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## **Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management**

**26 - 27 September 2016, Braşov Romania**

**Venue: Hotel Aro Palace – Braşov**

***“ Identification and protection of natural and virgin forests, as well as management of forests in protected areas”***

### **MEETING REPORT**

#### Opening of the meeting

Mr. Harald Egerer, on behalf of UNEP Vienna – SCC, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants of the Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management in Brasov, Romania. He then thanked to the Ministry of the Environment of Romania and the National Forest Administration - Romsilva of Romania for supporting the organization of and hosting the meeting.

#### Welcome by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests of Romania and the National Forest Administration

Romania's delegation was led by Mrs. Secretary of State for Forests, Erika Stanciu, along with Mr. Cristian Mihai Enescu, Chief of Staff of the Secretary of State on Forests and Ms. Liliana Vârtopeanu, Senior advisor to the Biodiversity Directorate and National Focal Point for the Carpathian Convention, all of the representing the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests of Romania.

From the National Forest Administration – Romsilva, Mr. Ciprian Dragos Pahonţu, Director General and Mr. Robert Pache, from the Service of Protected Areas, took part in the meeting.



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### Election of the Chair

Mr. Costel Bucur, Regional Head Forests & Protected Areas, WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, was elected the Chair of the meeting.

### Adoption of the Agenda

The Draft Agenda was unanimously agreed by the participants.

### Progress report on cooperation with the European Environment Agency on Action “Regional cooperation – Carpathians” – Forests

On behalf of the European Environment Agency (EEA)/ EU Topic Centre on Urban Land and Soil Ecosystems (ETC-ULS), represented by the University of Malaga (UMA), Ms. Dania Abdul Malak made a general presentation on the cooperation activities with the Carpathian Convention on forests, in accordance with the partnership agreement signed between the two organizations in July 2014 and with the joint work plans attached to the agreement.

The joint activities are focusing on development of specific Carpathian wide forest resource indicators to support sustainable management:

- Forest naturalness,
- Spatial data on virgin forests,
- Forest connectivity and fragmentation,
- Temporal change in forest cover in the region 2000-2012 (based on the temporal data flow of Corine Land Cover)



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## Carpathian Old-growth Forests in a Global Context: Understanding Variability Within and Among Temperate Old-growth Systems

Mr. William Keeton, Professor at the University of Vermont, USA and member of the IUFRO Working Group on Old-growth Forests and Reserves, held a presentation on the “Global Analysis of Temperate Old-Growth Forests”, comparing the Carpathians with the global context. Old-growth forests have been studied in many moist temperate regions of the world, but only recently researchers have begun to collaborate on global assessments of old-growth ecosystem structure and function. The Professor and its team research’s goal was focused on exploring ecological characteristics shared by and diverging among these systems. Below some main conclusions related to the Professor research:

- Carpathian old-growth forests are intermediate in structural complexity, but share characteristics deemed of universal ecological value;
- Aboveground biomass (live and dead), large tree densities, and CWD volumes are universally predictive of stand age, but there is high variability within and among systems;
- Criteria for defining and mapping old-growth need to accommodate variability in developmental pathways and forest structure;
- Conservation of the world’s remaining old-growth forests, including those in the Carpathians, will maintain an important carbon storage reservoir, while providing co-varying ecosystem services.

### Towards Carpathian Inventory of Virgin Forests

Member States of the Carpathian Convention participating in the Working Group, namely: Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, presented the status of identification and mapping of virgin forests in their own countries.



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Member States have different levels of progress in delineating their virgin forests distribution (please see meeting presentations).

From the presentations, it resulted that in the Carpathians, virgin forests are identified but they are not protected despite of their clear identification in some countries and that forests should be protected according to the law, but they are not properly identified yet and therefore de facto are not protected in other countries. In Slovakia, for example, a very precise database of virgin forests ([www.pralesy.sk](http://www.pralesy.sk)) exists. The total area of primary forests is 10491 ha (0,48% of all forest of Slovakia and only 0,21% from the whole Slovakia) but the 30 % of the identified areas are not yet under protection. In Romania virgin forests are protected by the Ministerial Order No. 3397 and the preparation of a complex map of virgin forests is under development and not yet finished. There is a good example of ongoing cooperation between the governmental and NGOs sectors on forests protection and conservation.

In order to support the creation of an inventory data of virgin forests, in accordance with the Strategic Action Plan for the implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management, the Secretariat will make use of a template table for collecting information. The table, based on the Romanian template developed under the Ministerial Order 1417/2016, which establishes the National Catalogue of virgin and natural forests, will be circulated among the Countries for feedback. Compared to the Romanian template, the Parties agreed to add a column on the level of the forests protection (fully protected, in progress, not protected). The table will support the possible identification of virgin forests outside the protected areas.

### Towards harmonized criteria and indicators for identifying natural forests

According to the Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management, the Parties shall also take measures to identify and protect natural forests and agree on criteria and indicators for their identification.



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With reference to this, Ms. Dania Abdul Malak presented the study carried out by the EEA/ETC-ULS on the development of specific Carpathian wide forest resource indicators to support sustainable management. The study is reflecting an overall Carpathian wide coherence of data but the nature of data being regional has its limitation in terms of interpretation of the indicator at local and national levels. Local and national data are essential for a better validation of the results.

The indicator on the morphological structure of forests offers a general harmonised overview of the structure of the Carpathians Mountains. It identifies the level of fragmentation within Carpathian forests with the KEO boundaries. The outcomes of this indicator support regional efforts of the management, conservation, and restoration of Carpathian forests. The identification of fragmented forests in the region and the areas with potential risk of fragmentation are deemed essential for the prioritisation of the actions of regional managers and policy makers. The indicator of a Carpathian wide assemblages naturalness was also presented as a harmonised indicator that would contribute to the identification of old-growth/ virgin forests to support the Carpathian wide delineation of virgin forests.

After EEA presentation, Member States discussed the different national definitions of forests naturalness, which are diverging also from the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Forests Management.

The definition/indicator on natural forests seems to be the most needed dataset / indicator to be agreed upon among the countries. The Secretariat, in cooperation with the EEA/ETC-ULS, will collect the existing definitions and work on a common agreement for the future identification of natural forests distribution in the Carpathians.



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## Implementation of the EU Timber Regulation and Examples of good practices on sustainable forest management in member states

Member States presented the status of implementation of European Timber Regulation, which prohibits the placing on the EU market for the first time of illegally harvested timber and products derived from such timber and requires operators (who place timber products on the EU market for the first time) to exercise 'due diligence' systems. The Commission, on July 2016, published the updated table with information on the state of implementation of the Regulation by the EU Member States as regards whether they have complied with their obligations provided for by the Regulation: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/pdf/EUTR%20implementation%20scoreboard.pdf>

Countries discussed also the possibility of jointly develop one common platform for sharing information and harmonize the level of implementation of the EUTR's provisions at transnational level, making use of the good practices already existing in some countries.

On the second day of the meeting, Mr. Mircea Verghelet, Park Director of the Piatra Craiului National Park, hosted the participants of the Working Group in the new Tourist Centre of the National Park, where Countries discussed about good practices on sustainable forests management.

During the meeting, the memorandum of cooperation between the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention and the Association of Natural Protected Areas Administrations (ANPAA) was officially signed. This in an important step towards the development of a better cooperation in the management of protected areas within and between the Carpathian countries.



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### Next steps

It was agreed that UNEP Vienna – SCC will finalize and circulate among Countries, the table for collecting information on the distribution of virgin forests in the Carpathian area, based on Romania forests table example. The cooperation with EEA/ETC-ULS was very much welcomed during the meeting. UNEP Vienna – SCC will continue working, with the support of the EEA/ETC-ULS on the development of harmonized criteria and indicators for identifying natural forests.

A possible project idea on the implementation of the EU Timber Regulation through the development of a common informative platform in the Carpathians has to be further discussed and examined.

The outcome of the Working Group will be submitted by the Secretariat to the next meeting of the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee (Vienna, 21-22 November 2016) for consideration and recommendation for COP5 adoption.

### Closure of the meeting

Mr. Harald Egerer and Mr. Costel Bucur thanked all the meeting participants and closed the meeting.