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An example of the implementation of the Alpine Convention was presented in the form of a report from St. Martin in the Canton of Valais on their programme for the conservation of the cultural landscape and the development of green tourism.

Pierre-Alain Rumley, Director of the Swiss Federal Office of Spatial Development, stressed the importance of the ratification of the Alpine Convention protocols. The conference unanimously approved a resolution addressed to the 7th Alpine Conference on 19-20 November in Merano/I calling on the Environment Ministers of the countries of the Alps and the EU Commissioner to ensure that all states signatory to the Alpine Convention quickly ratify all the protocols, that the process of implementation of the protocols be begun as soon as possible, and that a permanent secretariat for the Alpine Convention be established without delay.

Mario Broggi, as chairman of the jury, presented the winners of this year's Community of the Future competition, namely Reit im Winkl/D, Brandberg/A and Belluno/I. Reit im Winkl has built a biomass power plant serving 180 buildings. The biomass project, in which local residents are closely involved, permits some 1.6 million litres of oil to be substituted annually. Brandberg is running a cultural landscape programme which makes use of scientific findings to promote farming on the steep mountain slopes in order to preserve the cultural landscape, support the farming community and make the countryside more attractive for tourism. Among other things, Belluno has added another 295 hectares to the Dolomiti Bellunesi National Park, which has been extended right up to the municipal boundaries so as to integrate the natural environment in an urban setting.

<http://www.alpenallianz.org> (de/fr/it/sl)

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Conference on mountain region policies in the EU

(17.10.02) As a contribution to the United Nations Year of Mountains, the European Commission is currently (17 - 18 October) holding a conference in Brussels on "Community Policies and the Mountain Areas". Attendees include Commission members Romano Prodi, Michel Barnier and Franz Fischler, the Slovenian Minister of Economics Teja Petrin, and Luciano Caveri, President of the Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism at the European Parliament.

Actors from the field of development in mountain regions, including representatives of NGOs, national and local authorities, and social and economic partners have come together to discuss how the mountain regions can benefit most from the political instruments available in the European Union, with a special focus on regional policy, agriculture, transport and energy. The agenda includes working groups on Regional Policy and Regional Planning in Mountain Areas, Mountain Agriculture, and the Quality of Life in Mountain Areas.

Information: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/events/mountains/index_en.htm (en)

"United against transit traffic" in Austria

(24.10.02) On 25 October demonstrations against transit traffic will be held on five key road transport routes through Austria. The anti-transit groups are planning to block the Tauern Motorway, the B99 near Obertauern, the Felbertauern Highway, the Inn Valley Motorway and the B179 over the Fern Pass as a protest against the impacts of the growing numbers of heavy lorries on the roads.

One reason for the demonstrations is the declared intention of the European Commission to abolish, at the end of 2003, the ceiling on the annual number of heavy goods vehicles permitted to transit Austria. That has led to fears of a steep rise in HGV traffic through Austria on top of the anticipated general increase in traffic on Austrian roads following the enlargement of the EU.

The organisers of the protests are calling for retention of the ceiling on the total number of lorries in transit, implementation of the provisions of the Transit Agreement for a sustainable 60% reduction in pollutants, a general ban on HGV traffic at night and a general shift from road to rail for goods transport. They are drawing attention to the multiple negative impacts of transit traffic on life and the economy in the Alpine regions, including health problems for the resident populations, the loss of jobs in local small and medium-size enterprises in the Alpine space, and even administrative restrictions such as the refusal of the Tyrolean regional authority to grant approvals for new industrial plants in the Inn Valley because of the high pollutant levels there. All concerned are calling for existing agreements to be respected, including the Alpine Convention and the Transit Agreement.

The date for the demonstrations has been chosen with an eye to the decisions the EU will be taking shortly in the field of transport policy, e.g. at the 2nd Annual European Energy and Transport Conference to be held in Barcelona on 11 - 13 November.

On 24 October the Swiss Alpine Initiative is also planning a demonstration at the Gotthard Tunnel. The event is planned as a combination of a memorial ceremony for the victims of last year's fire disaster there and a call for traffic restrictions in the tunnel in the interest of road safety.

Sources: <http://www.transitforum.at> (de); Der Standard 21.10.02; ARBÖ 17.10.02; Kulturinitiative Gegenverkehr Lienz 17.10.02

30th anniversary of the Working Community of Alpine Regions

(29.08.02) Founded back in 1972 in Telfs/Mösern (A) as the first platform for cross-border co-operation in the Alps, the Working Community of Alpine Regions (ARGE ALP) now has a membership of eleven länder, provinces, regions and cantons in Austria, Germany, Italy and Switzerland representing some 23 million people living in a total area of about 142,000 km².

Source: ARGE ALP Secretariat <http://www.argealp.org> (de/it)

Toward a Carpathian Convention

(17.10.02) On 14 - 15 October representatives of the Carpathian region came to Vaduz/FL to gather useful tips for drawing up a convention to protect the Carpathian Mountains and for a sustainable economy in the region. The Carpathian countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, the Ukraine and Yugoslavia, wish to create a binding document in international law on the model of the Alpine Convention.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the Carpathian region, observer countries and international environmentalist organisations, who discussed a paper submitted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and a draft of the proposed convention. The more specific the objectives and the proposed measures are to be, the thornier the political road to a Carpathian Convention. The meeting was initiated by UNEP Director Klaus Töpfer and the Minister of the Environment of the Ukraine, and received financial support from Liechtenstein.

Source: Liechtenstein Press Office, 14.10.02

Threat to the last natural river in the Alps

(07.11.02) The regional authority of Friuli Giulia-Venezia/I has plans to build a series of flood retention basins covering a total area of 14 km² on the middle reaches of the Tagliamento. The project would involve the loss of a long stretch of river comprising ecologically valuable river biotopes, including the typical riverine zones that are the habitats of many species of flora and fauna. The invasive measure would significantly impact a river landscape that is seen as a reference ecosystem at the European level.

Sources: Regional authority of Friuli Giulia-Venezia, 04.11.02; EAWAG 04.11.02

Information: http://www.eawag.ch/research_e/lim/Tagliamento/Tagliamento/Tagliamento.html (en)

Hydropower – Alpine rivers in danger again

(24.10.02) At first sight the future looks encouraging enough; EU Directive 2001/77/CE provides for a significant increase in the share of renewable energy. In Italy in particular the goal is to increase the share of renewable energy from 16% in 1997 to 25% by 2010.

European Directive 96/92/CE on the liberalisation of the electricity market led to the publication in 1999 of a document known as the Bersani decree, which summarises the regulations relating to the promotion of renewable energy. For example, in the case of energy produced by conventional means a limit of 100 GWh was set, beyond which 2 % of the energy has to be fed into the grid from renewable sources, an obligation that can also be met in full or in part by simply purchasing electricity generated from renewable energy sources.

In Italy, however, this regulation – in combination with the high price of energy from renewable sources – has led to a steep rise in the number of applications for new hydropower plants, especially in the Alpine region. So far the proposals have been largely limited to small power stations with a generating capacity of less than 3 MW, but recently ENEL – a formerly state-owned company that is now the biggest generator of electricity in Italy – started planning the construction of power plants which had earlier been dismissed as being unprofitable. If the company goes ahead with these plans, there is a real danger that some of the most beautiful valleys in the western Alps will be lost for ever, such as Valli di Lanzo, Val Germanasca, Val Soana and Valsesia.

Global Mountain Summit – a successful conference and new partnerships

(07.11.02) Friday 1 November saw the close of the Global Mountain Summit in Bishkek/Kyrgyzstan, with new international partnerships established for sustainable development in mountain regions and an undertaking for specific protection measures against radioactivity in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed the Central Asian Mountain Charter and thus entered into a formal commitment to work for sustainable development to protect the mountain regions there. Along with the countries of the Carpathians and the Caucasus, where there are plans to establish similar legal instruments in the form of a convention or charter for the protection of the mountain regions, the states parties to the Central Asian Mountain Charter enjoy the support of the European Mountain Initiative, which was created by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to promote collaboration between the governments of the countries involved. In Bishkek, UNEP representatives presented the Mountain Watch Report, which provides the first ever global overview based on cartographic material of environmental change and hazards in mountain regions and their impacts on sustainable development.

The governments of Switzerland and Italy pledged their support for the creation of a mountain region network in developing countries.

During the last session of the summit, Norway offered assistance in the rehabilitation of nuclear waste deposits in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. There is a danger that the radioactive materials could pollute the rivers that provide the downstream plains with water. Almost 20% of the total population of Central Asia would be affected by such a disaster.

Information: http://www.unep-wcmc.org/information_services/publications/MountainWatch_Bishkek/presspack/ (en), <http://www.globalmountainsummit.org> (en)

Wildhaus Declaration for sustainable tourism in the 21st century

(17.10.02) The conference on international tourism held in Wildhaus/CH on 13 September by Friends of Nature International focused on the role of tourism in responding to the global challenges of the future, i.e. protection of the environment and the fight against poverty. In this context the conference approved a declaration targeted at the tourism industry, tourism regions, individual tourists, governments, international and national authorities, and the Friends of Nature membership.

The conference marked the launch of a new Friends of Nature action programme under the motto "Conserving landscapes – enjoying Europe!". The general objective of the programme is to preserve the diversity of the natural heritage in Europe as a fundamental asset for the tourism and leisure industries.

Source: Friends of Nature International, 14.10.02, <http://www.nfi.at> (de/en/fr)

Economic importance of traditional foods

(31.10.02) A few years ago the international Slow Food organisation, which is committed to the preservation of taste in food and wine, launched a programme by the name of Presidia to create a market for traditional foods and thus make a significant contribution to the preservation of cultural landscapes in agriculture and the protection of cultivated plants at risk of extinction, and at the same time to provide support for small farms located mainly in mountain regions and now often reduced to subsistence farming.

In the framework of the organisation's Salone del Gusto Exhibition in Turin/I, a study performed by the University of Milan was presented showing the economic importance of 54 of the Presidia projects initiated by Slow Food. In general, the results include increased employment opportunities, higher turnovers and also higher retail prices for traditional farmhouse foods, which are becoming increasingly popular with consumers. Traditional Italian produce like salami, cheese, fruit, bread and confectionery represent a valuable source of supplementary farm income and also permit the development of micro-enterprises in regions with structural problems. Such produce also helps to establish a name and upgrade the image of the region involved. The authors of the study point out that the higher prices are due to the type of sales outlet, i.e. on the farm or in nearby tourist resorts.

Further information: <http://www.slowfood.com> (de/fr/it/en)

Source: Il Sole 24 Ore, supplement 23.10.02

Miscellaneous

(17.10.02) **Alpine Caravan – alarming findings on mountain air:** The Alpine Caravan spent three months crossing the Alpine region of Italy. One of the many activities designed to draw attention to the mountain ecosystems was measuring the ozone levels at the various locations en route. The data have now been published and the results are alarming; at every stop on the itinerary, and especially at altitudes above 1000 m, the ozone levels were found to be in excess of the EU limit values and thus constitute a source of harm to the vegetation and a danger to human beings. The pollution derives primarily from the urban centres.

Source: Legambiente press release, 8.10.02

<http://www.legambiente.com/filematic/news/todaynews/2002/10/ID103409536522-3.html> (it)

<http://www.lanuovaecologia.it/inquinamento/atmosferico/137.php> (it)

(17.10.02) **New record volume of transalpine goods traffic:** In 2001 the volume of goods transported across the Alps in Austria, France and Switzerland reached a record total of 137.2 million tonnes, an increase of 3.2% over the previous year. 67% of the total went by road and 33% by rail. In Switzerland the percentage of transalpine goods shipments sent by rail decreased from 70% in 2000 to 67% last year, although the figure is still relatively high compared with Austria (28%) and France (19%). These are just some of the statistics in the latest report from the Swiss Federal Office of Spatial Development (ARE), which has been monitoring developments in transalpine goods transport for several years now.

Source and report on-line: <http://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/verkehr/alpinfo/index.html> (de/en)

(24.10.02) **Traffic monitoring centre:** Switzerland and the European Union have agreed to establish a monitoring centre for heavy goods traffic by road and rail in the Alpine region, with the data to be supplied by the various national authorities. The idea behind the monitoring centre, which will be attached to the Swiss Federal Statistics Office (BFS) in Neuchâtel, is to produce comparable data for the whole of the Alpine space. Operations will begin in the course of 2003, and the centre will submit an annual report to the joint EU-Switzerland Transport Committee.

Source: Tagblatt, 17.10.02

(24.10.02) **EU funding for NGOs:** The European Union has earmarked funds for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working mainly in the field of environmental protection. NGOs are invited to submit project proposals for 2003 by 18.11.02 at the latest.

Further information: http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/funding/ngo/call_en.htm

(07.11.02) **Heating with sewage sludge in Switzerland:** With a second combined heat and power plant (CHP) recently commissioned, the Kiesen sewage plant in the Swiss Canton of Berne can now provide a large number of local households with electricity through a local heating network. The plant is fired with a combination of biogas from the sewage sludge and fatty wastes from the food processing industry. The CO₂ balance is neutral. The Kiesen plant generates enough electricity to meet the facility's own power requirements several times over, whereas conventional sewage plants only cover about 70% of their own electricity consumption. The additional sales of electricity also have a positive effect on the households' waterworks bills in Kiesen.

Source: DaimlerChrysler Schweiz AG, 4.11.02