

Declaration of the XIVth Alpine Conference on Fostering a Sustainable Economy in the Alps

The Parties to the Alpine Convention,

Recognising the special sensitivity of the Alps as a living space for more than 14 million people, rich in culture and traditions, with outstanding natural and cultural landscapes and as a biodiversity hotspot of European and global significance and particularly vulnerable to climate change, as an area at the crossroads of Europe, and a region with limited availability of, in particular, land and soil;

Highlighting the role of the people of the Alps, their diversity and knowledge, their potential for innovation and their contribution to a sustainable economy in the region;

Being aware that the long-term goal for the Alpine region should be to gradually shift to a green and sustainable economy which respects the environmental limits of the region, addresses challenges such as climate change, demographic developments and limited natural resources, and contributes to good health and high quality of life of the population;

Stressing the importance of fully achieving the objectives of the Alpine Convention and its Protocols, in particular in light of these emerging challenges for the Alpine area;

Welcoming the efforts of the German presidency in this respect during the last biennium and appreciating the work carried out by the Working Groups and Platforms, the Observers and through other ad-hoc processes in the framework of the Alpine Convention;

Welcoming the adoption of the Declaration on Sustainable Spatial Development in the Alps by the ministers responsible for Spatial Planning;

Welcoming in particular the 6th Report on the State of the Alps on “Greening the Economy” and its conclusions and recommendations, and bearing in mind the previous reports on issues relating to a sustainable economy in the Alps, i.e. transport and mobility, water, rural development and innovation, sustainable tourism and demographic change;

Wishing to contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Europe 2020 Strategy and the 7th Environmental Action Programme of the European Union;

Highlighting the need to implement the Multiannual Work Programme 2017-2022 of the Alpine Conference which sets “Greening the Economy” as one priority for cooperation;

With the aim of fostering a sustainable economy in the Alps, declare the following:

1. A Sustainable Alpine Economy will serve the needs of the people

The Parties to the Alpine Convention will define further progress towards a sustainable economy through objectives on climate change mitigation and adaptation, energy and resource efficiency and savings, in line with the preservation of ecosystem services, biodiversity and landscape, and translate such objectives into workable strategies and policies.

Reinforcing their efforts to ensure the well-being of the alpine population, the Parties to the Alpine Convention will work towards making full use of the potential for competitiveness and green jobs. This potential lies in particular in the construction, energy, transport, tourism, industrial and service sector, as well as in agriculture and forestry – and can be achieved through the creation and further improvement of sustainable regional products and value chains.

When promoting green and sustainable innovation, the Parties to the Alpine Convention will draw on the knowledge, talent and cultural resources available in the Alps. Focussing on the population's capabilities and needs will enhance the region's resilience and adaptability to economic, social and environmental changes.

To better serve the people's needs for mobility, accessibility, clean air, a healthy environment and landscapes, the Parties to the Alpine Convention will continue their efforts to develop a sustainable, future-oriented transport policy through an intelligent mix of mobility options in and across the Alps for people and goods.

To deliver benefits for all parts of society, the Parties to the Alpine Convention will foster cooperation with and facilitate dialogues among all relevant actors including economic actors, citizens, experts, and governmental and non-governmental organisations. In order to develop integrated policies for a range of stakeholders, they encourage wide participation by all branches of their national and regional governments.

2. A Sustainable Alpine Economy will help overcome climate and energy challenges

At the heart of a sustainable economy lies the transformation of the Alps into a climate resilient region in line with international and European agreements. Following the Paris Agreement, Parties to the Alpine Convention will increase action on mitigation and adaptation towards an ideal goal of overall climate neutrality in the Alps by 2050, and widen the reach of the Convention in this regard – also concerning public awareness.

The Alpine Climate Board established by this Alpine Conference will bring together the various existing initiatives at Alpine level and elaborate a system of measurable targets and objectives for a comprehensive Alpine climate neutrality strategy, taking into account the Convention's Climate Action Plan. The Parties to the Alpine Convention note with interest the establishment of the Virtual Alpine Observatory as a concrete measure of cooperation to enhance the scientific understanding of climatic processes relevant for the Alps, and look forward to receiving more information on its progress.

Developing efficient and low-carbon energy systems is key to a sustainable economy, with progress towards the “Vision Renewable Alps” as an important component. The Parties to the Alpine Convention highlight the importance of expanding renewable energy production capacities in accordance with nature conservation and sustainable land use. They will also continue to strive for energy efficiency and energy savings, including through low energy buildings and neighbourhoods as well as in the transport sector. They therefore note with great interest the results of the Alpine Building Conference initiative and look forward to the continuation of their exchange on these topics as well as of the architecture award “Constructive Alps” and of the efforts towards mitigation and energy efficiency in the hotel and tourism sector.

In order to further develop the potential for climate mitigation and adaptation on a local and regional level, the Parties to the Alpine Convention will continue supporting the numerous constructive efforts undertaken by local administrations and their networks as well as by non-governmental actors and businesses. Building resilience across the Alpine territory can also increase its potential for green growth. This can be attained by increasing the efforts of all stakeholders at all levels, including municipalities, citizens and the business sector towards adaptation to climate change by means of projects at all territorial levels, also by valuing the results achieved on the matter in the framework of the Alpine Convention through original initiatives and joint research and cooperation projects.

3. Nature and landscape are assets for a Sustainable Alpine Economy

Nature, including biodiversity, and landscape represent values beyond economic ones and provide the foundation of life and many economic activities in the Alps. In order to incorporate such values into economic decision-making, Parties to the Alpine Convention will foster dialogues and joint projects among relevant public and private actors from nature and landscape protection and other sectors, including assessing and internalising environmental externalities.

In order to strengthen natural hazards and risk governance, the Alpine Conference dedicates the 7th report on the State of the Alps to the topic of “Risk Governance in the Context of Natural Hazards”. The Parties to the Alpine Convention will also enhance their efforts concerning sustainable water management that creates synergies between ecological preservation and the restoration of rivers and the requirements of flood protection.

The Parties to the Alpine Convention highlight the role of ecological networks of protected and non-protected areas in creating green jobs, sustainable value chains and regional environmentally-friendly products. They will use existing and new pilot regions in the framework of the Platform Ecological Network to test promising best practices that may positively affect regional sustainable economic development. In order to allow for such biodiversity and landscape protection approaches to stretch beyond the core Alpine region, the cooperation between the Platform Ecological Network and the newly established Action Group 7 on ecological connectivity of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) should be enhanced.

Alpine tourism benefits from the region’s natural and cultural resources, landscapes and biodiversity - while also being a driver for economic development as well as environmental change. To strike a balance between these aspects, Parties to the Alpine Convention will further focus on the tourism sector’s potential for creating sustainable jobs, income and recreation opportunities. The Parties to the Alpine Convention encourage all relevant actors to develop additional sustainable tourism offers, including sustainable all year offers.

4. A resource-efficient economy is key to a sustainable future

The Parties to the Alpine Convention will support action on resource efficiency and reduced resource input - such as of water, energy, material, land and soil – as well as on waste reduction and resource recycling, also on the basis of the circular economy principles. They will promote an increased use of regionally available, renewable resources such as wood for production and building, making use of the entire resource life cycle.

Land and soil in the Alps are limited resources. The Parties to the Alpine Convention will therefore support policies and activities aimed at a sustainable land and soil management and spatial development. Welcoming the adoption of the Declaration on Sustainable Spatial Development in the Alps by the ministers responsible for Spatial Planning, they look forward to continuing the open expert group on this matter and strengthening their exchange on a common vision for spatial planning in the Alps, to fully achieve the objectives of the Protocol on Spatial planning and sustainable development.

Regarding the conservation and careful use of soil, Parties to the Alpine Convention will take further steps with regard to implementing the Soil Conservation Protocol and strengthening qualitative and quantitative soil conservation, inter alia by establishing a technical soil conservation working group or platform.

Sustainable mountain forestry and agriculture are key drivers of a sustainable alpine economy. Sustainable mountain agriculture inter alia produces high-quality products while saving resources, maintaining and developing typical cultural landscapes, protecting biodiversity and providing economic benefits and food security. Mountain forestry plays an important role in providing a sustainable energy source as well as high-quality materials and contributes to risk reduction of natural hazards.

In the context of a sustainable resource use, the Parties to the Alpine Convention will also conscientiously fulfil their responsibilities in supporting the Permanent Secretariat and the Land of Carinthia in their role as co-leaders of EUSALP action group 6 on natural resources including water and cultural resources – while also participating in other action groups such as action group 4 on intermodality and interoperability of transport. In general, the Convention and its Protocols and the knowledge accumulated on their basis provide the foundation for the contribution of the Alpine Convention to the EUSALP; their objectives should be integrated into the work of EUSALP overall.

5. A Sustainable Alpine Economy requires continuous efforts

The Parties to the Alpine Convention call upon all Observers and other relevant actors to support the efforts to progressively to shift to a sustainable economy in the Alps.

To mobilise resources and a broad range of stakeholders, the Parties to the Alpine Convention will address sustainable economic practices in joint transnational projects, making use of funding instruments such as the INTERREG Alpine Space Programme.

The 6th Report on the State of the Alps and its recommendations will be taken into consideration for further concrete steps to drive forward a sustainable economy. On this basis, the Parties to the Alpine Convention, led by Germany, will work together to elaborate a comprehensive and ambitious Action Programme for a Green Economy in the Alpine Region for consideration at the next Alpine Conference.