

Conclusions and Recommendations

POLICY PAPER

Alpen.Leben – input for discussion and vital impetus for the consideration of the Alpine Convention in the EUSALP process

The discussions concerning a macroregional strategy for the Alpine region clearly indicate how varied and essentially different the interests and political positions prevailing in the region are, and why its implementation on the broader plane poses such a great challenge. The preconditions for a successful EUSALP (EU Strategy for the Alpine Region) process dictate an open and transparent exchange among all stakeholders and civil society, as well as consideration of the established structures and longstanding experience of the Alpine Convention. With well-structured wide-ranging governance functioning on multiple levels (MLG), it can become reality to transform existing prejudices, scepticism and negativity concerning any vision of the European future – still currently perceived by the populace as abstract and awkward – into a constructive process.

With the elaboration of thematic focal points based upon the ‘Three Pillars of Grenoble,’ and the intersection of the discussion with the Alpine Convention and its implementation protocols within the framework of the Alpen.Leben project, an interesting debate has developed, particularly in Austria, concerning the proposed future macroregion. Austria offers a functional procedural model, since the establishment of the Austrian coordination platform by the chancellery and the office of foreign affairs has facilitated an intensive exchange among all important stakeholders. On the one hand, the Alpine Convention can be integrated into the discussion and entrusted with an important role, while on the other hand this also creates the possibility for CIPRA and its project Alpen.Leben to function as an important access and communication platform for civil society. It also became possible to introduce an in-depth position paper concerning workable governance in the structure of an Alpine macroregion, thus creating the basis for further discussions.

Nevertheless, on an international level there remains the specific irritant that it has not been possible – owing to the intransigence of certain individual Alpine states – to establish the Alpine Convention as an essential element in the development of the EUSALP. Inclusion of the Alpine Convention as an observer in the steering group is at least a small consolation. Although it was emphasised repeatedly – and in particular by upper-level political representatives of the EU as well as those from Austria, Switzerland and Bavaria – that not only must the Alpine Convention be given a leading role in formulating a macroregional strategy for the Alps, but also that civil society must be integrated into the process from the beginning; obstructions and barriers in the international channels can still not be cleared away. Admittedly, civil society was included as participant in a sub-workgroup – and the inclusion of CIPRA as well as other representative organisations of civil society can be interpreted as an important step, but only by the concrete development of a governance system and the generation of a plan of action for the implementation of the EUSALP will it truly be shown whether or not the concerns and issues of civil society have indeed been acknowledged. The Alpine macroregion stands at the start of a long journey; many questions remain in need of clarification. In contrast, the Alpine Convention has recourse to longstanding experience, to well-established

structures and networks that have already enabled it to articulate and address the major Alpine-specific challenges that the future holds.

Recommendations resulting from discussions conducted in the course of the Alpen.Leben project regarding the successful realisation of an Alpine macroregion are presented here in compact form. These recommendations have also been submitted to the steering group in the form of a policy paper, with the call to bring these proposals into the ensuing processes of discussion and negotiation.

Recommendations for a successful implementation of the EUSALP, from the viewpoint of Alpen.Leben

Added value of the Alpine Convention and the importance of civil society

With its existing structures solidly in place and its pan-Alpine practical knowledge, the Alpine Convention is certainly well suited to assuming a leadership role in the EUSALP, to develop it further and to supply forward-thinking informative content. The entire EUSALP process can profit from this knowledge. Alpen.Leben would therefore consider it an important signal and a responsible step on the part of the European Commission to grant the Alpine Convention a leading role in the development and implementation of the EUSALP.

The same holds true for civil society as well, whose role in the continuing process must still be regarded as underrepresented. Especially the CIPRA, with its more than 100 member organisations, its many years of collected specialised knowledge and its effective networking in the entire Alpine region, can function as a concentrated centre of competence in sustainable Alpine development as well as in protection of the Alpine region, thus providing a substantial and essential contribution to positive elaboration of the EUSALP.

In the view of Alpen.Leben, the EUSALP can only be successful in the mid- and long-term if the Alpine Convention and civil society assume a leading and formative role. Therefore Alpen.Leben will make the following clear recommendations to the steering committee concerning the successful implementation of the EUSALP and its added value for the Alpine Convention.

A leading role for the Alpine Convention, above all in the 'Third Pillar of Grenoble'

The implementation protocols, declarations and action plans of the Alpine Convention are constructed upon principles of sustainable development and protection of the Alpine region. The Convention has already engaged itself comprehensively for more than two decades with themes specific to the Alps, themes that for the most part must be laboriously worked out in the current EUSALP process, then consequentially integrated and securely anchored. For this reason it must be seen as the logical conclusion for the European Commission to entrust the Alpine Convention with an important role in all three thematic fields, and the appropriate leadership position – particularly because of their basic expertise – with respect to the Third Pillar of Grenoble (sustainable management of energy, natural and cultural resources).

Established law must remain law

The Alpine Convention is juridically anchored in all Alpine states and in the European Community. Through the ratification of the implementation protocols by the European Community – which are also a component of European law – the EU Commission has been assigned a great responsibility as custodian of the contracts. It must therefore be ensured that no weakening or undermining of the Alpine Convention and its substance be permitted to take place – the legal standards of the

implementation protocols may not be disturbed. On the contrary, the EU Commission should have particular interest in strengthening the Alpine Convention as a part of the macroregional Alpine strategy, and to employ its implementation protocols as important cornerstones upon which to base development of the focus issues.

The Alpine Convention as an important connecting link to the EUSALP's area of application

The EU Commission's proposal regarding an appropriate demarcation of the macroregion also takes into account the geographic boundaries of Alpine Space and the perimeter of the Alpine Convention. With this, the Alpine Convention assumes a functional place in the EUSALP process. It remains open, however, to decide within which exact geographic framework these measures and activities will be managed as part of the macroregion, along with how and in which form the priorities concerning fields of action will be determined. From the viewpoint of Alpen.Leben the following is clear: the greater the geographic area, the more divergent the ambitions within the macroregion will prove to be. Within a region that is too large, there will be other goals and points of focus – with possibly different solutions proposed – than there would be in a theatre of operations involving only the heart of the Alpine region. Therefore a geographic framework for the determination of applicable measures must be comparable with the perimeter of the Alpine Convention, whereas, at the same time, flexible management – according to case-to-case requirements – of the EUSALP's area of application needs to be guaranteed. With this we must take into account the reality that functional relationships between the core area of the Alpine region and the surrounding regions will vary from issue to issue, and that the specific requirements of the individual case must be determined in each instance. Proceeding in this fashion it can be guaranteed that there will be no weakening or undermining of the Alpine Convention and its implementation protocols. So the EU Commission's interest must lie in strengthening the region beyond the substance of the Alpine Convention, and to create in the Alpine macroregion a connective link between the respective perimeters of the Alpine Convention, Alpine Space and the EUSALP, with which a meaningful exchange between the mountain districts and the sub-Alpine regions and their great cities can take form, guaranteeing a level playing field for discussion.

The Alpine Convention as basis for governance of the Alpine macroregion

Proposals made by the EU Commission and by the German state of Bavaria concerning how multi-level governance for an Alpine macroregion might function are already on the table. But here it is striking that when they were put forward both proposals favoured a 'top-down' hierarchy, with emphasis placed upon the higher political and governmental strata, in which no integration of the Alpine Convention or of civil society was imagined. But if the EU Commission should in the future realise the importance and validity of a frequently suggested 'bottom-up' approach, then the Alpine Convention and the civil population must be regarded as important components of governance. The governance structure proposed by the EU Commission cannot currently meet this need. It is precisely the Alpine Convention that already has experience with functional and established governance, and thus conforms to the third suggested prohibition of the EU Commission, namely the prohibition against creating any new structures. It would thus be productive on the part of the EU Commission to blend the currently proposed governance with the existing governance structure of the Alpine Convention.

Here, possibilities will be shown – based on the EU proposal – how the Alpine Convention and civil society can successfully be integrated, fully enfranchised, into the EUSALP's governance structure.

I) Incorporation of the Alpine Convention into the various strata of the EUSALP's governance structure

EU level

The canopy of a EUSALP governance is formed at the EU level by the European Parliament, the EU Council, economic and social committees and the Committee of the Regions. Representatives of the Alpine Conference of the Alpine Convention, who meet every two years on the environmental ministry level, can already be integrated on the EU level, and thus present Alpine-specific themes for discussion.

Ministerial level, member states, non-EU nations

The EU proposal anticipates strategic coordination as well as leadership and decisionmaking on the ministerial level, with a rotating chairmanship. Particularly on this level, the environmental ministers (Alpine Conference) can play an essential role, so that Alpine-relevant themes can be determined and discussed.

National points of contact

This council is to be made up of high-ranking officials, and constitute a nationally effective, operational coordinating platform (between federation, nation, regions, departmental ministries, organisations, etc.). These national contact points are closely woven into the ministerial level and with the individual members (both EU and non-EU nations) as well as the EU Commission, and also constitute a connecting link to the High Level Groups and civil society/the general public. The Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention, which consists of upper-level delegates from signatories to the accord, watches over the goals as well as the principles and the essential thinking of the Alpine Convention. Additionally, it reports to the Alpine Conference concerning the progress of the Alpine Convention, thus ensuring a direct connexion on the EU level, also functioning as an important disseminator of information and interface to the ministerial level and to the High Level Groups.

Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention and Focal Point Alpine Convention

The Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention occupies an important staff position as well as a crucial and pivotal role in all questions concerning the Alpine Convention and its implementation protocols. It is therefore necessary to integrate this important network into an EUSALP governance, so that it may function as a connecting link to the Alpine Conference, to the Permanent Committee, to the individual specialists and to those with dedicated knowledge (for example, study groups and platforms) as well as to civil society and the general public. The Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention can thus assume a leadership role with regard to the Third Pillar of Grenoble. For this reason alone it is extremely necessary to include the Alpine Convention in all discussions and sharing of knowledge. Virtually every Alpine state has its own Focal Point to the Alpine Convention established in its environmental ministry, which among other duties carries out important discussions and defines the Alpine Convention's goals in the respective nation. These information, discussion and strategy platforms – through inclusion of the concerned ministries, countries, social partners and NGOs – can, much like the Permanent Secretariat, assume an important function in networking.

Specialised expertise and action groups

The EU Commission and the state of Bavaria would provide for the establishment of a group of specialists, whose responsibility would lie in the development of thematic material as well as in the discussion of horizontal issues. This group is also designed to establish leadership teams in the various areas of expertise as well as actively accompanying the EUSALP process with regard to content. The Alpine Convention is predestined to be incorporated in this council of experts: For more than two decades it has addressed those very thematic considerations in its study groups and platforms that are currently being developed in the EUSALP process; for this reason it has collected a great deal of Alpine-specific practical knowledge in terms of research and sharing of information. With the Alpine status reports or the Alpine Observation and Information System (ABIS), there exists many years' worth of Alpine-specific data that can provide important input concerning the determination and development of topics.

2.) Integration of civil society and the general public

The course of events in the EUSALP process has up to now been rather significantly characterised by a top-down approach, since up to this point civil society and the general public have not been represented in the decisionmaking process. Also in this respect, EUSALP governance could orientate itself by the structure of the Alpine Convention, because with the participation of seventeen various observer organisations, it functions very effectively in its bottom-up approach.

a) Austria's National Committee for the Alpine Convention, positioned in their Environment Agency, offers that nation a unique platform for information, discussions and strategy – one composed of ministries, federal states, social partners and NGOs. This has not only created a tight network, but a highly functional communications structure as well – one that operates effectively from both the horizontal and vertical perspectives.

b) The EUSALP process must have as its goal a dedicated breaking down of the thematic material to the community level. In this respect, the community network Alliance in the Alps can function not only as an important disseminator of knowledge, but can also provide valuable input regarding implementation.

c) Since 1995 the CIPRA and its member organisations have concerned themselves with Alpine-specific themes and issues. For this reason the CIPRA possesses not only great practical knowledge, but also maintains a network that functions throughout the Alpine mountain arc. The CIPRA can serve as an important and comprehensive conduit for information and communication as well as an important propagator among the populace.

Currently available designs of governance proposed by the EU Commission and Bavaria already include some positive beginnings. But a few substantial improvements are necessary in order to satisfy the criteria of good governance. It must remain an important goal to integrate all concerned – including the Alpine Convention and civil society – in governance, to grant them leadership status and endow them with relevant decision-making authority. Only then can it be ensured that the EUSALP will achieve a positive outcome in its ongoing evolution.

Further recommendations for the successful design and implementation of the EUSALP

Good work can rarely be done in a hurry – give the concept of an Alpine Macroregion time to mature and develop

Few would argue against the point that a complex process like that of the EUSALP requires time to unfold and develop. For this reason it seems advisable at the present time to put the brakes on just a bit with this very ambitious plan of action. Too many questions about this future project remain open and unanswered – also concerning its effect beyond the mountains themselves. Countries, regions, cantons and communities are for the most part still searching for optimal solutions with regard to actual implementation. Many things have been up to this point discussed, decided and put into action on the smaller scale – so one is tempted to expect that great things ought to suddenly happen. But this process and its possible impact are undiscovered country for a great number of the persons involved, and must be understood and grasped in its entirety. Besides, the concept of a macroregional strategy for the Alpine region hasn't really filtered through to the level of the communities or into the general populace – and the officials responsible have been in no hurry to get it there. Also the international compact of the Alpine Convention could not be implemented in a short period of time. It is part of the nature of the issue that these types of international negotiations and arrangements must come as the result of a highly necessary, long and intensive process of discussion. The Alpine macroregion needs to take the time for this to evolve naturally and organically.

Continue the EUSALP process with the inclusion of all concerned, and to make Europe fit for the future

On no account can the discussions concerning the EUSALP come to an end with the consultation process and the subsequent incorporation of its conclusions in a strategy paper proposed for mid-2015. The EUSALP calls for a dynamic approach, an approach that on the one hand anticipates a basis-oriented governance structure involving all stakeholders as well as civil society, and on the other hand carries the idea of an Alpine macroregion outward, and thus allows sufficient room for vision. Europe is in desperate need of a fundamental structural transformation, one attuned to solidly united social and sound environmental behaviour, one to which controversial topics like, for example, eco-efficiency, have not been rendered taboo. Instead, its specific focus must in the future be built upon the themes 'quality of life' and 'justice.' With this it naturally is also necessary to preserve the Alpine mountain region as living space for nature and man, to strengthen it as a cultural, social and economic environment – naturally with the knowledge that that Alpine region must be integrated into the context of the surrounding territory and the EU, but likewise must have its own interests acknowledged. Any essential success of a macroregional Alpine strategy would surely depend upon how the bridgebuilding between the Alpine core region and the sub-Alpine regions with their economically powerful cities would be implemented, and how the common challenges would be addressed and met by all concerned on an equal footing.

Maximum transparency

What the implementation of a macroregional Alpine strategy of greatest added value to all sides needs, is pulling together with the maximum measure of transparency and openness. Only then will it be made possible for an Alpine macroregion to bring about something new and innovative – in the sense of inspirational, possible and concrete.

Regardless of viewpoint – Alpine Convention, Alpine Space or CIPRA – all are actively participating in the EUSALP process, and thanks to their longstanding experience are able to provide important input, to breathe life into this still-unwieldy construct of an Alpine macroregion. It is up to the EU Commission and the participating countries, regions and cantons – at the close of the consultation process as well as in the design of the action plans, and in the ensuing phase of implementation – to

choose a transparent and open mode of operation, to conduct an active dialogue with all stakeholders in order to ultimately arrive at the added value demonstrated by Alpen.Leben.

Alpen.Leben
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