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Workshop D

**The Ramsar platform for the Morava-Dyje floodplain and the
Carpathian Wetland Initiative**

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Regional initiatives are recognized as important for the promotion of the objectives of the Ramsar Convention and its Strategic Plan in particular, as they can build upon biogeographic commonalities, shared wetland systems and wetland-dependent species, and solidly established common social and cultural links. They can play a positive, catalytic, and decisive role in planning and providing technical and financial support for projects and activities.

Trilateral NGO Initiative in the Morava-Dyje floodplains

The lower Morava/March River forming the border between the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria is one of the largest tributaries of the middle Danube. Together with the floodplain of the River Dyje/Thaya, which is located on the border of the Czech Republic and Austria, the Morava floodplain represents one of the best preserved floodplains in Central Europe with a high biological value and a well-preserved complex of diverse wetlands and wetland species. The site is important also from the economic, cultural and historical point of view. It has an important educational and recreational potential. The global importance of this area has been proved by its designation as a Ramsar site and Natura 2000 sites in all three countries.

Soon after re-opening of the borders it became apparent that saving the site's natural heritage will need a transboundary approach and collaboration of stakeholders from all sides of the borders. Environmental NGOs Daphne (Slovakia), Veronica (Czechia) and Distelverein (Austria) recognised this necessity and, coordinated by the WWF International Danube-Carpathian Programme, started to cooperate on common projects. These NGOs contributed substantially to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Waters of the Republic of Austria, the Ministry of Environment of the Czech Republic and the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic. For their efforts towards the cooperative management of the Morava-Dyje floodplains, the NGOs received the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award in 2002.

Based upon the Memorandum, the Trilateral Ramsar Platform was established with representatives of the environment ministries, nature conservation and water management agencies, and NGOs from all three countries. Common interest to cooperate on the designation of a trilateral Ramsar site, to develop a management plan for this site, and to enhance the communication and exchange of information relevant to conservation and sustainable use of the area was confirmed.

Main achievements

Activities of NGOs in the region during the last 10 years were not only focusing on promoting the institutional set-up of the trilateral site conservation. They also implemented several successful projects in all three countries sharing the Morava floodplain. The main achievements include:

- development of a common strategy of nature conservation and wise use of the trilateral region of Morava-Dyje floodplains; participation on the development of regional and local sustainable development strategies and restoration plans;
- development of common goals and principles for establishment of the site's management plan, accepted by the Trilateral Ramsar Platform;
- influencing policy to achieve effective conservation of the site at local, national and international levels;
- leading and/or participation in projects focusing on river and meadows restoration – re-connection of Morava and Thaya river oxbow lakes, remedial measures on the river; conversion of 140 ha of arable land to meadows in Slovakia; land purchase in Austria; support of the local beaver population, etc.
- awareness raising on the Morava-Dyje floodplains values and functions - organising trilateral conferences (5 conferences up till now); establishment of the Morava Floodplain Nature Trail and the Daphne Eco-Centre in Devin, Slovakia.

Cooperation of Carpathian countries in supporting a network of Carpathian protected areas and Ramsar sites

The Carpathians are a large mountain range extending from Austria to Serbia and Montenegro, covering most of Slovakia and Romania and parts of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine. The Carpathian mountains contain some of the least disturbed ecosystems, such as forest complexes. They house numerous endemic and threatened mountain species and communities. The headwaters of major rivers and important wetlands are found in the Carpathian biogeographical region, some of them surely fulfil the criteria of international importance. However, in the Carpathians only Slovakia (5 sites), Hungary (2 sites), and recently Ukraine (1 site) have designated Wetlands of International Importance to the Ramsar List. Many Ramsar sites in neighbouring countries are to a large extent dependent on water flowing from the Carpathians. Many Wetlands of International Importance have been identified in this region during the inventory of habitats and species for ecological networks in Europe (ECONET, Natura 2000, Emerald Network).

To conserve the natural and cultural heritage and the resources of these mountains, the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians was developed and was signed by the ministers of the environment of the Carpathian countries in May 2003. The convention contains articles on conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity and on sustainable and integrated water/river basin management which are especially relevant also to other international obligations of the Carpathian countries.

Carpathian Wetland Initiative

The State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic in Banská Bystrica (SNC), through the funding of a project in the framework of the Norwegian Government's Plan of

Action for candidate countries to the EU supported during last year activities for the establishment of a Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) and the implementation of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) in the Carpathian region. The network is a supporting mechanism for an efficient management, tool for sharing experience, exchange and co-operation with all national parks, nature parks, protected landscapes, biosphere reserves, Ramsar sites and other important protected areas in the region.

Besides the support of the Carpathian Convention, a special Carpathian Wetland Initiative has been developed and launched on World Wetlands Day 2004 to help with the implementation of the obligations of the Ramsar Convention and its Strategic Plan 2003-2008 and other resolutions adopted at COP8, and to establish and promote collaboration of managers of protected, or otherwise important, wetland sites in the Carpathians.

Even if Carpathian waters are flowing to two seas (Baltic and Black Seas) and four large river catchments (Danube, Dniester, Vistula, Oder), the habitats and challenges in their protection and use in the Carpathians are similar enough that common measures for their sustainable management and conservation could be developed and achieved. The development of river basin management plans and the protection and management of water sources for the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive in some Carpathian countries have also become priorities. The implementation of the Carpathian Wetlands Initiative does not only help information exchange on the obligations of the Carpathian and Ramsar Conventions, but also works in favour of the implementation of the Danube River Protection Convention in other Carpathian countries.

Our efforts are aimed at promoting Ramsar Resolution VIII.10 on *Improving implementation of the Strategic Framework and Vision for the List of Wetlands of International Importance*, e.g. designation of new Ramsar sites in the Carpathians and their effective management; Res. VIII.11 on *Additional guidance for identifying and designating under-represented wetland types as Wetlands of International Importance*, to designate examples of, among others, peatlands, wet grasslands and other under-represented wetland types found in the Carpathians; Res. VIII.12 on *Enhancing the wise use and conservation of mountain wetlands*, in order to promote the establishment of national networks of Ramsar sites which fully represent the diversity of wetlands in the countries, and to promote their key ecological and hydrological functions, and hydrological, biological, cultural and socio-economic importance. The initiative can help in developing the appropriate actions for improving awareness and understanding of their functions and values, and to ensure that due attention is given to the role of mountain wetlands and the importance of their conservation and wise use in the preparation and implementation of river basin management plans, development of strategies and management plans, etc.

The Carpathian Wetland Initiative invited all Carpathian countries and some other representatives of international organisations, including the Ramsar and the Carpathian Convention and their Administrative Authorities, the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) and Ramsar International Partner Organisations to cooperate in wetland conservation in this ecoregion. The meeting devoted to the preparation of a long-term coordination of activities, sharing experience and collaboration in wetland conservation was held in April 2004 in Slovakia. A questionnaire to Ramsar Administrative Authorities of Carpathian countries, to identify their interests, needs and suggestions, and to nominate contact persons was distributed before the meeting and was evaluated. A

conference with wider representation of governmental and non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental organisations and other international partners with a topic on the status, inventory and conservation of wetlands in the Carpathians is planned for 2005.

Possible other future partners include the Danube Commission (a Memorandum of Understanding between ICPDR and the UNEP Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention was proposed), the Danube Environmental Forum, the Tisza/Tisa Water Forum, the UNECE Helsinki Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the River Basin Initiative, the Alpine Convention and Alpine Network of Protected Areas, the Council of Europe (PEBLDS, Emerald Network, Bern Convention), the UNESCO MaB Programme, the Mountain Partnership, FAO, Europarc and Eurosite Federations, Environmental Partnership for Central Europe, ECNC, REC, etc.

It was agreed that this initiative should be included in future protocols of the framework Carpathian Convention. It should be developed under the CNPA and the activities within this initiative should be based on the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Ramsar and Carpathian Conventions should be prepared; the governments of Carpathian countries should provide existing database information, relating to identified wetlands of national and international importance and wetland protected areas as an initial background for future development of the wetlands network. The governments should identify relevant stakeholders with an interest in and directly or indirectly responsible for wetland issues, and support their participation in the Initiative. Such stakeholders should include intergovernmental bodies, international organisations operating in the region, NGOs, academia, and economic actors. The CNPA Steering Committee and Carpathian Convention Interim Secretariat should establish a Working Group on wetland issues and prepare terms of reference for such a Group in the framework of CNPA. The governments and all other stakeholders should identify funding sources for launching of the initiative, for preparation of the Conference on Carpathian Wetlands, and for long term financing of this initiative.

Conclusions

Successful transborder and international cooperation can be developed as an initiative of non-governmental organisations of different countries and/or of governmental body of one country involving other parties. It can be based on transborder/shared catchment units, but also on regional/biogeo-graphical similarities (e.g. mountains).

Difficulties

- language barriers (7 languages in the Carpathians), administrative barriers (e.g. visa requirements for meetings)
- approach of representatives of few countries, slow process,
- identification of the relevant partners

Tools for cooperation

- Memoranda of Understanding between governments or intergovernmental bodies (e.g. secretariats of conventions) are suitable base for legitimisation and formalisation of the cooperation;

- responsible governmental bodies are important to be involved from the beginning for providing information, contacts and organisational and legislative arrangements;
- identification of two or three main partners from political and scientific bodies in each country who will cooperate in the future development of the initiative is crucial. A meeting of stakeholders to state the common vision, ways of collaboration on local, national and regional activities and sunder of responsibilities is necessary at the early stage;
- at least part-time coordinator is necessary from the beginning to keep the line and „keep the fire“, lead and coordinate the activities, contact other partners and make fund raising.

The initiative should be based on the Guidance for the development of regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands (Resolution VIII.30).

If you need more information do not hesitate to contact relevant organisations:

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