

REPORT

BIG WIN FOR DINARIC ARC **high-level event**

9th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

Bonn, Germany

29 May 2008



Introduction

'I should speak now, but I am speechless. I regret that the rest of the world is not here to see what can be achieved in a region with heavy historic burden.' said Mr. Tamas Marghescu, Director of the IUCN Regional Office for Europe, in one of the closing speeches after the ceremony in which six government representatives of south-eastern Europe signed an agreement for joint cooperation on conservation and sustainable development of the Dinaric Arc ecoregion. Regarded as being one of the most important assemblies of the six countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia) in the last 13 years, the Big Win for Dinaric Arc event brought forward the importance of regional cooperation for establishment of a viable protected area system.

Hosted by the Slovenian Government which is currently holding the European Union Presidency, and the Dinaric Arc Initiative partners (WWF, IUCN, UNESCO BRESCE, UNDP, Council of Europe, FAO, UNEP, SNV, and Euronatur), the Big Win for Dinaric Arc high-level event occurred during the 9th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 9) in Bonn, Germany, on 29 May. Mr. Paolo Lombardi, Director of WWF Mediterranean Programme and the Chairman of the event, welcomed the governmental delegations, donors, representatives of international institutions and other guests by introducing the Joint statement and National priorities in delivering on the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA). Opening speech was held by Mr. Mitja Bricelj, State Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia, emphasizing the values of the Dinaric Arc ecoregion and the importance of transboundary sustainable management for ensuring maintenance of ecosystem services and sustainable development. The good will of the six governments was celebrated and welcomed by Mr. Jim Leape, Director General of WWF International, and Ms. Nandhini Iyer Krishna, CBD/UNCCD Liaison Officer of the CBD Secretariat. Mr. Matthias Machnig, State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany supported the achievements of the governments and Dinaric Arc Initiative, taking into regards the past history of conflict in the region. 'Biodiversity conservation acts as a bridge towards cooperation across political borders.', said Mr. Matthias Machnig.

Joint statement

H.E. Lufter Xhuveli, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (Albania), H.E. Nevenko Herceg, Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Mr. Zoran Sikic, State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture (Croatia), H.E. Predrag Nenezic, Ministry of Tourism and Environment (Montenegro), H.E. Sasa Dragin, Ministry of Environmental Protection (Serbia), and H.E. Janez Podobnik, Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning (Slovenia) signed a Joint statement by which they recognized that a joint and coordinated effort is needed in efficient delivery of the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas obligations, for safeguarding the Dinaric Arc ecoregion's exceptional natural and cultural values. The Joint statement of the six governments' representatives is a major highlight of this historic event at which 5 Ministers and 1 State Secretary agreed to mutual cooperation, exchange of experiences, and coordinated actions in sustainable management of the Dinaric Arc ecoregion.

'It makes this joint commitment of six countries a big win for biodiversity conservation in south-eastern Europe, helping safeguard the region's rich biological and cultural diversity and favouring the growth of national economies as well as providing a concrete basis for lasting regional cooperation.', stated Mr. Paolo Lombardi.

The six governments called upon Dinaric Arc Initiative (DAI) partners to facilitate necessary support in the delivery of national and regional priorities. Noting that DAI partners will follow the south-eastern European governments' example in strengthening joined efforts for conservation and sustainable development of the Dinaric Arc ecoregion, Mr. Tamas Marghescu, on behalf of all DAI partners congratulated the governments in making this crucial step forward in achieving transboundary cooperation in integrated biodiversity conservation. DAI partners have been working intensively on achieving greater cooperation between governments, international bodies and regional and international conservation partners. 'For WWF and the Dinaric Initiative partners this is a major milestone to build a representative and viable system of protected areas in the Dinaric Arc ecoregion.' concluded Mr. Paolo Lombardi. Dinaric Arc Initiative with its broad framework of cooperation is active since 2005. Its goals are focused to conservation and sustainable development of the region, emphasizing transboundary cooperation and the importance of establishment of ecological networks in the region.

Joint statement

of the representatives of the Governments of the Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, Montenegro, the Republic of Serbia, and the Republic of Slovenia

As the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Governments of the above listed countries recognize that a joint and coordinated effort is needed in efficient delivery of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas obligations. Transboundary cooperation between the Dinaric Arc countries in the implementation of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas, with the aim to create a well managed, and ecologically representative protected area network, is the key to safeguard the Dinaric Arc ecoregion's exceptional natural and cultural values.

We, the representatives of the Governments:

1. Recognize the specific natural and cultural values of the Dinaric Arc ecoregion and acknowledge the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas to be a valuable framework for conserving biological diversity and generating benefits to local and national economies.
2. Aim to further continue our activities towards implementation of national priorities leading to delivering on the objectives of the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas.
3. Support increased understanding of the relationship between the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas and the EU legislation on nature conservation.
4. Encourage mutual cooperation and exchange of experiences in protected areas management on the regional level.
5. Recognize the importance of regional cooperation to achieve transboundary sustainable management of the South-Eastern European region, including the Adriatic Sea, Dinaric Alps and Sava River Basin.
6. Recognize and support the need for sustainable use of water resources and protection of groundwater-dependent ecosystems by introducing sustainable integrated management principles in the Dinaric karst system.
7. Encourage the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Dinaric Arc through support for traditional activities in protected areas which contribute to biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods.
8. Call upon the Dinaric Arc Initiative partners (WWF, UNESCO BRESCE, IUCN, UNDP, Council of Europe, FAO, SNV, UNEP, Euronatur) and other interested parties to strengthen their cooperation with the Dinaric Arc countries and facilitate necessary support in the delivery of the national priorities.
9. Support evaluation of the contribution of protected areas to each country's economy and for the region as a whole.

National priorities

Each of the six governments prepared a list of national priorities to support the efficient implementation of the objectives of the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas. These national priorities were announced at the Big Win for Dinaric Arc event among the wide audience. Each country prioritized enlargement of the surface of their protected areas, including the establishment of new protected areas and extension of the existing ones, with the ultimate vision to create a well-managed and representative protected areas network stretching across the six Dinaric Arc countries, and providing a practical basis for lasting cooperation, as well as generating benefits to local and national economies. "This protected area network will fill a crucial gap in a pan-European network stretching from France to Greece, ensuring shelter for threatened species as well as corridors for species' mobility," said Paolo Lombardi. Mr. Zoran Sikic, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture of Croatia emphasized: 'Our protected areas are covering almost 12% of the territory; additionally almost 47% is designated under the National Ecological Network, as an effort to establish an ecologically representative national and regional systems of protected areas and nationally important sites within the ecological network.'

At least 13 new protected areas and enlargement of 9 existing protected areas will be established in Dinaric Arc ecoregion of south-eastern Europe. For example, Albania will enlarge the surface of its protected areas by at least 40,000 hectares. Bosnia and Herzegovina will establish five new protected areas in its central mountain region, and enlarge two protected areas. Croatia will establish two new terrestrial parks, while Montenegro, a country that only recently obtained status of the Contracting Party to the UN CBD, committed to create two terrestrial and three new marine parks. Serbia will establish one new protected area and enlarge an existing one into a transboundary reserve. Slovenia has agreed to increase its protected area network in the Dinaric ecoregion by 2,5%.

Some of the above mentioned protected areas include marine ecosystems. Apart from Montenegro, Albania prioritized the establishment of their first marine protected areas in the country. 'Having 1185 islands binds us to keep the islands' biodiversity and marine ecosystem as issues of high importance for the Republic of Croatia.', said Mr. Zoran Sikic, State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture of Croatia. Croatia will work towards strengthening management of five marine protected areas.

'We are at intersection of roads between sustainable development and unsustainable use of resources. I deeply believe that I share the common opinion that we are able to overturn the course of destruction of the world's nature and to step forward to safer biological future.', highlighted H.E. Nevenko Herceg, Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Apart from taking action at local levels, the six governments acknowledged the importance of mutual cooperation and transboundary cooperation. 'Our often pristine nature, including rich biodiversity and specific landscape and cultural values, represents the greatest national treasure. On the other hand, economic growth and significant forest investments induced development pressures that have to be carefully balanced with the need to protect natural assets and resources. The overcoming of these challenges and obstacles will strongly depend on strengthening of the partnerships among relevant stakeholders.', said H.E. Predrag Nenezic, Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Montenegro.

H.E. Sasa Dragin, Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia, presented national priorities of Serbia in the implementation of the CBD PoWPA, which include evaluation of the management effectiveness of their protected areas system. This has also been prioritized for Albania by H.E. Lufter Xhuveli, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration.

The Slovenian Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning, H.E. Janez Podobnik, announced provision of technical assistance to the countries in the region, based on Slovenia's experience in the establishment and promotion of Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCI). Slovenia, as partly Alpine country, emphasized the importance of linking the region covered by Alpine Convention with the Dinaric Arc ecoregion.

The Big Win for Dinaric Arc event radiated with a lot of positive energy and hope for an improved situation regarding nature conservation in the region. H.E. Nevenko Herceg from Bosnia and Herzegovina said 'We are determined to preserve and improve the existing biological and landscape diversity in the country.'

Future for the Dinaric Arc

'The world is from this evening wealthier for one national park as the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaimed Una National Park today, announced H.E. Nevenko Herceg of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Generating a strong applause from the audience, this announcement delivered the first practical contribution to the Big Win event. In order to have more such practical inputs, and generally, to enable implementation of national and regional priorities of the six countries, Scientific and Technical Advisor of MAVA Foundation, Mr. Holger Schmid, called upon donor community to respond to the governments' quest for assistance. Mr. Schmid suggested establishment of a donor coalition to implement the planned priorities of the governments.

Apart from the MAVA Foundation's statement, UNDP discussed GEF grants for Albania, Croatia, and Serbia before the event, making clear support for development of projects from these countries.

'Croatia has a long tradition in nature conservation, but what we are doing now is a great step forward and response to the requirements of Heads of States from Johannesburg in 2002.', said Mr. Zoran Sikic of Croatia about the importance of the Big Win for Dinaric Arc event's agenda. This event provided a valuable platform for potential donor agencies to fund the activities leading to fulfilment of the countries' priorities. It also showed that the governments are ready to unite their efforts in achieving the conservation and sustainable development goals. An additional effort needs to be taken by Dinaric Arc Initiative partners and donors to ensure safeguarding of the Dinaric Arc's vast natural and cultural wealth.

