

## **New solidarity between the Alps and surrounding areas**

### **CIPRA position paper on a European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)**

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*Various political actors in the Alpine space are pushing for a European strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). The International Commission for the Protection of the Alps CIPRA, with over one hundred member organisations, possesses a wide-ranging network in all Alpine countries that extends beyond the Alps and into the surrounding metropolitan areas. CIPRA is therefore actively joining the process for a European Strategy for the Alpine Region, representing the interests of sustainable, eco-friendly Alpine policies. Strengthened co-operation in such a macro-region must take place with the Alpine regions and surrounding areas as equal partners without undermining the achievements of the Alpine Convention.*

#### **I. Initial position**

The Alpine Convention today offers a clearly defined image of the Alps that is recognised under international law, with a specific scope of application and the explicit aim of ensuring the sustainable development of this region. In its 1995 document “Europe 2000+ – European Co-operation in Territorial Development”, the European Commission followed on from this by giving the Alpine space the designation “Alpine Convention” as an area for transnational co-operation. This specified the area to which CIPRA now gives its main attention and provides its knowledge and experience as regards the territorial development of the Alpine space. In CIPRA’s view it is important that the proposal for the EUSALP was co-initiated by important stakeholders in the Alpine Convention and thus cannot be discussed without them. The legal status of the Alpine Convention as a valid treaty under international law is to be regarded as crucial here.

Since the signing of the Alpine Convention in 1991, important networks have been built up in the Alps. Dedicated institutions have been established, such as ALPARC (Protected Areas), “Alliance in the Alps” (Communities), ISCAR (Scientific Committee for Alpine Research) and the “Alpine Town of the Year” association. Yet, on the whole, the Alpine Convention is inadequately implemented in the signatory states. CIPRA, as a critical observer and an ambassador of protection and sustainable development in the Alps, as well as being at the origin of the Convention, is now asking the State Parties to take concrete measures, substantially reinforcing their financial input and significantly strengthening the actual implementation of the Alpine Convention on the ground. Thus, in its “Action Plan for the Implementation of the Alpine Convention”, in 1995 CIPRA proposed the establishment of a public Alpine fund.

The train for an Alpine macro-region has now left the station; none of the major actors wants to miss it. But where is it ultimately heading, who decides how fast it is going, and what will the tickets cost? Numerous questions remain unanswered. CIPRA is now posing these questions: it sees a macro-regional strategy as an opportunity for the Alps to make the whole of Europe aware of the issues facing its Alpine regions. It should however also be considered that behind the discussion on the EUSALP is the fundamental question of what should a general future strategy for the Alps look like. CIPRA has been addressing this question for over three decades now and has produced numerous documents on the matter, available on the CIPRA homepage.

The macro-regional approach is based on an EU proposal. The aim is to assist large areas without firm political and administrative borders to address their common challenges and opportunities where this is not possible through conventional initiatives. Although there is no standard definition for a macro-region, the definition used in the Alpine Convention refers to the same term used in connection with the EU's Lisbon Strategy as regards the discussion of territorial cohesion. According to this, a macro-region is an area that covers various states or regions that are linked by one or more common characteristics or challenges. The Alps have such common features and certainly fit this definition. The EU view is that additional institutional, financial and legal burdens are to be avoided: use is instead to be made of the existing instruments, possibilities for financing and co-operation (e.g. European environmental or cohesion policies), and national and international regulations. This will require the realisation of a work programme containing the main points of focus, measures to be taken and flagship projects. Thus far the European Baltic Sea strategy (2009) and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (2010) have led to the establishment of two macro-regions.

## **II. Current initiatives lack reference to the Alpine Convention**

Three initiatives were launched in the Alpine countries to foster the debate on a future EUSALP: by means of the Alpine Convention, the Alpine Space Programme and the governments of certain regions whose territory lies in part or in whole within the Alps. These three initiatives intend, from their specific perspectives, to contribute to this debate: they undertake to co-ordinate their activities in order to exploit the synergies arising from the various starting points and mandates. The Alpine Convention has so far not sufficiently featured in the considerations as regards the EUSALP:

- Some Alpine regions from France to Austria in 2012 drafted an initiative paper on a macro-regional strategy for the Alpine space and, in the conference of the Alpine regions on 29 June 2012, adopted a resolution for an "Alpine Space Macro-Region" with the aim of turning the Alpine space into the "beating heart" of Europe. A conference of the Alpine regions on this topic was held in Innsbruck in October 2012.

- The European Union's Alpine Space Programme is realising a project (2011-2013) for the development of a strategy for the Alps that is above all intended as a contribution to the production of the Alpine Space Programme for 2014-2020; the project's wide-ranging dialogue process is however also intended to stimulate suggestions for an Alpine macro-region.
- The Alpine Convention set up a working group on the question of a macro-region for the Alpine Region at the XI Alpine Conference in Brdo, which over different sessions produced the initiative paper of 14 May 2012. The initiative paper above all indicates the areas to which the Alpine Convention can make a substantial contribution to a future macro-regional strategy for the Alpine space. The XII Alpine Conference in Poschiavo in 2012 adopted a resolution on this and recommends using the potential of the Alpine Convention in the further development of the process leading towards a macro-regional strategy.

### **III. The Alpine Convention as a core element**

The Alpine Convention has to be the core element for the EUSALP. The EUSALP and the Alpine Convention should complement each other to create new synergies.

The co-operation of the Alpine Convention with an Alpine region in the broader sense must now be strengthened. The values acquired by means of this unique international treaty must be applied as a minimum standard for the protection and sustainable development of an extended Alpine region, as well as underpinning co-operation between the Alps and the surrounding areas. It is furthermore necessary to ensure the participation of the actors, organisations and institutions as well as the local authorities, towns and regions within the Alpine Convention area as strong partners in the development and implementation of the future EUSALP. There must not be contradictions between the Alpine Convention and the EUSALP.

The Alpine Convention and its committees have in the past 20 years created a unique structure for the protection and promotion of sustainable development in the Alps. It would be foolish now to risk its achievements and play them off against the EUSALP. The Alpine Convention and the EUSALP should complement each other, not compete against one another. In CIPRA's view no EUSALP is conceivable without a large input of values from the Alpine Convention. It should be considered that the Alpine Convention has, in legal terms, a strong position as a treaty under international law. Yet the Alpine Convention also requires constant renewal and amendment: CIPRA sees the EUSALP as an opportunity to be seized for this purpose.

The principles and aims representing the basis of a sustainable future strategy for the Alps have since 1991 been established as part of a comprehensive process forming part of the Alpine Convention. These aims appear in the wording of the framework convention and its protocols and have been supplemented and clarified by numerous other significant documents. The content has resulted in the creation of Alpine-wide networks that today provide effective support for numerous activities at local, regional, national and international level for the protection and sustainable development of the Alps. Future Alpine strategies are thus, in CIPRA's view, only meaningful with a renewed Alpine Convention, not alongside it or indeed without it.

#### **IV. EUSALP: a core area in the Alps with a co-operative area with functional relations**

In CIPRA's view, the EUSALP should refer to the Alps as a core area and the surrounding metropolitan areas as a co-operative area with functional relations. Future co-operation should aim for co-operation on specific matters, with a focus on sustainable development between regions within and outside the Alps, to be viewed in flexible terms. The actors and agencies in the core area of the Alps should be able to make decisions on solutions to Alpine-specific problems.

CIPRA welcomes the current initiatives for the strengthening of co-operation between actors in the Alps and the surrounding areas and approves the active co-operation of these initiative promoters with the intensive involvement of organisations. CIPRA is convinced that many problems and challenges in the Alpine space – for example transit traffic, energy production and distribution, habitat networking, the use of renewable resources such as water, sustainable tourism, employment policies, climate change – can be better addressed and solved jointly by the regional agencies both within the Alps and in the surrounding areas.

The actors and agencies in the core area of the Alps should however now be able to make decisions on the solutions to Alpine-specific problems. The EUSALP should be a network of actors at highly diverse levels, from politicians and public and private institutions and enterprises, all the way through to civil society. It is therefore not the perimeter of the macro-region that is central, but rather the actors involved in it and their activities. Should it nevertheless be necessary to define an area of application for the EUSALP, CIPRA suggests a zoned model: first the *Alps Core Area* and second the *Co-Operative Area with functional relations*. The *Alps Core Area* will extend to the perimeter of the Alpine Convention and form the priority target area of the joint activities of actors within and outside the Alps. The *Co-Operative Area* includes the *Alps Core Area* and the surrounding regions. This is where the relations between the Alps and the lands adjoining the Alps are defined.

CIPRA sees the necessity for co-operation to be expanded to neighbouring regions that are not part of the Alpine Convention but that fundamentally affect economic, social and ecological developments in the Alpine space. This can strengthen the nature of the relationship and the solidarity between the inhabitants of the Alpine space and those of the surrounding areas. New partnerships may for example lead to innovative solutions in areas such as nature and the landscape, energy, public services or tourism. Indeed, co-operation between the Alps and the surrounding areas already has a long tradition in most countries.

The stronger orientation of the Alps towards superordinate functional relationships must not however lead to the Alps simply being integrated into metropolitan regions as peripheral areas. CIPRA opposes such a strategy, as the Alpine space requires special strategies and solutions for the problems it faces that are specific to mountain areas. If new structures are necessary for the EUSALP, these should be of a federal and participative nature. This requires the active involvement of the municipalities, regions, agencies and associations in the Alps. Non-governmental organisations should have observer status to allow them to draw on positive experiences in the context of the Alpine Convention. The EUSALP should strengthen rather than weaken the Alpine Convention and its capacities for influence.

## **V. Central themes**

### **1. Energy and climate protection**

The Alps and the metropolitan areas are jointly moving towards a climate-compatible energy future involving energy saving, energy efficiency and Alpine-compatible renewable energies, and the modernisation of existing power plants. There must be no further development of hydropower in the Alps under the cover of climate protection.

In order to reduce global warming, it is first of all vital to save energy, using it more efficiently and taking steps to lower consumption. This also involves the modernisation of existing hydropower plants. We see sustainable building as having great potential with the use of wood, a regionally available, regenerating raw material. This creates jobs and value in the region but is not an adequate climate-compatible model. We must fundamentally change our consumption of energy and switch from energy-intensive goods and services. The move from fossil to renewable energies must be pushed ahead, but not at the expense of nature. The production of biomass, the installation of wind-power plants and new hydropower plants in the Alps all contain major potential for conflict. The ecological, social and economic effects of climate protection measures must be carefully examined and weighed against each other.

- An “Energy Vision Alps” should be jointly realised with the surrounding regions with good examples to take account of special natural and ecological needs.

- The Alps and the metropolitan regions should jointly present an economic and efficient energy consumption model in order to considerably reduce output of greenhouse gases, e.g. through sustainable building using regional wood.
- Instead of new hydropower plants, priority should be given to modernising existing hydropower plants. These measures should as far as possible aim to preserve the special nature and landscapes of the Alps.
- New pumped storage facilities must not be considered a simple technical solution over other storage technologies and an effective load management.
- Wind turbines need to take into account the characteristics of the Alpine nature of and should be planned primarily in predisposed areas.
- Nuclear energy should have no future role in providing energy for the Alps and the surrounding areas. The Alps are furthermore completely unsuited to the storage of nuclear waste.

## **2. Traffic transiting the Alps and sustainable transport**

CIPRA calls on the Alpine states and the EU to support the Alps in the promotion of environmentally friendly mobility and to promote the large-scale shift of persons and goods traffic onto rail.

Increasing mobility – in particular cars and heavy goods vehicles – is one of the major causes of climate change. In the Alpine countries, over 25% of greenhouse gases are produced by traffic.

- The Alpine countries and surrounding regions should help strengthen regional flows in the Alps and promote environmentally compatible mobility, including in peripheral areas, for example via intelligent spatial and mobility planning.
- The Alps and the surrounding regions should jointly aim to reduce leisure-related traffic by launching and promoting new sustainable mobility offers.
- The aim of shifting transit goods traffic onto rail must finally be implemented effectively, e.g. by the Alpine-wide introduction of the Alpine transit exchange.
- Personal transit traffic through the Alps should also see a large-scale shift onto rail, not least by decreasing passenger car traffic in the surrounding regions.

### 3. Natural resources and natural risks

The Alps and the metropolitan areas jointly promote ecological networks, protected areas and ecological corridors for biodiversity, and examine all climate protection measures for their sustainability and eco-compatibility.

If the climate changes, nature gets to notice. Mountain areas are particularly sensitive: the fear is that these will see the highest loss rates of plant and animal species. Whole ecosystems, such as watercourses, are affected by climate change – and not just in the Alps, but also in the surrounding regions. Nature protection and climate protection can mutually complement one another. Intact habitats can better absorb the consequences of climate change than damaged ones. Moreover, natural forests, living moorlands and extensively worked meadows improve our greenhouse-gas balance: they store carbon in a natural way.

- The Alps and the metropolitan regions should jointly promote ecological networks, protected areas and ecological corridors for nature so that animals and plants can react to climate change and find new locations to survive in.
- The Alps and the surrounding areas should revitalise watercourses. If rivers have more space along their banks they can retain more water and thus reduce the danger of flooding. They become more diverse and more valuable as plant and animal habitats.
- The Alps and the surrounding areas should jointly ensure permanent protection of the vitally necessary resource of drinking water.
- The Alps and the surrounding areas should sustainably manage natural risks, wherever possible without resorting to ecologically unsustainable (and often expensive) infrastructures.
- The surrounding areas, jointly with the Alps, should commit themselves to the preservation of moorlands. Areas that have in the past dried out and been partly destroyed should wherever possible and reasonable be returned to their natural state.
- The Alps and the surrounding areas should aim for climate-compatible forest stewardship and certify all forests according to a recognised system such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).
- The agencies in the Alps and the surrounding areas should undertake to check all climate protection measures for their sustainability and compatibility with nature.

#### **4. Eco-oriented, sustainable tourism**

Operators in the Alps and the surrounding areas will in future jointly support sustainable and climate-compatible forms of tourism.

Climate change presents tourism in the Alps with major challenges. It must adapt to the consequences for the climate and at the same time become more climate-compatible. Tourism is simultaneously a sector that receives generous subsidies. The public sector is thus in a position to direct the development of tourism further towards sustainability.

- With the support of the surrounding areas, the emphasis in the Alps in future should be on offering attractive, climate-friendly travel opportunities.
- Tourist operators in the Alps and the surrounding areas should promote energy-efficient infrastructures and act as a role model for their guests.
- The building of second homes must be curtailed throughout the Alps as it is harmful in terms of local economies, scenery and climate.
- With winter sports areas now finding it harder than ever to guarantee snow, the Alps and the surrounding areas should aim to prevent any new tourist development of glaciers or unspoilt landscapes. Limits must be set on the spatial usage of solid infrastructures.
- National and private promotional institutions will include nature conservation and landscape preservation concerns in tourism promotion activities and undertake as far as possible to promote only landscape- and eco-friendly projects and products, as set out in Art. 6 of the tourism protocol of the Alpine Convention.

#### **5. Issues affecting younger and older people**

Better training and qualifications, regional empowerment and greater involvement of previously disadvantaged social groups in the Alps.

Sustainability means that succeeding generations should have the same development opportunities as their predecessors. All too often, however, disadvantaged social groups – e.g. young people as the generation concerned – are ignored in any discussion of sustainable development. These groups are not included, either by governments or by regional administrations, NGOs, associations or protected areas.

- The concerns of young people, older people, women and new Alpine residents should – more systematically than previously – form part of the work of the Alpine Convention and the future EUSALP.

- We need an Immigration policy that also applies to rural areas. As well as preserving traditions there must be openness to the new, an opening outwards, and more acceptance of social variety and of diversity.
- In the context of future restrictions on fossil fuel sources, alternative suitable infrastructures should be developed for older people in peripheral areas of the Alps, for example to ensure their mobility.

## **VI. Conclusion and next steps**

Against the backdrop of European and global development, the co-operation of the Alps with the surrounding areas has grown in importance. However, the specific challenges of the Alpine regions should in future be central to a sustainable and ecological Alpine policy. The explicit involvement of surrounding areas in Alpine policies represents a major challenge for the actors in the Alps. New forms of decision-making are required to shift the unequal balance of power between the Alps and the surrounding areas more in favour of the Alps. In addition, we need good governance to allow the population (all stakeholders) to participate directly in these processes. A good governance model needs to be developed as soon as possible. Care must also be taken that co-operation with areas outside the Alps does not strengthen the existing centralising trends, thus further weakening the Alpine regions.

The development process for the EUSALP is only at the beginning stage, with many points yet to be clarified. It is for example an open question as to how the aims and process of the EUSALP should look, who will steer the process and which actors will be involved in it. It is still not clear what will be the political force or legal status of the Alpine Convention's core area in future in the context of the EUSALP, or what will be the relationship of the Alps core area with the surrounding regions. Can for example metropolises outside the Alps determine whether and where in the Alps the Winter Olympics should take place? These and other questions must be clarified in the course of a process of dialogue between the key actors in the Alps. CIPRA is ready to take an active part in this dialogue.

In CIPRA's view it is important that the agencies in the Alps can also in future be able to decide for themselves which are the suitable and correct strategies and solutions for their regions. In this sense the focus of Alpine policies should from now on be on solidarity with the mountain areas. Producing creative solutions for a future life in the municipalities and cities of the Alps however requires a new awareness that the Alps and the surrounding areas are closely related in regard to these essential topics. A new solidarity between the actors involved is urgently needed. With the support of its large European network stretching over and beyond the Alps, CIPRA is ready to play an active part in this new solidarity. In return it requires that the actors in civil society, in particular non-governmental organisations, be actively included in any process for the EUSALP.

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