

**DRAFT WORKING DOCUMENT ON PROPOSED PRIORITY AREAS AND
RELATED ACTIONS/PROJECTS FOR A POSSIBLE EU STRATEGY FOR THE
CARPATHIAN REGION**

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INTRODUCTION

The Carpathian Region consists of seven countries and five of them are EU Member States. It is the Europe's largest mountain range and links the Central and Eastern part of the continent through the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic and Ukraine. Furthermore, the Area occupies a strategic position, connecting the EU Members to its neighbours in the Eastern part of Europe. With its nearly 53 million inhabitants, in the Carpathian Region live approximately the 7.6% of the whole European population¹.

The Carpathian Region is characterized by a unique cultural and natural heritage, providing an ideal environment for wildlife and serving as ecological connection within Europe. In particular the variety of the natural heritage represents one of the biggest resources of the whole area. The Carpathians include also the mountain foreland and all related entities in direct connection with the mountain areas, where a considerable segment of the functions, serving the mountain dwellers, are placed.

The seven Carpathian countries adopted in 2003 the Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention), which entered into force in January 2006. The Carpathian Convention is serviced by UNEP Vienna Office – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (UNEP Vienna - ISCC) with the support of the European Academy Bolzano (EURAC) Expert Team in Vienna and represents an important achievement that reflects a common vision of the Parties on the protection and sustainable development of the Region. The improvement of the quality of live, the strengthening of local economies and communities and the protection of natural values and cultural heritage are among the most relevant issues that are included in the Convention.

Until now a Protocol on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity (Biodiversity Protocol) and the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism

¹ UNEP Vienna – ISCC (within the INTERREG CADSES Carpathian project), *VASICA - Visions And Strategies In The Carpathian Area*, 2009, p.14. Available at: www.carpathianconvention.org/publications-64.html

(Tourism Protocol) entered into force and the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management (Forest Protocol) has been adopted.

The Convention represents not only a legal framework for the protection and the sustainable development of the Carpathian Region but also a fundamental platform for cooperation for the Carpathian countries and also all the other stakeholders acting in the Region.

The Carpathian Convention is also strongly involved in strengthening territorial cooperation in the Carpathians at different levels and plays an important role in the implementation of the EU Strategy of the Danube Region (EUSDR)² – see below.

Furthermore a Strategic Action Plan for the Carpathian Area has been adopted by the competent Ministries of the Carpathian Countries at the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (COP 3) in Bratislava in May 2011³ in order to better coordinate the efforts of stakeholders at different levels acting in the Carpathian Area. This document was developed with the technical assistance of the Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Regions (AEM) and was finalized at the Consultative Workshop “Moving towards a Carpathian Strategy – Implementing the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in the Carpathian Area”⁴, organised in Brussels in January 2011.

In order to further strengthen this fruitful cooperation between stakeholders at different levels and to further reinforce the role of the Carpathians in Europe, the development of an EU Strategy for the Carpathian Region (Carpathian Strategy), covering all the seven

² European Commission, *Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. European Union Strategy for the Danube Region*, 8 December 2010, COM(2010) 715 and its accompanying Action Plan, SEC(2010) 1489. Available at: www.danube-region.eu

³ The Strategic Action Plan for the Carpathian Area is available at: http://www.carpathianconvention.org/tl_files/carpathiancon/Downloads/02%20Activities/2.1.2%20Strategic%20Action%20Plan%20for%20the%20Carpathian%20Area.pdf

⁴ For further information: <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/wg-spatial-planning.html>

Carpathian Convention countries and promoting those actions and projects that are a priority for the Carpathians, is essential.

Fundamental condition for the achievement of this important objective is the involvement of all the national, regional, local authorities and all the other actors (International Organizations, NGOs, public and private associations etc...) in this process and their active promotion towards the EU institutions and bodies.

Such a Strategy would complete the already existing EUSDR and EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)⁵ with those Priority Areas and related actions/projects examples that are not included in the Danube and Baltic Strategies.

In this sense the Carpathian Strategy should follow a similar structure of the two above mentioned Danube and Baltic Strategies, that are divided, with some small differences, in Priority Areas, actions and project examples.

The EUSDR, adopted in 2010 by the European Commission and officially endorsed by the European Council in June 2011, already includes in its Action Plan several actions and project examples that are also relevant for the Carpathian Area⁶.

In Pillar A of the Action Plan, dedicated to the topic “Connecting the Danube Region”, and in its Priority Area 2 “To encourage more sustainable energy”, the Carpathian Convention is mentioned for its important role in promoting sharing of best practices on using biomass for energy purposes. In this context is mentioned a specific project to be developed under the leadership of the Carpathian Convention aiming at strengthening the cooperation between the regions of the Alpine Convention and the regions of the Carpathian Convention for simplifying the transfer of practices, best available

⁵European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*, 10 June 2009, COM/2009/0248 and its accompanying Action Plan, SEC(2009) 702, SEC(2009) 703, SEC(2009) 712. Available at: www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu

⁶ The actions and project examples of the EUSDR relevant for the Carpathian Area are listed in the “Strategic Action Plan for the Carpathian Area”, p. 12-14

technologies, environmental and social know-how. Because of this important role of the Carpathians and the Carpathian Convention in the renewable energy field within the EUSDR, we didn't consider necessary to include a specific Priority Area on renewable energy in the Carpathian Strategy.

In the same Pillar, in the process of promoting culture and tourism, the Carpathians are mentioned as one of the most visited sightseeing related to the Danube Region and the Strategy mentions that the Carpathian Region should be adequately promoted as a tourist attraction with appropriate infrastructures and services.

The EUSDR underlines also the importance to restore and maintain the quality of Danube waters, issue which is directly related to the Carpathians and to the Alps because of the drainage area.

Pillar B of the EUDSDR Action Plan deals with the "Protection of the Environment of the Danube Region".

In this part of the Strategy various mining activities, which still take place in the Carpathians, are considered as a serious danger for the nature and an immediate management for environmental risks is requested.

Within Priority Area 5 "To manage environmental risks", the Action "Anticipate regional and local impacts of climate change through research", makes reference to the preparatory action "Climate of the Carpathian basin". It underlines the importance of considering also the Carpathian basin within the research initiatives aimed at anticipating regional and local impacts of climate change in the Danube Region. For this reason, and taking also into account that climate change is a cross – cutting issue relevant for several other topics such as biodiversity and forest, we didn't consider necessary to include it as a specific Priority Area in the Carpathian Strategy, despite its high importance of this topic for the Carpathian Region. In addition to this a "Strategic Agenda on Adaptation to Climate Change in the Carpathian Region", under development within the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Adaptation to Climate Change (Climate Change WG), co – financed by the CARPIVIA⁷ and CARPATCLIM⁸ projects, proposes already some actions to be taken in order to face climate change in the Carpathians.

⁷ For further information: www.carpivia.eu

Within this Pillar, protecting the biodiversity, the landscapes and the quality of air and soil (Priority Area 6) is a central issue that links the Danube Strategy to the Carpathian Convention. In this context the European Transnational Cooperation South East Europe BIOREGIO Carpathians project⁹ is mentioned as a flagship project aimed at promoting the sustainable development and at improving the ecological connectivity in the whole Carpathian Region. Furthermore the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) is mentioned as an important tool for the effective management of Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas. The Carpathian Convention, especially through the UNEP Vienna – ISCC, is actively involved in the implementation of this Priority Area and is observer to its Steering Group. UNEP Vienna - ISCC is involved in strategic ongoing projects implementing the Strategy, such as the mentioned BIOREGIO Carpathians project or the Austria – Slovakia Cross - Border Cooperation Alpine – Carpathian Corridor project¹⁰. Furthermore it is responsible for Action 6.9 “To prepare and implement transnational spatial planning and development policies for functional geographical areas (river basins, mountain ranges etc.)” within which is mentioned as project example “To implement the VASICA - Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian area”¹¹.

For this reason we consider that a specific Priority Area related to biodiversity is not needed in the Carpathian Strategy, despite the importance of this topic in the Carpathian Region.

We consider also that several Priority Areas and related actions/project examples included in the Pillar C “Building prosperity in the Danube Region”, dealing with research, education, information technologies and competitiveness, and the Pillar D “Strengthening the Danube Region”, dealing with institutional capacity and cooperation and security, are relevant also for the Carpathian Region.

In addition to this, in the field of research, the “Research Agenda for the Carpathians 2010 – 2015 – Integrating nature and society towards sustainability”, developed within

⁸ For further information: <http://www.carpatclim-eu.org/pages/home/>

⁹ For further information: www.bioregio-carpathians.eu

¹⁰ For further information: www.alpenkarpatenkorridor.at

¹¹ VASICA is available at: www.carpathianconvention.org/publications-64.html (See above)

the Science for the Carpathians (S4C) Initiative¹², already identifies several research priorities in various fields related to the sustainable development of the Carpathian region. For these reasons we think that these topics don't need to be included as specific Pillars and Priority Areas in the Carpathian Strategy.

The EUSBSR, adopted by the European Commission in 2009 and endorsed by the European Council the same year, doesn't mention the Carpathians in its Action Plan, but is relevant for the only Carpathian country not included in the EUSDR, Poland, which plays an important role both in the Baltic Strategy and the Carpathian Convention. Furthermore several actions and project examples included in the EUSBSR can be an inspiration for actions and project examples to be included in the Carpathian Strategy.

According to what stated above the following specific Pillars and Priority Areas to be included in a possible future Carpathian Strategy have been identified:

Pillar A: PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CARPATHIAN REGION

Priority Area 1: To Promote Sustainable Forest Management

Priority Area 2: To Improve Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development

Pillar B: CONNECTING THE CARPATHIANS AND PROMOTING REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Priority Area 1: To Preserve the Cultural Heritage

Priority Area 2: To Promote Sustainable Tourism

Priority Area 3: To Improve Sustainable Transport and Infrastructure and Accessibility

The related actions and project examples have been selected mainly from the Strategic Action Plan of the Carpathian Area with few additional inputs from other relevant documents and publications that are indicated in the text.

¹² Science for the Carpathians Initiative, *Research Agenda for the Carpathians 2010 – 2011. Integrating nature and society towards sustainability*, 2011. Available at: <http://mri.scnatweb.ch/mri-europe/carpathians/>

A) PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CARPATHIAN REGION

The overall objective of this Pillar is to improve the awareness about the risks that an inefficient and unregulated use of the environmental resources could cause and to protect these assets strengthening the coordination and cooperation among the main stakeholders acting in the Region.

According to what explained in the introductory part, the Pillar focuses on two Priority Areas: (1) To promote sustainable forests management; (2) To improve sustainable agricultural and rural development.

These Priority Areas have to be considered with other policy fields such as biodiversity, climate change, tourism and renewable energy.

Priority Area (1): To Promote Sustainable Forest Management
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Presentation of the issue

The Carpathian Region has abundant (and thriving) forests and vast areas of woodlands cover a big part of its range. Forest cover is nearly 60% of the Carpathian territory¹³ but the percentage varies considerably according to countries and areas. The largest forests complexes are located in the Eastern Carpathians while in the Southern Carpathians considerable areas were destroyed and converted to other use of land. Damaging deforestation took place during the communist era in Ukraine and Romania bringing along increasing fragmentation from the region's main ridge to the fringes. The Carpathians Region is worldwide known for its large part of natural and semi-natural woodlands occurring either on areas of high altitudes or in areas of hilly topography with restricted entrance.

¹³ VASICA, p.130

The Carpathian countries are concerned about sustainable and nature-friendly forest management. In the Western Carpathians, almost all the scraps of natural and semi-natural forests are now under protection thanks to natural reserves and national parks created for instance in the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, including their valuable, rare and threatened forest ecosystem. A consistent percentage of primeval and natural forests are still present in Romania and in Ukraine. Unfortunately not all these ecosystems are yet protected by the authorities, but now selective cutting systems are employed and big efforts are made to restrict forest exploitation.

Furthermore, the amusing role of forests and the attraction of Europe's largest stands of virgin forests supports a balanced and respectful development approach.

As mentioned above in the introductory part, the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management (Forest Protocol) has been approved at COP 3.

Furthermore a Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the Forest Protocol is under discussion within the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management (Forest WG) and common criteria for identification of virgin forests are under development within the BIOREGIO Carpathians project.

Actions

- **Action - "To improve forest management in protected areas"¹⁴**
- **Action - "Common forest management against illegal logging"**
- **Action - "Implementation of forest-environmental schemes"**

→ *Example of project – "Research for sustainable forest management in the Carpathians"*

¹⁴ Carpathian Convention, *Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management*, Art. 11.1, May 2011. Available at: http://www.carpathianconvention.org/tl_files/carpathiancon/Downloads/01%20The%20Convention/1.1.2.2%20ProtocolonSustainableForestManagementsigned27may2011.pdf

→ Example of project – *“To develop criteria of high conservation value forests (HCVF)”*¹⁵.

- **Action - “To improve cooperation and share of expertise”**¹⁶

→ Example of project – *“Promote projects aimed at establishing an inventory of Carpathians virgin forests and at ensuring their protection”*

Priority Area (2): **To Improve Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development**

Presentation of the issue

Collective farms were mandatory during the communist era. This approach limited the quality of agriculture and the protection of the soil. Nevertheless the economy of the Carpathian Region is still supported by the agricultural sector, though its share in GDP and employment is constantly decreasing, as its level of production. Even though agriculture plays still an important economic role in the Carpathians countries, not all the countries refer to it as a main goal of their national strategies.

Agricultural production gives dissimilar benefits to the Carpathian countries. Although the lowlands are more proper for plant production, mountain areas offer more occasions for animal farming and wood production. To overcome this disadvantage, mountain territories should concentrate on the creation of those products, for which they have better contingency (e.g. milk, cheese, berries and mushrooms).

A solid background for possible initiatives and projects in this field is represented by the Project for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions

¹⁵ EURAC, *National achievements and challenges related to the implementation of the Carpathian Convention*, October 2011, p.24. Available at: <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/publications-64.html>

¹⁶ Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management, Art. 17.3

(SARD-M) that, under the leadership of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has developed and implemented a methodological framework for a rapid assessment of policies for SARD in mountain region¹⁷.

Actions

- **Action – “To reorganize mountain and local agricultural markets”**
- **Action – “To promote mountain quality products”**
- **Action - ”Promotion of agri-environmental practices and traditional products”**

→ *Example of project – “Promote the establishment of a label for Carpathian quality agricultural products”*

¹⁷ For further info: <http://www.fao.org/sard/en/sardm/home/index.html>

B) CONNECTING THE CARPATHIANS AND PROMOTING REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The overall objective of this Pillar is to connect people in the Carpathian Region and to promote the development of the Region through their common cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, the improvement of the transport system and accessibility, and the promotion of sustainable tourism.

In order to reach this objective three Priority Areas have been identified: (1) To preserve the cultural heritage; (2) To promote sustainable tourism and (3) To improve sustainable transport and infrastructure and accessibility.

The Priority Areas have to be considered with other policy fields such as biodiversity, climate change, renewable energy and spatial planning.

Priority Area (1): To Preserve the Cultural Heritage

Presentation of the issue

The cultural heritage of the Carpathian Region represents an exceptional composition of inheritance within Europe. In this part of the continent the monuments of folk art and architecture have been preserved through the centuries in the most intact way. Also the intangible cultural heritage (music, songs, dances, fairy tales) represents a protected sphere of the cultural traditions of the Carpathians.

Sites and landscapes of specific natural and cultural value are harbored in the Carpathians and an important part of them is recorded in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Moreover, the Carpathian area is a leading European region where old rural architecture and different rural arts and professions have always been protected. This popular

knowledge should be promoted and could definitely assist the local economic and industrial development. For centuries the Carpathians have been a meeting and transit point for people and cultures moving through Eastern and Western parts of the continent, linking religions and traditions and many examples of socio-cultural variety can be found. This unique asset, worldwide known, should be promoted as one of the most important basis for regional development.

Therefore, the conservation and protection of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge is often considered of main importance in the national policies of several Carpathian countries.

At the moment a Carpathian Convention Protocol on Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge is under elaboration within the "Carpathians Unite – mechanism of consultation and cooperation for implementation of the Carpathian Convention" project, funded through the Swiss Contribution to the enlarged European Union and led by UNEP Grid Warsaw¹⁸.

Actions

- **Action – “Identification and protection of main cultural heritage sites in the Carpathians”**

→ *Example of project – “To promote the creation of the Carpathian-wide Heritage Inventory¹⁹”*

¹⁸ For further information: <http://karpatylacza.pl/en/project>

¹⁹ VASICA, p. 159

Priority Area (2): **To Promote Sustainable Tourism**

Presentation of the issue

The beautiful Carpathian mountain areas could represent, for the local economy, one of the most important sectors thanks to the great opportunities for the tourism industry.

Despite nearly forty years of communism, tourism is nowadays one of the most dynamically developing branches of the economy in the Carpathian countries that should be developed further in a more sustainable way. For this reason, as mentioned in the introductory part of the document, the seven Parties to the Carpathian Convention adopted in 2011 the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism (Tourism Protocol), recently entered into force.

There are several sites in the Carpathians with well-equipped and easy accessible recreation, also for seasonal sport enthusiasts. Moreover, the Carpathian Region has also abundant medicinal mineral water sources and spas. This unique area benefits from an important potential of traditional works, local SMEs and sustainable industries, relevant for a diversified mountain economy and its endogenous development.

In order to further support the promotion of sustainable tourism in the Carpathians the elaboration of a “Strategy for the Future Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians” is the main objective of a recently launched project funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety led by Ecological Tourism in Europe (ETE)²⁰.

Actions

- **Action – “To encourage specific economic sectors and SMEs based on traditional knowledge and great tourism potential, which would benefit to mountain inhabitants by reversing depopulation and making their territory attractive by respecting their traditions and environment at the same time”**

²⁰ For further information: www.oete.de

→ *Example of project – “Carpathian Tourism Cluster Development – Enhancing European Competitiveness (Via Carpathia, Greening the Carpathian Tourism Industry - Ecocertification and Marketing Scheme)”*

→ *Example of project – “Development of projects promoting education on sustainable tourism and best practices of environmentally – friendly tourism in the Carpathians”*

Priority Area (3): To Improve Sustainable Transport and Infrastructure and Accessibility

Presentation of the issue

Development of the transport system (highways, main roads, railways etc.) within the Carpathian Region could bring great economical growth to the new Member States of the EU. Moreover, it represents also a good chance for improving security on Carpathian roads and in facilitating the reaching of areas of tourist or natural interest. At the same time is essential that planning of new transport infrastructures takes into account the specific environmental needs of the Region. Air and noise pollution and damages to biodiversity and ecological connectivity caused by transport infrastructures and the transport system have to be limited in order to preserve the unique natural heritage of the region.

At the moment important initiatives and projects aimed at promoting sustainable transport and infrastructure and accessibility are ongoing. For example with the support of all Ministers of Transport of all seven Carpathian Countries the project “Via Carpathia”, a railway line which links Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia, represents a noteworthy cross-cutting initiative linking in a sustainable way transport and tourism²¹. Or for example the European Transnational Cooperation South

²¹ For further information: <http://www.viacarpathia.com/>

East Europe ACCESS2MOUNTAIN project²² represents an additional fundamental experience that aims at promoting sustainable mobility and tourism in sensitive areas of the Alps and of the Carpathians. Within the project the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Transport is under development.

Actions

- **Action – “Finalization of the planned TENT Corridors”**
- **Action – “Preservation of traditional mini-railways in forests”**
- **Action – “Development of multimodal transport systems”.**

→ *Example of project – “Development of transport systems aimed at facilitating transfer of goods from road to rail in the Carpathian Area”*

- **Action – “Respect of eco-corridors”**

→ *Example of project – “Promotion of green infrastructure in the Carpathians”*

- **Action – “Development of modern communication systems”**

→ *Example of project – “Facilitation of crossing borders among Carpathian Countries”*

²² For further information: www.access2mountain.eu

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www.carpathianconvention.org/publications-64.html

Projects:

Access2Mountain: www.access2mountain.eu

Alpine Carpathian Corridor: www.alpenkarpatenkorridor.at

BIOREGIO Carpathians: www.bioregio-carpathians.eu

CARPATCLIM: <http://www.carpatclim-eu.org/pages/home/>

Carpathians Unite: <http://karpatylacza.pl/en/project>

CARPIVIA: www.carpivia.eu

SARD – M: <http://www.fao.org/sard/en/sardm/home/index.html>

Via Carpathia: <http://www.viacarpathia.com/>

LIST OF ACRONYMS:

ACCESS2MOUNTAIN - Sustainable Mobility and Tourism in Sensitive Areas of the Alps and the Carpathians

AEM – Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Regions

BIOREGIO Carpathians – Integrated management of biological and landscape diversity for sustainable regional development and ecological connectivity in the Carpathians

CADSES - Central European, Adriatic, Danubian and Southeast European Space

CARPATCLIM – Climate of the Carpathian Region

CARPVIA - Carpathian integrated assessment of vulnerability to climate change and ecosystem-based adaptation measures

CNPA - Carpathian Network of Protected Areas

COP 3 – Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention

ETE – Ecological Tourism in Europe

EU - European Union

EURAC – European Academy of Bolzano

EUSBSR – EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

EUSDR - European Union Strategy for the Danube Region

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization

HCVF – High Conservation Value Forests

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

S4C – Science for the Carpathians Initiative

SARD – M - Project for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions

SME – Small and Medium Enterprises

TENT – Trans - European Network for Transport

UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VASICA - Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian Area