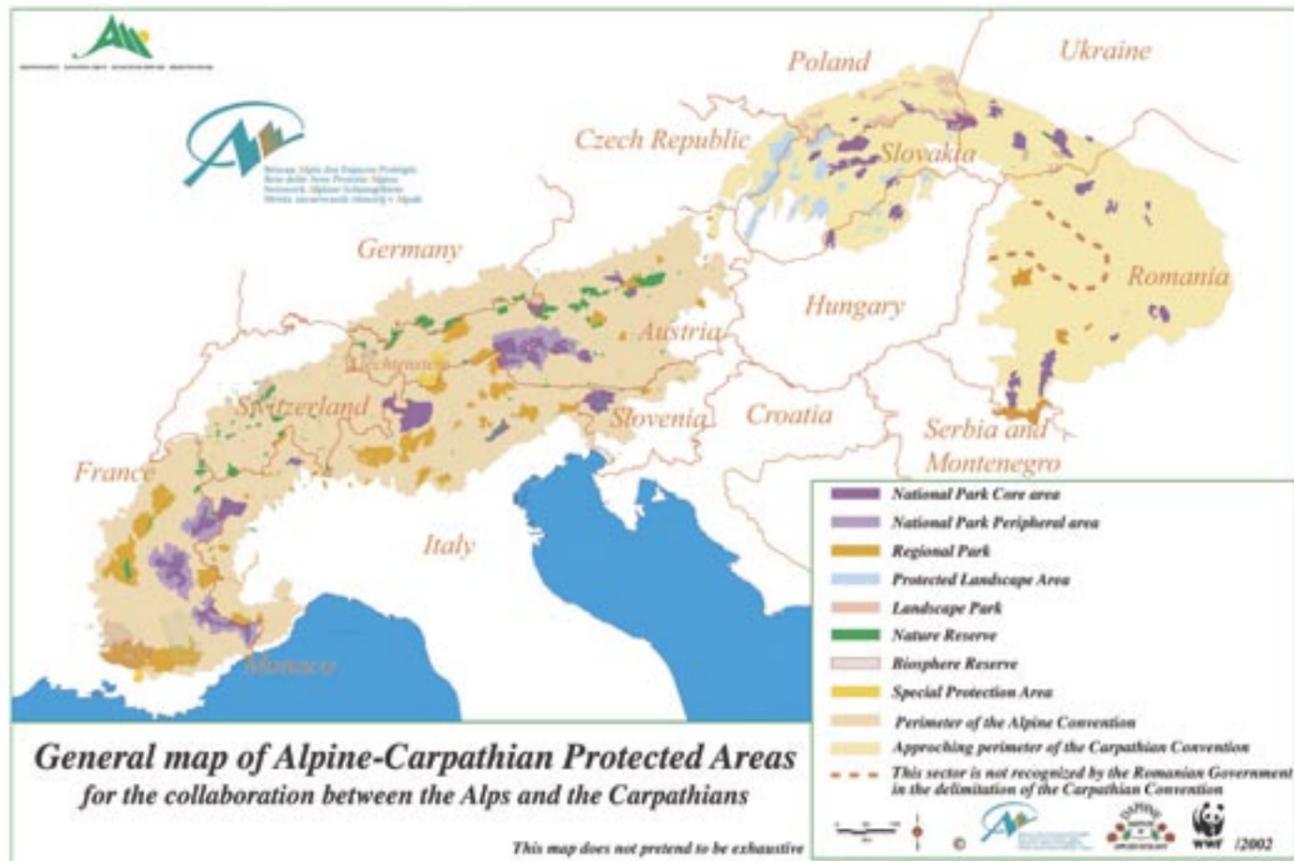


■ THE ALPS

The Alps cover an area of approximately 191 000 km² with a population of 14 millions. The highest peak in the Alps, Mt. Blanc culminates at 4810 m. The Alps extend across eight countries covering parts of Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Monaco, Slovenia and most of Liechtenstein and Switzerland. The Alps are a region of high cultural and natural diversity. Due to their central location in Europe and favorable economic factors, the Alps have developed rapidly, leading to an increased pressure on the natural environment. Transport routes and tourist developments have divided and reduced the natural habitats of many Alpine species of flora and fauna.

■ THE CARPATHIANS

The Carpathians cover an area of about 209 000 km² with a population of 17 millions. The highest peak of the Carpathians, Gerlach culminates at 2655 m in Slovakia. The Carpathian range extends from Austria to Serbia and Montenegro, covering most of Slovakia and Romania and parts of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine. The Carpathians form a natural bridge between western and Eastern Europe, allowing for species migration and genetic exchange. They contain some of the least disturbed ecosystems and house numerous endemic species. The Carpathian landscape has largely been shaped by a long tradition of mountain agriculture and shepherding. Today these traditional occupations are facing decline due to increased poverty and lack of economic and social incentive.



ALPINE NETWORK OF PROTECTED AREAS



The Alpine Carpathian Cooperation of Protected Areas

CNPA
ALPARC

■ BACKGROUND OF THE ALPINE-CARPATHIAN COOPERATION

Since 1991, nature protection in the Alps is supported by an international legal mechanism, namely the **Alpine Convention**. In 1995, the **Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC)** was established under the protocol for Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation of the Alpine Convention. Inspired by this incentive, the Carpathian countries with the participation of the United Nations Environment Programme set out on a similar initiative within the Carpathian Convention – **Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA)**.

The article 4.5 of the Carpathian Convention states in deed that “The parties shall cooperate in developing an ecological network in the Carpathians, as a constituent part of the Pan-European Ecological Network, in establishing and supporting a Carpathian Network of Protected Areas, as well as enhancing conservation and sustainable management in the areas outside of protected areas”.



The procedure of CNPA (Carpathian Network of Protected Areas) started with the meeting which took place in Gran Paradiso National Park (I) in October 2001 organised by ALPARC and the concept of regional cooperation in the Carpathians was further addressed on the occasion of two subsequent meetings in 2002 in Bolzano (I), “Sharing the Experience, Mountain Sustainable Development in the Carpathians and in the Alps” and in Berchtesgaden “The Alpine Process – an Approach for other Mountain Regions?” The procedure of CNPA continued with the European Mountain conference of Chambéry (F) held in 2002 organised by ALPARC. Different Alpine countries support the process of the establishment of a Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA), especially **Germany, France** and the **Principality of Monaco** by a continuous support for this project since 2003 and as well by the support of expert workshops organised for the Carpathian and Alpine protected areas managers (2006). **Austria** supported the process by organizing the NATURA 2000 symposium in 2004. The foundation **HEIDEHOF (D)** is an important partner for the organisation of exchanges between the Alpine and the Carpathian protected areas as well.

■ MISSION OF THE CARPATHIAN NETWORK OF PROTECTED AREAS

An international Steering Committee composed of one government representative for each Carpathian country was created in 2003 to establish the CNPA. This Steering Committee defined the establishment procedure of the CNPA and the network’s mission:

“The CNPA mission is to contribute to the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians. The CNPA is a tool for the implementation of the Carpathian Convention, by enhancing the cooperation of Carpathian protected areas with each other and with other mountain regions of Europe. The CNPA is a network of protected areas promoting cooperation, representing the interests of Carpathian protected areas to national and international authorities and organisations”.



■ IMPORTANCE AND PRIORITIES OF COOPERATION

When several countries with different languages and cultures are brought together to work on a common topic as complex as nature conservation, it is difficult to coordinate common projects without an organizing structure such as a network. A trans-boundary approach towards ecological concerns is necessary, in particular for mountain ranges running through a number of countries.

A network allows thematic exchanges in order to identify important issues that need to be addressed to (for instance, controlled tourism development, species monitoring, preserving natural habitats, etc). Common tools are established for common actions and by working in collaboration, time is saved and work is done more efficiently (i.e.: standardized monitoring forms for various species, bulletins, websites and common databases). It allows to strengthen lobbying as well and to establish a common communication strategy in order to increase public awareness and support for nature protection.

In preparation for the creation of the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas, it is essential to assess the actual needs and expectations of Carpathian protected areas towards the future network. In order to collect sufficient information from protected areas, a questionnaire was elaborated by the CNPA Partnership Steering Committee in 2003. This questionnaire attempted to explore the expectations that Carpathian protected areas have for the future network, the challenges they face and their interest in training and in participation in working groups on various topics.

Some topics were identified as priorities for the cooperation between the Carpathian protected areas as well as between the Alps and the Carpathians in a more general way:

- Protected area management (project management as well as GIS implementation)
- Tourism (impacts of tourism and regional benefits by sustainable tourism)
- Implementation of European Union legislation in nature protection (in particular the NATURA 2000 network)
- Large carnivore management (the Carpathians maintain viable populations of large carnivores including 8000 brown bears, 5000 wolves and 3000 lynx)

The creation of the CNPA will facilitate communication between Carpathian protected areas and between the Alps and the Carpathians. Long term cooperation between the Alps and the Carpathians is necessary in order to consider the possibility of creating ecological corridors for species migration and genetic exchange, as well as exchange of know how and experience between the protected areas of both mountain ranges for the daily management of natural and cultural mountain spaces.

■ NEW EUROPEAN DIMENSION IN NATURE PROTECTION

Four of the seven Carpathian countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) entered the European Union in 2004; Romania will join the EU soon. There is a particular need for cooperation in the implementation of European nature conservation directives such as the NATURA 2000 network, the Bird Directive, the Habitat Directive and the Water Framework Directive. The protected areas of the Carpathians play a crucial role in terms of ensuring the efficient implementation of EU directives. They are necessary structures to preserve the unique biodiversity of the Carpathians and they are important actors in regional sustainable development.

■ LONG TERM VISION

The establishment of the CNPA in the context of the Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Project will certainly contribute to increasing exchange and cooperation between Carpathian and Alpine protected areas, and probably also with protected areas in the Pyrenees to include all mountain regions from the “alpine biogeographic region” in the heart of Europe. The network of protected areas in the Carpathians and in the Alps is today an important element of a concrete implementation of the international conventions of both mountain ranges. An important cooperation between them is natural.