

INFORMATION NOTE ON THE UPCOMING ALPINE CONFERENCE

The XVI. Alpine Conference, the political decision-making body of the Alpine Convention, will be held on 10 December 2020, for the first time and due to the sanitary situation as a virtual meeting. The Conference will focus on **air quality** in the Alps, **climate action**, **water management** and **mountain biodiversity**. The Contracting Parties assemble at ministerial level. The meeting will be chaired by Bérangère Abba, Secretary of State on Biodiversity to the French Minister of Ecological Transition Ms. Barbara Pompili. At the end of the Conference, France will pass over the Presidency to Switzerland for the next two years.

MAIN ISSUES

1. Air Quality

The prevention of air pollution is already established as one of **the main objectives** of the Alpine Convention. The Contracting Parties commit themselves to “**drastically reduce the emission of pollutants and pollution problems** in the Alpine region [...] to a level which is not harmful to man, animals and plants.”

Overall, although the Alps benefit from good air quality, sources of **atmospheric pollution** are present in the Alpine region: examples are wood burning and industry, as well as large cities and main roads. Certain areas, especially Alpine valleys and foothills, can suffer from **high levels of pollution**, which can be detrimental to human health. Polluted air often accumulates in the valley floors beneath an invisible lid which prevents pollutants from escaping upwards (a so-called “inversion layer”). Numerous sources, whether of natural origin such as dust and pollen or, to a larger extent, of human origin and the result of economic or domestic activities, contribute to the deterioration of air quality. At the same time, the long-range transportation of air masses from neighbouring regions also impacts the quality of Alpine air.

The **extremely sensitive Alpine ecosystems and biodiversity** also suffer as a result: the effects on flora and fauna, such as the accumulation of nitrates or the acidification of soils, are a cause for concern.

Following the proposal of the French Presidency, the previous Alpine Conference (XV.) in April 2019 agreed that air quality would be the central theme of the eighth Report on the State of the Alps (RSA 8).

1.1 8th Report on the State of the Alps (RSA 8)

The RSA 8 is a **major concrete contribution** to the implementation of the Alpine Convention's objectives in the field of air quality and will be submitted for approval by the Alpine Conference.

The report sets out concrete **recommendations** for reducing air pollution and helping improve overall air quality in Alpine areas:

1. Supporting relevant organisations in measuring wood-burning pollution in Alpine areas and, specifically, informing the public about its health effects;
2. Improving the energy efficiency of buildings and aiming towards low-emission heating systems to reduce emissions;
3. Combining incentives with restrictions to promote the use of public transportation and active modes of mobility for passenger and freight transport;
4. Promoting a clean mobility and zero emission vehicle strategy;
5. Promoting the use of smart traffic management and encouraging the implementation of alternative transport technologies as well as of modal shift;
6. Limiting nitrogen compound emissions and the open burning of green waste through supporting the development of good agricultural practices;
7. Setting up air quality initiatives tackling the most relevant sources;
8. Collaborating with neighbouring regions and countries to tackle transboundary air pollution;
9. Upholding EU rules and striving to achieve the WHO guidelines on air quality;
10. Developing research and in-depth studies addressing the specificities of air quality in the Alps.

The biennial Reports on the State of the Alps provide periodical information on **ecological, economic and social development** in the Alpine space for politicians, managers, journalists and scientists. Furthermore, this standard work recommends important criterion tailored for the Alpine area to help formulate strategies adapted to tackling a concrete issue.

2. Climate Action

The **first Climate Action Plan** of the Alpine Convention dates back to 2009. At the last Alpine Conference in 2019, the Contracting Parties affirmed in the Declaration of Innsbruck their commitment to achieving climate neutral and climate resilient Alps by 2050 and adopted the **Alpine Climate Target System 2050**. In the past two years, in close cooperation with the other Thematic Working Bodies and further experts, the Alpine Climate Board (ACB) developed sequences of concrete short- and mid-term measures i.e. *implementation pathways* for achieving these targets. These pathways form the core of the Climate Action Plan 2.0 which will be submitted to the XVI. Alpine Conference.

The ACB's output together with the implementation pathways for the Alpine Climate Target System 2050 are available on the ACB's website: www.alpineclimate2050.org.

At the Alpine Conference, the Ministers will debate further on the two issues of Air quality and Climate change.

3. Water Management

For the **first time in the history of the Alpine Convention**, the Contracting Parties are adopting a political **declaration on water**. The outcomes of the Conference on *Water Resources and Alpine Rivers: Adaptation to the challenges of climate change* held by the French Presidency in Annecy in February 2020, as well as of ten years of work of the Convention's former *Water Management in the Alps Platform*, laid the foundations for a **Declaration on Integrated and Sustainable Water Management in the Alps**.

The Declaration will be adopted by the XVI. Alpine Conference and entails commitments by the Contracting Parties in several areas:

- The protection of wild rivers
- Adaptation to climate change
- A more economic use of (scarce) water resources
- Prudent management of small hydroelectric power plants
- The development of international cooperation in transboundary water management.

4. Mountain Biodiversity

Mountain biodiversity is immensely **valuable** yet is particularly **vulnerable to climate change** and the impacts of an **intensive tourism industry**. **Protecting and restoring mountain ecosystems**

was one of the priorities of the French Presidency, which proposed a political contribution by the Alpine Convention to the post-2020 process of the Convention on Biological Diversity. To this end, the French Presidency consulted the Contracting Parties and Observers to draft a **Declaration on the Protection of Mountain Biodiversity and its Promotion at International Level** which will be adopted at the XVI. Alpine Conference. Its messages will be promoted through a **global virtual conference on Mountain Biodiversity** organised by the outgoing French Presidency on 13 January 2021, ahead of the IUCN World Conservation Congress and the COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

5. AlpWeek *Intermezzo* “Youth & Climate”

AlpWeek is an **international event dedicated to sustainable development** in the Alps and organised by a group of key Alpine organisations strongly engaged in science, environmental protection and regional and sustainable development. It is held every four years and is interspersed with shorter interim sessions known as AlpWeek *Intermezzos*.

The *Intermezzo* taking place during the XVI. Alpine Conference is dedicated to showcasing the **innovation and creativity of young Alpine inhabitants**. Participants will discuss the implications of climate change in the Alpine regions for young people, with an opportunity for **inter-generational exchange** on climate action.

As a cooperative effort between the Alpine Convention, the AlpWeek and the EUSALP (EU Strategy for the Alpine Region), a dialogue between **young people and alpine stakeholders** will be organised under the title “Young alpine citizens are committed to a climate-resilient Alpine region” on Thursday 10 December in the afternoon. During this exchange, young people will also present the **results of the latest Photo Contest** of the Alpine Convention and share their **experiences from the Youth Alpine Interrail (YOALIN)** project. More information is available at www.alpweek.org

6. Young Academics Award

Research and innovation make a major contribution to sustainable development in the Alps. With the biennial Young Academics Award, the Alpine Convention **recognises and rewards the key role young researchers play in shaping the future of the Alps**. This year's topic was “Emissions in the Alps: climate change and air quality, measurement and measures” and included issues such as measuring emissions and their impacts in the Alps and communicating this scientific knowledge to a broader public.

This 5th edition of the Young Academics Award offered **aspirant researchers** from the **natural, technical** or **social sciences** the opportunity to apply, with the three most outstanding master theses being awarded €1.000, €750 and €500 respectively; at the same time, two prizes have been made available by the Alpine Convention Infopoints of Chamonix (France) and Domodossola (Italy) for **thematically relevant and geographically dedicated** scholarly works! In a virtual ceremony on Thursday 10 December afternoon, the French Presidency and the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention will present the winners with their awards.

The Young Academics Award is a joint initiative in collaboration with ISCAR, the International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps.

7. Swiss Presidency

The XVI. Alpine Conference also marks the **end of the French Presidency** of the Alpine Convention and, at the same time, the **handover of the baton to Switzerland** for the next **two-year term** Presidency of the Alpine Convention.

Climate will be the thematic priority for the Swiss Presidency, with a focus on **non-motorised transport in tourism, spatial planning and spatial development**. The Swiss Presidency intends to work closely with **Alpine towns** and **municipalities** on these issues.

8. Other Topics

The Alpine Conference will acknowledge the extensive work done by the **Thematic Working Bodies** of the Alpine Convention. Based on numerous exchanges between experts and with stakeholders that took place over the past two years, the Thematic Working Bodies gathered relevant **data and best practices** and produced important **recommendations**, which we look forward to presenting after the Alpine Conference.

The new proposed mandates for the Thematic Working Bodies as well as the topics of the **incoming Swiss Presidency** will also be defined.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ALPINE CONVENTION

The Alpine Convention was a pioneer of its kind by being the world's first international treaty that considered a **transnational mountain area in its geographical entirety**. The Convention on the Protection of the Alps, namely "The Alpine Convention," was signed on 7 November 1991 in Salzburg (Austria) by Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and the EU

(Slovenia signed the convention on 29 March 1993 and Monaco became a party on the basis of a separate additional protocol). The Convention entered into force on 6 March 1995.

The Alpine Convention – with its eight internationally binding Protocols and to date four Ministerial Declarations – aims at the **sustainable development and protection of the Alps**. The Convention covers an area of approximately 190,000 km², with a length of around 1,200 kilometres and a maximum width of 300 kilometres.

The Alps are too often (stereo) typically associated with peaks, forests and glaciers. If, however, we take a closer look, there is so much more waiting to be discovered! As a **living space for more than 14 million people** and a **recreational space** for numerous guests each year, the Alps constitute a precious, yet sensitive area at the heart of Europe.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ALPINE CONFERENCE

The “Conference of the Contracting Parties,” referred to as the “Alpine Conference” is the highest body of the Alpine Convention. The **responsible Ministers of the Alpine States** and **high-level representative from the European Union** usually meet every two years. The meeting is chaired by the Contracting Party that holds the Presidency of the Convention. As the **political decision-making body**, the Alpine Conference discusses the objectives and establishes the **political measures for the implementation of the Alpine Convention**.

Several international organisations, cross-border associations of Alpine territorial authorities and non-governmental organisations participate in the work of the Alpine Convention as **Observers**. Decisions at the Alpine Conference are adopted based on **consensus**.

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