

CAA's opinion on the "Input paper" for the informal meeting of the Permanent Committee (14-15.3.18 in Vienna)



The CAA welcomes the initiative of the Presidency and the Permanent Secretariat on self-reflection in principle very much, but does not consider it sufficient to confine itself to working methods only, even if this seems reasonable for pragmatic motives. In particular, the role with regard to EUSALP also raises the question of the importance that the contracting states attach to the Alpine Convention.

This question certainly cannot be discussed conclusively at the meeting, but this is no reason not to raise it.

To the concrete proposals of the "Input paper":

- **Stronger alignment of the work of the working groups and platforms with the MAP (Multiannual Programme) 2017-22**

The MAP has been developed in a broadly based process under the German Presidency, setting focus and priorities for implementation, which are quite diversified. However, the scope of the work of the working groups and platforms goes beyond this: assigning all working groups and platforms to specific MAP priorities, as happened in the "Input paper", is a legitimate attempt at structuring; however, the MAP tries to set clear priorities. Naturally, not all workgroups and platforms can have priority, otherwise prioritization can be dispensed with. Rather, consideration should be given to how the content of the working groups' and platforms' mandates can be better aligned with the MAP. If necessary, working groups and platforms, which are not directly linked to the MAP, should suspend or discontinue their work until the next MAP? This means that resources can also be saved or used more concentrated. (Of course, there are obligations to fulfil mandates, but this only until the next Alpine Conference.)

In addition, the work of the working groups and platforms should generally be made more practice-oriented and more concrete (positive example: Common guidelines for small hydroelectric power plants, 2011). The results of this work should not only be published, but also disseminated more widely so that they can be of practical use.

The problem of the lack of participation in several working groups and platforms addressed in the "Input paper" would be reduced, if there were fewer working groups and platforms on the one hand and, on the other hand, would produce better applicable results in practice. Observers in particular often have very limited resources at their disposal, so that the question is increasingly being raised: „What does participation bring us?“

The selection of a MAP priority for each Permanent Committee meeting mentioned in the "Input paper" and the request to States and observers to report on their activities in this area are in principle to welcome. However, one should be aware of the fact that it is above all about activities that have been carried out independently of the MAP. Moreover, there are too few consequences. At least written summaries of the activities should be distributed so that there is a chance to inform oneself about the activities afterwards and to network them better and/or to deduce needs and draw conclusions from them.

- **Language topic**

Official publications of the Alpine Convention should continue to cover all four Alpine languages so that they can reach as many people as possible in the Alps.

On the other hand, English should be sufficient as a language for the written working documents for the Permanent Committee, but also for the Alpine Conference. In principle, English is also sufficient for the minutes of the meetings, but this would make it difficult to link them with the four Alpine languages used orally in the meetings. Therefore, probably, protocol languages and interpreted languages used in the sitting itself must be the same.

In principle, financial savings for the secretariat and the presidency are, of course, to be welcomed. However, the saved funds should then be used, for example, for projects for implementation or public relations, e.g. collected in a kind of "project fund", instead of simply distributing them to other budget items.

Or they should be used to strengthen the role of the Alpine Convention in EUSALP:

- **The Alpine Convention and EUSALP**

In our view, the Alpine Convention should play as important a role as possible within the framework of EUSALP, which naturally requires a great deal of effort, especially on the part of the Permanent Secretariat. In fact, the Secretariat and the working group MRS do almost all the work of the Alpine Convention within the framework of EUSALP. The "Input paper" and the previous resolutions of the Alpine Convention bodies claim that the Alpine Convention even plays a leading role in EUSALP. This is certainly the case in EUSALP-AG 6 and involves a great deal of work; the MRS working group has also played a leading role in coordinating the working groups and platforms of the Alpine Convention with the EUSALP action groups. For all other levels of EUSALP, we believe there are doubts about a "leading role".

The "Input paper" proposes that the Permanent Committee should play a stronger strategic role in the orientation of the Alpine Convention towards EUSALP. From the CAA's point of view, that would be to be welcomed, BUT:

In our opinion, the Permanent Committee has become less and less strategic in its role within the Alpine Convention itself in recent years.

Very few "strategic decisions" were made, and discussions on strategic topics hardly took place. Instead, many projects and initiatives were presented that contribute to the implementation of the Alpine Convention. The Permanent Committee then merely "noted" or "welcomed" this, and at most a (more ideational) "support" was decided upon. Although these projects are or were usually desirable, this is not yet a strategy or strategic function. The very "cooperative spirit" in the committees and the increasing cooperation between observers and states in many projects cannot hide this fact.

Some dissatisfaction with this development is presumably present among some representatives (as can be concluded from discussions on the sidelines of meetings), but hardly anyone knows how to remedy it. Unfortunately, the importance of the Alpine Convention in the contracting states has not increased in recent years at the political-administrative level, and the political priorities in the states are others. The representatives of the Alpine Convention bodies have no influence on this. Many of the representatives of the states and many of the observers still believe in the relevance of the Alpine Convention, but skepticism is increasing.

It would therefore be important for the Alpine Convention to reflect on its USP points mentioned in the "Input paper" on page 5, center, and to make them clearer, both internally and

externally, as peculiarities and strengths, i.e. also: to **stand up for them noticeably**. This includes, in particular, official decisions at regional and local level that are to be made and/or taken on the reference to the Alpine Convention. EUSALP would also see the Alpine Convention as being more important than it seems at the moment. In particular, this concerns the fundamental premise of the protection and sustainable development of the Alpine region. All too often, however, short-term economic interests have priority in practice.

Unfortunately, the commitment of many participants in the meetings of the Permanent Committee has decreased in recent years, i.e. many people only take part in some parts of the meetings and / or do other work on the laptop during the meetings. This applies equally to representatives of the States and observers. For people who present activities, the relatively low level of attention is probably not pleasant. It does not show respect, interest or commitment to the implementation of the Alpine Convention. However, this behavior is probably also due to the above-mentioned fact that there are hardly any strategic discussions and decisions, but rather the activities of individuals are presented. These are interesting to some more, to others less. The often very long agendas also lead to a fragmentation of the topics. Concentration and streamlining would also be helpful here. The fact that the minutes of the meetings are almost literally definite beforehand makes sense for an efficient and timesaving course of the meeting, but does not encourage commitment, since real debates seem to be undesirable.

Therefore, before the Permanent Committee can play a stronger role in the EUSALP process, it should perhaps consider its role and mode of operation within the Alpine Convention: to reflect on and strengthen itself in order to be strong externally.

The Alpine Convention and its bodies are often perceived from the outside as static, obsolete, inflexible and abstract. EUSALP, on the other hand, still scores points at the moment with its claim to be dynamic, flexible and innovative (and thus much more in keeping with the spirit of the times...). However, this has yet to be proven in the results.

The proposal to commission the working group MRS to develop scenarios on the interplay between the Alpine Convention and the EUSALP is acceptable. However, this working group can only do preparatory and structuring work. Ultimately, the decisive factor is the political significance - and thus also the financial support - which the states and their representatives attach to the Alpine Convention and which also shapes the work of the Permanent Committee.

Ultimately, this is also a question of believe that the actors involved should ask themselves.



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