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8th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Tourism 12 - 14 April 2016, Brașov, Romania

MEETING REPORT

The Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, with a generous support and hospitality of the Romanian National Authority for Tourism and the Brașov County Council, organized the eighth meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Tourism (WG Sustainable Tourism), held in Brașov, Romania, 12 -14 April 2016.

Mr. Harald Egerer, Head of the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, together with Mr. Adrian Gabor, Vice-president of Brașov County Council, Mr. Christopher Imbsen, Deputy Regional Director for Europe of UNWTO, and Mr. Marius Andra, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Relations with Business Environment of Romania, opened the meeting and made welcome remarks.

The Working Group members of the Czech Republic and Serbia were not present at the meeting. The Secretariat was requested to encourage the active involvement and contributions of all Parties to the WG Sustainable Tourism activities.

Mr. Harald Egerer and Mr. Marius Andra were co-chairing the meeting. Following the Agenda, which was adopted without any changes, Mr. Egerer reported on the outcomes of facilitation of the joint proposal of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) to support the implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Protocol and its Strategy.

Outlining, the idea of establishing the Platform derives from the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians (Strategy), adopted at the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention in Mikulov, Czech Republic, September 2014. Following the request of the COP4 to implement the Strategy and the discussion by the WG Sustainable Tourism, the call for the proposal of the possible Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform was open, and consequently three offers were submitted to the Secretariat. Namely, offers were received from: the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion, Poland; the Romanian National Authority for Tourism, Romania; and Ecological Tourism in Europe/European Wilderness Society, Ukraine.

After the discussion, the Sixth Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee (CCIC) decided to elaborate one joint proposal merging all three offers.

The Secretariat, following the recommendation of the CCIC, prepared the Joint Proposal, which was circulated to the Focal Points, the WG Sustainable Tourism and the involved partners seeking consultations and comments to the document. The first draft of the Joint Proposal received comments from Poland and Romania, which were sent around shortly before the WG Sustainable Tourism meeting in Brasov.

At the WG Sustainable Tourism meeting in Brasov, the Secretariat presented the draft Joint Proposal and received comments in details. The presentation was followed by an intensive discussion, which resulted in the final draft version of the document to be circulated together with the Meeting Report and also to be made available on the Carpathian Convention website under the activities of the WG Sustainable Tourism.

The final draft version of the Joint Proposal states that the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (final name, as agreed by the WG Sustainable Tourism) will consist of the three offers proposed by Poland, Romania and Ukraine, namely:

- the CSTP Center Poland
- the CSTP Center Romania
- the CSTP Center Ukraine

As agreed by the WG Sustainable Tourism, the CSTP will remain open to further Centres proposed by a Party.

One of the major discussion points during the WG Sustainable Tourism meeting was the part of the Joint Proposal providing information of each Center and they possible arrangements for their establishment. The WG Sustainable Tourism meeting agreed that the informative part of the Joint Proposal will be added to the Meeting Report (please see the last page of the Meeting Report). The Agreement, which will lay the basis for operational functions of the CSTP, will be signed by all the Centres and the Secretariat. Besides information about each Centre, the Agreement will include the indicative list of possible roles/responsibilities/tasks and projects.

A first draft of suggested Terms of Reference for the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform was introduced to the WG Sustainable Tourism meeting. The WG Sustainable Tourism decided that first the need of having the ToR for the CSTP should be considered. The online consultation on the need of the ToR for the CSTP will start together with the consultation on the final draft version of the Joint Proposal.

In order to start implementation of the activities to be taken by the CSTP as soon as possible, it was suggested by the WG Sustainable Tourism to consult the Joint Proposal with the CCIC through e-mails.

The delegations present in Brasov agreed to make sure that their National Focal Points and other relevant colleagues will be informed about the arrangement of the Joint Proposal and the discussion held during the meeting.

Poland maintained its offer to host the next meeting of the WG Sustainable Tourism, to be held in Kombornia, Poland from 12 to 14 September. The WG Sustainable Tourism meeting will be organized back to back to the Second Carpathian State Tourism Forum, which is an initiative of the Polish Ministry of Sport and Tourism. The event will be organized in Rzeszow, Poland from 14 to 16 September.

Poland asked for providing a list of possible participants involved and interested in the subject seeking possible panellist and speakers. Possible contacts can be sent to the Secretariat, which will forward them to the organizers.

More information about the conference, as well as other relevant documents, are available on the Carpathian Convention website:

<http://www.carpathianconvention.org/eventdetailwg-tourism/events/eight-meeting-of-the-working-group-on-sustainable-tourism.html>

Slovakia briefly presented its Plan of Coordination and Implementation of Measures of the Carpathian Strategy – implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism in the Carpathians. The document will be circulated by Slovakia shortly.

During the meeting, the interim result of the project funded by the German government¹ were presented asking for feedback from the Parties and other relevant stakeholders in terms of structure, content etc. The interim results include the Database on Sustainable Tourism in the Carpathians (containing information about the projects in the regions, publications on sustainable tourism and relevant funding for activities on sustainable tourism), proposals for a detailed Description to the Country and Joint Action (separately) Plan of the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Carpathians. The link to the database and the documents are available on the Carpathian Convention website.

Mr. Constantin Serban, GreenTourism Ecological Association, presented a possible common project for cooperation, "Wallachian Vatra trail", a common cultural heritage across Carpathians, a niche product in a green holistic approach. He mentioned the motto: "We live where others only in vacations can live" and the traditional Wallachian values in few key words of the project: Freedom, Nature Harmony, Healthy life, Mystic and Spiritual. In his updated presentation was highlighted the importance of cooperation, not for competition. The project could be a good initiative and reason for starting to build a functioning cooperation network between the Parties in this implementation period of the Protocol. Mr. Constantin Serban, proposed the Wallachian Vatra project to be considered as a tool of Sustainable tourism development, a common project for the entire Carpathian territories. The first step of the project would be to start a common consensus between all stakeholders, by opening a Wallachian Culture Hub, to cooperate for developing sustainable tourism in Carpathians trough common culture heritage.

Mr. Marius Arsene made the concluding remarks and thanked the participants for their contribution to the meeting discussion.

NEXT STEPS:

- Online consultation on the final draft Joint Proposal of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform and the need for draft Terms of Reference for the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform
- Feedback on the Database on Sustainable Tourism and on the proposals for detailed Description to the Country and Joint Action Plan of the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Carpathians
- Next meeting of the WG Sustainable Tourism to be held in Kombornia, Poland, 12 -1 4 September

- Second Carpathian State Tourism Forum organized by Poland to be held in Rzeszow, Poland, 14 – 16 September 2016

DESCRIPTION OF THE CSTP CENTERS (taken from the first version of the Joint Proposal of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform)

Description of the CSTP Centers:

Romania will follow its respective national procedure in order to create its CSTP Center Romania.

Poland/Carpathian Euroregion for creating the center will use both its institutional capacity, over 22 years of experience in international cooperation in the Carpathian Mountains, network of cooperation (about 1,000 entities from the Carpathians) and professional training in preparation and management of international strategies, programs and development projects.

CSTP Center Poland will be established by resolution of the Management Board Association Carpathian Euroregion Poland immediately after the decision taken by the Parties of the Carpathian Convention to be established the CSTP. The Center will operate on the basis of their own finances and through projects using aid funds in this number EU.

Ukraine/ ETE-EWS confirms that it will finance the center partially from its own resources when it comes to the premises in Uzhhorod, technical equipment and staff of up to 8 tourism experts in the Ukraine as well as supporting offices in Austria and Germany. The stable finance is available until December 2017 and beyond depending on availability of project funding which is dependent on the fast implementation of the CSTP.

Indicative list of possible roles/responsibilities/tasks to be included into the Annual Work Plan

Coordination function of cooperation network.

Project management.

Carpathian brand management.

Coordination of e-marketing activities through reconstruction visitcarpathia.com in order to play the role of the largest international tourist-information portal Carpathians.

Creation of the editorial portal with a network of correspondents/partners in each country. Synchronizing the portal with social networking profiles FB YT, Instagram.

Establishment of a network of relevant stakeholders (e.g. local and regional governments, non-governmental organizations, science, tourism business sector) - covering the entire geographical scope of the Carpathians.

Establishment of a structure for the implementation of the Joint Action Plan - training for marketing and tourism faculties, experts in vocational training.

Development and implementation of a communication strategy

Development of a reporting format and reporting on the achievements on a yearly basis to the WG Sustainable Tourism - format for the measures included within the Action Plan, numerical indicators

(e.g. number of ecotourism destinations, number of new clusters, number of laws issued at national and regional level , number of new brands for touristic regions of Carpathians, etc.)

Assistance in implementation of the Country Action Plans

Cluster the 24 actions of the Joint Action Plan of the strategy according to feasibility in time and financial capacity with regard to:

- Sustainable Product Development
- Sustainable Tourism Management
- Training, Education and Capacity Building
- Marketing and Promotion
- Monitoring

Regular newsletters in the seven languages of the parties, a common multilanguage internet platform including an intranet for internal use by the common mechanism and the parties.

List of project ideas / initiatives in line with the Joint and Country Action Plans

Poland/Carpathian Euroregion

The list of projects needs to be prepared together by the partners for the Action Plan.

List of European Territorial Cooperation programs available in the format of the Virtual Operational Programme "Carpathian Horizon 2020" will be prepared on the basis of a list of projects and timing of calls.

Romania/National Authority for Tourism

This year National Authority for Tourism will finance the designing of a brochure, which presents the Romanian mountain destinations included in the Carpathian Convention. It is also planned to organize some conferences in order to disseminate information related to Carpathian Convention.

Ukraine/ETE-EWS

There is already a multitude of project ideas already developed by the Sustainable Tourism Team of ETE and EWS with input by sustainable tourism experts from the seven party countries. Among these, but not limited to, are:

- Carpathian Heritage Trail,
- Carpathian National Park Route,
- Carpathian Bike and Wine Trail,
- Standard Definition for Sustainable Tourism Accommodations,
- Tourism training for Tourism Operators

Funding opportunities exist among private foundations, EU organizations like Erasmus, Life+ and others, international donors like Norwegian grants, Mava and Volkswagen and the EU neighbourhood and regional development funds.

¹ Project "Support for the implementation of the Carpathian Convention, the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism and the Sustainable Tourism Strategy of the Carpathians" financed by the Advisory Assistance Programme for Environmental Protection on the Countries of Central and Easter Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Construction and Nuclear Safety. The project is led by the Ecological Tourism in Europe.