



## **Workshop “Towards a EU Strategy for the Carpathian Region”**

**28 May 2013**

**Committee of the Regions**

**Room VM1, Van Maerlant Building, Rue Van Maerlant 2, 1040, Brussels, Belgium**

### **FINAL REPORT**

The Workshop aimed at promoting a EU Strategy for the Carpathian Region (Carpathian Strategy) integrating the already existing EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

Representatives of the EU Institutions and Bodies (European Commission, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions), Carpathian countries, regions and local authorities, NGOs, and associations acting in the Carpathian Region participated in the Workshop.

#### **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Gianluca Spinaci, Head of Cabinet of the Secretary General at Committee of the Regions, welcomed the Workshop participants on behalf of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) that hosted the event. In his welcome speech he underlined the importance of the EU macro regional strategies for regions and local authorities and the important role that the CoR has played and continues to play in the macro regional strategies processes, in particular through the promotion of these processes with CoR Opinions.

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For Mr. Spinaci the proposed idea of a Carpathian Strategy integrating the existing EUSDR and EUSBSR with those priorities for the Carpathians that are not included in the Danube and Baltic Strategies is pragmatic and represents a good approach on how to tackle this issue.

Finally he stated that, in order to reach this objective, raising awareness to the CoR members on the importance of a Carpathian Strategy, a joint effort at national and regional level, the support of a wide community of projects developers and the use of existing platforms and agreements (e.g. Memorandum of Understanding between the CoR and UNEP) are important.

The Chairman, Mr. Harald Egerer, Head of UNEP Vienna Office – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (UNEP Vienna – ISCC), thanked Mr. Spinaci for his encouraging words and gave the floor to Mr. Georges Kremlis, Head of Cohesion Policy and Environmental Impact Assessments Unit, DG ENVIRONMENT, European Commission, that represented at the Workshop DG ENVIRONMENT and DG REGIO.

Mr. Kremlis, after a short introduction of some of the most important steps in the development of the EU cohesion policy and the EU macro regional strategies, from the Treaty of Lisbon to the adoption of the EUSDR, stressed that the results of the assessment of EU macro regional strategies by the European Commission in June 2014 will be very for the possible development of a future Carpathian Strategy.

He underlined the already fruitful cooperation between the EU and the Carpathian Convention through the existing instruments, such as the European Regional Development Fund, within which several strategic Carpathian projects are co – funded, and the EUSDR, within which the Carpathians and the Carpathian Convention are mentioned and play an important role. Furthermore he reported that Commissioner Potocnik considers premature a possible accession of the EU to the Carpathian Convention, also in the light of this already ongoing above mentioned cooperation.

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He encouraged the use of the existing available instruments in order to develop and implement important priority actions and projects for the Carpathian Region, in particular making more visible the Carpathian dimension in the EUSDR, also taking into account the possible future integration of different EU funds for projects development and implementation.

Finally Mr. Kremlis stated that, in his own opinion, in order to advance the process towards a Carpathian Strategy the recognition at EU level of the Carpathian Area as a Macro Region is essential and the need of specific priority actions and projects for this Region to be included in a possible separated EU macro regional strategy have to be clearly demonstrated.

Mr. Egerer thanked Mr. Kremlis for his speech and stressed that he considers that not all the priority actions and projects for the Carpathians are included in the available EU instruments. He stated that, following the recommendation of Mr. Kremlis, the Carpathian Convention and all the interested partners will do their best in order to clearly demonstrate this to the European Commission and the other competent EU Institutions and Bodies.

Afterwards Mr. Egerer gave the floor to H.E. Jan Kuderjavy, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic in Brussels.

Ambassador Kuderjavy underlined the unique natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathian Region and stressed the need of a Carpathian Strategy strengthening the role of the Carpathians at EU level.

Mr. Egerer thanked Ambassador Kuderjavy for his speech and thanked the Slovak Presidency of the Carpathian Convention for its excellent work.

The next speaker, Natalia Tarasovova, Head of Prešov Region Brussels Office - Slovakia, stressed how the Presov Region has a lot of potentials, in particular for its very rich natural

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and cultural heritage, but the investments in the region are not adequate to fully make use of these potentials. In her opinion a possible future Carpathian Strategy would be a very important instrument in order to face these problems for her region and for all other Carpathian regions that are in a similar situation and expressed her support for a possible CoR Opinion promoting the need of such a Strategy.

Nicolas Evrard, Secretary General of the European Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Regions (AEM), stressed the importance of considering the specificities of mountain territories at policy level and how the macro regional strategies are very effective instruments for this purpose.

He also underlined that the processes towards the development of EU macro regional strategies, such as the Alpine Strategy process, which started already five years ago and is now still under development, usually are very long processes.

Martin Guillermo Ramirez, Secretary General of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), in his speech pointed out that border regions and mountain regions have to face specific challenges that have to be taken into account at policy level. In his opinion an additional challenge for the possible future Carpathian Strategy is that it would be the first EU macro regional strategy on the other side of the former iron curtain.

He stressed the importance of a Carpathian Strategy to face these challenges and that the creation of a Carpathian interregional group within the CoR would be important to carry on the process at EU level. In addition to this he stated that AEBR is ready to support this initiative through its members and its expertise, taking also into account that most of the AEBR members are from the Carpathians.

Mr. Egerer concluded this first session of the Workshop saying that an additional challenge is represented also by the fact that the development of EU macro regional strategies in the west

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side of Europe could be easier because most of the western EU countries are net payers in the EU and that most of the eastern EU countries are not.

After this last concluding remark he thanked all the distinguished speakers and closed the first session.

### **Presentations**

Mr. Egerer opened the second session of the Workshop, characterised by a series of presentations related to the Carpathian Strategy<sup>1</sup>.

Gilles Rudaz, University of Geneva - Switzerland, presented the “European Regional Mountain Initiatives – ERMI’ project, that represents a solid scientific background for a possible future Carpathian Strategy.

Dawid Lasek, Vice – President of the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland, presented, also through a video, the Carpathian Euroregion (that is covering 5 out of the 7 Carpathian Convention countries: Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine) and the Carpathian Horizon 2020 strategic document.

He underlined that more than 1000 Declarations of support for such a strategic document have been received and that the main aim of the document is the creation of a specific EU financial programme for the Carpathian Euroregion.

Following the presentation of Mr. Lasek it was agreed that it won’t be possible to have a specific EU financial programme for the Carpathians for the period 2014 – 2020 and it will

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<sup>1</sup> The presentations are available at: <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/eventdetail/wg-spatial-planning/events/workshop-towards-a-eu-strategy-for-the-carpathian-region-148.html>

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be important to concentrate the efforts of the Carpathian community in trying to influence the existing programmes.

Giacomo Luciani, EURAC Expert Team – ISCC, presented the Draft working document on proposed structure, Priority Areas and related actions/ projects for a possible Carpathian Strategy and the related documents that are the basis of the Draft: the Strategic Action Plan for the Carpathian Area and the EUSDR and EUSBSR. He further underlined that important elements for the development of a Carpathian Strategy are the evaluation of the existing EU macro regional strategies by the European Commission and the success of the related processes, such as the Alpine Strategy process. In this regard the recent Resolution of the European Parliament of 23 May 2013 on the Alpine Strategy represents a relevant document also for the Carpathian Strategy process.

Finally Mr. Zinovyi Broyde, “EcoResource” Centre in Ukraine, made a presentation on the links between Alps and Carpathians and on the specific common features of the Carpathian Region that are at the basis for a possible definition of the Carpathian Region as a Macro Region.

Mr. Egerer thanked all the speakers and opened the floor for the discussion part of the Workshop.

### **Discussion on the draft document on the Carpathian Strategy and on related processes/initiatives and next steps**

All the Workshop participants agreed on the need to coordinate and, where possible, to integrate the two processes related to the Carpathian Strategy and Carpathian Horizon 2020.

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Some additional Priority Areas to be considered in the possible future Carpathian Strategy were proposed by the Workshop participants (human resources, education, research, competitiveness, water management, climate change) and it was proposed to further underline the landscape as an important cross – cutting issue.

In addition to this it was underlined that, in developing the possible future Carpathian Strategy, important available documents, such as the Strategy for the Future Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians (under development within the same project), resources, such as the common climate database for the Carpathians, and platforms for cooperation, such as the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), have to be taken into account.

Furthermore it was considered important that all the Carpathian countries, regions and other stakeholders, will try to promote at EU level the priorities for the Carpathian Region for the next EU financial period 2014 – 2020 through available instruments, such as the Strategic Action Plan for the Carpathian Area.

It was stressed that the Carpathian Strategy process and the efforts aimed at influencing the current negotiations for the next EU financial period are both very important and need an urgent action from all the stakeholders acting in the Region.

Finally the Workshop participants agreed that a possible next step in the process towards a Carpathian Strategy would be a an Opinion of the Committee of the Regions promoting the need of such a Strategy integrating the existing EU macro regional strategies.

Mr. Egerer thanked all the participants for their participation and active contribution to the Workshop and the Committee of the Regions for hosting the event.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
AEM	European Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Regions
Carpathian Strategy	EU Strategy for the Carpathian Region
CoR	Committee of the Regions
DG ENVIRONMENT	Directorate-General for the Environment of the European Commission
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission
EGTC	European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation
ERMI	European Regional Mountain Initiatives
EU	European Union
EUSBSR	EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP Vienna – ISCC	UNEP Vienna Office – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention

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