



## Memorandum of Cooperation between the Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC), the Danube River Network of Protected Areas (DANUBEPARKS) and the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA)

### 1. Background

Considering that:

- Mountain regions in the Alps and the Carpathians as well as the Danube River floodplain represent some of the most important natural and semi-natural areas in Central and South-East Europe;
- Protected Areas are crucial sites for the long-term preservation of the rich biodiversity and natural heritage in these regions;
- economic pressure is increasing constantly in the Alps, Carpathians and in the Danube River Basin regions, resulting in growing pressure on the natural treasures;
- changes to more intense land use are limiting the multi-functionality of ecosystems and modifying the life conditions for humans, animals and plants;
- transport infrastructures, spreading cities and human settlements are occupying more and more space in the landscape, causing growing impact of habitat fragmentation and making genetic exchange between wildlife populations more and more difficult;
- nature faces new threats and, especially in the context of climate change, numerous impacts have to be expected;
- the richness in bio-geographic regions qualifies Central and South-East Europe as model regions for habitat connectivity and corridor functionality;
- Protected Area Networks represent core areas within ecological networks and are in a leading role to foster coherence and habitat connectivity,

these three organisations ALPARC, DANUBEPARKS and the CNPA express their intention to intensify formally their cooperation, aiming for the realisation of common actions and long term projects in favour of the conservation of biodiversity, especially by the creation of ecological networks in and among their respective regions.

## 2. Legal framework for the establishment of ecological networks within the three regions

The legal basis for the establishment of the **Alpine Network of Protected Areas** and the creation of ecological networks in the Alps is fixed in the **Alpine Convention** in the Article 12 of the Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation Protocol<sup>1</sup>. The long lasting cooperation between Alpine protected areas in the frame of the Alpine Convention (since 1995) has allowed the realisation of common tools and procedures, the implementation of common projects and a joint communication activity. This cooperation is the backbone of common strategies to develop ecological networks within the Alps and towards the neighbouring massifs, as well in the frame of the **EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)**. All Alpine countries are currently working about the issue of ecological connectivity and ALPARC's work is based on national and European legal frameworks of this topic. ALPARC tries with common tools and a common procedure to contribute to the cooperation ability of the different Alpine spaces and regions and by this to a concrete implementation of ecological networks on the ground.

The **EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)** is a key policy background for the work of **DANUBEPARKS** towards more ecological connectivity along the Danube River. The EUSDR Action Plan underlines the outstanding role of Danube Protected Sites, and calls for transnational cooperation and the provision of ecological connections that are essential for overall European environmental health. The Action Plan of Priority Area 6 to develop green infrastructure in order to connect different biogeographic regions is an appeal for initiatives over large areas, facing the key role of the Danube as eco-corridor connecting over five bio-regions. The importance of the Danube river continuity is stressed by the **Danube River Basin District Management Plan**. To establish and to improve migration for long and medium distance migrants of the Danube River and the connected lowland rivers is in the focus of this policy. In the **Danube Declaration 2010**, the Danube countries reconfirmed their commitment to further develop and make full use of the ecological prioritisation approach for measures to restore river and habitat continuity in order to ensure that they are ecologically most efficient.

Ensuring continuity and connectivity of habitats and species, cooperation of Contracting Parties in developing an ecological network in the Carpathian Mountains and protection of migration routes are among key principles of the **Carpathian Convention**<sup>2</sup>. These principles are transferred into relevant articles of the Convention and its thematic Protocols, including the Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity, or Protocol on Sustainable Transport. Article 4.5 of the Carpathian Convention emphasizes the importance of nature protection and encourages the parties to develop an ecological continuum that could be a constituent part of the Pan-European Ecological Network. Collaboration in the field of ecological connectivity is also included in the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention<sup>3</sup>.

For implementation of these principles several projects have been developed and implemented during the last decade.

The **Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA)** was established by the relevant Ministries during the 1st Meeting of the Conference of Parties of the Carpathian Convention (COP1) in 2006 as one of

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<sup>1</sup> Protocol on the Implementation of the Alpine Convention of 1991 relating to Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation

<sup>2</sup> Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum of Understanding for the cooperation between the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention (2006)

the most important implementation tools of the Carpathian Convention. The creation of CNPA and its further development are regularly supported from the Alpine Convention, in particular by the Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC) and its institutional partners with the objective of the establishment of an ecological network, beside others.

The **Carpathian Wetland Initiative (CWI)** is a Regional Initiative of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, endorsed in 2009. Its mission is to facilitate collaboration between the Carpathian and Ramsar Convention and their Parties in their efforts in conservation and wise use of wetlands in the Carpathian region and beyond, through local, national, regional and international activities.

### **3. Approach to ecological connectivity of the networks**

#### **Alpine Network of Protected Areas - ALPARC**

The Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC) is also based on article 12 of the Nature Protection Protocol of the Alpine Convention; this article indicates both - a thematic and spatial network of protected areas. For this reason, ALPARC works on ecological connectivity in the frame of its own work programme and in close cooperation with the Alpine Convention and the Macro regional strategy (EUSALP).

Several EU Projects concerning this topic have been realised and several tools, becoming an Alpine and international standard, for evaluating the potential of connectivity have been elaborated. Since 2015, ALPARC focuses especially on the aspect of ecological connectivity within the Macro regional process as important barriers are around the Alps, and participates at its competent structures.

Results in the following fields are expected: definition of the most important areas of ecological connectivity within the Alpine Space (Special Alpine Conservation Areas), implementation of strategies and measures in Pilot Regions, communication and awareness-raising work about the topic, cooperation with the official Alpine and EU institutions and definition of the most important barriers around the Alps with recommendations on how to overcome them.

#### **The Protected Areas' Network of the Danube – DANUBEPARKS**

Danube Protected Areas preserve core sites within the Danube River habitat corridor. Since 2007, DANUBEPARKS has worked to raise the efficiency of each single Danube Protected Area by experience exchange and know-how transfer. Sound strategies and coordinated pilot actions strengthen the coherence of the numerous Natura 2000 sites along the Danube, as stressed by winning the 2015 Natura 2000 Award.

With support of the EU-funds for European Territorial Cooperation (ETC-SEE), DANUBEPARKS launched first initiatives for ecological connectivity all along the Danube, in terrestrial, semi-aquatic and aquatic habitats. Follow-up activities and project proposals are prepared to establish and further develop the Danube as habitat corridor.

National and cross-border policies and projects contribute to bring transnational initiatives on the ground. The Alpine-Carpathian Corridor acts as good practice to showcase the Danube as linkage between these two mountainous areas. The strategic approach of DANUBEPARKS to foster ecological connectivity in the region includes cooperation within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and other policy makers.

Results in the following fields are expected: the cooperation with ALPARC and CNPA enables DANUBEPARKS to further intensify efforts towards more ecological connectivity in the region, by intense experience exchange, coordinated sound strategies and joint implementation oriented projects in the near future. Pilot regions - like the Alpine-Carpathian Corridor, the Iron Gates, the Duna-

Ipoly National Park region and (mountainous) tributary rivers - are in the focus with (future) concrete eco-corridor projects, and stress the function of the Danube as linkage between the bio-regions of the Alps and Carpathians.

### **Carpathian Network of Protected Areas - CNPA**

The Platform on Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians was established (with the support from ALPARC) by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Carpathian Convention in 2011 and this Memorandum of Cooperation is based on this and supports its implementation. CNPA Medium Term Strategy and Action Plan include cooperation and exchanges with other networks, development of ecological networks and harmonisation of measures. Concrete results have been delivered by the project “Integrated management of biological and landscape diversity for sustainable regional development and ecological connectivity in the Carpathians” (BioREGIO Carpathians). Results in the following fields are expected: gap analysis and definition of priority connecting corridors, key mainstays and migratory routes; development of a methodology for the creation of the ecological network and creation of a catalogue of measures and, finally, the designation of and work with pilot areas.

## **4. Common goals and objectives**

The above mentioned demonstrates that the Alpine countries, the Danube River Basin countries and the countries of the Carpathians are particularly interested in the creation of ecological networks and wish to cooperate for a better synergy and efficiency in the realisation of those networks in order to:

- Respond to the loss of biodiversity, especially in times of climate change, by ensuring the migration of species;
- contribute to article 12 of the Alpine Convention protocol about “Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation” and of relevant protocols to the Convention;
- contribute to the goals of the DANUBEPARKS network for ecological connectivity in the Danube region;
- contribute to the implementation of Article 4.5 of the Carpathian Convention about the “Conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity” and of relevant protocols to the Convention;
- contribute to the creation of a European and worldwide ecological network, one of the most ambitious objectives of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD);
- contribute to the cooperation of the both Alps and Danube Macro regions in the field of biodiversity conservation; a close cooperation with the both EU macro-regional strategies (Danube, Alps) is part of the cooperation;
- develop a joint voice towards habitat connectivity on a political level and EU policies (e.g. green infrastructure) including all concerned countries of the regions;
- raise awareness of the general public for the importance of large non-fragmented areas and permeable landscapes.

## **5. Activities**

The following activities will lead to the achievement of the above defined objectives:

- Creation of a forum for exchange of results, knowledge and know-how in the field of ecological networks conception and creation between the partner organisations;

- Exchange of information on activities about the ecological networks in the Alps, the Danube River Basin and the Carpathians at regional, national and international level, in order to harmonize ongoing projects and their approach as well as to optimize their impact on common goals;
- Support of concrete measures for the establishment of national and transnational ecological networks;
- Definition of pilot regions to demonstrate the need and the efficiency of harmonized actions towards ecological connectivity between the natural areas of the Alps, the Danube floodplains and the natural areas of the Carpathians;
- Use and improvement of common tools for landscape and connectivity planning such as those developed by several European projects;
- Work with territorial communities (pilot regions) and local stakeholders, with a view to the creation of links between protected areas and areas with high biological diversity on local and regional level;
- Identification of financial and political resources on different levels, for the implementation of measures to strengthen ecological connectivity;
- Communication activities with the public and stakeholders with a view to the improvement of understanding, acceptance and support;
- Capacity development and education activities for professionals in protected areas on ecological connectivity and green infrastructure;
- Contribute with common expertise to official European policies (e.g. EU green infrastructure working group).

## **6. Organisation**

The cooperation will be insured by a regular exchange of information and reporting of activities towards the ecological network in all three regions (Alps, Danube space, Carpathians).

The cooperation will include an exchange and close cooperation with the competent structures of the both Macro Regions (Alps and Danube).

The activities from all three spaces will be reported in the available media of the three networks and the cooperation initiative will be particularly stressed in order to highlight this cooperation in favour of biodiversity conservation in this large European region.

One meeting per year should be organised in the common space deciding about joint actions, new project developments and communication activities. Additional formal or informal meetings are foreseen to tackle specific fields of intervention. Representatives from the competent structures concerning ecological connectivity from the both Macro Regions (action group 7, EUSALP; Priority Area 6, EUSDR) and the both conventions – Alpine Convention and Carpathian Convention as well as from the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) should be regularly informed and associated.

The steering committee of this cooperation initiative is ensured by the involvement of the management boards (or councils) of the three networks and will be fixed by common agreement. No new structure should be created.

Financial support for this cooperation and for the implementation of joint activities will be requested by competent national institutions or/and the European Commission or by individual public or private programs.

**To ensure a realistic and concrete implementation of this Memorandum of Cooperation a specific action plan has been developed and is attached to this document. The action plan needs to be revised every 5 years.**

## **7. Final disposals**

The partner protected areas and partner institutions of the three networks should be in a continuous and permanent informal contact and information loops in order to be well informed about ongoing procedures and cooperation needs.

This Cooperation Initiative will take effect upon signature from all three sides. Its duration is unlimited but each signatory may terminate it by informing the other signatories in writing with a prior delay of 1 year in order not to endanger running projects.

The signatories may, by mutual consent and in writing, review and amend this Memorandum of Cooperation on the basis of the experience gained in implementing it.

Grassau, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2016

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