

Governments, Motorway Companies and Stakeholders from Austria and Slovakia take Action to Strengthen the Ecological Connection between the Alps and the Carpathians

International Conference on the Alpine Carpathian Corridor
30 January 2012, Bratislava, Slovakia

VIENNA/BRATISLAVA, 30 January (UN Information Service) – An important step towards the protection and revitalization of the ecological connection between the Alps and the Carpathians has been undertaken today at the International Conference on the Alpine Carpathian Corridor in Bratislava, Slovakia.

The representatives of the relevant Slovak and Austrian national and regional authorities as well as the leading motorway companies (ASFINAG and NDS) of both countries have signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which establishes the framework for future cooperation and coordinated activities in the sector of spatial planning, transport and infrastructure, agriculture and nature protection.

"The protection of nature and economic development are two sides of the same coin. I am therefore very pleased that, thanks to the memorandum, we are showing the way forward – how we can, in a united Europe where borders are not important, build transport infrastructure and simultaneously preserve natural pathways for fauna and flora in protected areas," said the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic, Ján Figel. Two members of the provincial government of Lower Austria, Stephan Pernkopf and Karl Wilfing, stressed: "The signature of this Memorandum of Understanding is a milestone for nature. A clear sign that protecting nature is overcoming barriers in our region. The sustainable objective for further cooperation: free migration for large mammals and maintaining the area for recreation for people in our common environment. This cooperation is a showcase."

The MoU has been facilitated by UNEP Vienna - Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention in the context of the crossborder project Alpine Carpathian Corridor (AKK) funded under the Slovak-Austrian Cross border Cooperation – Programme.

The Alps and the Carpathians, Europe's greatest mountain ranges, are among the most diverse ecoregions of the world. Not long ago large mammals such as red deer or lynx (and with them a whole range of other species) could migrate between the two mountain regions without hindrance. This traditional migration route crosses the area between Vienna, Bratislava and Sopron – a region that ranks among the most dynamic economic areas in Europe. "Carpathians are home to the European Union's (EU) biggest populations of brown bear, wolf, lynx, European bison and imperial eagle - all endangered species. The establishment of such ecological corridors will ensure safe migration of these animals from one place to another," said the Slovak Minister of Environment, József Nagy.

The AKK project with the Lead Partner Government of Lower Austria - Department for Nature Protection aims to re-establish the ecological corridor between the Carpathians and the Alps in this area. In-depth research on reducing the impact of highway infrastructure for example has been conducted and results are already going to be incorporated into spatial planning instruments and investment strategies and the construction of wildlife passages. The significance and the contribution of the project has already been acknowledged at various political levels, including by the EU: for example the AKK project is seen as a flagship project of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and is also one of the finalists for the 2012 RegioStars Awards.

More information about the AKK project can be found at www.alpenkarpatenkorridor.at or www.alpskokarpatskykoridor.sk

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