



Federal Ministry for the  
Environment, Nature Conservation  
and Nuclear Safety

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## Special Issue

### International Partnerships for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions

Mountain Partnerships under the Alpine Convention



IT'S OUR FUTURE.

# International Partnerships for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions

## Mountain Partnerships under the Alpine Convention

Mountain regions are particularly sensitive ecosystems. They require special protection efforts. For the Alpine region, the Alpine Convention and its Protocols provide the foundations for international cooperation aimed at preserving this unique habitat. At the VIIth Alpine Conference in 2002, the competent ministers of the Parties to the Alpine Convention resolved to incorporate their experiences from the Alpine process into "International partnership for sustainable development in mountain regions". This was agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, and further developed at the "Global Mountain Summit" in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

The Alpine Convention and its origination process demonstrate an approach to the organisation of sustainable development in transboundary mountain regions. The integrative approach of Alpine cooperation, from environmental and nature conservation, to regional, economic and social development, through to joint cultural activities, may serve as an example for strengthening public participation and democracy, for environmentally, economically and socially compatible progress, and for international cooperation in mountain regions that is based on solidarity and responsibility. For the Alpine region, however, it will be vital for all protocols, particularly the transport protocol, to enter into force in all Alpine states as quickly as possible.



*Federal Environment  
Minister Jürgen Trittin*

The Federal Republic of Germany will chair the Alpine Conference for the years 2003/2004. One of the top priorities of our work programme is to intensify links between the Alpine Convention and other mountain regions. We have undertaken to further expand cooperation with the mountain regions of the Carpathians, the Caucasus and Central Asia. As well as furthering environmental protection, it is hoped that this will also contribute to security, stability, and the development of international cooperation in politically sensitive mountain regions, such as the Caucasus.

Together with other Parties to the Convention, non-governmental organisations and networks of the Alpine Convention, in 2003 we initiated a number of projects in these three mountain regions, some of which have already been implemented. These successful mountain partnership projects under the Alpine Convention with the mountain regions of the Carpathians, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Tianshan / Pamir) are presented on the following pages, in the hope of encouraging further cooperation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jürgen Trittin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

*Jürgen Trittin  
Federal Minister for the Environment,  
Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety  
Chair of the Alpine Conference*

## Statement

### by the competent Ministers of the Parties to the Alpine Convention at the VIIth Alpine Conference on 19 November 2002 in Meran, Italy

1. We, the competent Ministers of the Parties to the Alpine Convention, Austria (A), Switzerland (CH), Germany (D), France (F), Liechtenstein (FL), Italy (I), Monaco (MC) and Slovenia (SLO) and a representative of the European Commission, view the “World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg”, the designation of 2002 as the “International Year of Mountains” by the United Nations, and the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, as an opportunity to reinforce our objectives as defined in the Alpine Convention and its implementation protocols for the sustainable, holistic development of the Alpine region as the most significant mountain region in Europe.
2. Aware that mountain regions represent particularly sensitive ecosystems with global significance as sources of water and energy, as the habitat of numerous species, as locations of rich biodiversity, as recreational destinations, as centres of cultural heritage, and also as economic regions, we believe that they represent our contribution to the European and global debate on sustainability.
3. In view of the fact that the mountain regions are becoming ever more crucial worldwide to the survival of global ecosystems, to mark the International Year of Mountains, we will be stepping up our activities within the framework of the Alpine Convention and efficiently implementing the Convention and its objectives and measures as defined in the implementation protocols.
  - As a legal prerequisite, the Parties have commenced parliamentary proceedings for the ratification of the Protocols to the Alpine Convention agreed to date. Since the nine protocols have already been ratified by Liechtenstein, Austria and Germany, all protocols will enter into force in the year 2002.
  - Having reached a decision on the seat of the Permanent Secretariat and the ad interim election of the Secretary-General within the context of the VIIth Alpine Conference, in 2002, the Parties created the organisational prerequisites for continuous work to implement the Alpine Convention.
4. In an international context, we view the Alpine Convention as an example of the sustainable development of transboundary mountain regions. The integrative approach of Alpine cooperation, from environmental protection, to regional, economic and social development, through to joint cultural activities, may serve as an example for the strengthening of public participation and democracy, for environmentally, economically and socially compatible progress, and for international cooperation in mountain regions that is based on solidarity and responsibility.
5. The Parties to the Alpine Convention hereby explicitly declare their willingness to incorporate their experiences from the Alpine process into the “International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions”, agreed within the framework of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and further developed at the “Global Mountain Summit” in Bishkek/Kyrgyzstan. In particular, they will become actively involved in the mountain regions of the Carpathians, the Caucasus and Central Asia, which already collaborate closely with the Alpine region.

# International mountain partnerships under the Alpine Convention with the mountain regions of the Carpathians, the Caucasus and Tienshan / Pamir

- G II 3 – The International Year of Mountains in 2002 prompted governments, organisations and individuals worldwide to consider the particular role played by mountain regions in the earth's overall ecosystem and the significance of the mountains for water supply, the preservation of biodiversity, and as a habitat and economic region for humans in the mountain regions. The most important – but also the most difficult – task currently facing us is to harmonise the protection of sensitive ecosystems in the mountain regions with reasonable economic development (including agriculture, transport, tourism, energy industry and infrastructure). Moreover, many mountain regions span national borders and are therefore particularly sensitive in a political sense. For this reason, their sustainable development also requires international cooperation between neighbouring states in all relevant areas.



change and other factors. Due to a lack of economic development, poverty is on the increase in many mountain regions. The situation is further exacerbated by armed conflict and the movement of refugees.

Prompted by these considerations, “International Partnerships for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions” were initiated at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, aimed at the international exchange of experience between mountain regions and the transfer of funding to promote mountain regions. This initiative was reinforced and further developed at the Global Mountain Summit to mark the end of the International Year of Mountains in November 2002 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

## The Alpine process – An approach for other mountain regions?

As a concrete contribution, in June 2002 the Federal Environment Ministry, together with other German authorities and the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps CIPRA, hosted an international conference entitled, “The Alpine Process – An Approach for Other Mountain Regions?” in Berchtesgaden.

The conference took stock of the process to date in the Alpine region, and discussed the transferability and applicability of these experiences to other mountain regions around the globe. One pivotal question posed by the Conference was: As a mountain range in the heart of the highly developed economic region of Western Europe, are the Alps in any way comparable with mountain ranges in other parts of the world? Issues that are highly explosive for the Alps, such as the transit of traffic, do not (yet) pose the same problems in the Caucasus or in Central Asia. On the other hand, this presents an opportunity to steer economic development, regional planning and infrastructure measures in the appropriate direction from an early stage.

Against this background, experiences of the Alpine process and its proven structures, such as

- international cooperation between the states of the mountain regions
  - the involvement of non-governmental organisations
  - the creation of networks of mountain communities or protected areas
- may prove helpful.

In particular, it was stressed that the Alpine Convention itself cannot be transferred, and that instead, a detailed analysis of the actual situation and problems in the respective mountain region is needed. On this basis, a specific approach must be derived in order to develop suitable instruments for mountain politics in the region.



*The experience gained in the Alpine region can also be useful for other mountain regions  
(Photograph: Brendt)*

The formulation of international agreements aimed at promoting and regulating sustainable development in a mountain region is a protracted process. Work to create the legal framework – the Convention and its nine Protocols to date – has been underway since 1989. The Alpine Convention entered into force in the eight contracting states in 1995, followed by its nine protocols in Austria, Liechtenstein and Germany in 2002. In 2003, Slovenia ratified all protocols, whilst Monaco and France ratified some of them.

Experiences from the Alpine process show that regional action for sustainable development in mountain regions is preferable to a global approach. The basic principles comprise the responsibility of governments, the participation of local communities and civil society, the formation of transboundary networks, the role of science, and the active involvement of the international community.

### **Mountain partnerships – A priority under Germany’s chair of the Alpine Conference**

At the VIIth Alpine Conference, Germany took over the chair of the Alpine Conference for the years 2003 and 2004. The agenda under Germany’s presidency includes the intensified linking of the Alpine Convention with other mountain regions so as to

further contribute to the “International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions”.

The Federal Environment Ministry (BMU) believes that the exchange of experiences should be conducted at a variety of different levels:

- between the ministries and authorities of the Alpine states and the states of other mountain regions, and
- the non-governmental organisations, particularly with the involvement of the International Commission on the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA).

In this respect, particular competence is attributable to the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps, as a non-governmental umbrella organisation representing more than 100 associations and organisations from all the Alpine states, which was instrumental in helping to initiate the Alpine Convention.

The existing transboundary networks in the Alps

- the protected Alpine regions
- the Alpine cities
- the local communities (“Alliance in the Alps” network of communities)
- the scientific institutions (Alpine research)

may contribute to the creation of similar networks in other mountain regions.

The network of communities – an alliance of almost 150 local communities throughout the entire Alpine region – operates in close contact with the population to improve the ecological, social and economic situation in the local communities. It makes the most concrete contribution towards implementing the objectives of the Alpine Convention for sustainable development in the Alpine region. Consequently, the experiences of the network of communities are deemed particularly well-suited for achieving environmentally compatible economic development in the communities of other mountain regions.

### **Mountain partnership projects by the Federal Environment Ministry**

Together with other Parties, non-governmental organisations and networks of the Alpine region, in



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### Mountain partnership between the Alps and the Carpathians

Together with the Free State of Bavaria, the Federal Environment Ministry is promoting the development of a network of protected areas in the Carpathians within the context of the Carpathian Convention in collaboration with the Network of Protected Alpine Regions. Its partners in the Alps are France and Monaco, and at international level, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It will continue to promote the network in 2004 / 2005.

### Mountain partnership between the Alps and the Caucasus

In collaboration with the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Federal Environment Ministry is promoting the development of a long-term action plan for the sustainable development of the Caucasus region on a transboundary basis for the states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia. The project is coordinated by the Regional Environmental Centre in Tbilisi (REC Caucasus) in collaboration with the Regional Environmental Centre in Moscow (REC Russia).

Further funding is scheduled for the years 2004 / 2005. In the long term, it is hoped that further donors can be recruited from the Alpine region for this ambitious project.

### Mountain partnership between the Alps and Central Asia (Tienshan / Pamir)

With due regard for the concrete conditions of the Central Asian mountain region, a network of communities is being developed based on the model of the "Alliance in the Alps" network of communities. This will consider the priority topics for local sustainable development – sustainable production, regional economy, conservation of resources, self-help, agriculture, water, nature conservation, energy, forests and climate.

The complex project is being implemented locally Switzerland. Financial assistance from the BMU will continue in 2004 / 2005. Additional partners from the Alpine region include the Principality of Liechtenstein, the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps CIPRA, and the "Alliance in the Alps" network of communities.

2003, the German chair of the Alpine Conference initiated or co-funded a number of concrete mountain partnership projects in the three mountain regions of the Carpathians, the Caucasus and Tienshan:

The projects subsidised by the Federal Environment Ministry each constitute part of the partnership between the Alpine region and the three moun-

tain regions. Additional Alpine states, non-governmental organisations and international organisations are also involved in the process. The mountain partnerships are still in their infancy and can only be "sustainable" if they are geared towards long-term, continuous collaboration.

The achievements to date are outlined below.

## Mountain partnership between the Alps and the Carpathians

As a principal contribution to the United Nations International Year of Mountains 2002, a concept was developed in the Carpathian region to formulate a legal cooperation framework for its protection and sustainable development. The outcome of this inter-governmental negotiation process between the seven participating Carpathian countries (Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, the Czech Republic,

Hungary and the Ukraine) was the draft Carpathian Convention.

The Alps - Carpathian partnership, initiated by the UNEP Regional Office for Europe to promote



## The Carpathians

The Carpathians form a majestic arc through Central and Eastern Europe, spanning eight national borders as well as the future outer border of the EU. In area terms, they are one of the largest mountain chains in Europe with a length of around 1,500 km and a width of up to 350 km. The Carpathian states include Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Ukraine (and Austria with less than 0.5 %).

The highest elevation is the Gerlach Peak (2,655 m) in the High Tatras (Slovakia). Around half of the Carpathians are covered in forest, which are home to some of the last remaining primeval forest in Europe. The Carpathian forests are a vital link between the Nordic forests and the forest regions of Western and South-Western Europe. One-third of all European vascular plants (with over 4,000 species, including 481 endemic species) are found in the Carpathians. The Carpathians are still home to a number of large predators (8,000 bears, 3,000 lynxes, 4,000 wolves) and the imperial eagle, threatened with worldwide extinction. Around 16 % of the Carpathians are under some form of protection.



*Carpathian wolf (Archive for Slovakian nature conservation; Slovak Republic)*

of the WWF International (Danube-Carpathian programme). The exchange of information was supported by the European Mountain Forum (EMF).

Against this background, the Carpathian Convention was designed by the participating countries as an innovative legal instrument to promote cooperation, support harmonisation, strengthen integration and incorporate the Carpathians into a holistic development perspective. This aims to

- create a permanent framework for cooperation
- improve the implementation of existing legal instruments
- stimulate partnerships and recruit donors
- practice preventive care rather than retrospective care, and
- promote integration and coordination between various different areas.

The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathian Mountains was adopted and signed at the Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” on 22 May 2003 in Kiev, the Ukraine. The provisional Secretariat for the Convention is currently located in Vienna until the Convention enters into force and a Permanent Secretariat is established in the Carpathian region. It is managed by UNEP and supported by Austria.

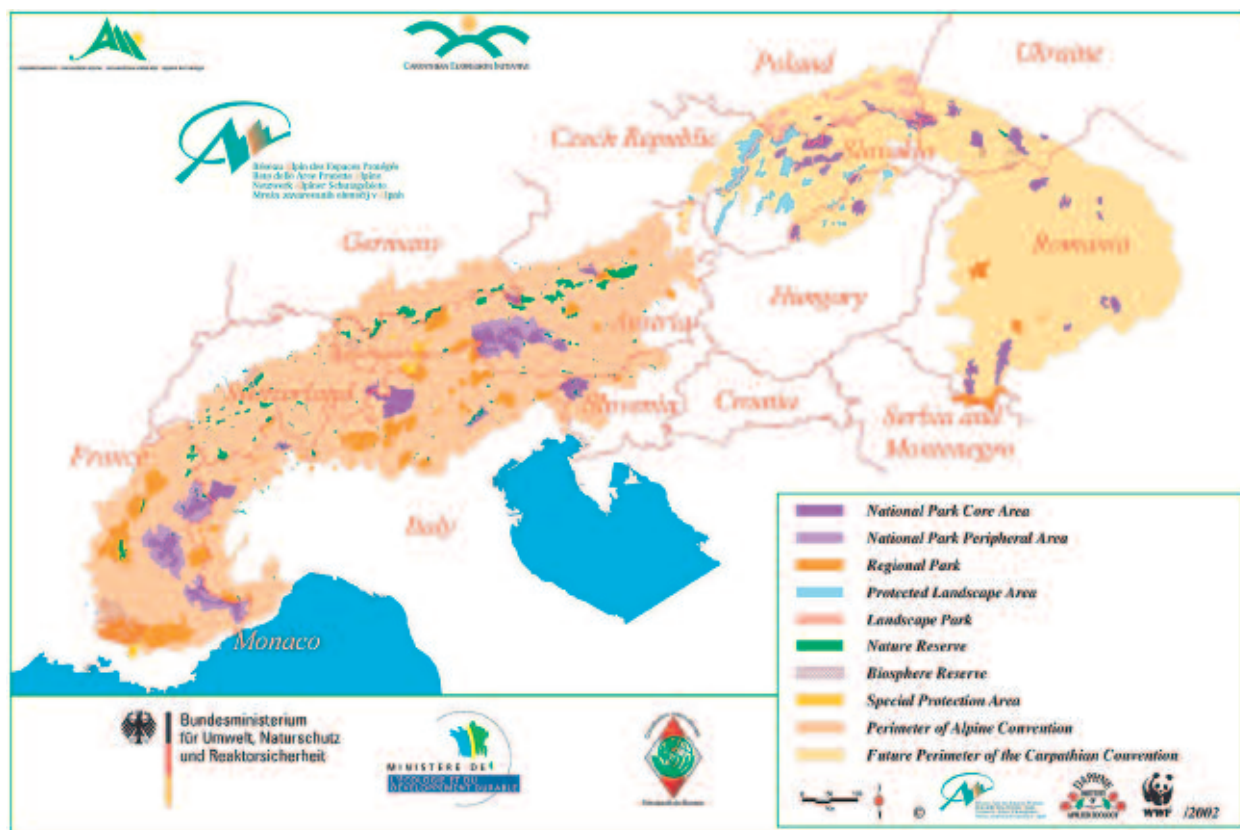
Like the Alpine Convention, the Carpathian Convention is a model for international cooperation for the protection and sustainable development of a large, transboundary mountain ecosystem.

the exchange of experiences between the Parties to the Alpine Convention – the only international legal instrument on mountain protection currently in force anywhere in the world – and the Carpathian countries provided a basis for the formulation of the Carpathian Convention. The experience gleaned in the Alpine regions of Europe was adapted to the requirements and situations in the Carpathian states.

The entire process was funded primarily by Italy, Austria, the Principality of Liechtenstein and the Netherlands (as a non-Alpine country). The Federal Republic of Germany supported and promoted the Carpathian process by hosting the international conference “The Alpine Process – An Approach for Other Mountain Regions?” (Berchtesgaden, June 2002).

Non-governmental organisations were represented by the “Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative (CEI)”

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*The network of protected areas in the Alps and in the Carpathians*

Unlike the Alpine Convention, the Carpathian Convention explicitly regulates the creation of a network of protected areas (Carpathian Network of Protected Areas, CNPA) as an official intergovernmental implementation initiative of the Convention.

Article 4, paragraph 5 of the Carpathian Convention states 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 enhance conservation and sustainable management in the areas outside of protected areas.

In collaboration with the Alpine Network of Protected Areas and UNEP, and with the support of Germany, France and Monaco, the Carpathian states are preparing to establish this network of protected areas.

### **A network of protected areas as a contribution to European collaboration**

There are a total of 86 large protected areas (national parks, nature parks, landscape reserves, landscape parks and biosphere reserves) in the Carpathians, as well as hundreds of smaller nature conservation areas. For the preservation of European and global biodiversity, it is of vital importance that the untouched nature in the Carpathians is conserved via these protected areas, and that their extensive biological diversity is preserved.

Four out of the seven Carpathian countries (Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary) will be joining the European Union in 2004 and are currently revising their national nature conservation legislation in order to prepare for EU integration. In this regard, there is a particular need for support with the implementation of European nature conservation directives, such as the NATURA 2000 concept, the Birds Directive, the Habitat Directive and the Water Framework Directive. The Carpathian protec-



ted areas play a decisive role in ensuring the efficient implementation of EU Directives. They represent a structural necessity for the preservation of the Carpathians' unique biodiversity. Carpathian protected areas represent significant factors in regional sustainable development vis-à-vis the promotion of tourism linked to efficient nature conservation alongside traditional economic activities (farming and pastoral farming).

In this connection, the Alpine Network of Protected Areas and UNEP (Regional Office for Europe) are accompanying the cooperation project between the Alps and the Carpathians. Long-term collaboration between the Alps and the Carpathians is needed in order to create the possibility of ecological corridors for species migrations and genetic exchange, and to facilitate the exchange of know-how and experience between the protected areas of the two European mountain ranges.



As part of its work agenda, the German chair of the Alpine Conference is supporting this cooperation project between the mountain ranges, which is financed by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, the Bavarian State Ministry for Environment, Health and Consumer Protection, the French Government, and the Principality of Monaco.

## Mountain partnership between the Alps and the Caucasus

What do the Swiss have in common with the Armenians? Italians with Georgians? Germany, Liechtenstein, France and Austria with Azerbaijan, Russia or Turkey? At first glance, not a great deal. In the Alpine states, peace reigns, and traditions coexist alongside the very latest technology, whereas the battle action in the Caucasus is never-ending. In the former, tourists enjoy superb pistes and luxury hotels, whereas in the latter, people live in villages with no electricity or gas, and with no passable road access. Due to the difficult living conditions in the mountain regions, more and more people are moving into the towns and cities, because the absence of medical

### Main areas of cooperation between the protected areas of the Carpathians and the Alps

The principal areas of collaboration include

- the designation and management of NATURA 2000 areas
- the scientific monitoring of large predators (wolf, bear, lynx)
- exchange on the topics of forest management and tourism
- the joint formulation of ecological educational measures
- the investigation of opportunities for involving the local population in management of the protected area.

### Future prospects

With the establishment of an official network of protected areas in the Carpathians, for which preparations are currently underway, a long-term vision of cooperation between networks of protected areas in the European mountain ranges will be further reinforced. By creating ecological corridors, species migration will be facilitated, not only within the mountain massifs, but also between them. The creation of a network of protected areas in the Carpathian Mountains with the support of the Alpine states is a concrete contribution towards cooperation between mountain regions in Europe.

care, schools or employment seems to offer them zero prospects. For those left behind, nature is their only resource, but its thoughtless exploitation can have life-threatening consequences, such as landslides and soil erosion.

Nevertheless, there is one thing which unites residents of the Alps and the Caucasus: life at high altitude, in a treeless environment, with thin air close to or even above the clouds.

The topographical similarities lead us to hope that one day, the peaceful prosperity of the Alpine

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countries will be extended to the Caucasus. Imposing peaks, clean air, ski pistes and continuing traditions provide excellent prerequisites. So why shouldn't the Caucasus region achieve sustainable development?

Within the framework of a mountain partnership, the Alpine states are supporting the countries in the Caucasus along this path. The first steps have already been taken:

In July 2003, the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) funded a conference to bring all interested parties together. It was organised by the REC Caucasus (Regional Environmental Centre Caucasus)<sup>1</sup>, an independent, non-profit-making environmental organisation which brings together government and non-government environmental players in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and promotes dialogue between them. The conference "Sustainable development of mountain regions in the Caucasus" has major significance for the regions, where transboundary communication is impaired by multi-layered conflict.

### The Caucasus

The Caucasus is a 1,100 km long, 180 km wide mountain range between the Black and the Caspian Seas. The highest elevation is the 5,642 m high Mount Elbrus, which forms the border between Europe and Asia. As such, it may be ranked as the highest mountain in Europe. In the north, the structure is more steppe-like, compared with the steep drops in the south. In the west, the mountain range is heavily forested (deciduous forests up to 1,500 m, and above this altitude, coniferous forests and alpine pastures). The east is unforested. The northern range forms the so-called Greater Caucasus. Around 100 km south of this is the Lesser Caucasus, ranging from Turkey via Armenia to Azerbaijan. The main crest of the Caucasus forms the border between Russia on the one hand, and Georgia and Azerbaijan on the other. Armenia is also situated in Transcaucasia. The Caucasus has often been the site of ethnic disputes and the subject of power struggles between the major powers.



Source: *Caucasus Environment Outlook (CED) Tbilisi, 2002*

In Tbilisi, Georgia, representatives of non-governmental organisations, parliaments, ministries, media and youth organisations discussed the (development) problems of their mountain regions, and assured one another of their mutual support in solving them. The Office of Forests, Nature and Countryside in the Principality of Liechtenstein subsidised a youth meeting which was staged parallel to this, which contributed significantly to the success of the negotiations. The experiences from Germany, Liechtenstein and other Alpine states may prove helpful in improving the economic and social structures, which are to be developed in harmony with nature.

The project "Pilot projects for sustainable development in the mountain regions of the Caucasus – Local Agenda 21" will implement the objectives of the conference: In close collaboration with the local population, eight villages in the mountain range of the three South Caucasian states and Russia are to be selected for a model demonstration of sustainable development. If the concept proves successful, it will later be transferred to other communities. The pilot phase of this project (October 2003 to October 2004) is being funded by the Federal Republic of Germany (BMU) and the Office of Forests, Nature and Countryside of the Principality of Liechtenstein.



The mountain partnership will help to improve the situation of many mountain residents, counteract the causes of migration, and reinforce hopes that in

future, the Caucasus will have more in common with the Alps than just geography.

### **Pilot projects for sustainable development in the mountain regions of the Caucasus – Local Agenda 21**

Particular significance is attached to this project in a region where borders are still disputed, and development is hampered by ethnic conflict and political instability.

It is designed as a model to demonstrate sustainable development in mountain villages of the Caucasus. The Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety in the Federal Republic of Germany, together with the Office of Forests, Nature and Countryside of the Principality of Liechtenstein, are funding the start-up phase. The criteria for selecting two villages each in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia include development potential, the willingness of the local population and the local councils to cooperate, and the availability of key data. The situation of the villages must be typical for the region, so that the results of the project may be transferred and serve as a basis for regional or national strategies for sustainable development of the mountain regions.



The REC Caucasus in Tbilisi is implementing the project in cooperation with the REC Russia. The procedure is coordinated by one contact person in each country. Experiences from

other projects are collated and analysed, databases are set up containing key information on the mountain villages in the Caucasus, and experts are consulted who will jointly define the criteria for selecting the villages. A behavioural code is also to be formulated which will enable staff to understand the mentality of the local population.

Firstly, the national coordinators are ensuring an exchange between all parties involved, above and beyond national borders. This will help to resolve conflict through practical cooperation. Secondly, decisions are also taken in close collaboration with the local population, whose needs and own suggestions should provide guidelines for the project.



*Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park / Georgia National park administration, WWF and German development cooperation together for man and nature in Georgia (Photograph: Dr. Steinmetzer)*

Each village will determine its own path to economic and social development in harmony with nature. Supported by the REC and other experts, they prepare action plans for the implementation thereof. In October 2004, these are to be presented to the Parties to the Alpine Convention and other potential donors in order to canvas for additional funding.

### **A convention for the Caucasus**

In the long term, the partnership with the Alpine states will aid the development of a convention for the Caucasus, thereby creating a legal basis for the protection of the mountain ecosystems. The Alpine states have already completed the long path to such a convention, and the neighbouring states of the Carpathians are likewise well on their way. In the Caucasus, the process was set in motion in 1999, and is now supported by various parties. First, Georgia, North Ossetia and Russia adopted a mountain statute. In the same year, Georgia founded a parliamentary committee for the mountain regions, which was followed by the draft of a Caucasus Convention, an initiative by the Caucasian Environment Ministry, subsidised by UNEP.

In Yerevan, the Armenian Nature Conservation Ministry, in collaboration with UNEP and the WWF Georgia, organised a conference on the convention in 2001. High-ranking government representatives from Georgia, Armenia and Russia, UNEP, UNIDO, WWF and the REC Caucasus have exchanged regional and international information and experiences

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on the protection of the mountains and their ecosystems, on legislative possibilities, transboundary cooperation, and the effectiveness of existing mechanisms. They adopted a resolution on the formulation of legal instruments to protect the ecosystems of the Caucasus, and agreed on concrete steps for future collaboration.

In 2002, the first draft convention was drawn up in Tbilisi. In collaboration with UNEP and CIPRA International, in 2002 the Federal Republic of Germany facilitated an exchange of experience with the Alpine states for representatives from the Caucasus at an international conference in Berchtesgaden.

The international conference “Sustainable development of mountain regions in the Caucasus” in 2003 in Tbilisi, organised by the REC Caucasus, took the region a major step closer to the Caucasus Convention. Participants from the Caucasus states, representatives of international non-governmental organisations and the donor countries Germany and

Liechtenstein, formulated joint problem-solving approaches.

The dedication of all parties involved over the last five years is a testimony both to the keen interest in a convention for the Caucasus, and of the need for such a joint legal basis for the protection of its mountains, their unique ecosystems, and cultural and biological diversity. Donors such as the Alpine states or the Commission of the European Union (EuropeAid), who provide practical support to the process, are enabling the Caucasus to continue along this path.

The partnership with the Alps and the “Pilot projects for sustainable development of mountain regions in the Caucasus – Local Agenda 21” has highlighted a practical approach which this region – with all its difficulties and the potential it offers – can pursue. The residents of the Caucasus are able to become involved in this process and benefit directly from its results.

## Mountain partnership between the Alps and Central Asia (Tianshan / Pamir)

Today, the social and economic conditions in the Central Asian transition countries are at the root of the following core ecological problems, the bulk of which are attributable to the intensive highland/lowland relationships, which have changed significantly since 1991:

- soil degradation
- water shortages (lack of water management / conflicts)
- degradation of vegetation
- loss of renewable resources
- poaching and the displacement of rare species of animal into small residual habitats
- an increase in natural disasters
- widespread pollution of natural ecosystems
- considerable pressures from waste and residual contamination from mining.

### AGOZA: Main objectives and planned activities <sup>1</sup>

The main aim of the alliance is to promote sustainable development of the mountain regions in Central Asia.



The standard of living amongst the mountain people is to be significantly improved in the medium term.

In order to achieve this principal objective, AGOZA is planning to concentrate on the following activities:

- exchange of experience (also in the sense of concrete craft knowledge) between mountain communities, both within the states and across national borders
- education and training in practical skills for product development and to improve living conditions



## Mountain ranges in the south-east of Central Asia

The mountain ranges in the south-east of Central Asia are the Tianshan and the Pamir. The Tianshan extends from the south-east of Uzbekistan, via the north of Tajikistan, through to Kyrgyzstan (where it accounts for around 90 % of the land area), continuing through Kazakhstan and finally into the Chinese province of Xinjiang. The Pamir takes up almost the whole of eastern Tajikistan and then continues to Afghanistan, Pakistan and into the east of Xinjiang. The Pamir then merges into the Hindukush Mountains and Himalayas in the east. The extent and height of this mountain range in Central Asia, which is largely unknown in Central Europe, by far exceeds that of the Alps, the Carpathians and the Caucasus.

Tianshan and Pamir have the highest elevations of the EECCA\* states (there are a number of peaks in excess of 7,000 m in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). Their flanks tend to be dry. Generally speaking, forests are only found at heights of between 1,700 m and 2,800 m, but rarely extend beyond 300, or a maximum of 600, metres above sea level. In the vicinity of Tajikistan, for example, only 0.8 % of the Pamir is forested, whilst the damper Tianshan in the borders of Kyrgyzstan is around 5 % forested.

The mountain ranges of Central Asia, as a large area, are characterised by intensive highland/lowland relationships. The greatest economic significance is attributable to the narrow strip of land between the high mountains abounding in water, and the arid and semi-arid deserts and steppes. The sparsely populated mountain region plays a central role as a supplier of natural resources. It provides water for irrigated farming, and is also home to the summer pastures for herds of sheep, ponies and yaks. Moreover, the Central Asian mountain ranges also contain many rare minerals and raw materials, and a breathtakingly beautiful landscape offering major potential for the development of tourism.

- cultivation of contacts with political decision-makers at all key levels for development of the mountain region, and political representation of the joint interests of the mountain population
- dissemination of "lessons learnt" and "success stories"
- other activities aimed at improving the social and economic living conditions in the mountain region.

The following principals are pivotal to the way in which AGOZA works:

- unity means strength. The institutionalised merger between villages helps to foster the recently initiated political dialogue
- the interests of the mountain villages are voiced on the political stage in the cities
- AGOZA promotes concrete projects in cooperation with the Central Asian Mountain Partnership (CAMP)
- the alliance can only be successful by making a concrete contribution towards improving living conditions in the communities

- PR work and networking: With the aid of the secretariat initiated by CAMP, AGOZA publishes a magazine four times a year which serves as an important exchange medium, and is present in the press, radio and TV with reports on its concrete projects.



The Central Asian Mountain Partnership (CAMP) is a long-term programme by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) to develop mountain regions in Central Asia. This programme is implemented by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) at Berne University.

CAMP has been working in the Central Asian regions of Tianshan and Pamir for three years. It has acquired a wealth of experience, both positive and negative, with concrete projects in village development. CAMP funds projects and supports the procurement of funds for further projects within the framework of AGOZA. CAMP is a mediator between European, other international and Central Asian players.

\* Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia

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This prompted the interesting cooperation between an on-going programme by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for mountain region development of a Central Asian network of communities, and the Alpine Conference. The German chair saw this as an ideal opportunity to make its own contribution within the framework of a pre-existing mountain partnership between the Alps and Central Asia.

### AGOZA: Foundation of the Alliance of Central Asian Mountain Communities

- AGOZA can be described as a “spin-off” of the community network “Alliance in the Alps”, which unites some 150 mountain region communities from seven European countries.
- In September 2002, the first international conference was held in the Kyrgyzstan capital, Bishkek, with resourceful and innovative mountain village representatives from the high mountain states of Central Asia. The conference was initiated by the Central Asian Mountain Partnership (CAMP). It was resolved that a mountain village alliance would be founded with the support of experienced organisations from the Alps.
- In June 2003, AGOZA was ceremoniously launched at a founding conference in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan.
- The Secretariat of AGOZA is now based in “DOM GOR” (Russian for “House of Mountains”) in Bishkek / Kyrgyzstan.
- AGOZA currently has fourteen member communities in three Central Asian states. Applications from other communities have also been received.
- CAMP will be maintaining the secretariat until further notice. AGOZA is controlled via an Executive Committee, consisting of a President and two Vice-Presidents, and via the Secretariat. The statutes have been drawn up and are expected to be adopted at the next General Assembly.

**The subsequent development of AGOZA is broadly assured at international level and has been designed with a long term view**

The experiences from the network of communities “Alliance in the Alps”, which was initiated by



*Yurt construction on the summer pasture of an AGOZA village in a valley of the Narynskaya Oblast (2,800 m) / Kyrgyzstan. (Photograph: CAMP 2003)*

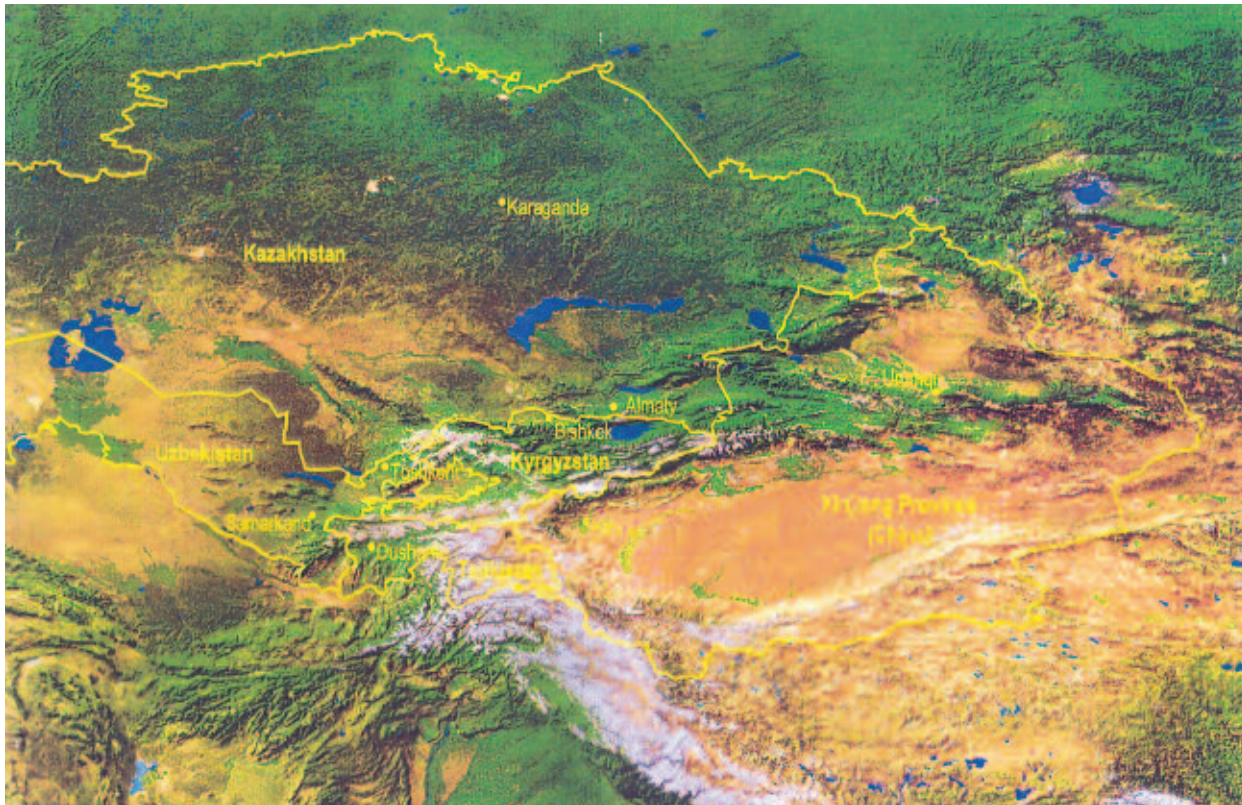
the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps CIPRA and with whom AGOZA collaborates closely, is pivotal to AGOZA’s international validation. CIPRA is the umbrella organisation active throughout the Alps, with over 100 member organisations in eight Alpine states.

CIPRA accompanied the preparatory work and participated in the founding of the “Alliance of Central Asian Mountain Communities” in Tajikistan in June 2003. The first



magazine by this network was published to mark its foundation. For this and nine other themed issues in the Russian, Kyrgyz, Tadjik and Kazakh languages, CIPRA supplies articles on the situation in the Alps. A programme of visits has also been arranged with representatives of the mountain communities, aimed at promoting exchange within the network. Such a programme has already proven extremely beneficial in the Alps and extensive use has already been made of it in Central Asia for the purposes of exchange and for visiting concrete projects.

The development of the Alliance of Central Asian Mountain Communities is subsidised by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety. CIPRA’s involvement is funded by the Principality of Liechtenstein and mana-



Overview map of Central Asia. From: *Digital Chart of the World*, (DCW) Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI).

ged by the Liechtenstein Office for Forests, Nature and the Countryside.

As a long-term Swiss development cooperation programme, CAMP facilitated the founding work of AGOZA as an on-site partner.

### AGOZA puts its faith in TOS

TOS stands for “territorial self-administration organisation” (in Russian: Territorialnaja Organizacija Samoupravlenii) and is explained here using the example of Kyrgyzstan. The significance of the structure extends far beyond this former Soviet Republic. Many of the CIS states are working on such structures, and it is predicted that this concept and the subsequent learning processes will assume major significance for rural and mountain regions in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Asia, over the next ten years.

Village development is no longer decreed “from above”, as was the case in the former Soviet Union within the context of the Government’s five-year

plans; instead, the villages themselves are taking the initiative. If a village wishes to become a member community of AGOZA, it must found a TOS, seize the initiative, and manage all future projects itself.

The call to organise into a TOS demands a democratic interplay between resourceful citizens’ groups, government administration and clan structures. This is unprecedented and will need to be tested. If a community wishes to become a member of the Central Asian Alliance, it can only do so on the basis of such a self-administration organisation. This TOS must be validated by the membership in the entire village, by many families, rather than just individual clan chiefs. AGOZA is justifiably hopeful that this self-administration organisation will be able to offer a sustainable organisational structure for local learning and planning processes.

For the first time decentralisation is laid down for local governance with a legislative basis. Many of the transition countries already recommend a TOS or local self-administration, at least on paper.



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