need for cooperation in the frame of a potential Carpathian programme covering the whole Carpathian area and specifically adapted to the mountain dimension.

Furthermore, a stronger emphasis should be given to neighbourhood programmes, including the participation of non-member states in the Carpathian area.

- In the new multiannual financial framework of the European Union for 2021 – 2027, currently under development, it is essential to stress the importance of the Cohesion Policy, which aims at supporting the less developed European countries and regions in order to reduce the economic, social and territorial disparities that still exist in the EU. Given that the Carpathians are one of the poorest region in the EU, the EU budgetary support for development activities within the Carpathian region will contribute to the economic growth of the EU and help fight against unemployment and social exclusion. Therefore, launching of a dedicated and adequate programme supporting regional cooperation dedicated to the Carpathians within the new multiannual financial framework 2021 – 2027 is recommended.
- The Convention has been providing a vital link between the five EU Member States and Serbia and Ukraine. Compliance to such legal instrument as the Carpathian Convention will further facilitate these two non-EU countries' integration with the European structures, unification of environmental legislation and implementation of EU legislation in the region.

In this context, accession of the European Union to the Carpathian Convention will strengthen its ties with Serbia and Ukraine in the framework of the Convention. It will provide more opportunities for common activities and enhanced dialog for environmental protection and sustainable development of the entire region

- Becoming a party to the Carpathian Convention could be perceived as a positive response by the EU to the increasing demand for better recognition of the mountain areas within the EU legislation and a step towards enhancing cooperation on the mountain dimension at the EU level.
- The accession will also enhance and institutionalize cooperation between the EU and the Carpathian Convention, it will further strengthen the already close cooperation between the Carpathian Convention and different Institutions and Bodies of the European Union, in particular:

European Commission: the Carpathian Convention is closely cooperating with **DG Regio** in mainstreaming and profiling mountains at EU level, both in macro-regional strategies and through possible new initiatives. The final aim of this cooperation is the possibility to develop a "Mountain Agenda" for Europe. Within this cooperation, an Expert Workshop on "Mountain Dimension in the Danube Region, the case of Carpathians. Challenges and Opportunities for Regional Cooperation in Mountain Areas" was held in Brussels on 25 November 2015.

As a follow up to the workshop, a Joint Synergy Paper between the Carpathian Convention and the relevant Priority Areas (PAs) of the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) has been developed. Related to this, different Memoranda of Cooperation between the Carpathian Convention and the EUSDR Priority Areas have been signed with several PAs. The Memoranda aim

at facilitating coordination of activities with the respective PAs and possible support to Carpathian - related activities.

The Carpathian Convention supports also the implementation of several important EU co-funded projects, such as the ongoing DTP TRANSGREEN and CONNECTGREEN projects in the fields of green infrastructure and connectivity as well as the Central Europe project CentralParks, building management capacities of Carpathian protected areas,

Furthermore, the Carpathian Convention cooperated with **DG Environment** Units, such as the Biodiversity Unit, for example, through the participation of the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention together with the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention in the European Commission Working Group on Green Infrastructure.

Committee of the Regions: The Carpathian Convention has established close cooperation with the Group “Carpathians” of the Committee of the Regions and has been actively participating in the meetings and exchange of information. The Group has expressed its initial support for the idea of the EU accession to the Carpathian Convention.

European Environment Agency (EEA): The cooperation with the EEA is based on the Partnership Agreement of 2014 and regularly updated joint Work Plan. It constitutes exchange of information and contribution to respective activities, such as the establishment of a Carpathian Integrated Information System, contribution by the Convention Secretariat to the EEA Adaptation Clearinghouse mechanism (Climate-ADAPT), as well as joint development of an Inventory of the Virgin Forest in the Carpathians.

Precedents of EU' participation in regional Conventions

The EU took on an active role in several of the regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements in Europe, among others:

Alpine Convention

The Alpine Convention is an international treaty between the Alpine Countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland) as well as the EU, for the sustainable development and protection of the Alps. The European Community acceded to the Convention by its Council Decision 96/192/EC of 6 February 1996.

Danube Convention:

The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) is a transnational body, which has been established to implement the Danube River Protection Convention (www.icpdr.org). The EC signed the Danube Convention in 1994. In 2000, the ICPDR contracting parties nominated ICPDR as the platform for the implementation of all transboundary aspects of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) (Council Directive 2000/60/EC).

Helsinki Convention:

The 1974 Helsinki Convention, which was signed in March 1974 by all the States bordering the Baltic Sea (Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia), aims to help reduce pollution in the area around the Baltic Sea. The European Community acceded to the Convention by its Council Decision 94/156/EC of 21st February, 1994 (The Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, Helsinki, Finland, 1992).

Annex I

JOINT STATEMENT

**of the 11th Meeting of Ministers of Environment
of the Visegrad Group Countries**

20-21 May 2004 Siófok, Hungary,

The Minister of Environment of the Czech Republic, Minister of Environment and Water of the Republic of Hungary, Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic and Minister of Environment of the Republic of Poland, the countries of the Visegrad Group,

Recognizing the historical moment of the enlargement of the European Union and trusting that it will contribute to the improvement of quality of life and the environment in the new Member States, particularly, in our countries and that all EU-citizens will benefit from it,

Welcoming the continuation of the process of EU enlargement,

Appreciating the participation at the Meeting of the Minister of Environment and Water Management of Romania, Mrs. Speranta Maria Ianculescu, the Director and Regional Representative of UNEP Mr. Frits Schlingemann and Ms. Marta Szigeti Bonifert, Executive Director of the Regional Environmental Centre as observers,

Recalling the Guidelines of the "New Visegrad Declaration" adopted by the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries on 12 May, 2004 in Kromeriz, Czech Republic,

Reaffirming the interest to proceed in continuing co-operation within the Visegrad Group, as well as in regional project-based collaboration involving other interested countries in V4+ format,

have expressed the following:

Visegrad Group Countries, as member states of the European Union

1. The Ministers expressed satisfaction with the successful accession and pledged themselves to the constructive participation in formulation and implementation of the internal and external dimensions of the Community's environmental policies.
2. The Ministers emphasised their commitment to implement and enforce all pieces of environmental legislation in the most efficient way, parallel with active participation in the EU legislative work, contributing to the further development of the community law with special emphasis on the environment.

3. The Ministers attached great importance to the active participation in EU bodies and joint lobbying in the EU decision making mechanisms, in order to pursue national as well as common interests of the Visegrad Group Countries.
4. The Ministers expressed their willingness to maintain multi-level co-operation in identifying common Visegrad Group priorities and actions at various stages of the EU decision making process, with the active involvement of national environmental attachés, respective EU Departments and at ministerial level where appropriate
5. The Ministers expressed their willingness to convene their regular meetings annually and if it is necessary also in relation to the Environmental Council's meetings.
6. Furthermore they confirmed the interest in further participation in the regional consultative forum initiated by Austria in 2003 (Visegrad Group Countries, Austria, Germany and Slovenia), the next meeting to be held on 21-22 September, 2004 in Cejkovice, Czech Republic.
7. The Ministers confirmed the interest of their countries in the implementation of the "European Neighbourhood Policy" and development of a "New Neighbourhood Instrument" in order to promote the effective co-operation with neighbouring countries, in particular Ukraine, Western NIS and Western Balkan countries in the field of environment.
8. Given the significance of transboundary co-operation in the development and improvement of relations with the neighbouring countries and based on their own experiences of Phare CBC programmes, the Ministers welcomed the recently launched INTERREG III/A programmes, e.g. Hungarian-Slovakian-Ukraine programme, Hungarian-Romanian-Serbian programme.
9. The Ministers agreed to support the proposal of the Czech Republic regarding a jointly managed project on technical assistance in the field of environmental protection in the countries of the Western Balkans, in particular Serbia-Montenegro. They requested the Czech Republic to communicate this intention for consideration to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan following its proposal to the V4 co-ordinators.

Use of EU co-financing in the implementation of national environmental programmes and national development plans

1. Noting that the environmental advantages of Visegrad Group Countries as new member states – e.g. high level of biodiversity, bigger share of use of public transport, less intensive agricultural practices – should be emphasised in the enlarged EU, the Ministers welcomed the objectives and priorities of the 3rd Report on Economic and Social Cohesion and the Financial Perspective, and agreed that the contribution of the EU funds for the environmental pillar of sustainable development are proposed to be increased.
2. The Ministers emphasised the common interest of their countries in reinforcing and increasing the level of EU financial sources, available for the implementation of the EU environmental policy and integration of the environmental considerations into other policies as described in the 6th Environmental Action Programme for 2001-2010.

3. The Ministers agreed to share experience on the effective utilisation of EU funds so as to improve the absorption capacity of their countries and support each other in getting more assistance for environmental projects in the frame of the new cohesion policy for the period of 2007-2013.

Experiences in the establishment of Natura 2000 network

1. The Ministers agreed that tighter collaboration could promote the conservation of natural habitats and the wild fauna and flora of European Union interest, especially through the maintenance and restoration of the favourable conservation status of sites where animal and plant species and habitats of community importance occur.
2. The Ministers called the European Commission to provide for a more articulate support to the nature conservation authorities in fully implementing Natura 2000 network, including to help to develop mechanisms of sharing the responsibilities for European nature for all sectors, in particular agriculture, forestry, tourism, transport etc.
3. Noting that the LIFE-Nature program is a very important financial instrument for nature conservation and it is desirable to utilize it in a greater extent in the future, the Ministers agreed to prepare and submit joint projects of the Visegrad Group Countries..
4. The Ministers stress the importance of the continuation of the activities in relation to transboundary Natura 2000 sites and agree to keep each other informed on future management plans, habitat restoration programmes and species protection plans to be aimed at those Natura 2000 sites bordering a similar site of a neighbouring Visegrad Group Country.

Implementation of waste management policies and use of economic instruments

1. Taking part in the initiatives launched by the EU in the field of waste prevention and reduction policy (Environmental Technologies Action Plan, Ecodesign, Integrated Product Policy, Eco-labelling) and being aware of the complexity of the tasks related to their implementation, the Ministers agreed to explore possibilities of profiting from one another's experiences and to enhance co-operation between their countries, especially in the field of recovery of special waste streams generated from product charge based products.
2. The Ministers note that in order to comply with EU regulations on recovery, the future extent of product charges will have to be continually established so that the system should encourage to obtain an exemption through recovery.
3. The Ministers emphasise the role of deposit charge as a regulation instrument encouraging to reduce the volume of waste and note that the rate of product subjects to deposit charge needs to be stable and in medium-term to extend slowly, and the necessity of joint efforts for harmonising waste prevention policies, in particular deposit refund systems of beverage packaging.

Contribution to the implementation of the Carpathian Framework Convention

1. The Ministers agreed upon to make efforts for the ratification of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, signed in Kiev, 2003 by their countries by the end of this year, and encourage other Signatories to do the same, so as to promote its early entry into force. The Ministers invited the EU to consider joining this legal instrument, similarly to the Alpine Convention, and support its implementation.
2. The Ministers emphasised the importance to ensure stable and predictable financing to the Carpathian Framework Convention and its Interim Secretariat's activities, pledged to provide further voluntary contributions by their countries and acknowledged with high appreciation the financial support of donor countries, in particular Austria, Italy and Switzerland.
3. The Ministers appreciated the strengthening partnership between the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Framework Convention facilitated by UNEP, encouraging the Alpine countries, international organisations and other donors to further support the ongoing activities under the Carpathian Convention, e.g. the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas, Carpathian Environmental Outlook.
4. The Ministers appreciated the efforts and scientific work carried out so far to define the geographical scope of the Convention and according to the mandate given by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries for Adoption and Signature of the Carpathian Framework Convention (Kiev, 22 May 2003) requested the Interim Secretariat to present the draft comprehensive report and proposal at the 1st Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Signatories (October 2004, Brasov, Romania).

The Ministers of the Environment welcome the invitation by the Minister of the Environment of the Republic of Poland, Mr. Jerzy Swatoń to attend the 12th Meeting of the Ministers of the Environment of the Visegrad Group countries to be in April 2005 in Poland.

Done in Siófok, on 21 May 2004

H.E. Mr. Libor Ambrozek
Minister of the Environment
Czech Republic

H. E. Mr. Miklós Persányi
Minister of the Environment and Water
Republic of Hungary

H.E. Mr. Jerzy Swatoń
Minister of the Environment
Republic of Poland

H. E. Mr. László Miklós
Minister of the Environment
Slovak Republic

Annex II

4

Madame Margot Wallström
EU Commissioner for the Environment
Mr. Jacques Barrot
EU Commissioner for the Regional Policy

21 May, 2004, Siófok

Dear Madame Wallström,
Dear Mr. Barrot,

We are pleased to inform you about the 11th meeting of the ministers of environment of the Visegrad Group countries held on 20-21 May, 2004 in Siófok, Hungary, the main issue of which was the future V4 environmental co-operation in the enlarged Europe. We attached high importance to strengthened sub-regional co-operation in the context of the EU New Neighbourhood Policy and Instrument. The Minister of Environment and Water Management of Romania and the Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe also attended this meeting as observers.

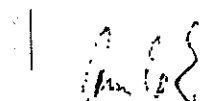
One of the items of our Agenda was the promotion of ratification and implementation of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, opened for signature at the "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Meeting held in Kiev, May 2003 and signed by all seven interested countries, among them our four countries which became recently EU members as well by Romania. The Carpathian Framework Convention represents a new sub-regional legal instrument for enhancing sustainable development transferring experiences and best practices of the Alpine Convention to which the European Union joined as a Party.

Therefore we are pleased to invite you to consider the European Union's accession to the Carpathian Framework Convention and support its implementation through the existing and the future financing mechanisms (Structural Funds, Cohesion Fund and other EU initiatives).

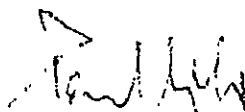
We are firmly convinced that the closer co-operation of EU member states and interested neighbouring countries will contribute to the stability, cohesion and improvement of the environmental quality and preservation of rich and diverse natural and cultural values of the Carpathians.

Please find attached the Joint Statement of our 11th meeting for your further information.

We are looking forward to fruitful co-operation with you.

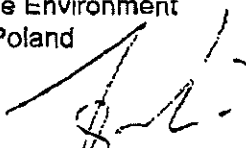


Libor Ambrozek
Minister of the Environment
Czech Republic

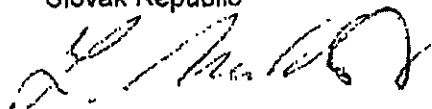


Miklós Persányi
Minister of the Environment and Water
Republic of Hungary

Jerzy Swaton
Minister of the Environment
Republic of Poland



László Miklós
Minister of the Environment
Slovak Republic



JOINT STATEMENT

of the 12th Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group States

Białowieża, Poland, 6-7 June 2005

The Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic, the Minister of the Environment and Water of the Republic of Hungary, the Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic and the Minister of the Environment of the Republic of Poland, representatives of the Visegrad Group States,

as well as the Minister of the Environment of the Lithuanian Republic, who participated in the meeting as an observer,

- recognising the historic moment of the accession of the Visegrad Group States to the European Union,
- supporting the continuation of the process of enlargement of the European Union,
- confirming their interest in the continued process of joint co-operation,
- bearing in mind the results of the previous Meetings of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group States as well as the existing bilateral and multilateral agreements concluded among the Visegrad Group States,

have expressed the following

The EU policies on chemicals - REACH Regulation

The Ministers fully supported the initiative for the better EU regulation of the chemicals within the REACH system, which is to ensure that the production, placing on the market, import or use of chemical substances do not have adverse impact on human health and on the environment.

The Ministers recognised that it is necessary to develop such system in order to simplify and minimise the costs related to the registration procedure; to this end the concept of one substance – one registration is supported. The common understanding is that industry would take the responsibility for the safety of the use of chemical products.

The progress of negotiations and final results on the REACH Regulation should be considered in a broader context of international community efforts to agree on the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), reflecting the goals of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

International cooperation to combat climate change

The Ministers welcomed the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol and they congratulate the Russian Federation on its ratification of the Protocol.

With a view to ensuring the full implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, the Ministers stressed the urgent need to start international negotiations on further steps to mitigate the global ghg-emissions, to develop medium- and long-term mitigation and adaptation strategies in order to limit the projected global warming, reflecting the 2°C target which was endorsed by the recent Spring European Council.

Due attention will be paid by the Visegrad Group States to the preparation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth sessions of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development as the respective themats cycle will be focused on climate change, energy for sustainable development, atmosphere and air protection and on industrial development.

The Ministers also underlined the importance of the review and renewal of the EU's ECCP which should take into account the implications of the enlargement, the need for the effective implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and preparation for the post-2012 period.

The Lisbon Strategy and the Gothenburg Strategy

The Ministers acknowledged the outcome of the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy and expressed their view that due attention to environmental protection and nature conservation should be paid within the framework of the refocused strategy for the sake of its effective implementation. Broader use of eco-efficient innovations, environmentally sound technologies and market instruments are key components in this context, but environment considerations should also be fully integrated in those specific policy areas which are highlighted in the framework of the new Lisbon Strategy.

Besides the Lisbon strategy, the revision of the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy was also launched and the Ministers expressed a strong interest to consider this process as the comprehensive determination of the long-term development perspectives of the European Community which should be based on the principles and the concept of sustainability.

An exchange of views and the development of a common position on the future of the Structural Funds

The Ministers emphasized that, in the course of the programming and negotiations with the European Commission, consideration should be given to the exceptional needs of the new Member States in relation to the construction of basic environmental infrastructure. The provision of financing for NATURA 2000 sites will also pose a challenge to the Visegrad Group States.

The Ministers underlined that the new Member States should be vitally interested in the fullest possible integration of the aspects of sustainable development and environmental protection into the regulations concerning the use of the EU Funds.

The Visegrad Group States welcomed the continuation and maintenance of the Cohesion Fund in the New Financial Perspective 2007 - 2013 as an important instrument of the EU Cohesion Policy and the Community environmental protection policy in the forthcoming programming period, especially regarding the extension of the priority areas to renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable transport.

Involved parties should support mutual exchange of experience and best practice in programming and implementation of the Structural funds and the Cohesion fund in the sector of environment. Ministers have called for expert level exchange of experiences regarding the funds in their respective countries.

The implementation of the new EC Waste Directives into the national legislation

With respect to the transposition and implementation of the provisions of the directives on packaging and packaging waste, on end-of life vehicles and on waste electrical and electronic equipment into the national legislation, the Ministers expressed their willingness to facilitate and encourage consultations on expert level concerning the legislative process.

They also called for exchange of experiences about the implementation and enforcement of existing waste related pieces of legislation, such as the transboundary shipment of waste, on the green list of wastes for recovery among the Visegrad Group States.

Exchange of experiences related to the management of the sites proposed for the European Ecological Network NATURA 2000 and their financing

The Ministers agreed that further co-operation in the area of the management of the sites proposed for the European Ecological Network NATURA 2000 and their financing should be concerned with:

- the organisational structure of the management of the NATURA 2000 Network,
- the development of measures allowing for the mobilisation of funds necessary for the functioning of the NATURA 2000 sites, the drawing up of conservation plans and the implementation of the related tasks, under LIFE +, the Rural Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Sectoral Operational Programme – Environment, the Regional Operational

Programmes or the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance in the new financial perspective for 2007-2013,

- the principles and scope of the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of conservation tasks on the NATURA 2000 sites.

The Visegrad Group States agreed to exchange information on the location of Natura 2000 sites along their common borders and to strive for ensuring connectivity of these sites across their borders where feasible and reasonable from the ecological point of view. They agreed to discuss possible extensions of national lists of SACs. Meeting of Nature Directors on this topic will be hosted by the Czech Republic.

The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians

The Ministers agreed to make further efforts for early ratification of the Convention by encouraging countries that have not yet done so. The Ministers reconfirmed their earlier common position to invite the European Communities to join this legal instrument and to support its implementation.

They called for high level participation of the Contracting Parties as well as European Communities at COP 1.

The Ministers appreciated the efforts and scientific work carried out so far to define the geographical scope of the Convention. The Ministers agreed to follow a holistic and integrated (multi-criteria) approach and encouraged the Interim Secretariat to prepare recommendations on the geographical scope for decision by the first meeting of the Conference of Parties, which reflect both the main goals and principles of the Convention and relevant EU policies and directives (eg. Natura 2000, Water Framework Directive, draft Mining Waste Directive etc.)

Others

The Ministers exchanged their opinions about the introduction of Genetically Modified Organisms and recalling the precautionary principle expressed serious concern in this context.

The Ministers agreed to make appropriate steps in their respective countries in order to encourage the submission of more environment related projects to the Visegrád Fund.

The 13th meeting of Ministers of Environment of the Visegrad Group States.

The Ministers of the Environment have accepted the invitation from Mr. Laszlo Miklos, the Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic, to participate in the 13th Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group States, which will be held in Slovakia in 2006.

Done in Białowieża, 7 June 2005

His Excellency Mr. Libor Ambrozek
Minister of the Environment
of the Czech Republic

His Excellency Mr. Miklós Persányi
Minister of the Environment and Water
of the Republic of Hungary

His Excellency Mr. Tomasz Podgajniak
Minister of the Environment
of the Republic of Poland

His Excellency Mr. Laszlo Miklos
Minister of the Environment
of the Slovak Republic

