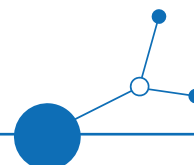


Policy recommendations

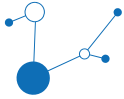
supporting transnational and cross-border
cooperation in mountain regions

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Version 2
03 2026





Policy recommendations supporting transnational and cross-border cooperation in mountain regions

Executive Summary

In line with its title, the main objective of this document, elaborated under the Central Mountains (CM) project, implemented with the financial support of the European Union (EU) Interreg Central Europe Programme, was to formulate **policy recommendations aimed to support transnational and cross-border cooperation in three mountain regions** of the Central Europe (CE), i.e. the Alpine, the Carpathian, and the Sudetes region.

These policy recommendations are addressed to **policy decision makers at all different levels** of policy formulation, including the European, international, national, regional and local levels.

In accordance with the above statement, policy recommendations are addressed to the **European Union (EU)**, its authorities responsible for shaping the EU Interreg Strand A (Cross-border) Cooperation Programmes, and to the **Governments** of respective countries (either EU Member States or EU Candidate Countries) being Parties to either the Alpine Convention (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia, Switzerland) or the Carpathian Convention (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine). Moreover, some specific policy recommendations are addressed to the Government of the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen) of Germany, sharing the trilateral Sudetes region with the Czech Republic and Poland.

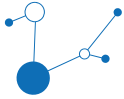
Further, other policy recommendations of this document are addressed to substantively relevant and/or territorially competent **public authorities** of countries sharing either the Alpine, Carpathian, or the Sudetes mountain region, operating at the national, regional or local level. Other policy recommendations can be useful for the improvement of **cross-border cooperation governance structures** at the local level, thus addressed to the authorities of particular Euroregions, European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), and other key local stakeholders in these three mountain regions, including the Interreg CE Central Mountains project partners.

These policy recommendations concern the possible further development, improvements and strengthening of the **legal framework**, the **strategic framework**, the **financial framework**, and of the **cross-border governance structures** present in all three Central European mountain regions concerned.

Policy recommendations of this document were formulated on the basis of a thorough **comparative analysis** of the **three main policy aspects: legal, strategic and financial**.

The above three policy aspects: legal, strategic and financial - each of them separately but more importantly - all of them taken together, are the decisive factors that determine the **legal, strategic and financial frameworks for transnational and cross-border cooperation** in the three mountain regions concerned.

Consequently, these legal, strategic and financial frameworks, taken together, determine the potential for the establishment and effective functioning of transnational and/or cross-border **cooperation governance structures**. Further, these factors largely impact the effectiveness and stability of these governance structures, as well as of initiatives and activities governed by these structures, deciding on their success, or sometimes a failure.



What can particularly be useful for the future of transnational and cross-border cooperation, regardless whether developing within any of the three particular mountain regions concerned or any other European region, this document outlines both the **achievements** in development of supportive legal, strategic and financial frameworks for cooperation, and describes **best practice examples** of effective cooperation governance structures, but also analyses the **reasons for failure of unsuccessful initiatives**, thus identifying gaps or field for further improvement, translated into the language of Policy Recommendations.

The comparative analysis performed, and resulting assessment indicated that, following the different legal, strategic and financial frameworks, largely determining potential for transnational and cross-border cooperation in an entire mountain region, but considerably differing between regions - also the governance structures facilitating cooperation are at **different stages of advancement or development in each of the three regions concerned, i.e. in the Alpine, the Carpathian, and the Sudetes region.**

Namely, **governance structures** facilitating transnational and cross-border cooperation in the **Alpine region** are diverse and quite well developed, including governance structures with long track record, significant achievements, extensive expertise and experience, gathered in the course of intensive and effective cooperation lasting over some 74 years (since the establishment of CIPRA in 1952). These governance structures are firmly embedded in binding legal framework of the Alpine Convention and its thematic Protocols with accompanying compliance mechanism. Last, but not least, these governance structures are supported by both strategic and financial policy frameworks of the EU, explicitly targeted at the entire Alpine region.

Contrary to the above, as at March 2026, governance structures aimed at transnational and cross-border cooperation in the **Carpathian region** are much less effective, still under development despite numerous common initiatives undertaken throughout the last 23 years since the adoption of the Carpathian Convention. These governance structures, although embedded in binding legal framework of the Carpathian Convention and its thematic Protocols (however, lacking a compliance mechanism), are supported neither by EU strategic nor EU financial policy frameworks that could cover the entire Carpathian region.

Simultaneously, similar governance structures in the **Sudetes region** are only few, limited in number and fragmented mainly among the three Euroregions, while other potential forms of cross-border governance are still under development, although jointly eligible for EU Interreg Central Europe Programme funding, but lacking any (either EU or transnational) legal and strategic policy frameworks concerning the entire Sudetes region.

Most importantly, the **disparities in the accessibility of EU funding sources** among the three European mountain regions concerned to a considerable extent **limit the possibilities of a 'simple replication'** of any Alpine transnational and cross-border cooperation models, governance patterns, and networking solutions in the other two mountain regions: Carpathians and Sudetes.

A clear structure and logical division of this document into subsequent thematic chapters and subchapters (see: **Table of contents** on the next page) will facilitate the navigation through the whole document, making it much easier to find particularly interesting text content.



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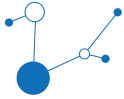


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List of acronyms and abbreviations

AC	Alpine Convention
ACANAP	Association of Carpathian National Parks and Protected Areas
ACEP	Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland
AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
ADRION	Adriatic-Ionian
ALPARC	Alpine Network of Protected Areas
ANZM	Agenția Națională a Zonei Montane (National Agency for Mountain Areas)
ARZ	Asociace regionálních značek (Association of Regional Brands)
AT	Austria
BG	Bulgaria
BR	Biosphere Reserve
CADSES	Central, Adriatic, Danubian and South Eastern European Space
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CBC	cross-border cooperation
CBFA	Cross-Border Functional Area
CC	Carpathian Convention
CEMAT	Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning
CESDEN	Carpathian Education for Sustainable Development Expert Network
CF	Carpathian Foundation
CH	Swiss Confederation (Switzerland)
CHKO	Chráněná krajinná oblast (Protected Landscape Area)
CIPRA	International Commission for the Protection of the Alps
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
CLRAE	Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe
CNM	FR: Conseil national de la montagne, RO: Consiliul Național al Muntelui (National Mountain Council)
CNPA	Carpathian Network of Protected Areas
CoE	Council of Europe
CoM	Council of Europe Committee of Ministers
COP	Conference of the Parties (decision-making body of a Convention)
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
CSO	civil society organization
CSTC	Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centre
CSTP	Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform
CWI	Carpathian Wetland Initiative
CZ	Czechia / Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
DMO	Destination Marketing/Management Organization
ECBC	Foundation for the Eastern Carpathian Biodiversity Conservation
EEA	European Economic Area
EGTC	European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro (€)
EURO MED	EURO Mediterranean
EUSAIR	EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
EUSALP	EU Strategy for the Alpine Region
EUSBSR	EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
EWG	European Working Group
FOK	Fundacja Ochrony Krajobrazu (Foundation for Landscape Protection)
FR	France
G20	Group of 20 (grouping 20 World's largest market economies in terms of GDP)
GA	General Assembly



GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HU	Hungary
HUSKROUA	Hungary - Slovakia - Romania - Ukraine
IIA	interinstitutional agreement
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
ISCAR	International scientific committee Alpine research
ISIG	Istituto di Sociologia Internazionale, Gorizia (Institute of International Sociology)
IT	Italy
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JS	Joint Secretariat
LAG	Local Action Group
LCCG	Local Cross-Border Cooperation Grouping
MAB	Man and Biosphere Programme (of UNESCO)
MAP	Multi-Annual Work Programme
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoC	Memorandum of Cooperation
MS	Member State
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NIK	Najwyższa Izba Kontroli (Supreme Audit Office)
NUTS	Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics
PL	Poland
PK	Park Krajobrazowy (Landscape Park)
RS	Republic of Serbia
RO	Romania
S4C	Science for the Carpathians
SCC	Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
SOIA	System for the Observation and Information on the Alps
TBR	Transboundary Biosphere Reserve
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UA	Ukraine
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USP	unique selling point / unique selling proposition
ZMOS	Združenie miest a obcí Slovenska (Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia)



Definitions of the relevant key terms

Cross-border cooperation (CBC): a process involving local stakeholders and public authorities from adjacent border areas or border regions of two (or more) neighbouring countries, located on both (or more) sides of national border(s), aiming to build neighbourly relationships, solve common problems and challenges, and foster regional development. CBC is a voluntary, collaborative effort aimed at promoting international dialogue, collaboration, and overcoming administrative restrictions and physical barriers arising from the existence of state borders in order to reinforce e.g. sustainable socioeconomic growth, cultural exchanges.

Cross-border Functional Area (CBFA): a spatially-specific territorial complex, not necessarily defined by the administrative borders within the neighbouring countries, encompassing adjacent border areas located on two (or more) sides of the state border(s), characterized by:

- functional relationships resulting from common and/or integrating spatial and socio-economic features,
- effective system of neighbourly cooperative relationships of various stakeholders,
- existence of the joint governance mechanisms, resulting from a common goal and solving common problems or capitalizing on local potential.

Cross-border governance structures: operational and regulatory framework enabling different public and private actors to cooperate between border areas. These are structures aimed at long-term cooperation aimed at solving joint challenges through sustainable projects and integrated, multi-level and multi-sectoral strategies within a given cross-border territory. Cross-border governance structures can take different, more or less organised forms: cooperation protocols, conventions, agreements, consortia, etc. depending on the objectives of the various initiatives, the public culture, the resources mobilized.

European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC): a new European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation, as well as enhance social, economic and territorial cohesion. The rules for setting up and operating an EGTC are laid down in Regulation (EC) No. 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation. Unlike the structures which governed this kind of cooperation before 2007, the EGTC is a legal entity and as such, enables regional and local authorities and other public bodies from at least two different EU MSs to set up cooperation groupings with a legal personality, organisational structure, own financial and material resources, and the power to institute legal proceedings. EGTC members can be EU MSs, regional and/or local authorities, associations, and other bodies governed by public law. The uniqueness of the EGTC concept is that it enables public authorities of various MSs to team up and deliver joint services, without requiring a prior international agreement to be signed and ratified by national parliaments. However, MSs must agree to the participation of potential members in their respective countries. The applicable law is that of the MS in which the official EGTC headquarter is located.

Euroregion: a formalized relationship structure aimed at supporting cross-border cooperation between regional or local government entities of a shared cross-border region, including two (or more) contiguous border territories located in different European countries, possibly with the participation of economic and social partners. The main purpose for establishing Euroregions is the promotion of common interests and enhancement of the living standards of border populations. Euroregions neither constitute supra-national structures, nor have direct political power, they remain under national jurisdiction, administration or control by respective countries involved, and may not be in conflict with internal legislation and the system of international agreements. The scope of their cooperation, usually focused on economic, social, cultural, tourism and nature conservation issues, is limited by the legal mandate and competencies of the regional and local authorities which constitute them. Euroregions have an organisational structure on the side of each participant (who have their own administrative, technical and financial resources).



Macro-region: the European Commission defines a macro-region as “*an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges*”.

Macro-regional strategy: an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council, which may be supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds among others, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

1. Introduction

The Interreg Central Europe project ‘**From the Alps to the Carpathians - strengthening governance models for sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe (Central Mountains)**’ was implemented between April 2023 and March 2026 (duration: 36 months) for the achievement of the Interreg Central Europe Programme priority P4 ‘A better cooperation governance’ and its specific objective SO4.1- Strengthening governance for integrated territorial development in Central Europe (Project ID: CE0100083, further referred to as the ‘CM project’).

The CM project provided an excellent opportunity for conducting this comparative analysis due to the fact, that it brought together partners from the three Central European mountain regions, the Alpine, Carpathian, and Sudetes regions. There were many joint Alpine-Carpathian projects in the past, but almost never with the involvement of partners from the Sudetes mountain region.

The CM partnership consortium was composed of eleven Project Partners, including five from the Carpathian region, four from the Alpine region, and two from the Sudetes mountain region, as follows:

CM Partners from the Carpathian region:

- Rzeszów County (Poland), CM Lead Partner
- Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland
- Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia
- Carpathian Foundation - Hungary
- Brasov County (Romania)

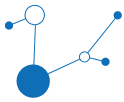
CM Partners from the Alpine region:

- Alpine Pearls Association to fund a sustainable tourism (Austria)
- CIPRA International Lab (Austria)
- Eurac Research (Italy)
- Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (Italy)

CM Partners from the Sudetes region:

- Association of Regional Brands (the Czech Republic)
- Foundation of Landscape Protection (Poland)

When submitting the Central Mountains application, future project partners coming from the above three European regions justified their joint initiative by emphasizing similar challenges and problems, common for all three regions, such as the challenge of achieving a long-lasting, effective and sustainable cross-border and transnational cooperation in mountain areas.



There are in fact more similarities between the three mountain regions concerned, e.g. there is not a single language that could facilitate communication, indispensable for both transnational and cross-border cooperation. Other challenges common for all three region include e.g. the ongoing land-use changes, fragmentation of natural habitats causing biodiversity loss, aging of the mountain communities paired by rural area depopulation due to the migration of youth to larger urban and development centres, or the climate changes, not only increasing the frequency of catastrophic natural hazards such as flash floods, landslides, droughts and forest fires, but also threatening the viability of winter skiing tourism model.

However, the three mountain regions concerned significantly differ, first and foremost due to their so much different image and perception in the global terms, as well as simplifications and stereotypes widespread in public opinion.

Looking from a global perspective, the Alps are a global synonym of a high mountain region, referred to in geographical names used:

- outside the Alpine region, e.g. the Albanian Alps, Arorchar Alps (Scotland), Dinaric Alps, Lyngen Alps (Norway), Pontic Alps (Türkiye), Transylvanian Alps (Romania)
- outside Europe, e.g. the Australian Alps, Bohemian Alps (Nebraska, USA), Issaquah Alps (Washington, USA), Japanese Alps, Schweizerland Alps (Greenland, Denmark), Southern Alps (New Zealand), Trinity Alps (California, USA), Yeongnam Alps (South Korea)
- and even on other planets: Montes Alpes (forming the edge of Mare Imbrium on the Moon)

Whereas the use of the geographic name 'Carpathians' is limited to the mountain range stretching across the Carpathian region, and Montes Carpatius (forming another edge of Mare Imbrium on the Moon, but more distant from Montes Alpes than the directly neighbouring Alps and Carpathians on the Earth), while the geographic name 'Sudetes' means solely the mountain ridge stretching along the Sudetes region.

As for the simplifications and stereotypes widespread in public opinion, if using nomenclature typical for commenting sport games, the CM project simultaneously united 'players' of:

- the World Championship winning team - the Alpine region, globally known, setting the global standards in e.g. mountaineering, climbing, skiing, tourist services quality level, a World-famous tourism destination with well-developed tourist and transport infrastructure, strong marketing brand, etc.
- the aspiring European League team - the Carpathian region, known mostly to the Europeans, although less accessible and less developed in infrastructural terms than the Alps, but already an emerging tourism destination, mostly due to its exceptional natural richness (harbouring some of the last virgin forests of Europe and refuges for Europe's largest wild populations of native large animals, some of which became extinct in the Alps long ago, like the European bison) as well as unique tangible and non-tangible cultural heritage manifestations
- and, the regional league team - the Sudetes mountain region, well accessible, well-developed and equally attractive, being a traditional tourism, skiing, recreation and wellness destination, but less known internationally and spatially much smaller than the other two mountain regions concerned.

But, looking at the Alps, Carpathians and Sudetes from the perspective of the CM project overall objective, **significant differences occur between these three mountain regions also in several policy aspects: legal, strategic and financial - which largely impacts the effectiveness of transnational and cross-border governance structures present (or absent) in these regions, and at least partly explains the so much different level of advancement, progress and achievements in transnational and cross-border cooperation within the three mountain regions concerned.**



2. Purpose of this comparative analysis study

The overall objective of the Central Mountains (CM) project was strengthening and improving governance models in mountain areas of Central Europe, with a particular focus on cross-border and transnational structures for cooperation for solving joint challenges in sustainable development of mountain regions.

The purpose of this comparative analysis study was definitely not to describe or summarise deliverables, outcomes and results of the CM project, which are either made publicly available on the [CM project website](#), or can be obtained on request from the CM project Partners.

Further, there was no real need to evaluate the CM project outcomes and results, or lessons learned during the CM project implementation. Such an attempt would immediately lead to the repetitions and duplication of work, as the Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (ISIG) has already perfectly summarised and evaluated the achievements and lessons learned from the implementation of the CM project, including its pilot implementation actions.

All deliverables of the CM project are related to different aspects of governance, while some of them are particularly related to either existing or developing **governance structures** in the three mountain regions concerned.

But, none of the CM project deliverables outlined and analysed the influence of the three different but strongly interrelated policy aspects: legal, strategic, and financial.

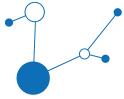
Each of them separately, but more importantly - all of them taken together, determine the existing policy framework for transnational and cross-border cooperation in the three mountain regions concerned. The policy framework of fundamental importance for the establishment of cooperation governance structures, their effectiveness and stability, ultimately impacting their common initiatives and activities governed, deciding on their success, or sometimes a failure.

Due to the above, the purpose of this study was to:

- build on the experience of CM partners gathered through the joint CM project implementation, but simultaneously try to position the CM project in a much broader political context
- analyse and compare policy context in each of the three mountain regions concerned, then point out differences that are either the main reasons for the success of joint initiatives, or create serious obstacles for the successful development of transnational and cross-border cooperation
- formulate policy recommendations for policy decision makers at all levels, including the European, international, national, regional and local levels, willing and able to support transnational and cross-border cooperation in three mountain regions of the Central Europe, i.e. the Alpine, the Carpathian, and the Sudetes region, as well as the potential networking between these three mountain regions.

The present comparative analysis and resulting assessment indicated that, in result of these legal, strategic and financial factors, largely determining potential for transnational and cross-border cooperation in an entire mountain region, the governance structures facilitating cooperation are at different stages of advancement or development in each of the three regions concerned.

Legal framework, strategic policy framework, financial policy framework, and existing transnational and cross-border governance structures - such are briefly be outlined and analysed in the following chapters of this comparative study.



Most of the information has been provided in a more or less concise form, as the aim of this study was definitely not to create a "Monograph of the mountain regions of Central Europe".

However, some longer text parts describe particularly inspiring or instructive 'case studies' (although not particularly highlighted as 'case studies' in the text), emphasizing the best practice examples of the most successful transnational initiatives (like e.g. the ALPARC) but also the examples of unsuccessful initiatives.

"It's good to learn from your mistakes. But, learning from other people's mistakes is more efficient, less painful, and much cheaper".

Last, but not least, just three 'practitioner's remarks' and hints for those who wish to develop effective and successful transnational, cross-border, or transboundary cooperation:

- The real 'key to success' and the most crucial asset for cooperation are not solely or necessarily the legal acts, strategic documents or money, but the **people** committed to cooperate across the boundaries, deeply involved in common activities.
- Before initiating any common transnational, cross-border, or transboundary cooperation activity one must remember that a failure in transnational, cross-border, or transboundary cooperation is much more highly visible, and at the same time the risk of failure is greater than usually.
- A failure of the first joint project can easily hamper future co-operation on other common priority issues. This is why such first 'kick-off' projects must not be too challenging or ambitious, and should mainly serve for familiarising people supposed to cooperate in the future.

3. Legal policy framework for transnational and cross-border cooperation in mountain regions

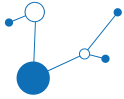
Member States (MSs) of the European Union (EU) are bound by the principle of pursuing a differentiated regional policy, tailored to the needs of the inhabitants of individual geographical regions and the potential for utilizing their resources. This principle also applies to mountain areas.

Article 174 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU) recognises the challenges faced by **cross-border and mountain regions** and stipulates that the Union should pay particular attention to these regions, when developing and pursuing actions leading to the strengthening of the Union's economic, social and territorial cohesion. *"Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross- border and mountain regions"*.

However, the above TFEU provision alone does not yet provide an adequate legal basis for the development of transnational and cross-border cooperation in the three mountain regions concerned.

The next sub-chapters of this study briefly present the relevant European legal acts, grouped as follows:

- European legal acts concerning transnational and cross-border cooperation
- National legal acts concerning mountain regions
- International legal acts concerning cooperation in European mountain regions



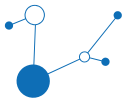
3.1. European legal acts concerning transnational and cross-border cooperation

The most important European legal act laying the foundations for cross-border cooperation is the 1980 [European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities \(ETS No. 106\)](#) (commonly referred to as the Madrid Outline Convention), a legal act of the Council of Europe (CoE). Pursuant to Article 1 *“Each Contracting Party undertakes to facilitate and foster transfrontier co-operation between territorial communities or authorities within its jurisdiction and territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of other Contracting Parties. It shall endeavour to promote the conclusion of any agreements and arrangements that may prove necessary for this purpose with due regard to the different constitutional provisions of each Party”*.

Another important legal act of the CoE is the [European Charter of Local Self-Government \(ETS No. 122\)](#) adopted in 1985 in Strasbourg, which Article 10 entitles local authorities to cooperate, form consortia with other local authorities, associate, belong to an international association of local authorities, and co-operate with their counterparts in other States. This last provision assigns the explicit legal mandate of local communities and their respective authorities to cooperate across borders with other local communities, for the protection or promotion of their common interests.

A legal act of fundamental importance for establishing effective cross-border governance structures is the [Regulation \(EC\) No. 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation \(EGTC\)](#). Pursuant to Article 1 of this Regulation *“The objective of an EGTC shall be to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and/or interregional cooperation, hereinafter referred to as ‘territorial cooperation’, between its members (...) with the exclusive aim of strengthening economic and social cohesion”*. Article 3 states that EGTC members can include Member States, regional authorities, local authorities, but also other bodies governed by public law, and associations consisting of bodies of all aforementioned categories. Importantly, Article 3 of the Regulation determines the transnational setup, by stating that *“An EGTC shall be made up of members located on the territory of at least two Member States”*. Further, Article 7 emphasizes that although *“the tasks of an EGTC shall be limited primarily to the implementation of territorial cooperation programmes or projects co-financed by the Community through the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and/or the Cohesion Fund”* but *“An EGTC may carry out other specific actions of territorial cooperation between its members (...) with or without a financial contribution from the Community”*.

Further, [Regulation \(EU\) 2025/925 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 May 2025 on a Border Regions’ instrument for development and growth \(BRIDGEforEU\)](#) should probably also be mentioned in the context of cross-border cooperation, although its main objective was to establish a voluntary governance mechanism to identify and resolve legal/administrative obstacles in EU border regions, *“a framework to facilitate identifying and resolving cross-border obstacles that hamper the establishment and functioning of any infrastructure necessary for public or private cross-border activities, or of any cross-border public service that is provided in a given cross-border region and that fosters economic, social and territorial cohesion in that cross-border region”*.



3.2. National legal acts concerning mountain regions

Almost all European countries harbouring mountain ranges have some legal instruments to foster their policies concerning mountain regions. For obvious reasons, in countries such as Switzerland or Liechtenstein where mountains prevail in their territories, all policies and legal acts can to some extent be considered as ‘mountain policies’ and ‘mountain laws’. However, the 1974 Federal Law on Investment Aid for Mountain Areas passed by the **Swiss Confederation** (revised in 1997, later replaced in 2008 by the New Regional Policy) was not perceived as an integrated policy, due to its main focus on counteracting disadvantages typical for mountain regions and improving local economic conditions.

Also in some other countries such mountain policies and mountain laws are neither comprehensive nor integrated, rather concerning particular economic sectors, most often agriculture, rural area development, tourism, or environment protection. For example, the purposes of the Law No 56/95-BP of 15 February 1995 “On the status of mountain settlements in **Ukraine**”¹ are to improve the living conditions of citizens living in mountain areas, support and promote the social and economic development of mountain settlements.

Within the three mountain regions concerned (Alpine, Carpathian, Sudetes) only three inspiring best practice examples of comprehensive integrated mountain policies can be mentioned, based on national legal acts, commonly called ‘mountain laws’, in force in **France, Italy, and Romania**, respectively.

3.2.1. National legal acts concerning the Alpine region

The official delimitation of mountain regions of **France**, encompassing some 20% of the country territory, was conducted already in 1961. The Law No. 85-30 of 9 January 1985 relating to the development and protection of the mountains² commonly called ‘the Mountain Law’ (Loi Montagne). The 1985 Mountain Law extended the concept of mountain massifs to contiguous areas linked with them, followed by the Decree No. 2004-69 of 16 January 2004 relating to the delimitation of mountain ranges³. The 1985 Mountain Law established a special body operating at the central level: National Mountain Council (Conseil national de la montagne, CNM) whose functions were determined by the Decree No. 85-994 of 20 September 1985 relating to the composition and operation of the National Mountain Council⁴. Further, this Law established collegial consultative bodies ‘Massif Committees’ (Commissariates des Massifs) for each individual mountain range in France (incl. [Commissariat Massif des Alpes](#)) operating within the institutional framework of the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires). Moreover, the 1985 Mountain Law ensured special state aid funds for the development, management, and protection of mountain regions. Massif Committees develop policies for individual massifs, manage state aid funds (EUR 822 million for 2021-2027), support local projects, and coordinate sustainable development initiatives. Over 30 years later, the 1985 Mountain Law was revised and updated, by adopting Law No. 2016-1888 on the modernisation, development and protection of mountain territories⁵ commonly called ‘the Mountain Law 2’ (Loi Montagne 2), amended in 2020 to include climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives.

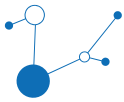
¹ Закон України від 15 лютого 1995 року N 56/95-ВР „Про статус гірських населених пунктів в Україні”
<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/56/95-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>

² Loi n° 85-30 du 9 janvier 1985 relative au développement et à la protection de la montagne
<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000317293>

³ Décret n° 2004-69 du 16 janvier 2004 relatif à la délimitation des massifs
<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000415643>

⁴ Décret n° 85-994 du 20 septembre 1985 relatif à la composition et au fonctionnement du conseil national de la montagne
<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGITEXT000006065167/1985-09-24>

⁵ LOI n° 2016-1888 du 28 décembre 2016 de modernisation, de développement et de protection des territoires de montagne
<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT0000033717812>



In Italy already the 1984 Constitution perceived mountains as areas with specific needs. Later, the Law No. 1102 New rules for mountain development⁶ of 3 December 1971 aimed at supporting the development of mountainous areas through the implementation of development programs and land-use planning. But, the fundamental progress in developing the mountain policy of Italy was the adoption of the Law No. 97 New Provisions for Mountain Areas⁷ of 31 January 1994, commonly called ‘the Mountain Law’. The 1994 Mountain Law strengthened the role of ‘Mountain Communities’ (Comunità Montane) as key local governance bodies responsible for promoting economic development. Article 2 of this Law established the National Mountain Fund ([Fondo Nazionale per la Montagna](#)), since 2021 the Fund for the development of Italian mountains ([Fondo per lo sviluppo delle montagne italiane](#)). The 1994 Mountain Law has recently been replaced by Law No. 131 Provisions for the recognition and promotion of mountain areas⁸ of 12 September 2025, supporting Italian mountain areas to overcome the structural disadvantages through economic, fiscal, and social incentives, that include the allocation of EUR 200 million annually for the three-year period 2025-2027 for measures aimed at strengthening the social, economic, and environmental development of the Italian mountain regions.

3.2.2. National legal acts concerning the Carpathian region

In Romania the Law No 347⁹ of 14 July 2004 known as the 2004 Mountain Law, later replaced by Law No. 197¹⁰ of 20 July 2018, commonly called 2018 Mountain Law, is the primary legislative act governing the sustainable development, protection, and modernisation of mountain regions. The Mountain Law aims at maintaining an ecological balance in development of mountain areas. It established an extensive institutional framework necessary for the implementation of the Romanian mountain policy, including a specialized agency operating within the framework of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development - the National Agency for Mountain Areas ([Agenția Națională a Zonei Montane](#), ANZM) with numerous [ANZM regional branches](#), grouped under nine regional Massif Committees (Comitete de masiv), established for each sub-region or mountain group of the Romanian Carpathians (Grupa Nordică, Grupa Centrală, Grupa Sudică, Grupa Bucegi, Grupa Făgăraș, Grupa Parâng, Grupa Retezat, Munții Banatului și Poiana Ruscă, Munții Apuseni). The Mountain Law established also a consultative body to advise on policies and strategies - the National Mountain Council (Consiliului Național al Muntelui, CNM), which composition was approved by the Decision of the Prime Minister No 29¹¹ of 7 February 2023, and gathered for the first time in April 2023.

Poland, harbouring parts of Sudetes and Carpathians but also the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, remains a bad practice example in the context of ‘mountain-specific laws’. The 1985 Council of Ministers Resolution on economic and social activation and agricultural development in mountainous and hilly areas¹² was repealed in 1991. The Resolution on sustainable development of mountainous and hilly areas¹³ adopted in February 1997 by the Parliament was repealed several months later, in October 1997. Further, the Law on the socio-economic development of mountainous regions¹⁴, adopted in 2001, was vetoed by the President.

⁶ LEGGE 3 dicembre 1971, n. 1102 Nuove norme per lo sviluppo della montagna
<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1971/12/23/071U1102/sg>

⁷ LEGGE 31 gennaio 1994, n. 97 Nuove disposizioni per le zone montane
<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1994/02/09/094G0108/sg>

⁸ LEGGE 12 settembre 2025, n. 131 Disposizioni per il riconoscimento e la promozione delle zone montane
<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2025/09/19/25G00139/sg>

⁹ LEGE nr. 347 din 14 iulie 2004 muntelui
<https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/53815>

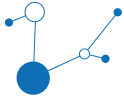
¹⁰ LEGE nr. 197 din 20 iulie 2018 muntelui
<https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/203223>

¹¹ DECIZIE nr. 29 din 7 februarie 2023 pentru aprobarea componenței Consiliului Național al Muntelui
<https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/264718>

¹² Uchwała nr 4 Rady Ministrów z dnia 21 stycznia 1985 r. w sprawie aktywizacji gospodarczej i społecznej oraz rozwoju rolnictwa na terenach górskich i górzystych (M.P. 1985 Nr 2, poz. 11) <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WMP19850020011>

¹³ Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 6 lutego 1997 r. w sprawie zrównoważonego rozwoju terenów górskich i górzystych (M.P. 1997 Nr 11, poz. 75) <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WMP19970110075>

¹⁴ Ustawa z dnia 6 września 2001 r. o rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczym regionów górskich
https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc3.nsf/ustawy/2323_u.htm



3.3. International legal acts concerning cooperation in European mountain regions

3.3.1. International legal acts concerning the Alpine region

The first ever worldwide multilateral international agreement concerning a single mountain region was the Framework [Convention on the Protection of the Alps](#) (Salzburg, 7 November 1991) commonly abbreviated as the Alpine Convention (AC).

The initiative to adopt the AC has been advocated for almost forty years by the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA), established in 1952 by the governments of four Alpine countries: Austria, France, Italy, and Switzerland. The necessity of international cooperation in the Alps was highlighted in the Final Declaration of the Conference of Alpine Regions (Lugano, Italy, 20 September 1978). The First Alpine Conference of Environment Ministers (Berchtesgaden, Germany, October 1989) adopted the Resolution on the Protection of the Alps, and agreed on the next steps towards an international treaty between the eight Alpine countries and the European Economic Community.

On 7 November 1991, during the Second Alpine Conference held in Salzburg (Austria), the AC was signed by Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and the European Economic Community. Slovenia signed the AC on 29 March 1993, while Monaco became the ninth Contracting Party in 1994, after signing a separate additional Protocol. Following ratifications in 1994 by Austria, Liechtenstein, and Germany, the AC entered into force for these three countries on 6 March 1995.

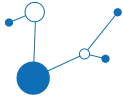
Slovenia became the Party to the AC in August 1995. Later the AC entered into force for France (1996), the European Economic Community (1998), Monaco and Switzerland (1999), and Italy (2004). The Depositary of the AC is Austria. In 2003 the **Permanent Secretariat** of the AC was established in Innsbruck (Austria), with a subsidiary scientific and operational branch office hosted by Eurac Research in Bolzano/Bozen (Italy).

Article 2 of the AC defines its thematic scope, including twelve thematic areas: population and culture, spatial planning, prevention of air pollution, soil conservation, water management, nature protection and landscape conservation, mountain farming, mountain forests, tourism and recreation, transport, energy, and waste management. Pursuant to Article 3, Parties committed to cooperate in carrying out research activities and scientific assessments, develop joint or complementary systematic monitoring programmes, and harmonize research, monitoring and related data acquisition activities.

As the AC is a framework agreement, its implementation required the adoption of thematic protocols regulating the Parties' cooperation in specific areas.

As at March 2026, already eight thematic Protocols have been adopted to the Framework AC:

- [Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development Protocol](#) (Chambéry, 20 December 1994) in force for seven AC Parties (except for Switzerland and the EU)
- [Mountain Farming Protocol](#) (Chambéry, 20 December 1994) in force for seven AC Parties (except for Monaco and Switzerland)
- [Protocol Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation](#) (Chambéry, 20 December 1994) in force for seven AC Parties (except for Switzerland and the EU)
- [Mountain Forests Protocol](#) (Brdo, 27 February 1996) in force for six AC Parties (except for Monaco, Switzerland, and the EU)
- [Tourism Protocol](#) (Bled, 16 October 1998) in force for eight AC Parties (except for Switzerland)



- [Energy Protocol](#) (Bled, 16 October 1998) in force for seven AC Parties (except for Monaco and Switzerland)
- [Protocol on Soil Conservation](#) (Bled, 16 October 1998) in force for eight AC Parties (except for Switzerland)
- [Transport Protocol](#) (Lucerne, 31 October 2000) in force for seven AC Parties (except for Monaco and Switzerland)

All above eight thematic Protocols to the AC entered into force in 2002.

It should be explained that Switzerland, as at March 2026, is still not a Party to any of the AC thematic protocols it has signed, due to the requirement for conducting a national referendum to ratify an international agreement, such as a thematic Protocol.

Besides the aforementioned eight thematic Protocols, two procedural Protocols accompany the AC: the Protocol on Solution of litigations (Lucerne, 31 October 2000) in force for seven AC Parties (except for Switzerland and the EU) and the Protocol on the Adherence of the Principality of Monaco to the Alpine Convention (Chambéry, 20 December 1994) in force for all nine AC Parties.

The Framework AC and its thematic Protocols, international agreements concerning the Alpine region, being acts of the international law ratified by and in force for respective Alpine countries, not only compensate the absence of national ‘mountain laws’ in the majority of Alpine countries (except for France and Italy), but additionally serve as a **legal basis for transnational and cross-border cooperation in the entire Alpine mountain region.**

However, cooperation on some of the AC thematic areas has not yet, as at March 2026, adequately been regulated by adopting and ratifying legally binding thematic Protocols. Potentially, such new thematic Protocols to the AC could concern e.g. population and culture and/or water management.

In addition to ten protocols, the Alpine Conference has adopted several Ministerial declarations on specific topics, as follows: [Declaration on Population and Culture](#) (2006), [Declaration on Climate Change](#) (2006), [Declaration on Fostering a Sustainable Economy in the Alps](#) (2016), [Declaration of Innsbruck: Climate-neutral and Climate-resilient Alps 2050](#) (2019), [Declaration on integrated and sustainable water management in the Alps](#) (2020) and the [Declaration on the Protection of Mountain Biodiversity and its Promotion at International Level](#) (2020).

Such declarations are particularly important for thematic areas not yet regulated by any thematic Protocol.

The fact that the European Economic Community co-signed the AC in 1991 probably facilitated the later establishment of the EU Interreg B Alpine Space Programme in 2000, as well as the adoption of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) in 2015. The Interreg Alpine Space Programme financially supports the implementation of the AC in some 5,800 municipalities of the eight Alpine countries, as well as their transnational and cross-border cooperation initiatives.



3.3.2. International legal acts concerning the Carpathian region

The [Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians](#) (Kyiv, 22 May 2003) commonly abbreviated as the ‘Carpathian Convention’ (CC) is the second sub-regional treaty-based regime for the protection and sustainable development of a mountain region worldwide, following the AC.

The first initiative towards concluding an international treaty concerning the Carpathian mountain region dates back to **6 May 1924**, when the bilateral ‘**Kraków Protocol**’¹⁵ signed by Government representatives of Czechoslovakia and Poland recommended “concluding, as soon as possible” two Conventions concerning the development of tourism, and protection of cultural heritage, nature and landscape in border areas of the above countries.

In 1999 the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative was established with the WWF support. The final document of the Carpathian-Danube Summit held in April 2001 in Bucharest (Romania), [Declaration on Environment and Sustainable Development in the Carpathian and Danube Region](#), paved the way for official CC negotiations, largely supported by Austria, Italy, Lichtenstein and Switzerland as Parties to the AC, and facilitated by international organizations, academic institutions and NGOs from the Alpine region. Negotiations on the CC took only six months, commenced on 14 October 2002 in Vaduz (Liechtenstein) and were successfully finalised on 22 March 2003 in Bolzano/Bozen (Italy).

On 22 May 2003, during the [Fifth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”](#) held in Kyiv (Ukraine), the CC was signed by five countries of the Carpathian mountain region: Czech Republic, Romania, Serbia (and Montenegro), Slovak Republic, and Ukraine. Poland signed the CC in November 2003, Hungary in May 2004. Following ratifications by Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovak Republic and Ukraine in 2005, the CC entered into force for these four countries on 4 January 2006.

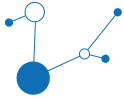
Poland became the CC Party in June 2006, Romania in March 2007, and Serbia in March 2008. The EU, being Party to the AC, has not yet considered acceding to the CC, despite reiterated invitations. The Depositary of the CC is Ukraine. In 2004, the **Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention** (SCC) was opened in Vienna (Austria), hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Vienna Programme Office.

The CC thematic scope includes the following areas: integrated approach to the land resources management (Article 3), conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity (Article 4), spatial planning (Article 5), sustainable and integrated water/river basin management (Article 6), sustainable agriculture and forestry (Article 7), sustainable transport and infrastructure (Article 8), sustainable tourism (Article 9), industry and energy (Article 10), cultural heritage and traditional knowledge (Article 11), environmental assessment/information system, monitoring and early warning (Article 12), climate change (Article 12 bis), awareness raising, education and public participation (Article 13).

Similarly to the AC, the CC is a framework convention, and does not contain detailed and specific substantive obligations, but expresses the political will of the Parties to cooperate, establishes the framework for their cooperation, determines common objectives, principles, and the thematic scope for cooperation.

Similarly to the AC, not all thematic areas of the CC have so far been regulated under a related thematic Protocol.

¹⁵ Oświadczenie rządowe z dnia 19 grudnia 1925 r. w sprawie uchwały Konferencji Ambasadorów z dnia 5 września 1924 r., dotyczącej Protokołu, podpisanego w Krakowie dnia 6 maja 1924 r. w związku z ustaleniem granicy polsko-czeskosłowackiej w okręgu Jaworzyny. Dz.U. 1925 nr 133 poz. 952 <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19251330952>



As at March 2026, five thematic Protocols have already been adopted to the Framework CC:

- [Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity](#) (Bucharest, 19 June 2008) commonly abbreviated as the ‘Biodiversity Protocol’, in force for all CC Parties
- [Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management](#) (Bratislava, 27 May 2011) commonly abbreviated as the ‘Forestry Protocol’, in force for six CC Parties (except for Poland)
- [Protocol on Sustainable Tourism](#) (Bratislava, 27 May 2011) in force for all CC Parties
- [Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development](#) (Mikulov, 26 September 2014) in force for six CC Parties (except for Serbia)
- [Protocol on Sustainable Transport](#) (Mikulov, 26 September 2014) in force for six CC Parties (except for Hungary).

The Framework CC and its thematic Protocols, international agreements concerning the Carpathian mountain region, being acts of the international law ratified by and in force for respective Carpathian countries, not only compensate the absence of national ‘mountain laws’ in the majority of these countries (except for Romania), but additionally serve as a **legal basis for transnational and cross-border cooperation in the entire Carpathian mountain region.**

However, cooperation on some of the CC thematic areas has not yet, as at March 2026, adequately been regulated by adopting and ratifying legally binding thematic Protocols. Potentially, such new thematic Protocols to the CC could concern e.g. spatial planning (CC Article 5), cultural heritage and traditional knowledge (CC Article 11), awareness raising, education and public participation (CC Article 13).

During the subsequent Meetings of the CC Conference of the Parties (COP), several ministerial declarations have been adopted under the CC, including:

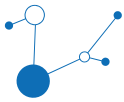
- [Ministerial Declaration of the Carpathian Convention on the impact of war on the environment in Ukraine and the need for cooperation and assistance](#) (Rzeszów, 22 November 2022)
- [Ministerial Declaration on Carpathian Commitments for the implementation of the new post 2020 global biodiversity framework](#) (Rzeszów, 22 November 2022)
- [Ministerial Declaration Empowering the Carpathian Vision 2050](#) (Belgrade, 12 October 2023), related to the adoption of the strategic Carpathian Biodiversity Framework.

3.3.3. Summary and Comparison - Alpine Convention and Carpathian Convention

Since the entry into force of the 1991 Framework Convention on the Protection of the Alps (AC) in 1995 and of the 2003 Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (CC) in 2006, transnational and cross-border cooperation in at least two out of three mountain regions concerned, i.e. Alpine and Carpathian regions, has a sound legal basis established by numerous acts of international law - the two aforementioned framework Conventions and their thematic Protocols, duly ratified by AC or CC Parties, respectively. Although, as at March 2026, not yet all thematic areas (neither of the AC nor of the CC) have been regulated by legally binding thematic Protocols to these two Framework Conventions.

However, two main substantial **differences between the AC and CC** should be emphasized.

Firstly, concerning the **geographical range of application** of these two Conventions: The perimeter of the AC implementation area has precisely been delimited. CC Article 1 states that the term “Carpathian region” is to be defined by the Conference of the Parties - which, as at March 2026, has not yet officially been executed.



Secondly, the AC has formally established a mechanism, **monitoring the compliance** of the Parties with their commitments under the Convention and its Protocols, including a special body (the Compliance Committee) and formal procedures for ordinary reviews (of national reports, submitted every ten years) but also in-depth reviews, and extraordinary reviews. A similar compliance mechanism is missing for the CC.

3.3.4. Legal acts concerning the Sudetes region

As for the Sudetes mountain region, there is neither an act of the international law similar to the AC or CC, nor a trilateral inter-state or agreement in force, nor any other act legally binding for public authorities from the three bordering regions (either NUTS level 2 or NUTS level 3), e.g. a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) or a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) establishing a joint cross-border governance structure, detailing specific responsibilities, roles, and potentially also financial terms, that could be perceived as the legal basis for trilateral cross-border cooperation in this particular region, shared by the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen) of Germany.

The signed formal ‘founding act’ of 21 December 1991 establishing the trilateral Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion that encompasses the westernmost part of the Sudetes in the territories of the Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland, cannot be perceived as a legal basis for cross-border cooperation in the whole Sudetes mountain region, as the Sudetes mountain range stretches further to the south-east along the Czech-Polish state border, across two other Euroregions (bilateral Euroregion Glacensis, and Euroregion Praděd - Pradziad).

The same relates to the bilateral Agreement on the mutual cooperation signed in 1996 between the administrations of the two national parks (Krkonoský národní park in Czech Republic and Karkonoski Park Narodowy in Poland) constituting the UNESCO-MAB Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Krkonoše/Karkonosze, but also by representatives of the state and local administrations, NGO’s and business spheres from the Czech and Polish sides, aimed at the achievement of harmonic development and full respect of natural, cultural and historical values of this mountain range, being the highest part of the Sudetes mountain region.

But, it was again only a bilateral agreement, not including the third national part of this region.

4. Strategic policy framework for transnational and cross-border cooperation in mountain regions

Contrary to the legal policy framework, based on legally binding legal acts, strategic policy framework includes only the ‘soft’, non-binding documents, such as strategies, programmes, or action plans.

The next sub-chapters of this study briefly outline the most relevant strategic documents, grouped as follows:

- European strategic policy framework for transnational and cross-border cooperation
- Strategic policy framework for cooperation in mountain regions.



4.1. European strategic policy framework for transnational and cross-border cooperation

4.1.1. Council of Europe Recommendation (2005)

On 19 January 2005 the CoE Committee of Ministers (CoM) adopted [Recommendation Rec\(2005\)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and inter-territorial cooperation between territorial communities or authorities](#), where the CoM, *inter alia*, emphasized the need to **establish an appropriate legal framework for transfrontier and/or interterritorial cooperation** activities of territorial communities or authorities, complying with the principles of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (ETS No. 106, mentioned in the previous chapter of this study) and its Protocols.

The CoM recommended, to recognise, in so far as it is permitted by the national constitution, **decisions taken under a transfrontier cooperation arrangement** as having the same legal value and the same effects as the acts of territorial communities or authorities under domestic legislation. The CoM recommended to organise regular and/or institutionalised **consultations with the competent authorities of neighbouring states** on matters of common interest, to jointly determine solutions, identify legal and practical obstacles to transfrontier and interterritorial cooperation and take appropriate remedial action.

Further, the CoM recommended to encourage, and if necessary, offer support for, the establishment of **transfrontier and interterritorial cooperation structures** at the level of territorial communities or authorities for exchanging information, planning and implementing joint measures and ensuring that issues raised by one side are not left unanswered by the other. Last, but not least, the CoM also recommended to **provide central financial support to transfrontier and interterritorial cooperation programmes and projects**.

4.1.2. European Commission Communication (2017)

On 20 September 2017 the European Commission adopted [Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament “Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions” SWD\(2017\) 307 final](#). The Commission noted that the EU internal border regions cover 40% of the EU territory, account for 30% of the population (150 million people) and produce 30% of the EU's GDP.

In conclusions of this Communication, The Commission emphasized that *“EU internal border regions contribute significantly to the socio-economic wealth of Europe”* and that *“The objective is to demonstrate that border regions can increase their contribution to the socio-economic well-being of EU citizens while also becoming living labs of European integration for the benefit of European territories and their inhabitants”*.

Although the aforementioned Communication mostly focused on the need for resolving and reducing cross-border obstacles, it also highlighted the good practice example of the **European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)** that *“enables entities from two or more Member States to work together under a common structure with legal personality. This facilitates cross-border cooperation in many cases and gives regional and local authorities a way to cooperate without the need for an agreement ratified at Member State level”*.



4.1.3. AEBR Charter for European Border and Cross-Border Regions

In the above context, the [Charter for European Border and Cross-Border Regions](#), originally adopted by the General Assembly of the [Association of European Border Regions](#) (AEBR) already in 1981 (later amended in 1995, 2004, and 2014) should be mentioned, also a non-binding document, rather a 'code of conduct', setting objectives to be taken into account in the development of cross-border cooperation.

4.1.4. Territorial Agenda 2030

As transnational and cross-border cooperation largely enhances the territorial cohesion, the [Territorial Agenda 2030 "A future for all places"](#) adopted on 1 December 2020 at an informal meeting held in Germany by the Ministers responsible for spatial planning, territorial development and/or territorial cohesion can also be mentioned here. This document pointed out numerous territorial challenges and European initiatives addressed to mitigate such, defined overarching objectives (a Just Europe, and a Green Europe), and listed various territorial priorities for Europe. It mentioned terms such as e.g. **mountainous areas, cross-border regions, macro-regional strategies, cross-border planning and legal cross-border agreements.**

But, in general, the Territorial Agenda 2030 did not determine enough tangible commitments, more tangible than e.g. *"We will take action to embed stable cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation in macro-regional, national, regional and local development strategies"*, despite the fact, that cross-border and transnational cooperation are, by definition, firmly embedded in EU macro-regional strategies.

4.1.5. EU macro-regional strategies

Responding to the objective of achieving territorial cohesion of the EU, macro-regional strategies provide an integrated framework for cooperation, across internal and external EU borders, in a specific area known as a 'macro-region', meaning a space usually defined on the basis of a significant common geographical or physical feature (a maritime area, a river basin, or a distinctive mountain range).

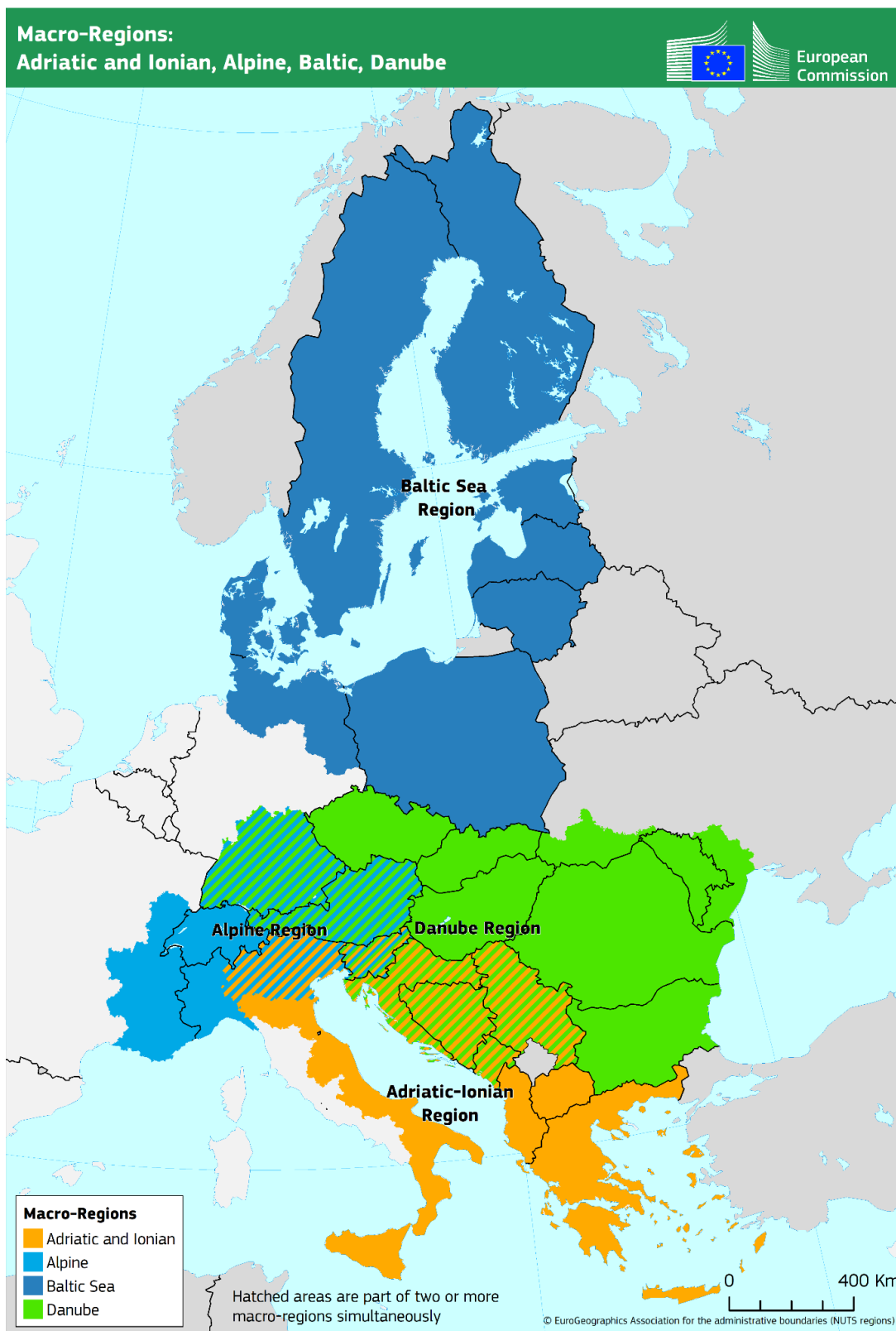
As formulated by the European Commission *"at a larger territorial scale, macro-regional strategies are a framework which allow to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area, and which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to economic, social and territorial cohesion"*.

Four EU macro-regional strategies, covering several policies, have been adopted so far:

- [The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region - EUSBSR](#) (2009)
- [The EU Strategy for the Danube Region - EUSDR](#) (2010)
- [The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region - EUSAIR](#) (2014)
- [The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region - EUSALP](#) (2015)

These four macro-regional strategies concern 19 EU member-states and 8 non-EU countries.

It should probably be noted here, that **some countries benefit from the spatial overlaps of two or three EU macro-regional strategies**, which is illustrated below on Map 1.



Map 1. The geographic scope of European Macro-Regions and corresponding EU Macro-Regional Strategies
Map source: European Commission¹⁶

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies_en



4.2. Strategic policy framework for cooperation in mountain regions

4.2.1. European Parliament Resolution (2010)

Among strategic documents concerning European mountain regions, probably the most relevant here is the [European Parliament resolution of 22 September 2010 on the European strategy for the economic and social development of mountain regions, islands, and sparsely populated areas \(2012/C 50 E/07\)](#).

In the above Resolution, the European Parliament expressed its belief that these areas deserved separate regional development programmes, and that, pursuant to Article 174 of the TFEU, particular attention should be paid to regions (including **cross-border and mountain regions**) suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps. This should be reflected in development strategies and measures aimed at overcoming these difficulties, structurally adapting these regions, exploiting their potential and increasing their competitiveness.

The European Parliament called for the introduction of an **integrated and flexible European policy framework** for such areas. The Parliament also called on Member States and regional and local authorities to play a major role in the development strategies of mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas, because a vertical approach involving all levels of government, in accordance with the **principle of subsidiarity**. Last, but not least, the Parliament called on **the Commission and the Member States to ensure that mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas will continue to benefit from specific provisions under the new multiannual financial framework** and during the next programming period. But, such specific, **integrated European policy framework** supporting the economic and social development of areas specified in the aforementioned 2010 Resolution of the European Parliament (including cross-border and mountain regions) has not yet, as at March 2026, even been developed, much less introduced.

4.2.2. Council of Europe - draft European Charter of Mountain Regions

In the above context, the [European Charter of Mountain Regions](#) should be mentioned, initially drafted already in 1995 by the CoE Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), appended to its Recommendation 14 (1995), which called on the CoE CoM to adopt it in the form of a legally binding Council of Europe convention¹⁷. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) in its [Opinion on the European Charter on mountain areas \(96/C 100/05\)](#) issued on 21 April 1995, called for the EU to define a mountain policy based on the recommendations of the draft Charter and trusted that the appropriate bodies in the EU will take steps to accede to this Charter, as soon as adopted definitively by the CoE. Further, the CoR asked the European Commission under what conditions the guidelines set out in the Charter could be transposed into Community law. But, the first version of the draft Charter was deemed too binding on governments, and was not approved by the CoM.

In 2003 the initiative towards the European Charter of Mountain Regions was reiterated in [Recommendation 130 \(2003\) on the European Charter for Mountains](#) adopted by the CLRAE on 22 May 2003 (which is exactly the date of adoption of the Carpathian Convention), with the appended draft of the 'European Charter for Mountains'. However, the [Reply adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 September 2005 at the 939th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies](#) was negative, as no consensus has been reached within the CoM on the advisability of furthering this work.

¹⁷ Report CG (10) 9 - Part II - the European Charter for Mountains (29/04/03)
<https://rm.coe.int/the-european-charter-for-mountains/168071a51c>



4.2.3. Council of Europe - draft European outline convention on mountain regions

In May 2000 the CLRAE adopted [Recommendation 75 \(2000\) on the draft European outline convention on mountain regions](#) and forwarded it for consideration by the 12th CoE Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT).

However, in September 2000 the CEMAT did not follow up the proposal made by the CLRAE and the Parliamentary Assembly concerning a draft European outline convention on mountain regions.

Instead, the CEMAT adopted the ‘Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent’, indicating that “*Various spatial development policy measures for urban and rural areas are also valid for mountain regions. An integrated policy for mountain regions should, however, be an autonomous part of a Europe-wide spatial development policy which should include measures of economic and social development, the protection and management of natural resources and the respecting of local traditions and cultures*”.

4.2.4. EU Macro-regional Strategy for the Alpine region (EUSALP)

In July 2015, at the request of the participating countries and regions and in consultation with them, the European Commission prepared the [EU Macro-regional Strategy for the Alpine region \(EUSALP\)](#), which the European Council endorsed on 28 June 2016.

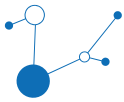
EUSALP involves five EU MSs (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and Slovenia) and two non-EU states (Liechtenstein, and Switzerland), and covers 48 regions in these seven countries.

EUSALP covers three thematic policy areas (or pillars): economic growth and innovation (Pillar 1), mobility and connectivity (Pillar 2), environment and energy (Pillar 3) as well as a crosscutting policy area addressing **governance and institutional capacity**.

EUSALP is implemented on the basis of long-term Action Plans, the first EUSALP Action Plan was adopted on 28 July 2015. In 2023 the preparatory works for its revision commenced. The [EUSALP Revised Action Plan 2026](#) was formally approved at the 10th Annual Forum and General Assembly of the EUSALP, held in Innsbruck (Austria) on 25-26 November 2025.

On 11 December 2025 the European Commission adopted the related [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the revised action plan of the EU Macro-regional Strategy for the Alpine Region COM\(2025\) 750 final](#), and the [Commission Staff Working Document SWD\(2025\) 403 final](#) accompanying the above Communication.

The EUSALP Revised Action Plan 2026 formalized the EUSALP Secretariat and the Youth Council, ensuring closer coordination with the Alpine Convention and Interreg Alpine Space Programme; and marks the beginning of the second decade (2026-2035) of the EUSALP.



4.2.5. Multi-Annual Work Programmes of the Alpine Convention

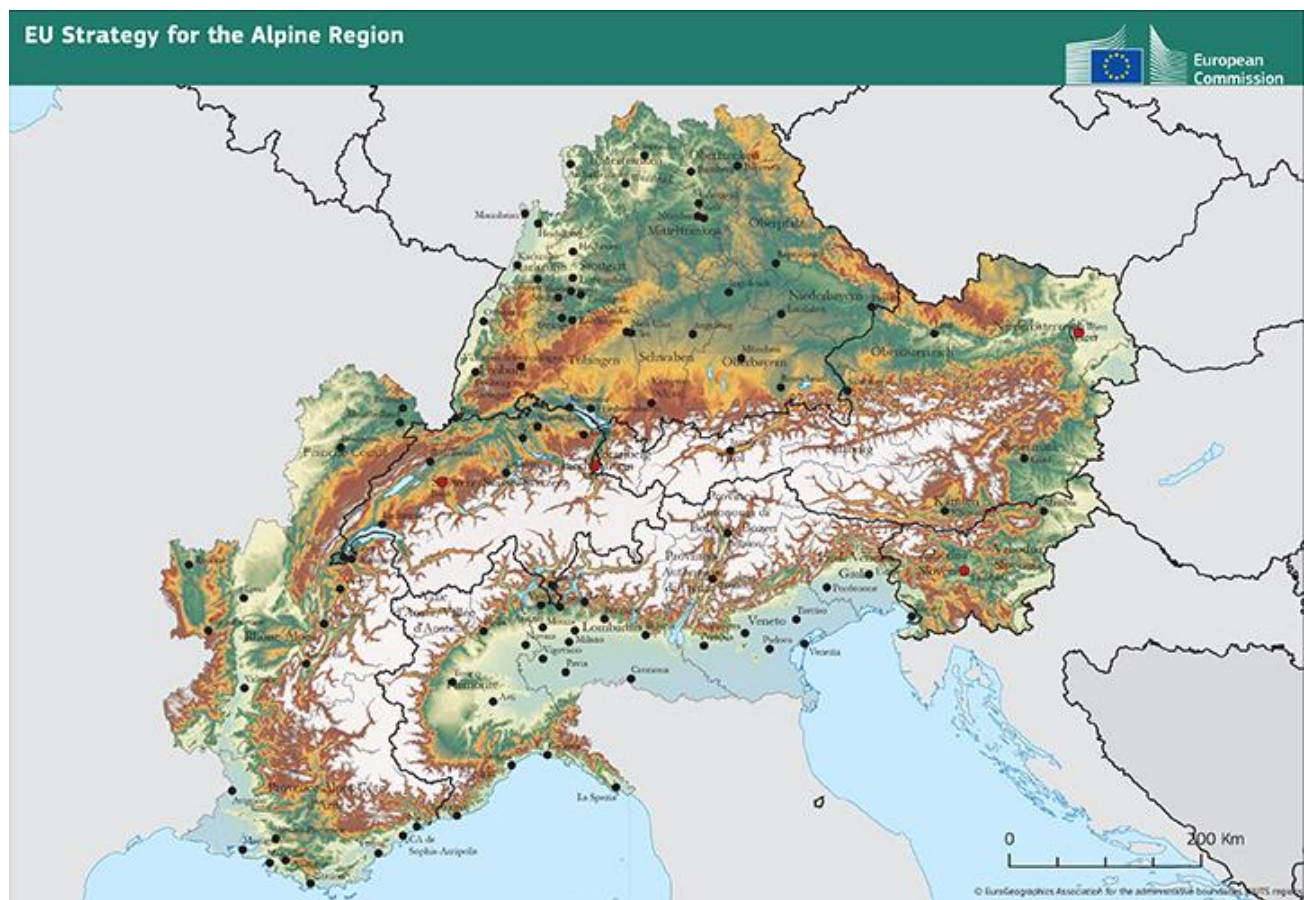
In addition to EUSALP Action Plans, the Parties to the AC adopt Multi-Annual Work Programmes (MAPs) of the Alpine Conference for subsequent AC implementation periods, defining the context for cooperation on common measures over an extended period of six years.

Since 2005, four MAPs have been adopted under the AC, for the periods 2005-2010, 2011-2016, 2017-2022, and 2023-2030, sometimes accompanied by Road Maps for a shorter sub-period than of the MAP, like the [Roadmap 2017-2018](#).

The current, fourth AC [Multi-Annual Work Programme 2023-2030](#) determined three priority areas:

- Priority area 1: Conserving and valuing Alpine biodiversity and ecosystems
- Priority area 2: Taking ambitious climate action
- Priority area 3: Enabling a good quality of life for the people in the Alps

Cooperation for the AC implementation is carried out in different formats by the Contracting Parties and the various AC bodies, including the biennial Alpine Conference, the Permanent Committee, the Compliance Committee, numerous Thematic Working Bodies, and the Permanent Secretariat, supported also by several Observer organisations.



Map 2. The geographic scope of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)
Map source: European Commission¹⁸

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/alpine_en



4.2.6. Carpathian macro-regional strategy ?

Already in May 2011 the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP3) to the Carpathian Convention, adopted the [Strategic Action Plan for the Carpathian Area \(UNEP/CC/COP3/DOC9\)](#) as a strategic briefing drawing attention to the Carpathian Convention process in the context of the discussions regarding the future European Union Territorial Cooperation Funding Programme. The [COP3 Ministerial Declaration](#) encouraged active participation in the ongoing discussion on the growing role of macroregions in the EU and in this context the importance of the Carpathian region as a vital link connecting the Baltic and Danube macroregional strategies.

Further, the CC Ministers welcomed and supported further efforts towards the development and inclusion of a Carpathian Space Program into relevant EU Funding Programmes, *inter alia*, the European Territorial Cooperation Programs of the EU for the financial programming period 2014-2020, as well as reiterated the invitation to the EU to accede to the CC.

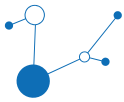
In October 2018 the Government of Poland submitted a draft [Macro-regional Strategy for the Carpathian Region](#) to the European Commission. In December 2019 the CoE CoR explicitly supported the initiative to create an EU strategy for the Carpathian region in CoR's [Opinion COTER-VI/057](#).

However, it should be noted that this draft document did not result from cooperation among the countries concerned. Instead, it has been developed unilaterally, later merely consulted with some other countries. Due to the above, this draft has not formally been approved by all countries concerned.

Furthermore, as for the geographic scope of the above draft proposal, it concerned a much broader area than just the Carpathian region. The authors of the proposal included not only numerous regions but also entire countries not associated with the Carpathian mountains. Namely, the geo-scope of this proposal included whole Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, but also the whole lowland Moldova, never before considered to be a 'Carpathian country' (the only justification could potentially be the Dniester river, originating in the Carpathian mountains and flowing through Moldova). Further, the proposal included several 'non-Carpathian' regions: Severovýchod (NUTS level 2: CZ05, more relevant for the Sudetes region), and the whole Jihovýchod (CZ06) despite that only the South Moravian Region (NUTS level 3: CZ064) is part of the Carpathian region in the Czech Republic; Lubelskie (PL81) and Świętokrzyskie (PL72) located well outside the scope of CC application in Poland, as well as two 'non-Carpathian' statistical units in Serbia: Belgrade, and Vojvodina.

The above indicates that the view of the European Commission, which defines a macro-region as "*an area including territory from a number of different countries or **regions associated with one or more common features or challenges***" has carelessly been neglected in this case, while the common challenges addressed to in this proposal did not differ much from challenges of other countries, including those already covered by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR, 2010).

According to the European Parliamentary Research Service [Briefing 12-12-2019 'A macro-regional strategy for the Carpathian region'](#), the European Commission took into account opinions expressed during plenary debates concerning the establishment of a Carpathian macro-regional strategy, continuing at the European Parliament since 2013, which expressed the view that EU participation was already guaranteed within the framework of the Danube strategy, which covered most of the Member States in question. This view was reiterated also by the Commission in its written answer to a parliamentary question of 6 January 2014, which stated that the Commission saw no rationale for a Carpathian strategy, urging the Carpathian countries to rather make use of the existing EU strategy for the Danube region.



Similarly, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) responding to the proposal submitted by the Polish government in 2018, noted that *“an initial exploration of all possible options, including the extension of the EU strategy for the Danube region to the Polish Carpathian regions, should take place before launching a new strategy”*. The above Briefing concluded that *“the draft strategy currently seems to have the support of only three EU Member States - Poland, Hungary and Slovakia - the level of political attention and commitment to the project across the wider region appears rather uncertain. This issue could turn out to be crucial for the strategy's future success, as broad political support is needed”* and that *“Other than launching a new macro-regional strategy, the new European Commission and the European Council may explore other options, whether including the Polish Carpathian regions into the Danube strategy, addressing needs in mountainous areas through cooperation between the Danube and the Alpine strategies or through an EU agenda for rural, mountainous and remote areas”*.

In the light of the above, it should be noted, that the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), jointly developed by the Danube Region countries and stakeholders, and the European Commission, adopted by the European Commission in December 2010¹⁹ and endorsed by the European Council in 2011, mentions the geographical name “Carpathians” only twice, in relation to rich environmental assets and environmental resources of the Danube region, sometimes among other mountain regions (e.g. in sentences *“Environmental resources are shared across borders and go beyond national interests. This is particularly true of the Danube Region, which includes mountainous areas such as the Carpathians, the Balkans and part of the Alps”*). Similarly, the 2010 EUSDR Action Plan²⁰ mentions the Carpathians only sporadically: as an emerging tourist destination, but also as a source of industrial/mining accident spills into the Danube drainage area, or in the context of remaining natural ecosystems, or best practices on using biomass for energy purposes.

Due to the above, it should be emphasized that, contrary to the views of the European Commission, DG REGIO, and of the European Parliament, the EUSDR is explicitly neither particularly suited for or targeted at the Carpathian region, nor addressing its common challenges and needs (which do not include e.g. waterway mobility, better port infrastructure and management, or fleet modernization related issues).

However, some common areas of interest for both the Danube and Carpathian regions do exist, including e.g. culture and tourism, preservation of biodiversity and landscapes, or the quality of air and soils.

Due to the above, given the absence of a separate EU macro-regional strategy for the Carpathian mountain region, taking into account that a considerable part of the Carpathian Convention (CC) application area (except for the whole Polish part, and for the Lvivska Province of Ukraine) is factually covered by the EUSDR, several **Memoranda of Cooperation (MoC)** were signed **between the CC and particular EUSDR Priority Areas**, i.e. MoC between CC and EUSDR PA 1B ‘Mobility | Rail-Road-Air’ (7 June 2016), MoC between CC and EUSDR PA 04 ‘Water Quality’ (30 August 2016), MoC between CC and EUSDR PA 02 ‘Energy’ (3 November 2016), MoC between CC and EUSDR PA 05 ‘Environmental Risks’ (13 December 2017) and MoC between CC and EUSDR PA 06 ‘Biodiversity & Landscape’ (13 December 2017). Due to the developing cooperation between the CC and the EUSDR, the above MoCs with the CC are now often referred to in the current 2020 EUSDR Action Plan²¹.

¹⁹ Communication from the Commission 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 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52010DC0715>

²⁰ Commission Staff Working Document 52010SC1489 ACTION PLAN Accompanying document to the Communication from the Commission 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* {COM(2010) 715 final} {SEC(2010) 1490 final} {SEC(2010) 1491 final} https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=swd:SEC_2010_1489

²¹ Commission Staff Working Document ACTION PLAN replacing Staff Working Document SEC(2010) 1489 final accompanying the Communication from the Commission 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* https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/danube/eusdr_actionplan_swd202059_en.pdf



4.2.7. Strategic documents of the Carpathian Convention

Several strategic documents concerning transnational and cross-border cooperation in the **Carpathian mountain region** were adopted under the Carpathian Convention (CC), concerning five CC thematic areas:

- Biodiversity: [Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the Biodiversity Protocol \(2011-2023\)](#), [International Action Plan on conservation of large carnivores and ensuring ecological connectivity in the Carpathians](#), [Carpathian strategy for enhancing biodiversity and landscape conservation outside and inside protected areas](#), [Carpathian Biodiversity Framework](#), and [Carpathian Biodiversity Framework Implementation Plan 2027-2035](#)
- Sustainable forestry: [Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the Forest Protocol](#)
- Sustainable tourism: [Strategy for the Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians](#) and [Strategy for local sustainable tourism development based on natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathians](#)
- Sustainable transport: [Joint Strategic Action Plan 2021 - 2026 for the implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Transport](#)
- Climate change: [Long-term Vision 2030 towards combating climate change in the Carpathians](#), [Action Plan 2030 accompanying the Long-term Vision 2030 towards combating climate change in the Carpathians](#), and [Strategic Agenda on Adaptation to Climate Change in the Carpathian Region](#).

However, an important difference should be emphasized here: the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (such as the EUSALP and EUSDR) is supported by ‘dedicated’ EU Interreg B Programmes (such as Interreg Alpine Space and Interreg Danube Region), while the implementation of all above strategies adopted under the CC (although also ‘soft law’ instruments, thus non-binding and not legally enforceable) largely depends on the willingness and financial capacities of the CC Parties.

Decisions adopted at each Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CC always include **Programmes of Work of the Carpathian Convention** for the subsequent CC implementation periods (of three years).

4.2.8. Strategic documents concerning the Sudetes region

As for the Sudetes mountain region, there is still no strategic document, neither a broader EU macro-regional strategy common for all three countries concerned, nor a trilaterally signed strategic document concerning cooperation and addressing common challenges of the entire mountain region.

For example, the ‘Integrated strategy of Krkonoše region 2014-2020, with the view to 2030’ / Integrovaná strategie rozvoje regionu Krkonoše 2014 - 2020 (s výhledem do roku 2030)²² developed by the Assembly of Krkonoše Municipalities (Svazek měst a obcí Krkonoše) or the ‘Krkonoše National Park and surroundings Green Infrastructure Strategy and Action Plan’²³ developed under the Interreg Central Europe project MaGiCLandscapes, was not coordinated with the counterparts on the Polish side. Similarly, the 2015 draft Outline strategy for sustainable development of the Karkonosze region²⁴ does not concern the Czech side.

²² https://svazek.krkonoše.eu/sites/default/files/docs/isrr-krkonoše-aktualizace-2020-final-cistopis_0.pdf

²³ <https://programme2014-20.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/STRATEGIE-ZELEN-IFRASTRUKTURY-KRNAP-A-JEHO-OCHRANN-HO-P-SM.pdf>

²⁴ <https://karkonoskie.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/1510-fin.-red.-TEZY-KARKONOSKIE-II.pdf>



The bilateral 'Action Plan for improved public-private cooperation in the Sudetes for regional products and tourism services' developed under the Interreg CE Central Mountains project (Deliverable D.1.4.5) with a specific focus on the Giant Mountains ("Krkonosé" in Czech and "Karkonosze" in Polish, the highest part of the Sudetes mountain range, stretching along the Czech-Polish state border) does not concern the smallest German (Saxony/Sachsen) part of the Sudetes region, shared by all three countries.

Even the trilateral Strategy for Development of the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion 2021-2027²⁵ cannot be perceived as a strategic documents for the entire Sudetes mountain region, as the above Euroregion encompasses solely the westernmost part of the Sudetes region, while the Sudetes mountain range stretches further to the south-east along the Czech-Polish state border, across two other Euroregions (bilateral Euroregion Glacensis, and bilateral Euroregion Praděd - Pradziad).

5. Financial policy framework for transnational and cross-border cooperation in mountain regions

5.1. Financial support for transnational and cross-border cooperation in Europe

It should first and foremost be noted, that almost always, for numerous formal and legal reasons, activities planned for joint implementation across or beyond the state borders (regardless whether transnational, cross-border or transboundary activities) of respective neighbouring countries cannot be financed from their in-country (e.g. national or regional) public funding sources, particularly not from the state budget funds, most often restricted for financing activities and investments within a given country.

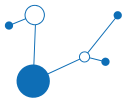
As emphasized in UNESCO publication²⁶ of 2003 *"the main impediment to transboundary cooperation is always the recurring issue of sovereignty, understood in a wide sense, whatever the field of cooperation may be, including the environment. Creating a regional entity such as a Euroregion or a biosphere reserve always comes up against the belief that every form of activity beyond a country's national borders comes under foreign policy, clearly and exclusively the responsibility of the State. In the Carpathian region, the centralist model of the State seriously curtails the possibilities for border regions even more, although increased decentralisation is taking place. (...) It is still difficult, or even impossible, to use state funding to cover activities linked to transboundary cooperation. In such a situation of limited budgets, transboundary cooperation is considered to be less of a priority, leading to a decrease in allocation of staff time and energy"*.

Secondly, the **Swiss Contribution**, that supported projects in 13 EU MSs (including Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) since 2007, always focused on bilateral cooperation of a particular beneficiary country with Switzerland, thus neither supported other transnational cooperation variants, nor any cross-border cooperation initiatives.

Thirdly, the **EEA and Norway Grants** had (and probably still have) a large potential to become an important source of financial support for transnational and cross-border cooperation initiatives, although not in all three European mountain regions concerned, only in the Carpathian and Sudetes mountain regions.

²⁵ https://www.euroregion-nysa.pl/images/Teresa/strategie-ern-final_PL_maly.pdf

²⁶ UNESCO (2003) Jardin.M., Fall, J., Thiry, E. "Five Transboundary Biosphere Reserves in Europe". Biosphere Reserves Technical Notes. UNESCO, Paris, p. 42. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000132140.locale=en>



It should be explained that the commonly used name ‘EEA and Norway Grants’ includes in fact two components, namely the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (funded solely by Norway) and the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (co-funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway, where the last is the main donor, due to its significantly higher GDP). Similarly to the Swiss Contribution, in addition to the main objective, i.e. reducing economic and social disparities, the EEA and Norway Grants aim to strengthen bilateral relations between Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and particular Beneficiary States. What is important in the Central Mountains project context, the EEA and Norway Grants established the Civil Society Fund for non-governmental organizations.

In 2018 the EEA and Norway Grants launched a **Fund for Regional Cooperation**, to support regional cross-border and transnational projects, and opened a two-step Call 2018-1b “Common Challenges - Shared Solutions”. Contrary to almost all EU funding schemes (solely except for Interreg III B CADSES, available only in 2005-2006) eligible countries included **all seven countries of the Carpathian mountain region** (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine) but also Slovenia. Moreover, all eligible countries could **participate in this call on equal basis**, with the only restriction that only entities from the 15 EEA and Norway Grants Beneficiary States could become the lead partner of the project consortium.

The EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation had five priority sectors:

- Innovation, Research, Education and Competitiveness
- Social Inclusion, Youth Employment and Poverty Reduction
- Environment, Energy, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy
- Culture, **Civil Society**, **Good Governance** and Fundamental Rights
- Justice and Home Affairs

The aforementioned 2018 call for proposals concerning regional cross-border and transnational projects had a budget of EUR 15 million and offered very advantageous 85% to 90% co-financing rates (the latter for NGOs, universities and research organisations). It is therefore no surprise that over 700 project applications were submitted for this call. Which, unfortunately, was **the first and so far the last** ‘EEA and Norway opportunity window’ for partners from 25 countries, willing to cooperate across borders at the regional scale.

Due to the above, the main funding sources supporting transnational and cross-border cooperation in Europe are the EU Interreg programmes, or ‘cooperation strands’, in particular **Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border)** and **Interreg Strand B (Transnational)**. The third Interreg Strand C (Interregional) supports interregional cooperation at the scale of the whole EU through large-scale information exchange and sharing of experience, and will therefore not be considered, as not suitable for supporting transnational or cross-border cooperation within a single, particular European mountain region. The fourth Interreg Strand D (Outermost Regions) targeted at the EU’s outermost regions and their neighbours is also irrelevant here.

As the saying, popular among nature conservationists, goes, “conservation without money is just a conversation”. Similarly, **a policy without funding is just a nice-sounding promise**.

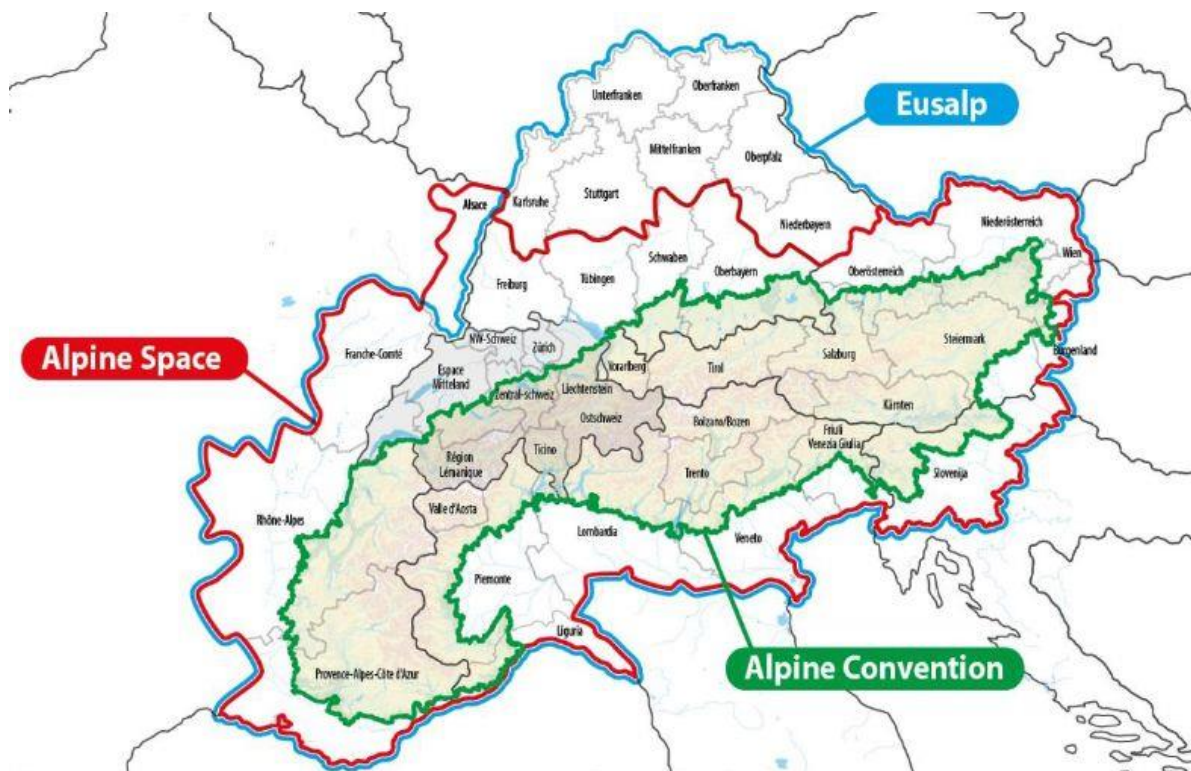
Consequently, four Interreg Strand B transnational cooperation programmes (Interreg Baltic Sea Region, Interreg Danube Region, Interreg IPA Adriatic and Interreg Alpine Space) directly support the implementation of the four corresponding (geographically related) **EU macro-regional strategies** (EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSAIR, and EUSALP).

The general rule for these four Interreg B programmes is that **at least 80% of financial allocation** must be aligned with a respective EU macro-regional strategy, contribute to the achievement of its objectives and priorities, including by enhancing the capacity of its stakeholders (e.g. public authorities) to implement the strategy, and supporting the management of its governance.



Further, transnational Interreg programmes linked to Sea Basin Strategies (e.g. Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin and Interreg Atlantic Area) also apply the thematic concentration principle.

This is why the availability of funding for transnational, cross-border and transboundary cooperation largely depends on the presence of a corresponding EU macro-regional strategy (like the EUSALP).



Map 3. Comparison perimeter Alpine Convention - EUSALP - Interreg B Alpine Space
Map source: European Commission²⁷

5.2. “A long time ago, during another EU financial perspective...”

It should also be noted, that the availability of EU funding for cooperation in the three European mountain regions concerned considerably changed over the last decades. Or, rather varied between **subsequent EU financial perspectives** (pre-2009 term) and **EU Multiannual Financial Frameworks (MFFs)**. The latter term was used in Article 312(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), commonly called the Lisbon Treaty, that entered into force on 1st December 2009.

The first EU Interreg I Programme for the programming period 1989-1993 was launched during the first EU financial perspective for 1988-1992. Between 1990 and 1993 Interreg I focused on supporting cooperation across the internal EU-borders. Under the second EU financial perspective for 1993-1999 the objectives of its successor Interreg II for the subsequent period 1994-1999 expanded, to support cooperation also along external EU-borders, that was continued under Interreg III (for the period 2000-2006).

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/alpine/eusalp_alpine_space_alpine_convention.pdf



On 6 May 1999, the third interinstitutional agreement (IIA) established the third EU financial perspective for 2000-2006, also known as Agenda 2000, where one of the main goals was to ensure adequate resources to finance the considerable enlargement of the EU in 2004, shifting its external borders significantly eastward and integrating into the EU over 74 million citizens of the ten new MSs (including five countries of the three mountain regions concerned: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia).

At the very beginning of this third EU financial perspective, already in 2000 the first transnational EU cooperation programme for a mountain region was launched - the **Interreg IIIB Alpine Space Programme**.

Almost four years later, another new instrument supporting transnational cooperation beyond national borders emerged under the Interreg Community Initiative: on 17 December 2004 the European Commission approved **INTERREG III B Neighbourhood Programme for the Central, Adriatic, Danubian and South Eastern European Space (CADSES)**. As emphasized at the Interreg Central Europe Programme website, *“Interreg III B CADSES helped paving the way towards EU enlargement and facilitated the integration of neighbouring countries. With a budget of EUR 161 million ERDF, it supported 1,600 project partners from 19 countries to work together in 134 projects”*.

The geographic scope of Interreg III B CADSES initially extended over 18 central and southern European countries (later 19, after the secession of Montenegro from the union with Serbia in June 2006) and included the whole Sudetes and Carpathian mountain regions, as well as part of the Alpine region, in four out of its seven countries (Austria, Germany, Slovenia, and five out of eight Alpine regions of Italy: Lombardia, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Provincia Autonoma di Trento, and Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano/Bozen).

Due to the above, Interreg III B CADSES allowed the implementation of common transnational and cross-border cooperation projects in the **whole Sudetes and Carpathian mountain regions** as well as in a large part of the **Alpine region**, but also encouraged partnerships and **interregional cooperation** simultaneously involving partners from **all three European mountain regions** concerned (Alps, Sudetes, and Carpathians).

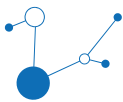
But, it was possible only between the launch of Interreg III B CADSES (in **2005**) and the commencement of projects approved within its period (ending in **2006**).

During the preparations for the fourth EU Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2007-2013 (approved on 17 May 2006), the European Commission and some MSs reportedly considered this extensive geographic scope of Interreg CADSES “too large for transnational cooperation”. The above resulted in the establishment of two new separate Interreg B Programmes to replace Interreg CADSES: Interreg IV B South East Europe and Interreg IV B Central Europe.

The above decision did not result in a strict division of the extensive CADSES area, as obvious spatial overlaps occurred, and some countries were eligible under both above new Interreg Programmes. But, the **Carpathian mountain region** has effectively been ‘divided’ beginning from 2007, and **remains divided among different Interreg Programmes until today** (which will further be explained in the next sub-chapter of this study).

But, the establishment of the successor Interreg Central Europe Programme, of a much narrow geographic scope (including solely 9 EU MSs) cannot compensate the closure of Interreg III B CADSES, that supported cooperation of 18 to 19 central and south-eastern European countries almost 20 years ago.

The above can best be illustrated by the comparison of programme areas of the former Interreg III B CADSES (Map 4) and of the current Interreg Central Europe (Map 5) Programmes, presented below.



Map 4. Interreg III B CADSES area
Map source: [Interreg III B CADSES Project Book](#)
(2007 reprint - map updated by adding two new EU MSs)



Map 5. Interreg Central Europe Programme area
Map source: [Interreg Central Europe website](#)

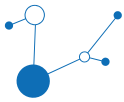
The only positive (but not for the Sudetes mountain region) change was that the Czech Republic, non-eligible for Interreg IV B South East Europe from which its closest neighbours (e.g. Austria and Slovakia) benefited, later became eligible for funding under the new Interreg IV Danube Region Programme, where three out of four countries neighbouring the Czech Republic are eligible (except for Poland).

5.3. Financial support for transnational cooperation in 2021-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework

Within the current 2021-2027 EU MFF 13 Interreg Strand B programmes supported transnational cooperation: [Interreg Alpine Space](#), Interreg Atlantic Area, [Interreg Baltic Sea Region](#), [Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE](#), [Interreg Danube](#), [Interreg EURO Mediterranean \(EURO MED\)](#), [Interreg IPA Adriatic-Ionian \(IPA ADRIION\)](#), Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin, [Interreg NEXT Mediterranean Sea Basin \(NEXT MED\)](#), Interreg North Sea, Interreg North-West Europe, Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic, and Interreg South West Europe (SUDOE).

It should be noted, that partners from most countries of the three European mountain regions concerned can take advantage of, and largely benefit from **spatial overlaps of several Interreg Strand B transnational cooperation programmes**.

For example, in the **Alpine** region, applicants from Slovenia are eligible for funding under as many as **five** Interreg B Programmes: Interreg IPA Adrion, Interreg Euro-MED, Interreg Alpine Space, Interreg Danube Region, and Interreg Central Europe. Applicants from the Austrian and German parts of the Alpine region are simultaneously eligible for funding under **three** Interreg B Programmes: Interreg Alpine Space, Interreg Danube Region, and Interreg Central Europe.



Similarly, partners from all eight Alpine regions of Italy are simultaneously eligible for Interreg Alpine Space and Interreg Central Europe, while six of these regions (except for Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano/Bozen) are additionally eligible for Interreg EURO Mediterranean (EURO MED), five of them (except for Liguria, Piemonte, and Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste) for Interreg IPA Adriatic-Ionian Programme funding.

As for the French Alpine regions, partners from the two NUTS level 2 regions (Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur and Rhône-Alpes) are simultaneously eligible for Interreg Alpine Space and Interreg EURO Mediterranean (EURO MED), while those from Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur are additionally eligible for funding under Interreg NEXT Mediterranean Sea Basin (NEXT MED), where also the Italian Alpine region of Liguria is eligible.

In the **Sudetes** mountain region, only one double Interreg B spatial overlap occurs, as the Czech Republic is simultaneously eligible for Interreg Danube Region and Interreg Central Europe Programmes.

As for the **Carpathian** mountain region, such double Interreg B spatial overlaps occur only in case of four out of seven countries of the region. Partners from the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia are simultaneously eligible for Interreg Danube Region and Interreg Central Europe Programmes, while applicants from the Serbian part of the Carpathian region are simultaneously eligible for Interreg Danube Region and Interreg IPA Adrion Programmes.

Due to the above, the accessibility of Interreg Strand B programme funding that can support transnational cooperation **significantly varies between the three European mountain regions concerned.**

5.3.1. Financial support for transnational cooperation in the Alpine region

In the Alpine region, shared by seven countries, including 5 EU MSs (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia) and 2 non-EU countries (Liechtenstein and Switzerland) being Parties to the Alpine Convention, all partners are eligible for funding under Interreg Alpine Space Programme, targeted solely at the Alpine region and well aligned with the EU macro-regional strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP).

Additionally, as already indicated above, many Alpine regions can also benefit from several other Interreg B transnational cooperation programmes (Interreg Central Europe, Interreg Danube Region, Interreg IPA Adrion, Interreg Euro-MED, and Interreg NEXT MED, respectively).

5.3.2. Financial support for transnational cooperation in the Sudetes region

Partners from the Sudetes mountain region, shared by three countries, all being EU MSs (the Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland) can submit joint applications solely to Interreg Central Europe Programme, although neither targeted at this region (supporting transnational cooperation in as many as 81 NUTS level 2 regions in 9 EU MSs) nor corresponding to any EU macro-regional strategy.

Partners from Saxony/Germany and Poland are non-eligible for Interreg Danube Region Programme (contrary to their partners from the Czech Republic). The priorities of Polish partners from the Sudetes mountain region are in obvious inconsistency with the objectives of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme (where the whole Poland is eligible, including the Polish parts of both the Sudetes and the Carpathian regions) for which the German partners from the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen) are non-eligible.



5.3.3. Financial support for transnational cooperation in the Carpathian region

But, in case of the Carpathian region, also shared by seven countries (like the Alpine region), also including 5 EU MSs (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania) and 2 EU Candidate Countries (Serbia and Ukraine) also being Parties to the Carpathian Convention, a similar stable long-term EU mechanism co-financing transnational cooperation (Interreg B programme) that could allow the equal involvement of partners from the entire mountain region is **absent**, as at March 2026.

Importantly, such EU funding mechanism for the entire Carpathian region has been **absent for almost the last twenty years**, since closing the Interreg III B CADSES with the end of 2006.

In result, beginning from 2007 (when successor Interreg Central Europe and Interreg Danube Region Programmes were launched) partners from several 'non-eligible' Carpathian countries were **automatically excluded from transnational cooperation** initiatives co-funded under either Interreg Central Europe or Interreg Danube Region Programmes, respectively.

The only Interreg B programme where applicants from **Romania** and three administrative units (provinces, equivalent to NUTS 2 level) of the **Ukrainian** part of the Carpathian region (i.e. Chernivetska, Ivano-Frankivska, and Zakarpatska Provinces) are eligible is the Interreg Danube Region Programme.

On the contrary, partners from the **Polish** part of the Carpathian region are eligible solely for Interreg Central Europe Programme.

It should probably be openly stated here, that despite that partners from the Polish part of the Carpathian region do meet eligibility criteria of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, most probably their potential partners from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, northern Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden will rather not be interested in joint projects, concerning Carpathian-specific priorities.

But, other three countries of the Carpathian region (**Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine**) are non-eligible for the Interreg Central Europe Programme.

The above can best be illustrated by the comparison of programme areas of the Interreg Danube Region (Map 6) and of the Interreg Central Europe (Map 7) Programmes.

Last, but not least, it should be emphasized here that partners from the remaining fourth administrative unit of the Ukrainian part of the Carpathian region (**Lvivska Province**, bordering Poland) were, as at March 2026, **non-eligible for funding under any Interreg Strand B transnational cooperation programme** (neither for the Interreg Central Europe, nor for the Interreg Danube Region Programmes).

The above disparities between the countries of the Carpathian region concerning their eligibility for the EU funding disbursed under Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes cannot fully be compensated by the availability of several Interreg Strand A (Cross-border) Programmes.



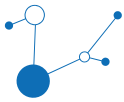
Central Mountains



Map 6. EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) determining Interreg Danube Region Programme area
Map source: European Commission



Map 7. Interreg Central Europe Programme area
Map source: Interreg Central Europe



5.4. Financial support for cross-border cooperation in 2021-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework

Within the current, but soon ending 2021-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework there were 64 Interreg Strand A (Cross-border) programmes, including 49 'typical' (EU-internal) Interreg A programmes, fostering cooperation between the EU MSs, ten Interreg IPA (the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, established in 2007) 3rd edition (IPA III) programmes designed to facilitate the expected enlargement of the EU, and five Interreg NEXT programmes, implemented at the EU external eastern and southern borders.

5.4.1. Financial support for cross-border cooperation in the Alpine region

Partners from respective seven countries of the Alpine region can receive financial support from ten Interreg A (Cross-border) Programmes, including eight **bilateral** Interreg A cross-border cooperation programmes, namely [Interreg VI-A Austria-Germany/Bavaria](#), [Interreg France-Italy \(ALCOTRA\)](#), [Interreg France-Switzerland](#), [Interreg Italy-Austria](#), [Interreg Italy-France \(Maritime\)](#), [Interreg Italy-Slovenia](#), [Interreg Italy-Switzerland](#), and [Interreg Slovenia-Austria](#), and, in addition to the above bilateral ones, also one **trilateral** [Interreg France-Germany-Switzerland \(Upper Rhine\)](#) and one **quadrilateral** [Interreg Germany-Austria-Switzerland-Liechtenstein \(Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein\)](#) Interreg A Cross-border Programme.

5.4.2. Financial support for cross-border cooperation in the Sudetes region

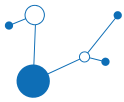
Partners from the respective three countries of the Sudetes mountain region can benefit from three bilateral cross-border cooperation Interreg A programmes: [Interreg Germany/Saxony-Czechia](#), [Interreg Poland-Germany/Saxony](#), and [Interreg Czechia - Poland](#).

For obvious reason, the above **division does neither encourage nor enhance trilateral cooperation** in this mountain region, shared by three neighbouring countries. It should be noted, that in the case of any joint tripartite initiative in the Sudety region, submitting parallel applications to two different Interreg A Programmes involving all three countries simultaneously (assuming the timing of both calls for proposals coincides) might not necessarily produce the desired effect, as the evaluation of applications in each of these programmes is independent, thus would not take into account the fact that a parallel application was submitted to another programme, and therefore the chances of simultaneous acceptance of both parallel applications (each concerning the same tripartite initiative) would be very limited, to say the least.

On the other hand, creating a new trilateral (as e.g. in the Alps) Interreg A program whose programme area would entirely overlap with the programme areas of already existing three bilateral programs is neither possible nor would make much sense.

Proposed solution

Therefore, taking into account that programme areas of the first two above mentioned bilateral Interreg A programmes extend well beyond the range of the Sudety mountain region, the only possible (?) 'creative' solution could be to authorize the **eligibility of applicants from Landkreis Görlitz** (the easternmost district of Germany and of the Free State of Saxony / Freistaat Sachsen, directly bordering Poland and the Czech Republic) in project consortia participating in calls for proposals under the bilateral cross-border cooperation Interreg Czechia - Poland (whose programme area almost entirely overlaps with the boundaries of the Sudety region in its two targeted countries).



5.4.3. Financial support for cross-border cooperation in the Carpathian region

Partners from respective seven countries of the **Carpathian** mountain region could apply for the EU co-funding under seven cross-border cooperation Interreg A programmes, including three ‘EU-internal’ bilateral Interreg A programmes, [Interreg Slovakia-Czechia](#), [Interreg Hungary-Slovakia \(HUSK\)](#) and [Interreg Poland-Slovakia](#), one Interreg IPA programme [Interreg IPA Romania Serbia](#) strengthening cooperation with Serbia (EU Candidate Country since January 2014) and three Interreg NEXT Programmes, established under European Neighbourhood policy, supporting cooperation with Ukraine (EU Candidate Country since June 2024), including two bilateral [Interreg NEXT Poland - Ukraine](#) and [Interreg NEXT Romania - Ukraine](#), and one **quadrilateral** [Interreg NEXT Hungary - Slovakia - Romania - Ukraine \(HUSKROUA\)](#).

Bilateral Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme²⁸ (ROHU) is not relevant here, as its Programme area includes solely the counties (NUTS level 3 units) located outside the Hungarian part of the Carpathian region.

Another bilateral Interreg A Programme should also be mentioned here, [Interreg Slovakia-Austria](#), taking into account that the Lower Austrian Inselberg Threshold (German: Niederösterreichische Inselbergschwelle) stretching in the Weinviertel region of Lower Austria (Niederösterreich) constitutes the south-westernmost part of the Carpathian mountain range, called Austrian - South-Moravian Carpathians (German: Österreichisch-Südmährische Karpaten). Therefore, despite that Austria is not a Party to the Carpathian Convention, cross-border cooperation supported under Interreg A Slovakia-Austria Programme should also be perceived as ‘cooperation within the Carpathian mountain region’.

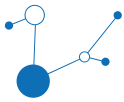
It should be noted, that programme areas of the above three Interreg NEXT Programmes involving Ukraine have a different geographic scope within this country. Namely, bilateral Interreg NEXT Poland - Ukraine programme area includes six administrative units (equivalent to NUTS level 2) of Ukraine: three out of four ‘Carpathian’ Provinces (Lvivska, Ivano-Frankivska, and Zakarpatska) and three other Provinces (Volynska, Rivnenska, and Ternopilka). The programme area of bilateral Interreg NEXT Romania - Ukraine includes four administrative units of Ukraine: again three out of four ‘Carpathian’ Provinces (Chernivetska, Ivano-Frankivska, and Zakarpatska) and Odesa Province (bordering Tulcea County in the Romanian part of the shared Black Sea coast), while the programme area of the quadrilateral Interreg NEXT HUSKROUA includes the same three ‘Carpathian’ Provinces of Ukraine (Chernivetska, Ivano-Frankivska, and Zakarpatska).

Due to the above, Ivano-Frankivska and Zakarpatska Provinces are simultaneously eligible under all three aforementioned Interreg NEXT Programme, Chernivetska Province (bordering Romania) is eligible under two Interreg NEXT Programmes involving Romania, while Lvivska Province (the only Ukrainian administrative unit non-eligible for Interreg B transnational cooperation programmes) bordering Poland can be supported solely under the bilateral Interreg NEXT Poland - Ukraine Programme.

Taking into account that two separate bilateral Interreg NEXT ‘Poland - Ukraine’ and ‘Romania - Ukraine’ Programmes, strengthening cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and one neighbouring EU MS were established, there is probably neither a simple explanation nor justification for not establishing another two similar bilateral cross-border programmes, i.e. Interreg NEXT ‘Hungary - Ukraine’ and ‘Slovakia - Ukraine’.

Further, it is also not clear why the extensive programme area of the **quadrilateral** Interreg NEXT HUSKROUA Programme (established in 2007, next year after closing Interreg III B CADSES) to a large extent overlapping with the **Carpathian Euroregion** (involving **five** countries) includes only some selected administrative units of only four out of five countries of the above Euroregion.

²⁸ <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/discover-the-rohu-programme/>



It should be noted that this quadrilateral **Interreg NEXT HUSKROUA Programme** is implemented under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), which is the main financial instrument for the EU's external action. Thus, if the purpose for its establishment was to support cooperation of Ukraine with neighbouring EU MSs in this particular part of the shared Carpathian region, this programme area should include all administrative units of Ukraine bordering the EU in this region, and all adjacent administrative units of the four relevant EU MSs.

Instead, the programme area of the Interreg NEXT HUSKROUA Programme **excludes** three administrative units of the Carpathian Euroregion located adjacent to the external EU borders: Podkarpackie Province of Poland (bordering Slovakia to the south and Ukraine to the east), Botoşani County of Romania (bordering Ukraine to the north) and Lvivska Province of Ukraine (bordering Poland to the west), but **includes** the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County of Hungary (which is bordering the neighbouring EU MS - Slovakia, but not bordering Ukraine). Therefore, 'bordering Ukraine' was obviously not the criterion implemented for the delimitation of the Interreg NEXT HUSKROUA Programme area.

Proposed solution

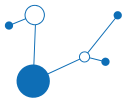
Consequently, in order to maintain, support and enhance cross-border cooperation of partners from all five countries of the Carpathian Euroregion, another 'creative' but reasonable and possible (?) solution could be to authorize the **eligibility of applicants from the Podkarpackie Province of Poland, Botoşani County of Romania, and Lvivska Province in Ukraine** in project consortia participating in calls for proposals under the Interreg NEXT HUSKROUA Programme.

5.5. Comparison of Interreg Strand A and Strand B programmes - main advantages and disadvantages

The main potential disadvantage of Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes is that, due to their more extensive geographic scope, when applying for project funding, a much larger number of other competing applications can be expected than under calls for proposals announced by Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes, of a much narrower programme area, thus with a lower number of potential applicants.

But, in general, Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes seem to be more universal and better suited to support transnational and cross-border cooperation in European mountain regions than Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes, for several sound reasons, as follows:

- Interreg Strand B programmes can **simultaneously support transnational cooperation** of partners from numerous countries constituting larger European regions, **but also the cross-border cooperation** of partners from several neighbouring countries, while most Interreg Strand A programmes are focused on supporting bilateral, thus narrowing the geographic scope - which is much less favourable for initiatives undertaken on a scale of the entire mountain region, including more than just two countries.
- While, in line with the name, Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes support broad transnational cooperation at the scale of European regions, Interreg Strand A (**Cross-Border**) programme areas, contrary to its name are **not limited to the border areas of neighbouring countries**, and often include whole NUTS level 2 regions (sometimes also those located far from any state border), instead of focusing on e.g. cross-border functional areas (CBFAs) or transboundary biosphere reserves (TBRs). Such 'overly inclusive' NUTS-based definition of a cross-border Interreg programme area, although facilitating the easy determination of territorially-eligible applicants, often results in funding initiatives and investments that have little or nothing to do with the real cross-border cooperation.



- Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes most often require higher co-funding threshold and offer larger co-funding amounts (allowing bigger total project budgets and larger project consortia) to be disbursed over a longer implementation period than Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes - which considerably influences not only the size of project consortia and the scale, intensity and duration of cooperation supported under awarded projects, but also the **quality of project outputs and results**.
- Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes usually offer much more flexible and convenient financial conditions for the participation of various types of targeted stakeholders than Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes, while those of many Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes most often **discriminate and discourage smaller civil society organisations (CSOs)**, instead favouring entities employing numerous and well-paid permanent staff;
- Last, but not least, Joint Secretariats (JSs) of Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes, managing larger financial allocations and expecting project proposals with higher total project budgets, can afford more thorough, professional and thus much more credible evaluation of project proposals than the JSs of many Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes, which often causes **distrust and frustration among applicants**.

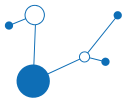
Some examples can probably help to justify and illustrate some of the above conclusions:

Even a cursory analysis of records available at [Keep.eu](https://www.Keep.eu) database (aggregating data on projects and beneficiaries of EU cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation programmes) indicates, that a considerable number of Interreg A ‘Cross-Border’ supported projects had in fact **almost nothing or little to do with the real cross-border cooperation**, understood as cooperation between directly adjacent border areas, as their main outcomes were e.g. sanitary sewage networks and/or sewage treatment plants constructed or modernized in cities located, for example 150 to 300 km apart, so the mere fact of conducting mutual study visits did not necessarily make these projects truly cross-border or transboundary.

Although a broad range of stakeholders is eligible for Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes, including e.g. institutions of national, regional, local governments or associations of such institutions, as well as NGOs with legal personality, the financial conditions, easily acceptable for institutionally-stronger entities efficiently **discriminate and discourage the participation of smaller civil society organizations (CSOs)** that employ little or no permanent well-paid staff. For example, under some Interreg A cross-border programmes staff costs may be settled only as a flat rate of the Partner’s direct costs, and this flat rate may vary (depending on priority targeted) e.g. between 6% and 8% of direct costs (which would neither allow for the employment of additional staff, at least for the duration of the project, nor motivate the current staff to perform additional, project-related tasks) while simultaneously higher external expertise costs are generally not welcomed by experts evaluating project proposals, and may lead to rejection of the whole application. In result, many CSOs simply avoid participation in any Interreg A cross-border projects.

Possibly, many Joint Secretariats (JSs) of Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes have **insufficient resources for ensuring professional and thorough high quality assessment of submitted project proposals**. For example, in a 2024 call for external experts /assessors, the JS of an Interreg A Programme offered “*Remuneration: The expert is entitled to a fee of EUR 200 (gross) per each application evaluated*”.

In result, applications which preparation required several months of work and consultations between project partners from two (or more) countries aiming at the common implementation of cross-border cooperation project of a considerable total value (usually between one and several million EUR) are later subject to evaluation by, and ultimately approved or rejected on the basis of **non-negotiable opinions** of independent but poorly paid external experts, contracted by the respective ‘neutral’ JS (two assessors per application).



Hence, experts who are not particularly motivated to read thoroughly and understand the proposal, just fill in the standardised Assessment Grid form with the least amount of work possible.

For example, under an Interreg Programme call for proposals which specific objective explicitly stated the particular emphasis on “*cross-border protected natural areas*”, the assessor hurriedly evaluating the proposal concerning cross-border cooperation activities in an officially designated UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (TBR), thus one out of only 25 TBRs designated worldwide, concluded that “*Achieving the same results without CBC cooperation is possible*”.

Similarly, an **overly formal approach to horizontal principles** can truly harm the logic of the assessment, like in the case of a proposal submitted to an Interreg NEXT Programme in 2023, which included purchasing and supplying war-torn Ukraine with necessary equipment, where the assessor lowered the overall score as “*the purchase of selected equipment such as cars/quads/bicycles etc. has not been justified in terms on equal opportunities and gender equality*”.

This is how the efforts of tens of people cooperating throughout months on the preparation of a cross-border project proposal can be wasted at the cost of just EUR 400 (EUR 200 per each of the two assessors).

Proposed solutions

Most probably, a possible (?) non-revolutionary improvement of Interreg A Cross-Border programmes in one of the next EU MFFs could be to follow the approach of Interreg B programmes aligned with a respective EU macro-regional strategy (where at least 80% of their financial allocation must be aligned with the Strategy’s thematic focus) to **prioritise truly cross-border activities** to be conducted in directly adjacent border areas of neighbouring countries, and adopt a general rule, that some **fixed percentage** (e.g. no less than 40%) of the financial allocation shall support cross-border cooperation activities in **cross-border functional areas (CBFAs) or transboundary biosphere reserves (TBRs)**, some other fixed percentage of funds shall be earmarked for activities to be undertaken in other parts of border areas (neither CBFAs nor TBRs), while only the remaining funds can be spent outside border areas, in other parts of larger NUTS level 2 regions (with the explicit priority for NUTS level 2 regions directly adjacent to the state border).

However, while TBRs are officially recognised and designated by UNESCO, the above solution would require the prior **delimitation and formal designation of CBFAs**.

Secondly, financial conditions for participation in Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes should probably be harmonised with those of Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes, so as to allow **equal accessibility** by all legally eligible categories of stakeholders, and **eradicate the current practices discriminating and discouraging the participation** of smaller civil society organisations (CSOs).

Last, but not least, Joint Secretariats (JSs) of Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes shall be allocated more **resources, adequate** for ensuring much more professional and thorough assessment of submitted project proposals, in order to eliminate frustration among applicants and **increase trust in EU Interreg Programmes as such** (regardless the Strand, as negative opinions on e.g. Interreg Strand A undermine trust in, and ruin the positive image and general perception of the whole EU Interreg instrument).



5.6. Financial support for transnational and cross-border cooperation in EU 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework

The preparation of the next generation of Interreg transnational (Strand B) and cross-border (Strand A) cooperation programmes (2028-2034) is, as at March 2026, underway.

On 21 November 2024 the CoR issued [Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions - The future of European Territorial Cooperation \(ETC\) post-2027](#). The CoR stressed, *inter alia*, the potential of using **Interreg A** to support cross-border functional areas through integrated instruments, e.g. Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and Community Led Local Development (CLLD), and called for their further simplification to enable their easy use in cross-border context. Further, the CoR drew attention to the unique value of people-to-people projects and the Small Project Fund and called for their further simplification; in this context, called for the removal of the single legal entity requirement for the management of Small Project Fund projects and enabling the partnership principle, especially in areas without joint cross-border structures; and expressed the opinion that the next regulation should **include the Small Project Fund in all Interreg A programmes**. Moreover, the CoR recommended using Interreg to test new cross-border solutions, making border regions laboratories of European integration; underlined the crucial role of **joint coordination structures in facilitating cross-border partnerships and coordinating dialogue** on solutions to joint challenges.

Concerning transnational cooperation **Interreg B**, the CoR pointed out, *inter alia*, that Interreg B is an important tool for supporting opportunities and challenges in **neighbouring and enlargement countries** by involving them and their regions, and called for Interreg B programmes to be **more differentiated and specialised based on the specific needs and potential of each transnational area**.

In the aforementioned Opinion, the CoR also called for more involvement and support from national authorities and EU institutions in order to **streamline and simplify the legal and administrative framework for territorial cooperation** and ensure coherence and complementarity between ETC programmes and other EU and national programmes and strategies. This includes identifying new forms and formats of territorial cooperation, such as small projects, strategic border connections, **functional areas** and cross-border public services. The CoR also pointed out that **current funding is insufficient** and does not meet the need for or satisfy the interest in European territorial cooperation. Many applications are rejected due to budget constraints, even if the projects are of high quality and importance. Moreover, the CoR insisted on keeping the **governance of cooperation programmes at regional and local level, in particular in the context of cross-border cooperation**. This approach ensures a better understanding of the specific needs of the territories concerned, promotes more flexible and tailored project management and strengthens solidarity between local communities. The proximity of regional and local authorities to the realities on the ground is essential to ensure that cross-border initiatives are effective, relevant and sustainable.

The **European Commission** responded on 31 October 2025, welcomed the CoR's overall support to Interreg and took note of the CoR's appreciation of the major features of the instrument. Further, the Commission, *inter alia*, stated that it continues to work with Member States and Interreg programmes to reduce administrative burdens. The Commission took note of the CoR's strong support for the Small Project Fund approach in Interreg cross-border programmes, but expressed the opinion that further reflection would be necessary on introducing this approach as an obligatory element as many cross-border programmes successfully support people-to-people projects without using a Small Project Fund. The Commission agreed with the CoR that European groupings of territorial cooperation and Interreg programmes could support the work of cross-border coordination points.



Few months earlier, on 16 July 2025, the Commission presented its proposal for the **EU MFF for 2028-2034**, where the Interreg programme was allocated EUR 10.26 billion budget (thus increased by 10%) for the **continuation of the four Interreg strands**. Further, the Commission stated that additional funding will be available from the EU Facility for Union Actions under the EUR 11.5 billion support for Union Actions including cities, inter-regional innovation and **cross-border projects**. The EU co-financing rates were retained at current levels: 80 % EU co-financing for Interreg programmes supporting cooperation within the EU, and 85 % EU co-financing for outermost cooperation and cross-border cooperation on external borders.

The new elements include:

- the **Interreg Plan** - a new plan covering Interreg as a whole;
- General and specific objectives with **no thematic concentration**, as follows: ‘**Better cooperation governance**’, ‘**A safer and more secure Europe**’ and ‘**More resilient regions bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine**’;
- new possibilities for cooperation between non-member countries’
- move from expenditure-based to **performance-based delivery**;
- pre-financing, set at 4 % per year for the first three years.

The Commission proposal was subject to negotiations by the European Council and the European Parliament, during which process the contents of the proposal for EU MFF for 2028-2034²⁹ **can still evolve**. The same relates to proposed new regulations, including the [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for Regional Development including for European Territorial Cooperation \(Interreg\) and the Cohesion Fund as part of the Fund set out in Regulation \(EU\) \[...\] \[NRP\] and establishing conditions for the implementation of the Union support to regional development from 2028 to 2034 \(COM/2025/552 final\)](#).

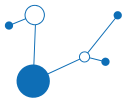
6. Transnational and cross-border cooperation governance structures in mountain regions

6.1. Transnational and cross-border cooperation governance structures in the Alpine region

6.1.1. Alpine Convention

The **Conference of the Contracting Parties** (commonly called the Alpine Conference) is the highest political decision-making body of the Alpine Convention (AC), usually gathered every two years. The **Permanent Committee of the Alpine Conference**, consisting of senior delegates of the Contracting Parties, is the executive body of the AC, that usually meets twice a year. Another important body of the AC is the **Compliance Committee**, which monitors the compliance of the Parties with their commitments under the AC and its thematic Protocols. The Compliance Committee includes mainly legal experts, but also representatives of the Observer organisations, it usually meets twice a year. Since 2002 the **Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention** is in operation, with a main seat in Innsbruck (AT) and an operational branch office in Bolzano/Bozen (IT), hosted by Eurac Research. The Permanent Secretariat provides not only administrative and technical support for the implementation of the AC and its Protocols, but also scientific support, and public relations. Other AC bodies are the thematic **Working Groups and Boards**, consisting of experts nominated by the Parties, supported by thematically-relevant Observer organisations.

²⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52025DC0570&qid=1753978048542>



6.1.2. EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)

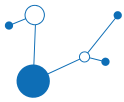
The governing bodies of EUSALP can be divided into three categories: decision bodies, advisory bodies, and implementation bodies. EUSALP decision bodies include the **EUSALP General Assembly (GA)** and the **EUSALP Executive Board**. The EUSALP GA, as a primary legislative body gathering representatives of the EUSALP member states, determines the overall direction of EUSALP and formulates strategies. The EUSALP GA meets annually, with a rotating Presidency, made responsible for the preparation and implementation of annual working plans, while strategic coordination is provided by 'Trio Presidency'. The EUSALP Executive Board, composed of the representatives of participating states and regions, provides the overall horizontal and vertical coordination, and monitors EUSALP Action Plan implementation. Another effective solution is the presence of **EUSALP National Coordinators**, who serve as liaisons between different administrative bodies involved in the EUSALP thematic areas within their respective states or regions. EUSALP advisory bodies include the **High Level Group** gathering official representatives who provide strategic guidance, the **Financial Dialogue Networks** facilitating relations between EUSALP and available funding sources, and the **Youth Council**, providing a platform for institutional involvement of young people in all EUSALP bodies. EUSALP implementation bodies include the **Board of Action Group Leaders**, meeting twice a year, being an internal coordination unit steering the EUSALP implementation and ensuring the horizontal coherence between nine **Action Groups**, composed of experts from participating states and regions with adequate expertise relevant for particular EUSALP thematic objectives. EUSALP Action Groups sometimes establish **Subgroups** addressing specific topics or tasks within their respective Action Group. Last, but not least, the **EUSALP Technical Secretariat** provides stable service support for all EUSALP bodies.

6.1.3. International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA)

The International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) was jointly established in 1952 by the Governments of Austria, France, Italy, and Switzerland. CIPRA is an independent non-governmental and non-profit umbrella organization, with an international Management and Executive Office domiciled in Liechtenstein. Since its foundation CIPRA advocated for the adoption of an international treaty concerning the Alpine region (AC). CIPRA, an important Alpine-wide cooperation network, has over one hundred member organisations in seven Alpine countries. CIPRA International has eight regional branches, in Austria (grouping 17 members: eight organisations and nine federal states), France (16 organisations), Germany (14 organisations), Italy (18 organisations), Liechtenstein (10 organisations), Slovenia (115 single members), Südtirol/Alto Adige (22 organisations), and Switzerland (11 organisations). The highest governing body of CIPRA is the **Assembly of Delegates**, convening at least once every year, backed by the smaller **Presiding Committee** (also meeting every year) and by the **CIPRA Youth Council**, the last serves as an advisory body.

6.1.4. Euroregions in the Alpine region

There are numerous Euroregions and similar cross-border cooperation governance arrangements in the Alpine region, each having its own, usually assembly-based governance structure, including: Espace Mont-Blanc (CH/FR/IT), Regio Insubrica (CH/IT), Regio Sempione (CH/IT), Conseil Valois-Valleé d'Aoste du Gd St. Bernard (IT/CH), Euregio Via Salina (AT/DE), Euregio Zugspitze - Wetterstein - Karwendel (AT/DE), EuRegio Inntal (AT/DE), EuRegio Salzburg - Berchtesgadener Land - Traunstein (AT/DE), Inn-Salzach-Euregio (AT/DE), Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol Trentino (AT/IT), and Euregio Steiermark -Slowenien (AT/SI).



6.1.5. European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation in the Alpine region

European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) operating in the Alpine region, as at 25 November 2025³⁰ included two multinational "Interregional Alliance for the Rhine-Alpine Corridor EGTC" and "Alpine Pearls EGTC", as well as bilateral Geopark Karawanken - Geopark Karavanke EGTC (AT-SI), EGTC GO (IT-SI), EGTC Euregio Senza Confini / Euregio Ohne Grenzen (AT-IT), EGTC Euregio Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino (AT-IT), and Parc européen / Parco europeo Alpi Marittime - Mercantour EGTC (FR-IT).

Some different EGTC governing structures are briefly described below, but only of the few selected EGTCs:

Interregional Alliance for the Rhine-Alpine Corridor EGTC, established in April 2015 with the main objective to facilitate and promote territorial cooperation among its members and to jointly strengthen and coordinate the territorial and integrated development of the multimodal Rhine-Alpine Corridor. Its 25 members include public authorities and stakeholders from Rotterdam to Genoa. The EGTC decision making body is the **Assembly** of all members, which elects a Chair and two Vice Chairs, and appoints the Director. The Chairs and the Director form the **Managing Committee** of the EGTC. This EGTC has an **Advisory Board**, consisting of representatives from science and research, economy, logistics enterprises and railway operators, as well as an **Expert Working Group**, with six thematic focus groups.

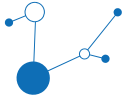
Alpine Pearls EGTC is a legal entity, originally founded in 2006 by 17 member municipalities/ destinations, the "Pearls of the Alps". As at March 2026, this EGTC is a coalition or a network of 13 municipalities from three Alpine countries: Austria, Italy, and Slovenia, cooperating with the objective to promote sustainable tourism, eco-friendly tourism services, and "soft eco-friendly mobility" concept (avoiding the use of private vehicles, instead offering a full mobility for guests at the destination through the expansion of the public transport network, and promoting traffic-calmed areas). The governing structure of this EGTC includes a **general meeting of all members** that decides on the EGTC annual budget, and the **director** performing representative and operational duties. Alpine Pearls EGTC also enhances coordination among its members and promotes the creation of transnational partnerships between the individual member municipalities.

EGTC GO established in the transboundary region of Gorizia/ Gorica (IT-SI) registered as a legal entity in 2011, has the typically **assembly-based** governance structure, but including also **Standing Committees** on transportation, town planning, energy, health, culture and training, and on sport.

6.1.6. Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC)

The Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC) was officially recognised in 2000, as a contribution to the implementation of the AC, in particular of the AC thematic 1994 Protocol Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation. Already in 1994 France promoted the idea of establishing a network grouping protected areas of the Alpine region, and in 1995 organised the 1st International Conference of the Alpine Protected Areas in Les Ecrins National Park. But, the ALPARC procedural rules were drafted in 2000. In 2006 ALPARC's staff became attached to the Permanent Secretariat of the AC under the name 'Task Force Protected Areas', but in January 2013 acquired the legal status of an 'association' in France and separated from the AC Permanent Secretariat. In February 2013 ALPARC signed MoC with the AC, to facilitate cooperation and benefit from potential synergies. The main goal of ALPARC is to promote the exchange of expertise among the managers of some 888 protected areas in the Alps. Through international cooperation, ALPARC serves as an intermediary between institutions, local actors and Alpine communities within the region in implementing the AC.

³⁰ European Committee of the Regions, List of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, 25/11/2025
https://cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Official_List_of_the_EGTCs.pdf



ALPARC governance bodies include the **ALPARC Board**, elected every four years, responsible for the administration and financial management of the **ALPARC Coordination Unit**, and the **ALPARC Council**, made up of protected area managers, this Council defines the main missions and actions of the association. ALPARC supported operations of several international thematic **Working Groups** (up to 15, on topics such as Alpine habitats, flora, mountain forests, pastures, raptors, large carnivores, large ungulates, bearded vulture, sustainable tourism, water issues, Alpine cultures, communication and public relations, but this number changed over time). The ALPARC Coordination Unit currently, as at March 2026, has seven staff members.

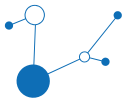
Projects and activities of ALPARC, being an independent NGO, are supported by different regional, national and international entities, including the EU Interreg B Alpine Space Programme, the French Ministry of Ecological Transition, Biodiversity and International Climate and Nature Negotiations (Ministère de la Transition écologique, de la Biodiversité et des Négociations internationales sur le climat et la nature), the Regional Directorate for the Environment, Planning and Housing (DREAL) Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (La Direction régionale de l'environnement, de l'aménagement et du logement (DREAL) Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes), the National Fund for Spatial Planning and Development of the Alpine Massif (Fonds National d'Aménagement et de Développement du Territoire Massif des Alpes), the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires), and the Prefecture of Chambéry, but also by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Innovation, Mobility and Infrastructure (Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz, Umwelt, Energie, Mobilität, Innovation und Technologie), the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (Ufficio federale dell'ambiente), the Government of Monaco (Gouvernement Princier Principauté de Monaco), and by the Principality of Liechtenstein (Fürstentum Liechtenstein).

6.1.7. UNESCO-MAB Transboundary Biosphere Reserves in the Alpine region

Transboundary Biosphere Reserves (TBRs) internationally recognized and officially designated under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme should also be mentioned, although often perceived merely as transboundary protected areas.

In the UNESCO understanding, Biosphere Reserves (BR)s are “*learning places for sustainable development*”. BRs integrate three main functions: conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity, economic development that is socio-culturally and environmentally sustainable, and logistic support underpinning development through research, monitoring, education and training. Although the spatial layout of a BR does comprise strictly protected core zone(s) that contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation (which is possible only in the presence of legally protected areas), the other two BR spatial components (buffer zones and transition area) are not required to be protected. BR buffer zone(s) surround or adjoin the BR core zone(s) in order to prevent and minimise adverse impacts of e.g. economic uses of surrounding areas and are therefore used for activities compatible with sound ecological practices that can reinforce scientific research, monitoring, training and education, while the BR transition area is where communities foster socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable economic activities. BRs involve local communities and all interested stakeholders in planning and management of the area.

What is important here, contrary to the in-country BRs, TBRs provide effective **cross-border cooperation governance platforms**. The official designation of a TBR by UNESCO requires a signature of an **official agreement between the governmental authorities** of all involved countries, the adoption of a **common workplan(s)** between the countries (including timetable, vision statement, goals and objectives, and its duration), and, if appropriate, the **cooperation agreement(s) for the TBR**, as well as the estimation of **budget for transboundary activities and initiatives**, including the estimated budget for the **coordinating structure** (where also the authorities in charge of the coordination/management, communication channels, staff and focal points for coordination have to be listed and described) as well as other mechanisms



of consultation and coordination among the different stakeholders, including **mechanism for involvement of local communities**. What is also important, each BR (and TBR) is subject to a **periodic review** conducted every ten years, so that the compliance mechanism is well established in case of BRs and TBRs.

As at March 2026, the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (already gathering 784 BRs in 142 countries) includes only 25 TBRs, of which only two TBRs were officially recognised by UNESCO in the Alpine region: **Mont-Viso/Monviso TBR** (FR/IT) designated in 2014, and **Julian Alps TBR** (IT/SL) designated in 2024. The latter has the potential to become the first trilateral TBR in the Alps, as there are initiatives towards extending this TBR to the adjacent areas located in the neighbouring region of Carinthia (Austria), including Dobratsch Nature Park.

6.1.8. Other transnational cooperation networks and associations in the Alpine region

System for the Observation and Information on the Alps (SOIA)

The System for the Observation and Information on the Alps (SOIA) is a scientific network set up under the AC, supporting policy development and the implementation of the AC and its protocols. Its aim is to optimise communication on research and observation activities and spread the relevant results. One basic activity of the SOIA is the regular elaboration of the Report on the State of the Alps, based on indicators set by ISCAR.

International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps (ISCAR)

The objective of the International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps (ISCAR), established in 1999, having the status of an official Observer of the Alpine Convention, is the promotion of scientific collaboration in Alpine research, as well as the transfer of research results into practice. Additionally, ISCAR advises the AC governing bodies. ISCAR open access publication series include journal “Mountain Research and Development” (4 issues per year), “eco.mont - Journal of protected mountain areas research and management” (2 issues per year), and “Journal of alpine Research - Revue de géographie alpine” (4 issues per year).

Alliance in the Alps

The Alliance in the Alps, founded in 1997, is an association of local authorities and regions from seven Alpine countries, networking over 300 member towns. The role of this association is to provide support and expertise, exchange experience, represent community interest, and implement joint cross-border projects. As stated by this EGTC *“The Alpine Convention is the basis of the network of municipalities. “Alliance in the Alps” sees the Alpine Convention as a support instrument, guideline and aid when planning for life in the Alpine region in the future. The “Alliance in the Alps” contributes towards implementing the Alpine Convention wherever politics is closest to the people, and wherever individuals can help shape the outcome: i.e. in the community, and in the region”*.

Alpine Town of the Year

The association “Alpine town of the year” gathers towns that have been awarded this title since 1997, stating that *“This title is a distinctive sign for particular commitment towards the implementation of the Alpine Convention”*. The governance structure of this association includes the Members Assembly, the Board, the international Jury, and the Secretariat, ensured by CIPRA International. This association organizes the AlpWeek, held every four years which is an international event dedicated to new and promising sustainable development perspectives in the Alps, co-run by the main Alpine organisations involved in sustainable development and mountain protection.



AlpPlan Network

The AlpPlan Network (alpine spatial planning network) is an European Working Group (EWG) enhancing sustainable territorial development in the Alpine region, by connecting experts in spatial planning with the objective to promote cooperation and coordination in the field of spatial planning in the Alpine region, especially from a cross-border perspective. According to AlpPlan Network own statement: “*The realisation of the objectives set by the Alpine Convention and their coordination by means of spatial planning form an important framework for the activities of the network*”. AlpPlan Network cooperates with the working bodies of the AC and action groups of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). The governing body of the AlpPlan Network is its Steering Committee.

AlpNet

The AlpNet is an association of nine leading tourism organisations from Austria, Italy, Germany and Switzerland, established with the objective to promote and strengthen Alpine tourism through cross-border cooperation and shared expertise. Members organisations of the AlpNet network include Allgäu Tourism, Graubünden Ferien, IDM Südtirol-Alto Adige, Luzern-Vierwaldstättersee, Made in Bern AG, SalzburgerLand Tourismus, Tirol Werbung, Trentino Turismo and Valais/Wallis Promotion.

6.2. Transnational and cross-border cooperation governance structures in the Carpathian region

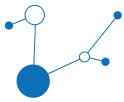
6.2.1. Carpathian Convention

The **Conference of the Parties (COP)** is the main decision-making body of the Carpathian Convention (CC), COP meetings are usually held every three years, with a rotating **Presidency**, transferred at each Meeting of the COP. The Presidency of the CC guides the overall implementation of the CC Programme of Work. In order to maximise the results of common efforts, a non-formal Carpathian Troika (in Russian “тройка” means “trio”) serves as a consultation platform between the previous, current and future Presidencies. The **CC Implementation Committee (CCIC)**, consisting of **National Focal Points (NFPs)** nominated by the Parties is the main subsidiary body of the CC, ensuring that the CC objectives and principles are translated into practice. The CCIC usually meets at least once per year.

Several **Working Groups (WGs)**, composed of NFPs and experts nominated by them, are thematic bodies that support the Parties to the Carpathian Convention in implementing key provisions of the Convention based on its thematic topic. Eight WGs were established: WG on Biodiversity, WG on Sustainable Tourism, WG on Sustainable Forest Management, WG on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development, WG on Climate Change, WG on Sustainable Industry, Energy, Transport and Infrastructure, WG on Cultural Heritage, and WG on Spatial Development, some of which meet once per year.

Since 2004 the **Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (SCC)** is in operation, hosted by UNEP Vienna Programme Office (until 2014 “ad interim”).

As already mentioned, unlike the AC, the CC has no separate ‘Compliance Committee’, as at March 2026 the function to monitor the compliance by the contracting Parties with the provisions of the Convention and its Protocols is carried out by the CCIC.



6.2.2. Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA)

The Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) is a thematic network, established on the legal basis of CC Article 4³¹. The CNPA reports to the CCIC through the SCC. Cooperation towards the establishment of the CNPA officially commenced upon the adoption of the CC in 2003, thus well prior to its entry into force in 2006. The CNPA and the **CNPA Steering Committee** were established by the CC COP in December 2006 (Decision COP1/4³²). In 2008 all CC Parties officially designated their protected areas that met the CNPA membership criteria as CNPA member areas. The commitment of the Parties to support the CNPA was later reiterated and even strengthened in Article 14³³ of the CC 'Biodiversity Protocol' (adopted in 2008, and came into force in 2010, since 2013 in force for all CC Parties).

The sound reason for inscribing the above official commitments regarding the CNPA into legal acts was the intention to prevent the CNPA from sharing the fate of the Association of Carpathian National Parks and Protected Areas (ACANAP). In 2003, when the CC was adopted, UNESCO noted, that *"Although several people mentioned this organisation as a positive contributor to cooperation in the area, it is unclear whether this is still operating"*³⁴. ACANAP was registered already in 1991 as an association domiciled in Tatranská Lomnica (Slovakia). At that time NGOs in Slovakia were not eligible for financial support from the side of the Government, while EU funds were not yet accessible. Thus, ACANAP mainly relied on member fees, supplemented by in-country sources (the Slovak National UNESCO MaB Committee, Slovak Academy of Sciences, and Tatra National Park administration). In result, ACANAP activities were also quite limited.

But, despite that both the CC and its 'Biodiversity Protocol' were duly ratified and remain in force until today, the support for CNPA established by the COP has so far been rather moral than tangible. After almost 20 years since its establishment by the CC Parties in 2006, the CNPA (of the still unclear status, not even of an association) can neither apply for funding nor become a project partner. In result, all three CNPA Conferences held so far were funded either by external partners: 1st in 2008 in Brasov (Romania) by the EUROPARC Federation, or by 'external' projects: 2nd in 2013 in Tatranska Javorina (Slovakia) by the BioREGIO Carpathians project, and most recently in 2021 in Visegrád, (Hungary) supported by both the ConnectGREEN project and the Centralparks project.

Currently, CNPA Chair and the SCC are exploring new ways of organizing this network, following good practice examples from similar organizations like ALPARC or DANUBEPARKS. The latter, the Danube River Network of Protected Areas, was founded as a non-profit association in 2014, uniting member areas from nine countries of the Danube region (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia), and has its Management Board and Secretariat.

6.2.3. Carpathian Wetland Initiative (CWI)

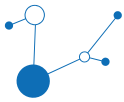
The Carpathian Wetland Initiative (CWI) operates as a regional initiative within the framework of both the Ramsar Convention and the Carpathian Convention. CWI aims to facilitate the collaboration between the two Conventions and their Parties in conserving and wisely using wetlands in the Carpathian region.

³¹ Carpathian Convention Article 4 paragraph 5: *"The Parties shall cooperate in developing an ecological network in the Carpathians, as a constituent part of the Pan-European Ecological Network, in establishing and supporting a Carpathian Network of Protected Areas, as well as enhance conservation and sustainable management in the areas outside of protected areas."*

³² Decision COP1/4 The Conference of the Parties 12. decides to establish the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas, constituting a thematic network of cooperation of mountain protected areas in the Carpathian region, and to designate one CNPA Focal Point in each Party to start up and encourage cooperation in the management of protected Areas within and between the Carpathian countries; 13. decides to establish the CNPA Steering Committee composed of the CNPA Focal Points of each country.

³³ Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity to the Carpathian Convention, Article 14, paragraph 1: *"The Parties shall support and facilitate cooperation under the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas established by the Conference of the Parties and encourage the protected area administrations to take part in the cooperation within this Network"*.

³⁴ UNESCO (2003) Jardin.M., Fall, J., Thiry, E. "Five Transboundary Biosphere Reserves in Europe". Biosphere Reserves Technical Notes. UNESCO, Paris, p. 31. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000132140.locale=en>



6.2.4. Carpathian Education for Sustainable Development Expert Network (CESDEN)

The Carpathian Education for Sustainable Development Expert Network (CESDEN), established under the Carpathian Convention is a network of experts in the field of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) aiming to help strengthen the CC networks, communication and awareness-raising.

6.2.5. Science for the Carpathians (S4C)

The Science for the Carpathians (S4C), a transnational cooperation network established in 2008 and closely cooperating with the SCC. S4C connects scientists in Central Europe, defines research priorities for the Carpathian region and enhances international collaboration with partners from outside the Carpathians. S4C promotes research coordination and collaborations across disciplines and national boundaries, advocates for a pan-Carpathian research, and fosters dialogue between research, policy and practice. Members of the S4C **Executive Board** are also members of its **Scientific Steering Committee**, both above S4C bodies include members not only from the Carpathian countries, but also from Austria, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and USA. S4C activities include the development and implementation of the 'Research Agenda for the Carpathians' and organization of 'Forum Carpathicum' open meetings, aimed at integrating different fields of expertise to generate value for the Carpathian mountain region.

6.2.6. Euroregions in the Carpathian region

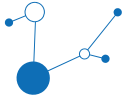
There are six Euroregions in the Carpathian region, including Euroregion Tatry (PL/SK), Euroregion Beskydy - Beskydy (PL/CZ/SK), Euroregion Bilé - Biele Karpaty (CZ/SK), Euroregion Kras (SK/HU), trilateral Euroregion Middle Danube - Iron Gates + Euroregion Danube 21 (BG/RO/RS), and also the spatially largest Euroregion in Europe, involving as many as five countries: the Carpathian Euroregion (HU/PL/RO/SK/UA), established in 1993 and formally operating as the Interregional Union of the Carpathian Euroregion, gathering over 100 members.

In the context of the 'House of Brands on the Czech-Polish border' concept, proposed in the 2024 [Action Plan for improved public-private cooperation in the Sudetes for regional products and tourism services](#) (CM project Deliverable 1.4.5) jointly prepared by the Foundation for Landscape Protection (FOK) and the Association of Regional Brands (ARZ), mentioning the regional brands in use on the Czech ([Regionální značky](#)) and on the Polish side ([Karkonoska Marka Lokalna - Skarby Duchy Gór](#)) it should be mentioned, that the Euroregion Bilé-Biele Karpaty (CZ/SK) has registered the first **transboundary regional trademark** in Central Europe, [Tradice Bílých Karpat](#) (Traditions of White Carpathians), while the Carpathian Euroregion promotes the use of the Carpathian Brand [CARPATHIA](#) (including sub-brands, e.g. EtnoCarpathia, AgroCarpathia) and is implementing the CARPATHIA Brand Strategy in partnership with the Canton of Valais (Switzerland).

6.2.7. European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation in the Carpathian region

European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) established in the Carpathian region, included, as at 25 November 2025, nine bilateral entities: Abaúj-Abaújban EGTC (HU-SK), Ipoly-völgye EGTC (HU-SK), Ister-Granum EGTC (HU-SK), Slaná-Rimava EGTC (HU-SK), Spoločný región EGTC (CZ-SK), Svinka EGTC (HU-SK), Tatry EGTC (PL-SK), Velká Morava EGTC (CZ-SK), and Via Carpatia EGTC (HU-SK).

In the above context, the first **EGTC involving** bordering regions of an EU MS and a **non-EU country** should be mentioned - Tisza EGTC (HU-UA), established on 26 October 2015 by self-governments of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and of Kisvárdá town on the Hungarian side, and of Zakarpatska Province on the Ukrainian side. However, it cannot be perceived as a 'Carpathian EGTC', as the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County of Hungary is located outside the Carpathian region.



6.2.8. UNESCO-MAB Transboundary Biosphere Reserves in the Carpathian region

As at March 2026, there are only two (like in the Alps) officially recognized UNESCO-MAB Transboundary Biosphere Reserves (TBRs) in the Carpathian mountain region: the worldwide first trilateral East Carpathians TBR (PL/SK/UA), initially designated as a bilateral PL-SK BR on 10 November in 1992, later extended to include the Ukrainian part on 11 December 1998; and the bilateral Tatra TBR (PL/SK) designated in 1992.

Tatra TBR (bilateral)

The cross-border cooperation governance structure of the bilateral **Tatra TBR** includes administrative/operational and advisory bodies of the TBR. Administrative and operational functions are ensured by closely cooperating **administrations** of the two adjacent national parks (Tatrzański Park Narodowy and Tatranský národný park), while the advisory function is performed by the TBR **Steering Committee**, composed of directors of both national parks, representatives of local governments of municipalities located within or adjacent to the TBR, representatives of scientific and non-governmental organizations, as well as of institutions and associations operating within the TBR.

East Carpathians TBR (trilateral)

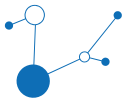
Cross-border cooperation in the trilateral **East Carpathians TBR** has initially been developed on the basis of a trilateral inter-ministerial agreement signed on 27 September 1991 by the Ministers of Environment of the three countries: Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine³⁵, i.e. the ‘Protocol on cooperation on establishing the international biosphere reserve in the Eastern Carpathians’. This Protocol provided for a delimitation of the area to be designated as a BR reserve in each country, and triggered the procedures for submitting separate national proposals for BR designation by UNESCO, and for designating two new protected areas on the Polish side to be included in the future TBR.

The 1991 trilateral Protocol expressed the joint intention for a later elaboration, adoption and signature of a trilateral intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in this TBR. It should be noted that the legislation of most countries (except for e.g. Ukraine) do not include BRs among the national categories of legally protected areas, which can adversely effect cooperation in a TBR, unless backed by a valid legal agreement. As at March 2026, a trilateral agreement concerning East Carpathians TBR, planned in 1991, is still absent.

In case of the trilateral East Carpathians TBR, its cross-border cooperation governance structure evolved over time. Initially, it had two bodies formally established on the basis of the aforementioned trilateral 1991 inter-ministerial Protocol: the **Coordinative Council**, and the **International Scientific Council** set as an advisory body. But, the TBR Coordinative Council met only thrice (last time in May 1994), while the TBR International Scientific Council never gathered.

Beginning from 1995 this TBR had a targeted external financial mechanism, the **Foundation for the Eastern Carpathian Biodiversity Conservation (ECBC)**, domiciled in Geneva (Switzerland, perceived as a ‘fourth, thus neutral country’), established on the basis of a trilateral international agreement between Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine signed in December 1992 in Snina (Slovakia), with the financial support by the World Bank and the MacArthur Foundation (USA) on the basis of Minutes of Understanding signed in September 1993 in Washington D.C. ECBC governing bodies included representatives of the ministries, state forest administrations, protected areas and leading scientific institutions from all three involved countries. Thus, in mid-1995 the **Board of the ECBC Foundation** replaced the above two Councils. To increase its operational efficiency, the Swiss-based ECBC established in 2000 the ECBC Representative Office in Poland, since 2002 backed by ECBC Country Coordinators appointed for the Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

³⁵ Ukraine regained independence on 24 August 1991



In result, between 1995 and 2006 the ECBC effectively coordinated and simultaneously funded joint cross-border cooperation activities in trilateral East Carpathians TBR. As emphasized by UNESCO “*The Foundation remains the only legally established body for trilateral consultations and cooperation*”³⁶. However, UNESCO also noted that “*Considering that in many ways this Foundation fulfills the role of a coordinating body for the biosphere reserve, it is undoubtedly a positive point for the functioning of the unit as a whole, even if the administrative functions rather take over the initial idea of having a Foundation to fund projects*”.

But, established as a Swiss-based foundation, the ECBC was non-eligible for the Swiss aid funds, much less for the EU funding or the EEA and Norway Grants. Most importantly, the ECBC did not survive the 2005-2007 period of political turbulences in Poland, resulting in purges in the administration and personnel changes.

On 15 November 2013 directors of protected areas constituting the East Carpathians TBR adopted a new agreement concerning the TBR functioning and the **TBR Coordinating Council**, expected to meet at least once per year. On the same day the above TBR Coordinating Council adopted a Framework Work Plan for the TBR for the ten-years period (until November 2023).

An international audit covering the 2012–2016 period was carried out in 2017 in all TBR national parts by respective national audit institutions, the Supreme Audit Offices of Poland (Najwyższy Urząd Kontroli, NIK) and of the Slovak Republic, and by the Audit Chamber of Ukraine. The NIK assessed the actual management capabilities of the aforementioned Council as limited, and its meetings as a forum for exchanging information on the management of the national parts of the TBR.

NIK findings indicated that cross-border cooperation was predominantly of a formal nature and did not translate into planning or implementation of joint projects, while its tangible results were limited to the signature of the Agreement in November 2013, establishment of the Coordinating Council, adoption of the Framework Work Plan, and joint submission of the TBR Periodic Review required by UNESCO. The NIK noted that the 2013 Framework Work Plan did not indicate priorities, and defined neither the timeline and budget of planned joint activities, nor responsible entities. In NIK opinion, no joint implementation, management, or coordination activities were undertaken within the TBR³⁷. These NIK observations were consistent with the conclusions and recommendations of the aforementioned audit bodies in Slovakia and Ukraine, who audited the parks that make up the TBR in their respective countries.

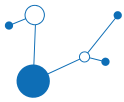
The NIK did not formulate any audit conclusions directly related to TBR functioning as the term “biosphere reserve” is absent in Polish law. Instead, the NIK expressed the opinion that “*it is advisable for the Minister of the Environment to take action to conclude an agreement - an international treaty - with the ministers responsible for nature conservation in the Slovak Republic and Ukraine regarding the operation of the Reserve. Such an agreement would provide the basis for establishing a management body for the Reserve, responsible for developing and implementing joint or coordinated conservation strategies in accordance with UNESCO requirements, as well as a body overseeing the proper implementation of the Reserve’s objectives and functions*”.

The Minister of the Environment of Poland did not present a position on the Information submitted by NIK.

As at March 2026, a valid trilateral agreement regarding the East Carpathians TBR advised by the NIK in 2017 is absent, while the East Carpathians TBR Coordinating Council last met before the COVID-19 pandemic.

³⁶ UNESCO (2003) Jardin.M., Fall, J., Thiry, E. “Five Transboundary Biosphere Reserves in Europe”. Biosphere Reserves Technical Notes. UNESCO, Paris, p. 34. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000132140.locale=en>

³⁷ NIK, Informacja o wynikach kontroli - Funkcjonowanie Międzynarodowego Rezerwatu Biosfery „Karpaty Wschodnie” https://www.nik.gov.pl/kontrola/wyniki-kontroli-nik/pobierz_nik-p-17-095-rezerwat-karpaty-wschodnie-2_typ_kk.pdf



6.2.9. Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP)

The Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) is an emerging transnational cooperation network in the Carpathian region, including, as at March 2026, three active national Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTC). The Association of the Carpathian Euroregion (ACE) - Poland hosts the CSTC Poland, the Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (ZMOS) hosts the CSTC Slovakia, while the Braşov County host the CSTC Romania.

As stated at the CC website *“The Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) shall be considered as a cooperation framework of interested Parties representant by officially designated national entities (CSTP Centres) that are created to assist the seven Carpathian Parties, WG Tourism and its stakeholders in implementing the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism, and its Strategy for the Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians”*.

The Ministerial Declaration of the Fifth Meeting of the CC COP (COP5), held in 2017, acknowledged the establishment of the CSTP. Decision COP5/10 welcomed the progress made in establishment of the CSTP by signature of the memorandum by Romania, Ukraine and Poland initiating the cooperation. Decision COP6/15 adopted in 2020 invited CSTP to share information on its activities with the WG Tourism and the Secretariat on a regular basis and requested that the CSTP reports become an integral part of the overall Carpathian Convention Progress Report in the future.

In 2023 Decision COP7/15 the Conference of the Parties welcomed the progress made by the CSTP and its Centres, particularly on creating and expanding the cooperation network that is crucial for further implementation of the CC in the field of sustainable tourism, in this respect appreciated the opening of the CSTP Centre Slovakia established in cooperation between the Ministry of Environment of Slovakia and the Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia. Further, COP7 welcomed the signing of the MoC between the SCC and the CSTC Poland, and invited the CSTC Romania, the CSTC Ukraine, and the CSTC Slovakia to proceed with the signing, if all formal requirements are met, at the earliest convenience.

COP7 in 2023 thanked the CSTC Poland for coordinating the activities of the CSTP in 2021 – 2023 and welcomed the proposal by Poland to continue the coordinating role of CSTP for the next implementation period 2024–2026 during the Serbian Presidency of the Carpathian Convention. What is also important, it is Poland who chairs the CC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism.

Already in 2021 ACE - Poland prepared the [Assumptions for the CSTP Work Plan for 2021 2023. Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform Work Plan for 2021 –2023](#) where it openly stated, that the *“Cooperation at the international level within the CSTP was very limited, there are no links between the individual nodes of the CSTP structure. Additionally, it is incomplete”*.

The above concise statement **perfectly identified the main shortcoming of the CSTP development process** and obstacle for initiating effective transnational cooperation within this network - the absence of CSTCs in other Carpathian countries, and of the joint transnational cooperation initiatives, indispensable for the proper functioning of the CSTP as an effective and fully operational transnational network.

The information recently posted on the website of the Information Center “Green Dossier” (NGO based in Kyiv, Ukraine) summarising the outcomes of the 11th Meeting of the CC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism held on 10-11 March 2026 and of the Final Conference of the CM project held on 12 March 2026, which presented key results related to the CSTP (both events organised back-to-back in Rzeszów, Poland) stated, that *“Although the Ukrainian National CSTP Centre is currently suspended due to military operations and related obstacles, Ukraine remains a critical component of the region’s sustainable*



development strategy” and that “It is planned that Ukraine will be fully integrated into the CSTP Work Plan “when possible”, allowing it to benefit from the established cross-border structures for the recovery and development of the tourism sector”³⁸.

However, there is no similar, simple and equally acceptable explanation for the **absence of national CSTCs in the other three Carpathian countries, namely in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Serbia.**

On one hand, it is true that an explicit commitment to establish the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) and its national Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTCs) has not been inscribed into any CC legal acts in force and binding for all CC Parties (neither in CC Article 9, nor corresponding 2011 Protocol on Sustainable Tourism).

But, on the other hand, besides the meetings of the CC WG on Sustainable Tourism established as a CC thematic body, the **transnational cooperation of national CSTCs under the CSTP umbrella** remains, as at March 2026, the only available tool for the effective transnational governance towards the achievement of the Convention’s objectives related to **sustainable tourism development in the entire Carpathian region.**

The thematic [Protocol on Sustainable Tourism](#) (Bratislava, 27 May 2011), already in force for all Parties since 30 June 2015, determines numerous **legally binding obligations for the Parties** to cooperate on e.g.:

- **marketing and promoting** the Carpathian region as the destination for sustainable tourism (Article 8, paragraph 2)
- development of the **common Carpathian regional sustainable tourism services, products and packages** (Article 9, paragraph 3)
- development and implementation of the **common Carpathian regional tourist brands** (Article 9, paragraph 4)
- development and implementation of **joint promotional strategies and marketing schemes** for the common Carpathian regional sustainable tourism products, services and packages (Article 9, paragraph 5)
- developing, promoting and implementing the **common Carpathian tourism quality standards** concerning accommodation, facilities, services and customer care (Article 10, paragraph 2)
- developing, promoting and implementing the **common Carpathian tourism quality certification system** (Article 10, paragraph 3)
- developing, adopting and implementing the common Carpathian policy for the **promotion, labeling and certification of local products and local producers’ networks**, in particular of traditional arts and handicrafts, and local goods including agricultural products utilizing local breeds of domestic animals and cultivated plant varieties (Article 11, paragraph 2)
- developing, adopting and implementing the common Carpathian policy of permanent and systematic **monitoring of tourist traffic** in the Carpathian region (Article 12, paragraph 1)
- **exchange of information and promotion of good practice examples** concerning the sustainable development of tourist transport and infrastructure in the Carpathians (Article 16, paragraph 7)
- **exchange of information and experience, and promotion of good practice examples** concerning the development and management of sustainable tourism in the Carpathians (Article 19, paragraph 1).

For obvious reasons, the WG on Sustainable Tourism has neither a legal mandate nor sufficient operational capacities to ensure the Parties’ compliance with these few selected aforementioned legal obligations, related to implementation of the Carpathian Convention in the field of sustainable tourism, while

³⁸ Information Center “Green Dossier” website, accessed March 2026
<https://www.dossier.org.ua/news/sustainable-tourism-in-carpathians/>



the developing transnational cooperation under the umbrella of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform can largely facilitate the achievement of the above objectives and tasks. Moreover, no other relevant transnational governance tool for the entire Carpathian region is currently available.

It should be reminded, that two Deliverables of the Central Mountain project concern the planned and so much desired operationalization of the CSTP, namely [D.2.2.1 CSTP Work Plan Designing and testing a new Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform Cooperation System](#) and [D.3.2.2 Transnational structures for long-term cooperation in mountain areas. The CSTP Solution: Cross-Border Working Teams \(CBWTs\) as a governance mechanism to secure lasting cooperation on sustainable tourism in the Carpathian region.](#)

6.3. Transnational and cross-border cooperation governance structures in the Sudetes region

6.3.1. Euroregions in the Sudetes region

There are as many as three Euroregions in the Sudetes region (versus only three in a much larger Carpathian region), including two bilateral, Euroregion Glacensis (CZ/PL) and Euroregion Praděd - Pradziad (CZ/PL), and one trilateral, Euroregion Nisse-Nisa-Nysa (DE/CZ/PL).

Euroregion Glacensis (bilateral), established across the Czech-Polish state border on 5 December 1996, spatially the largest of the three, located in the central part of the Sudetes region (between Euroregions Nisse-Nisa-Nysa to the northwest, and Praděd - Pradziad to the southeast) operates a cross-border Small Grants Programme, and in 2020 developed a joint strategic document the [Strategy for the Development of the Euroregion Glacensis 2020+](#). It should be noted, that this Euroregion has two separate websites for each respective national part, but not a common website, which could then enhance the sense of co-ownership and common responsibility for this Euroregion among its stakeholders.

Euroregion Praděd - Pradziad (bilateral), based on a framework agreement signed on 2 July 1997 (but effectively functioning since 7 May 1998), encompasses the southeasternmost part of the Sudetes mountain region (adjacent to the operational area of the Euroregion Glacensis to the northwest). It also operates a cross-border Small Grants Programme, and has a currently valid strategic document, the [Strategy of the Polish-Czech cooperation in Euroregion Praděd - Pradziad for 2021-2029](#). Moreover, contrary to Euroregion Glacensis, Euroregion Praděd - Pradziad does have a common, multilingual website.

Euroregion Nisse-Nisa-Nysa (trilateral), established as the first Euroregion in the Sudetes mountain region, already on 21 December 1991, encompasses the northwesternmost part of this region (adjacent to the operational area of Euroregion Glacensis to the southeast). It also operates a cross-border Small Grants Programme, has a trilingual common website and a common strategic document (published in each of the three languages), and the [Strategy of the Nisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion 2021-2027](#).

What is important, the joint governing structure of Euroregion Nisse-Nisa-Nysa is backed by common thematic Euroregion Working Groups on six thematic areas:

- Transport
- Economy and Tourism
- Environment, Climate and Energy
- Risk Management, Health and Safety
- Culture, Sport, Education and Knowledge
- Promotion of Cross-Border Cooperation.



Moreover, Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa currently implements an Interreg Central Europe project being a 'sister project' to the Central Mountains project, namely '[BorderLabsCE - Participatory cross-border governance for transition management in central European cross-border regions](#)', aimed at improving public capacities for participatory cross-border cooperation.

The BorderLabsCE project, to be implemented until November 2026, is led by the Saxon State Ministry for Regional Development, in a partnership consortium including, *inter alia*, EGTC GO (IT-SI) from the Alpine region, Ister-Granum EGTC (HU-SK) from the Carpathian region, as well as Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa and EGTC Novum from the Sudetes region. BorderLabsCE expected project outputs include a 'Charter for participatory cross-border cooperation governance in Central Europe'.

6.3.2. European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation in the Sudetes region

The only European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation in the Sudetes region is EGTC Novum (CZ-PL), established on 15 December 2015, domiciled in Jelenia Góra (Poland). Its governance structure includes the General Assembly, the Supervisory Council performing control functions, and the Director as an executive body. It should be noted, that the General Assembly of the EGTC Novum, composed of 11 members, includes the representatives of the Euroregion Glacensis and of the Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa.

6.3.3. UNESCO-MAB Transboundary Biosphere Reserve in the Sudetes region

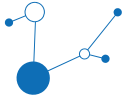
There is only one officially recognized UNESCO-MAB Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (TBR) in the Sudetes mountain region: the bilateral Krkonoše/Karkonosze TBR (CZ/PL), designated in 1992, additionally certified as a 'Transboundary Park' by the EUROPARC Federation in 2004.

The governing structure of the Krkonoše/Karkonosze TBR was established on the basis of an agreement, signed on 20 December 1996, included the bilateral Czech-Polish TBR Council (operational since 1997), composed of the directors of the two key protected areas, national parks adjacent to the state border (Krkonošský národní park, and Karkonoski Park Narodowy), representatives of regional (Jelenia Góra, Semily, and Trutnov) and local level authorities, local NGOs, and of the private business sector from both national parts. The TBR Council had a rotating Chairmanship and was expected to meet once per year.

The provisions of the 1996 bilateral agreement provided for the establishment of a Czech-Polish Office for the TBR, although its establishment and operations cannot be confirmed by any currently accessible sources.

Importantly the Krkonoše/Karkonosze TBR Council was backed by 10 transboundary thematic working groups (on forestry, tourism, culture, agriculture, nature conservation, spatial planning, support for local communities, relations with state administration, relations with NGOs, and relations with the private sector).

Further, the TBR Council included representatives of the two NGOs, of the 'Man and Krkonoše' Civic Society, and of the Karkonosze Foundation, appointed by the Council as 'country coordinators' for the Czech and Polish parts, respectively. The involvement of these NGOs was a practical solution, as it allowed to access funding earmarked for NGOs, for which e.g. national park administrations were not eligible.



7. Conclusions - summary

Probably the most concise summary of the above comparative analysis of the three different but strongly interrelated aspects (legal, strategic, and financial aspects - each of them separately but more importantly - all of them taken together) of the existing policy framework for transnational and cross-border cooperation in the three mountain regions concerned, being of fundamental importance for the **creation and functioning of effective cooperation governance structures** can be as follows:

Alpine region

- region-specific legal policy framework providing the legal basis for transnational cooperation in the entire mountain region: **Alpine Convention** and its thematic Protocols in force, involving **EU being a Party** to the AC, with effective formalised compliance mechanism
- EU strategic policy framework covering the entire mountain region: the **macro-regional EU Strategy for the Alpine Region - EUSALP**
- EU financial policy framework mechanism supporting cooperation between all countries of the mountain region: **EU Interreg B Alpine Space Programme**

Carpathian region

- region-specific legal policy framework providing the legal basis for transnational cooperation in the entire mountain region: **Carpathian Convention** and its thematic Protocols in force, but not involving the EU as a Party, and without any compliance mechanism
- EU strategic policy framework covering the entire mountain region: absent
- EU financial policy framework mechanism supporting cooperation between all countries of the mountain region: absent

Sudetes region

- region-specific legal policy framework providing the legal basis for transnational cooperation in the entire mountain region: absent
- EU strategic policy framework covering the entire mountain region: absent
- EU financial policy framework mechanism supporting cooperation between all countries of the mountain region: **EU Interreg Central Europe Programme**

In result of the above factors, largely determining potential for transnational and cross-border cooperation in a respective entire mountain region - **governance structures** facilitating cooperation are at different stages of advancement or development:

- in the **Alpine region**: diverse and well developed, including governance structures with long track record, significant achievements, extensive expertise and experience, gathered in the course of intensive and effective cooperation lasting over some 74 years (since the establishment of CIPRA in 1952), firmly embedded in binding legal framework of the Alpine Convention and its thematic Protocols with accompanying compliance mechanism, moreover supported by both strategic and financial policy frameworks of the EU, explicitly targeted at the entire Alpine region.
- in the **Carpathian region**: much less effective, still under development despite common initiatives undertaken throughout the last 23 years (since the adoption of the Carpathian Convention in 2003, which triggered cooperation towards the establishment of e.g. CNPA), despite that embedded in binding legal framework of the Carpathian Convention and its thematic Protocols (lacking a compliance mechanism), but supported neither by EU strategic nor EU financial policy frameworks that could cover the entire Carpathian region.



- in the **Sudetes region**: fragmented mainly among the three Euroregions, while other potential forms of cross-border governance are still under development, although jointly eligible for EU Interreg Central Europe Programme funding, but lacking any (either EU or transnational) legal and strategic policy frameworks concerning the entire Sudetes region.

Most importantly, the above **disparities in the accessibility of EU funding sources** among the three European mountain regions concerned to a considerable extent **limit the possibilities of a 'simple replication'** of any Alpine transnational and cross-border cooperation models, governance patterns, and networking solutions in the other two mountain regions: Carpathians and Sudetes.

8. Policy recommendations aimed to support transnational and cross-border cooperation in respective mountain regions

8.1. Policy recommendations concerning the legal framework

Based on the above comparative analysis, several policy recommendations concerning the legal framework can be formulated, for each of the three mountain regions concerned, as follows:

8.1.1. Policy recommendations concerning the legal framework in the Alpine region

Recommendation 1.1.1

addressed to the Parties to the Alpine Convention:

Consider the need and possibility to develop, adopt and ratify new thematic Protocols to the Framework Alpine Convention, concerning:

- *cultural heritage and traditional knowledge of the Alpine region (building on the 2006 Ministerial Declaration on Population and Culture, and/or cooperating with the Carpathian Convention, whose Working Group on Cultural Heritage drafted such thematic Protocol already in 2018)*
- *water management (building on the 2020 Ministerial Declaration on integrated and sustainable water management in the Alps).*

Recommendation 1.1.2

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in countries of the Alpine region:

Consider the need and possibility to encourage and support concluding cross-border cooperation agreements among Local Action Groups (LAGs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Alpine region.

Recommendation 1.1.3

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in countries of the Alpine region:

Consider the need and possibility to encourage and support concluding cross-border cooperation agreements among Destination Marketing/Management Organizations (DMOs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Alpine region.



8.1.2. Policy recommendations concerning the legal framework in the Carpathian region

Recommendation 1.2.1

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, in particular its COP Presidencies:

Continue to reiterate the invitation to the European Union (being a Party to the Alpine Convention since 1991) to accede to the Carpathian Convention, with the objective to enhance a greater territorial cohesion of Europe, but also to emphasize the neighbourly relations, cooperation, and networking between the Alpine and Carpathian mountain regions.

Recommendation 1.2.2

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, in particular its COP Presidencies:

Consider the need and possibility to address the invitation to Austria to accede to the Carpathian Convention, in order to encourage transnational and cross-border cooperation of stakeholders from the Austrian part of the Carpathian region, i.e. the Austrian part of Austrian - South-Moravian Carpathians (Österreichisch-Südmährische Karpaten) in the Weinviertel region of the Federal State of Lower Austria (Bundesland Niederösterreich) with partner entities and organisations from the other seven 'Carpathian countries'.

Recommendation 1.2.3

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

In compliance with obligations under Article 1 of the Carpathian Convention, agree upon and delimitate the Carpathian Convention application perimeter (geographic scope of application of the Convention).

Recommendation 1.2.4

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

Consider the need and possibility to adopt, enact and implement an effective Carpathian Convention Compliance Mechanism.

Supplementary note to Recommendation 1.2.4: see Annex 1 'Comparative analysis of the current legal framework to monitor compliance with the provisions of the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention'.

Recommendation 1.2.5

addressed to Hungary:

Consider the need and possibility to sign, ratify and accede to the Protocol on Sustainable Transport (Mikulov, 26 September 2014).

Recommendation 1.2.6

addressed to Poland:

Consider the need and possibility to ratify and accede to the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management (Bratislava, 27 May 2011).

Recommendation 1.2.7

addressed to the Republic of Serbia:

Consider the need and possibility to sign, ratify and accede to the Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (Mikulov, 26 September 2014).



Recommendation 1.2.8

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

Consider the need and possibility to develop, adopt and ratify new thematic Protocols to the Framework CC concerning, in particular:

- *spatial planning (CC Article 5)*
- *cultural heritage and traditional knowledge (CC Article 11), building on the draft Protocol elaborated by the CC Working Group on Cultural Heritage already in 2018*
- *awareness raising, education and public participation (CC Article 13).*

Recommendation 1.2.9

addressed to Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine:

Consider the possibility to adopt and sign a trilateral intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the trilateral East Carpathians TBR, envisaged by the trilateral inter-ministerial ‘Protocol on cooperation on establishing the international biosphere reserve in the Eastern Carpathians’ signed on 27 September 1991 by the Ministers of Environment of Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine, and as advised in 2017 by the Supreme Audit Office of Poland (NIK), based on the findings of an international audit carried out by respective national audit institutions, i.e. the NIK, the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic (Najvyšší kontrolný úrad Slovenskej republiky) and the Audit Chamber of Ukraine (Аудиторська палата України).

Recommendation 1.2.10

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in countries of the Carpathian region:

Consider the need and possibility to encourage and support concluding cross-border cooperation agreements among Local Action Groups (LAGs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Carpathian region.

Recommendation 1.2.11

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in countries of the Carpathian region:

Consider the need and possibility to encourage and support concluding cross-border cooperation agreements among Destination Marketing/Management Organizations (DMOs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Carpathian region.

8.1.3. Policy recommendations concerning the legal framework in the Sudetes region

Recommendation 1.3.1

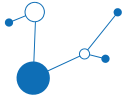
addressed to the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen):

Consider the need and possibility to conclude an agreement concerning trilateral cross-border cooperation in the shared Sudetes mountain region.

Recommendation 1.3.2

addressed to the Authorities of the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion, Euroregion Glacensis, and Euroregion Praděd - Pradziad:

Consider the need and possibility to conclude a formal agreement (e.g. MoC or MoA) between the three territorially relevant Euroregions: trilateral Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion, bilateral Euroregion Glacensis, and bilateral Euroregion Praděd - Pradziad, in order to strengthen cross-border cooperation in the Sudetes mountain region by establishing a legal basis for trilateral cooperation.



Recommendation 1.3.3

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in all three national parts of the shared Sudetes mountain region:

Consider the need and possibility to conclude a formal agreement (e.g. MoC or MoA) binding for public authorities in the adjacent border areas of the three neighbouring countries (the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Free State of Saxony) in the Sudetes mountain region at the NUTS level 3, establishing the joint cross-border governance structure, detailing specific responsibilities, roles, and potentially also financial terms of cooperation, intended to serve as the legal basis for trilateral cross-border cooperation in the shared Sudetes mountain region.

Supplementary note to Recommendation 1.3.3: Such Moc or MoA should involve public authorities of all ten territorially relevant NUTS level 3 units, including six in the Czech Republic (Ústí nad Labem Region - CZ042, Liberec Region - CZ051, Hradec Králové Region - CZ052, Pardubice Region - CZ053, Olomouc Region - CZ071, and Moravian-Silesian Region - CZ080), one in the Free State of Saxony (Görlitz - DED2D), and three in Poland (Jeleniogórski - PL515, Wałbrzyski - PL517, and Nyski - PL523).

Recommendation 1.3.4

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in all three national parts of the shared Sudetes mountain region:

Consider the need and possibility to encourage and support concluding cross-border cooperation agreements among the Local Action Groups (LAGs) established under the EU Common Agricultural Policy CAP LEADER Programme operating in adjacent border areas of the Sudetes region.

Recommendation 1.3.5

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in all three national parts of the shared Sudetes mountain region:

Consider the need and possibility to encourage and support concluding cross-border cooperation agreements among the Destination Marketing/Management Organizations (DMOs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Sudetes region.

8.2. Policy recommendations concerning the strategic framework

Based on the above comparative analysis, some policy recommendations concerning the strategic framework can be formulated, however only for the two of all three mountain regions concerned, as follows:

8.2.1. Policy recommendations concerning the strategic framework in the Alpine region

Given the presence of the EU Macro-regional Strategy for the Alpine region (EUSALP) and its long-term Action Plans (including the recently adopted EUSALP Revised Action Plan 2026), and of the Multi-Annual Work Programmes (MAPs) of the Alpine Conference (including the current MAP 2023-2030), as well as taking into account the continuous presence of the Interreg Alpine Space Programme, targeted solely at the Alpine region and well aligned with the above EUSALP, there seems to be **no urgent need for formulating any policy recommendations concerning either the strategic framework in the Alpine region or the successful implementation of the aforementioned strategic documents.**



8.2.2. Policy recommendations concerning the strategic framework in the Carpathian region

Similarly, given the number of strategic documents concerning transnational and cross-border cooperation in the Carpathian mountain region, adopted under the Carpathian Convention, there seems to be no reason for recommending the urgent development of any new strategies for this region.

Particularly not in a situation when the implementation of the vast majority of previously officially adopted or endorsed strategic documents must continuously be postponed, due to the absence of available funding sources for common initiatives to be undertaken at the scale of the entire Carpathian region.

The approach described by UNESCO³⁹, mentioning “*the belief that every form of activity beyond a country’s national borders comes under foreign policy*”, and noting that “*It is still difficult, or even impossible, to use state funding to cover activities linked to transboundary cooperation*” has not changed throughout the last 23 years, since 2003. As at March 2026, there is still little hope, to say the least, that the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (despite that including a country hoping to advance to the G20) will ever allocate a tiny portion of their state budget funds for the joint implementation of strategy(ies) commonly agreed under the Carpathian Convention.

There are currently, as at March 2026, some common hopes that at least the partial implementation of several strategic documents adopted under the Carpathian Convention can be funded, although not directly by the state central funds, but co-funded on the project basis under the common EU LIFE Programme (LIFE Strategic Nature Project ‘Carpathian LIFE - Safeguarding and Mainstreaming Biodiversity in the Carpathian Region’ proposal submitted on 5 March 2026).

Should the above joint proposal to LIFE be approved for funding, the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework Implementation Plan 2027-2035 and the International Action Plan on conservation of large carnivores and ensuring ecological connectivity in the Carpathians will be implemented, and partly also the Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the Forest Protocol.

But, the implementation of the other strategic documents of the Carpathian Convention will still be pending. In particular of the CC strategies concerning the sustainable tourism development.

Recommendation 2.1

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

Promote the common Carpathian strategic initiative and lobby for the approval of the ‘Carpathian LIFE - Safeguarding and Mainstreaming Biodiversity in the Carpathian Region’ LIFE Strategic Nature Project, and, should it be approved for funding, support the implementation of the aforementioned joint project.

Recommendation 2.2

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

Consider the need and possibility to identify potential funding sources for the joint implementation of the ‘Strategy for the Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians (adopted in 2014 by Decision COP4/6 paragraph 3) and of the Strategy for local sustainable tourism development based on natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathians (endorsed in 2023 by Decision COP7/9 paragraph 10, which encouraged its use, while Decision COP7/15 paragraph 7 reiterated the COP encouragement to consider and implement it while implementing the Carpathian Convention).

³⁹ UNESCO (2003) Jardin.M., Fall, J., Thiry, E. “Five Transboundary Biosphere Reserves in Europe”. Biosphere Reserves Technical Notes. UNESCO, Paris, p. 42. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000132140.locale=en>



8.2.3. Policy recommendations concerning the strategic framework in the Sudetes region

The analysis indicated the absence of strategic documents concerning the entire Sudetes mountain region.

Recommendation 2.3

addressed to the public authorities of the Czech Republic, Poland, the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen), Euroregions, EGTC Novum, TBR, and other key stakeholders in the Sudetes region:

Consider the need and possibility to develop a common trilateral Strategy for the protection and sustainable development of the Sudetes mountain region, or any other strategic document concerning the entire Sudetes mountain region, with a due involvement of and approval by the local government authorities, local NGOs and other key stakeholders.

Recommendation 2.3

addressed to the Interreg CE Central Mountains project partners from the Sudetes region:

Consider the possibility to extend the geographical scope of implementation, and impact of the 2024 'Action Plan for improved public-private cooperation in the Sudetes for regional products and tourism services' developed under the Central Mountains project (Deliverable 1.4.5) to involve and concern partners from the entire Sudetes mountain region, including not only stakeholders from the remaining Czech and Polish parts of the Sudetes mountain region, but also from Germany / the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen).

8.3. Policy recommendations concerning the financial framework for cross-border cooperation

Recommendation 3.1

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, in particular its COP Presidencies:

Use all available diplomatic channels, and working contacts with the EEA and Norway Grants Donor States (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) to promote the idea of re-launching their Fund for Regional Cooperation, potentially the sole funding source for joint transnational and cross-border initiatives planned at the scale of the entire Carpathian region, where entities from all Parties will again be equally eligible for funding.

Recommendation 3.2

addressed to the European Union (EU) authorities responsible for shaping the EU Interreg Strand A (Cross-border) Cooperation Programmes:

Consider the need and possibility to adjust the priorities of the Interreg A Cross-Border Programme in accordance to its name and purpose, by prioritising cross-border activities planned in directly adjacent border areas of neighbouring countries, over activities planned in other, non-adjacent and 'not necessarily border areas' of neighbouring larger NUTS level 2 regions.

Supplementary note to Recommendation 3.2: The above proposed adjustment will be possible through implementing a 'territorial focus approach' by Interreg Strand A (Cross-border) Cooperation Programmes, resembling the thematic approach of Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes aligned with respective EU macro-regional strategy (where at least 80% of their financial allocation must be aligned with the Strategy's thematic focus). Similarly, Interreg A Cross-Border programmes could adopt a general rule, that some fixed percentage (e.g. no less than 30% to 40%) of their financial allocation shall support cross-border cooperation activities in cross-border functional areas (CBFAs) or transboundary biosphere reserves (TBRs), some other fixed percentage of funds shall be earmarked for activities to be undertaken in other parts of border areas (being neither CBFAs nor TBRs), while only the remaining funds can be spent outside border areas, in other parts of larger NUTS level 2 regions (with the explicit priority for NUTS level 2 regions directly adjacent to the state border).



Recommendation 3.3

addressed to the European Union (EU) authorities responsible for shaping the EU Interreg Strand A (Cross-border) Cooperation Programmes:

Consider the need and possibility to harmonise financial conditions for participation in Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes with those of Interreg Strand B (Transnational) programmes, so as to allow equal accessibility of funding disbursed under Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes for all currently eligible categories of stakeholders, and eradicate the current practices discriminating and discouraging the participation of smaller civil society organisations (CSOs).

Recommendation 3.4

addressed to the European Union (EU) authorities responsible for shaping the EU Interreg Strand A (Cross-border) Cooperation Programmes:

Consider the need and possibility to allocate adequate, sufficiently increased financial resources to the Joint Secretariats (JSs) of Interreg Strand A (Cross-Border) programmes to enable these JSs ensuring a more professional and thorough assessment of submitted project proposals, in order to eliminate frustration among applicants and increase trust in EU Interreg Programmes as such (regardless the Strand, as negative opinions on Interreg Strand A undermine trust in, and ruin the positive image and general perception of the whole EU Interreg instrument).

Recommendation 3.5

addressed to the European Union (EU) authorities responsible for shaping the EU Interreg Strand A (Cross-border) Cooperation Programmes, concerning the Interreg NEXT Hungary - Slovakia - Romania - Ukraine (HUSKROUA) Programme:

Consider the need and possibility to extend the range of the Interreg NEXT HUSKROUA Programme area, so as to authorise and ensure the eligibility of applicants from Podkarpackie Province of Poland, Botoşani County of Romania, and Lvivska Province of Ukraine in project consortia participating in calls for proposals under the Interreg NEXT HUSKROUA Programme, in order to maintain, encourage, support and enhance cross-border cooperation of partners from all five countries of the Carpathian Euroregion.

Recommendation 3.6

addressed to the European Union (EU) authorities responsible for shaping the EU Interreg Strand A (Cross-border) Cooperation Programmes, concerning the Interreg Czechia - Poland Programme:

Consider the need and possibility to extend the range of the Interreg Czechia - Poland Programme area, so as to authorise and ensure the eligibility of applicants from Landkreis Görlitz (the easternmost district of Germany and of the Free State of Saxony / Freistaat Sachsen, directly bordering Poland and the Czech Republic) in project consortia participating in calls for proposals under the Interreg Czechia - Poland Programme, in order to create opportunities for the common trilateral cross-border initiatives in the entire Sudetes mountain region, shared by the aforementioned three countries.

Recommendation 3.7

addressed to the authorities of the Euroregion Glacensis, the Euroregion Praděd - Pradziad, the Euroregion Neisse-Nisa-Nysa, the EGTC Novum, Krkonoše/Karkonosze Transboundary Biosphere Reserve and other territorially competent public authorities in countries of the Sudetes region:

Consider the need and possibility to submit joint applications for the EU co-funding of your planned common trilateral and bilateral cross-border cooperation initiatives to the EU Interreg Central Europe Programme.



8.4. Policy recommendations concerning the cross-border governance structures

It should be reminded here that, apart from the governance structure already mentioned in the above comparative analysis, a multitude of other possible governance structure models for cross-border cooperation exists, universal and suitable for application in all regions, such as e.g. the **Local Cross-Border Cooperation Groupings (LCCGs)**.

Further, there are also some quite effective governance structures, although not necessarily focused on cross-border cooperation, like the **Local Action Groups (LAGs)** established in EU MSs under the EU Common Agricultural Policy CAP LEADER Programme, or the regionally and/or locally-established **Destination Marketing/Management Organizations (DMOs)**.

Potentially, a **cross-border cooperation between LAGs and DMOs** operating in adjacent border areas of neighbouring countries could provide for a stronger synergy effect, and (in case of DMOs) a much more internationally visible unique selling point / unique selling proposition (USP) of a common transboundary tourist destination.

Based on the above comparative analysis, several policy recommendations concerning the development and functioning of cross-border governance structures can be formulated, for each of the three mountain regions concerned, as follows:

8.4.1. Policy recommendations concerning the cross-border governance structures in the Alpine region

Recommendation 4.1.1

addressed to the relevant public authorities of the Parties to the Alpine Convention:

Consider the need and possibility to jointly develop and agree upon the methodology for delimitating Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) and on the formal and/or administrative procedure(s) that will be required for the designation of the aforementioned CBFAs, then carry out CBFA delimitation works, enact and execute the adopted designation procedures, with the objective to ultimately delimitate and designate CBFAs in border areas of the respective Alpine countries, where deemed useful.

Recommendation 4.1.2

addressed to the territorially relevant public authorities in countries of the Alpine region:

Consider the need and possibility to support cross-border cooperation between Local Action Groups (LAGs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Alpine region.

Recommendation 4.1.3

addressed to the territorially relevant public authorities in countries of the Alpine region:

Consider the need and possibility to support cross-border cooperation between Destination Marketing/Management Organizations (DMOs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Alpine region.



8.4.2. Policy recommendations concerning the cross-border governance structures in the Carpathian region

Recommendation 4.2.1

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

In compliance with obligations under Article 4 of the Carpathian Convention and Article 14 of its thematic Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity, support and facilitate cooperation under the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas established by the Conference of the Parties (Decision COP1/4, paragraph 12) and encourage the protected area administrations to take part in the cooperation within this Network.

Recommendation 4.2.2

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

In compliance with obligations under Article 16 paragraph 2 of the Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity to the Carpathian Convention, cooperate within existing transboundary protected areas in the Carpathians and harmonise the management objectives and measures applied and, if need be, encourage the expansion of existing transboundary protected areas or creation of new transboundary protected areas in the Carpathians.

Recommendation 4.2.3

addressed to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, and Ukraine:

Consider the need and possibility to establish or re-establish, where relevant, the national Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTCs) that will cooperate on a transnational scale under the umbrella of the common Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP), including already existing CSTCs in Poland and Romania, with the objective to facilitate the achievement of the Carpathian Convention objectives related to sustainable tourism development in the entire Carpathian region.

Recommendation 4.2.4

addressed to the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

Consider the need and possibility to support and enhance the operational capacities of the national Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTCs) to cooperate within the framework of the common Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP), an emerging Carpathian network expected to become a transnational cooperation governance mechanism for coordination, knowledge exchange, and the development of joint initiatives involving public authorities, experts on sustainable tourism development, and tourism stakeholders, with the objective to facilitate the achievement of the Carpathian Convention objectives related to sustainable tourism development in the entire Carpathian region.

Recommendation 4.2.5

addressed to all national Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTCs):

Consider the possibility to build on the outcomes of the Central Mountains (CM) project related to the operationalization of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP), not limited to, but in particular the 'CSTP Work Plan Designing and testing a new Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform Cooperation System' (CM Deliverable 2.2.1) and 'Transnational structures for long-term cooperation in mountain areas. The CSTP Solution: Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWTs) as a governance mechanism to secure lasting cooperation on sustainable tourism in the Carpathian region' (CM Deliverable 3.2.2).



Recommendation 4.2.6

addressed to the relevant public authorities of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

Consider the need and possibility to jointly develop and agree upon the methodology for delimitating Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) and on the formal and/or administrative procedure(s) that will be required for the designation of the aforementioned CBFAs, then carry out CBFA delimitation works, enact and execute the adopted designation procedures, with the objective to ultimately delimitate and designate CBFAs in border areas of the respective Carpathian countries, where deemed useful.

Recommendation 4.2.7

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in countries of the Carpathian region:

Consider the need and possibility to support cross-border cooperation between Local Action Groups (LAGs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Carpathian region.

Recommendation 4.2.8

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in countries of the Carpathian region:

Consider the need and possibility to support cross-border cooperation between Destination Marketing/Management Organizations (DMOs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Carpathian region.

Recommendation 4.2.9

addressed to the relevant public authorities in countries of the Carpathian region:

Consider the need and possibility to replicate the successful Alpine Pearls EGTC cross-border cooperation model in the Carpathian mountain region, encourage and support cooperation and exchange of experience between the Alpine Pearls EGTC and municipalities and tourism destinations in the Carpathian region, with the objective to foster mutual learning on sustainable eco-tourism development, sustainable mobility, destination management, and branding in mountain areas.

Recommendation 4.2.10

addressed to the relevant public authorities of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention:

Consider the possibilities for building competencies and capacities of the younger generations for their future involvement in governance structures supporting transnational and cross-border cooperation in the Carpathian mountain region, building on the examples of the EUSALP Youth Council and of the CIPRA Youth Council.

8.4.3. Policy recommendations concerning the cross-border governance structures in the Sudetes region

Recommendation 4.3.1

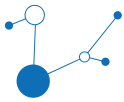
addressed to the territorially competent public authorities of the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen):

Consider the need and possibility to jointly develop and agree upon the methodology for delimitating Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) and on the formal and/or administrative procedure(s) that will be required for the designation of the aforementioned CBFAs, then carry out CBFA delimitation works, enact and execute the adopted designation procedures, with the objective to ultimately delimitate and designate CBFAs in border areas of the respective countries of the Sudetes mountain region, where deemed useful.

Recommendation 4.3.2

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in countries of the Sudetes region:

Consider the need and possibility to support cross-border cooperation between Local Action Groups (LAGs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Sudetes region.



Recommendation 4.3.3

addressed to the territorially competent public authorities in countries of the Sudetes region:

Consider the need and possibility to support cross-border cooperation between Destination Marketing/Management Organizations (DMOs) operating in adjacent border areas of the Sudetes region.

Recommendation 4.3.4

addressed to the nature conservation authorities in countries of the Sudetes region:

Consider the need, possibility and available capacities for the establishment of a network of protected areas of the Sudetes mountain region, building on the example and experience of the successful Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC).

Supplementary note to Recommendation 4.3.4: a network of protected areas of the Sudetes mountain region should involve administrations responsible for the following protected areas:

- on the side of the Czech Republic: Krkonošský národní park (Krkonoše National Park), Chráněná krajinná oblast (CHKO) Jizerské hory, CHKO Broumovsko, CHKO Orlické hory, and CHKO Jeseníky
- on the side of Poland: Karkonoski Park Narodowy (Karkonosze National Park), Park Narodowy Gór Stołowych (Góry Stołowe National Park), Park Krajobrazowy (PK) Doliny Bobru, Rudawski PK, PK Chełmy, Książański PK, PK Sudetów Wałbrzyskich, PK Gór Sowich, Śnieżnicki PK, PK Góry Opawskie
- on the side of the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen): Naturpark Zittauer Gebirge (Zittau Mountain Nature Park).

Recommendation 4.3.5

addressed to the relevant public authorities of the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen):

Consider the need and possibility to replicate the successful Alpine Pearls EGTC cross-border cooperation model in the Carpathian mountain region, encourage and support cooperation and exchange of experience between the Alpine Pearls EGTC and municipalities and tourism destinations in the Sudetes mountain region, with the objective to foster mutual learning on sustainable eco-tourism development, sustainable mobility, destination management, and branding in mountain areas.

Recommendation 4.3.6, addressed to the relevant public authorities of the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Free State of Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen):

Consider the possibilities for building competencies and capacities of the younger generations for their future involvement in governance structures supporting transnational and cross-border cooperation in the Sudetes mountain region, building on the examples of the EUSALP Youth Council and of the CIPRA Youth Council.

Recommendation 4.3.7, addressed to the authorities of the bilateral Euroregion Glacensis:

Consider the need and possibility to establish a common bilingual website of the Euroregion Glacensis, with the objective to enhance the sense of common co-ownership and common responsibility for the shared region among its stakeholders.

9. Annexes

Annex 1 Comparative analysis of the current legal framework to monitor compliance with the provisions of the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention

Annex 2 Questionnaire - Consultations with policy decision makers

Annex 3 Results of the survey concerning consultations with policy decision makers