



Common Input

New co-operation between the Alps and their surrounding areas for sustainable development

Brussels, 17th December 2013



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Various political actors in the Alpine region are lobbying for the adoption of a European Macro-regional Strategy for this area. We as NGOs, Alpine-wide networks and organisations gather as observers to the Alpine Convention to contribute to alpine-wide solidarity and cooperation between regions beyond the perimeter of the Alpine Convention. We form a diverse network bringing together different cultural and linguistic backgrounds but one common aim: ensuring sustainable development in the Alpine Region as defined in the Alpine Convention.

We advocate for an active involvement of civil society as well as of organisations and networks at the interface between the Alps and the metropolitan areas in a macro-regional process. We want to contribute to a better co-operation between the EU, the Alps and their surroundings and to embedding the EU's aspirations for a macro-regional approach more firmly across the Alpine region. The Alps and their surrounding areas have to co-operate as equal partners and build upon the existing co-operation mechanisms and experience, particularly of the Alpine Convention. The Alpine Convention is an existing, legally binding instrument and offers clear objectives for sustainable development, an important knowledge base and proven experience of effective alpine-wide cooperation. We ask for the Convention to be acknowledged as an integral part of the emerging Macro-regional Strategy that underpins all its aspects of concern. The sustainability aims of the Alpine Convention are equally relevant to and can also be applied in its adjacent regions.

We as observers of the Alpine Convention and engaged as partners in its transnational co-operation efforts in the Alps for the past 20 years fully support an EU Strategy for the Alpine region to enable and ease co-operation that will lead to a good quality of life, the ongoing preservation of the environment and a sustainable and efficient economy. Priority must be given to a robust and transparent governance model. The EU Strategy for the Alpine region should also include and strengthen think-tanks and initiatives dealing with new approaches and paradigms for the future development of the Alpine region.

We want to contribute the following suggestions and further develop them in the discussion with the other actors involved:

Why do we need an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region?

- 1) The Alps and their surrounding areas are both affected by major socio-economic and environmental trends such as climate change, the need for an energy transition, demographic change, urbanisation, economic globalisation and questions that evolve around the quality of life of their inhabitants. The impact of these trends varies in the different areas within and around the Alps. **Therefore forms of co-operation are needed that enable satisfactory solutions for all stakeholders, consider the different specific challenges and lead to a sustainable future.**

- 2) The Alps and their surrounding areas can become a model region for the European motto "United in diversity". Under the umbrella of a common strategy, different languages, lifestyles and cultures would cooperate with and within the EU, including the non-EU States Switzerland and Liechtenstein. **Following the subsidiarity principle, the Alpine region takes responsibility for its own future. This will enhance the local population's understanding of the EU and its core values and principles. The EU will gain increased local acceptance.**

- 3) **At the same time, the Alpine macro-region is an opportunity for the Alpine region to make the whole of Europe aware of the challenges it faces and to share the responsibility for its sustainable development, which plays a major role in social, environmental and economic terms for the whole of the EU, with all Member States.** The chance of an EU Strategy for the Alpine region is to overcome political and administrative borders and to co-operate in a region with common opportunities and challenges.

What could be the main fields of action?

An Alpine macro-region can serve the purpose of dealing jointly with the above-mentioned socio-economic and environmental trends. A balance between cities and peripheral areas is integral to the concept of a macro-region. This balance includes a decentralized structure for decision-making processes and the implementation of the strategy. For example, the presence and easy access to institutions and services in the fields of e.g. education, health and mobility must be ensured in urban as well as in rural areas.

The following fields of action reflect the above-mentioned trends, and we believe that these encapsulate both the areas with the greatest need for action and the best opportunities for intervention in the frame of a macro-region, supporting the dual aims of ensuring a good quality of life and the preservation of the environment in the Alpine region. The three fields of action contribute to the creation of new location factors and the transition to a more environmentally friendly and efficient economy.

1) Natural resources: preserving alpine biodiversity and ecological connectivity

Natural habitats and resources must be preserved or managed in a sustainable way so that they remain the base of a regional and environmentally friendly economy. The Alps and the metropolitan areas must jointly promote protected areas and ecological connectivity to preserve the rich alpine biodiversity, which is a fundamental asset of the Alps as a living space, including for the human population. Watercourses, for example, connect the Alps and their surroundings. 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. Furthermore, quiet zones must be kept free from development pressure related to, e.g. tourism, energy demand or urban sprawl.

2) Energy: a new common energy consumption and generation system must be developed

Mountain and peri-Alpine regions must move together towards a climate-compatible energy future involving energy saving, energy efficiency and environmentally sound renewable energy sources combined with a modernisation of existing power plants.

Our Alpine and European societies can live well with less energy. Based on a reduced consumption, a transformation of the energy production system is needed. The landscape and the environment, which are often compromised for energy generation, are important assets of the Alps, and they are not “renewable”.

3) Mobility planning: reducing the negative impacts of the mobility of goods and people

Increasing mobility threatens the natural and human environment in the Alpine region. The Alps and the metropolitan areas must jointly promote the principles of environmentally-friendly mobility as well as a large-scale modal shift of persons and goods traffic onto rail. In order to reduce traffic and to make mobility more sustainable, strong regional economies and a regional supply of goods (including, for example, agricultural products), as well as effective public transport and service infrastructures have to be in place. This includes the reduction of tourism and leisure-related traffic through new sustainable mobility offers.

Producing creative solutions for a future life in the municipalities and cities of the Alps requires an increased awareness that the Alps and their surrounding areas are closely related in regard to the above-mentioned essential topics. New forms of co-operation between the actors involved are needed. With the support of our large European network stretching across and beyond the Alps, we are ready to play an active part in this co-operation.

Alliance in the Alps

Alpine Town of the Year association

CIPRA International – International Commission for the Protection of the Alps

Club Arc Alpin

ISCAR – Comité scientifique international recherché alpine

IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature

proMONT-BLANC

WWF – World Wide Fund For Nature