

Multiannual Programme for the Alpine Convention

2011-2016 – Foundation Document

1. INTRODUCTION

The future development of the Alpine region must be balanced and sustainable: only in this way is it possible to preserve and improve the population's long-term quality of life and the region's scenery and wildlife. This is the main statement by the Alpine Convention, an international treaty signed by eight Alpine countries.

The objectives of the Alpine Convention and its implementation protocols express a consensus of opinion not only among the Contracting Parties but also from the observers and a whole range of organisations and networks.

The aim of the multiannual programme is to define the context for implementing the common measures over an extended period. This concentration of themes reinforced by the measures makes it possible to take advantage of significant synergies and permits further development of the aims endorsed by the Alpine Convention.

Through the Alpine Convention's multiannual programme, Alpine countries express their conviction that the current challenges to the Alpine Space, such as preserving biodiversity, regulating through traffic or protecting qualified employment and services of general interest, can only be effectively considered by a unified and coordinated transnational approach.

The Alpine Conference launched this multiannual programme in March 2011 and asks all stakeholders interested to take an active role in implementing the objectives of the programme.

2. CONTEXT

The theme orientation of the current multiannual programme was established in an extremely extensive way. For the years 2005 to 2010, the measures of the Alpine Convention were concentrated on the following priorities:

- Mobility, access and through traffic
- Society, culture and identity (UNESCO Declaration)
- Tourism, leisure and sport
- Nature, agriculture and forest management, cultural landscapes (“natural hazards” platform), protected areas, Reports on the state of the Alps.

The structures of the collaboration achieved within the Alpine Convention have been constantly expanded and reinforced during this period. The working groups and the theme platforms are now able to present concrete and interesting results emerging from the Alpine cooperation and these have an influence on the current and future development of the Alpine Space. It is because of this cooperation between these bodies that various measures in the Alpine Space are now being achieved as part of the close transboundary and transnational coordination. For the future, the aim is to reconnect this new multiannual programme to these successes. The programme must create a suitable basis for this purpose.

3. GENERAL AIMS

From the multiannual 2011-2016 programme, the members of the Alpine Convention expect a more decisive strategic orientation of its measures. At the meeting of the 43rd Permanent Committee of the Contracting Parties, held on 17 June 2010, there was agreement on the fact that, to effectively implement the objectives endorsed by the Alpine Convention and to maximise the effects of the cooperation within the Alps, strategic priorities must be defined. By issuing this multiannual programme, the Contracting Parties thus confirm that it is necessary to have a more decisive strategic orientation, to set out realistic objectives and to recommend and issue concrete and quantifiable measures for the next five years of Alpine collaboration (2011-2016).

However, the Alpine Space is not an autarchic creation; it is connected in many ways to the surrounding European territory and to the rest of the world. Like other regions, it is similarly challenged by a globalised world. This includes international economic competition, the consequences of climate change, demographic changes, sourcing energy supplies, managing water resources and access to the transit routes. Governments, institutions, the world of economics and other subjects of interest to the Alpine Space are therefore asked to find appropriate and cooperative solutions to these challenges. It will mean that, in the future, they will have to express themselves even better, by means of an approach that is able to meet

these common challenges and find directions for coordinated solutions: solidarity for the Alps.

The strategic functions of the Alpine Space must acquire greater visibility externally. Only in this way will the interests and specific needs of the Alpine Space be heard internationally. More active cooperation among Alpine countries creates the basis for presenting a united front to the rest of the world. Part of this collaboration includes assessing new instruments by, for example, creating an Alpine macro-region.

It is also a question of reinforcing the commitment of the Alps in the area of foreign politics, actively establishing partnerships with other mountainous regions.

The work of the Alpine Convention must just relate to the areas of action in which, as a result of the possibilities and powers granted, it is actually able to directly influence the development of the Alpine Space. At the same time, all the bodies and institutions of the Alpine Convention must be able to identify with the objectives proposed and communicate externally the measures for achieving them.

4. FIVE AREAS OF PRIORITY ACTION

Various developments and processes will influence the socio-economic and ecological system of the Alps in various ways of the next few years. These are generally complex dynamics that will involve many sectors and their causes and consequences must be taken properly into consideration when planning measures for a unified approach and actually putting them in place. For the Alpine space, the challenge will be to recognise these new framework conditions as an opportunity for protecting and sustainably developing the mountain territory and for implementing the appropriate measures.

By 2016, the Convention's activities must be referred to the following five areas of inter-sector activity.

- **Demographic change**
- **Climate change**
- **Tourism**
- **Biodiversity**
- **Transport and mobility**

Only by means of innovative ideas and approaches will it be possible to face the challenges emerging in these areas of activity that partly overlap each other. In this context, the existing interfaces between the various sectors are of central importance. The advantages of the Alpine Convention are in its inter-sector and unified approach. The work of the Convention must therefore mainly make reference to unified solutions.

In each of the five areas of activity, concerted efforts are necessary to implement the joint objectives of the Alpine Convention.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

There are various developments currently combining to increasingly modify the demographic structure of the Alpine area. While on one side people are generally getting older, as seen in all industrialised Western countries, on the other, a higher than average number of young people leave the rural areas to get qualifications in their nearest centres of economic activity and then generally fail to return to the place of origin. This migration is due to the fact that good jobs are particularly rare in the Alpine arch. However, this emigration is counterbalanced by an inflow of new people into the Alps, partly due to the international migration flows and also due to a new style of multi-local inhabitants i.e. parts of the population who spend time both in urban areas and in rural areas, mainly at weekends when such multi-local inhabitants decamp to the mountains for a break.

The Alps are going through a process midway between urbanising and depopulating. In the Alpine space, this development is happening in widely differing ways at local and regional levels. Also as regards demographic changes, the picture varies considerably. It is of vital importance to take these differences into account when deciding on actions.

The change in the demographic structure in the Alpine region has consequences for many sectors, such as those of services, education, healthcare and mobility, and then also for the work market, social assistance and the sector of homes (which stimulates questions about new types of dwelling for older people). At the same time it is essential to maintain services of general interest for guaranteeing a functioning and cooperative village life. Only by ensuring a dynamic village life will it be possible to stem the loss of human capital. It is important to react sufficiently and promptly to the changing demographics by using innovative solutions. The specific potential existing among the inhabitants of the Alps must be given a boost by intensifying the regional economic cycles and involving the nearest Alpine cities, always taking into account that economic elements are not the only decisive factors.

In the case of immigration of new groups of inhabitants, there is also the problem of changing needs and of new forms of use and relationships.

4.2 CLIMATE CHANGE

The Alps are particularly affected by changes in climate. The forecasts by experts are for an increase in temperature in the Alpine area that will be double that of the global average. The delicate Alpine ecosystem very sensitively reacts to a warming climate. Although climate change now seems inevitable, the handling of its consequences is still one of the more pressing tasks in the next few years.

To react promptly and sufficiently to future developments, the Alpine Conference at Evian in 2009 set out an action plan for the climate which defined the goals for reducing the risks and increasing the ability to adapt. These objectives should be achieved in the near future by means of concrete measures. Considering the particularly sensitive nature of the Alps, acting as an early warning system, the Alpine space must in future be a region acting as a template for adapting to the consequences of climate change. In this respect, the exchange of knowledge, experience and, above all, of good practices will be extremely important. It will also be necessary to attribute considerable importance to the developing of innovative, inter-sector solutions and aimed at the long-term for dealing with climate change in the Alpine region (model projects).

The measures for adapting must be implemented at the same rate as mitigation measures: the protecting of the climate refers to the causes of climate change i.e. the emissions of greenhouse gases and other substances causes worldwide warming. The Alpine space can, also in this case, stand as a model region, actively contributing to resolving the global problem of climate. Based on an integral harmonising of the various sector interests, there should be the long-term pursuit of climate neutrality or the creation of the «2000 watt society». The measures for energy efficiency and for promoting renewable energy should focus initially on the high energy sectors such as those of transport, tourism and urban areas. Both the measures for adapting and those for avoiding must absolutely comply with the principles of sustainability.

Lastly, it is necessary to remember that climate change is not just a source of risks but also a possible opportunity for the Alpine space. Owing to increased temperatures, new agricultural products can be farmed in the Alpine areas and also the area's tourist appeal in the summer will grow.

4.3 TOURISM

With an exceptionally broad range of offers for leisure time, a richness of scenery and diversity of the ecological conditions, the Alpine area is still one of Europe's largest tourist and leisure regions. The heritage of nature and culture is an important feature in this context. Tourism is the most important revenue generator in the Alpine space, but tourist infrastructures can have a damaging effect on the Alpine ecosystem, particularly those relating to winter holidays. But even tourists' own traffic has a considerable impact in terms of air and noise pollution in the Alpine regions.

The challenge as regards tourism is to harmonise the economic interests with the needs of ecology and the landscape and to exploit as much as possible the existing synergies with the layout of the mountain. To this end, tourism offers should be developed, promoted and produced that are close to nature and of low environmental impact. While many destinations are affected by the impact of climate change, summer tourism may, on the other hand, benefit from such change, making the freshness found in the mountains more attractive for enjoying in summer. The innovative measures for guiding and diversifying the existing offer are therefore of particular importance. However, it will be necessary to ensure that the possible increase in demand does not have negative consequences on nature, the landscape features and the environment.

To increase the competitiveness of the tourist regions, there must be new transboundary cooperation. The tourism offer must provide, in this context, a contribution to the development of the regions and the rural areas. This will mean bringing together, structuring and publicising a wide range of sustainable tourism offers. To minimise the negative effects of tourist traffic, strategies must be developed for regulating the number of visitors while new offers of public transport should be created for the so-called «last mile».

4.4 BIODIVERSITY

The Alps are an important European hotspot of biodiversity. As a result of climate change, intensive farming and the disorganised development of the landscape, an increasing number of species are disappearing from the Alpine space. Climate change has already encouraged the vegetation line to progress upwards. This has direct and indirect consequences on the plant and wildlife of the Alps. For the animal and plant species, the warming of the climate means, in many cases, that the territories where they flourished are moving north and into higher positions. The ecosystems and the existing functional relations can thus undergo radical changes. At the same time, new species (invasive) reach the Alpine space that can

have a huge effect on the native species. The presence of invasive species differs widely from one region to another and can mostly be seen in the Southern Alps. Climate change is one of the factors responsible for the fact that, in the future, many species could be threatened by extinction.

In the next few years, the aim must be to intensify efforts to preserve the biodiversity. This will mean recreating a link between the precious living spaces, protecting important corridors. The creating and protecting of natural corridors is an efficient way for increasing biodiversity in the Alpine space. The existing protected areas must be preserved and not be downsized to make way for tourism or transport purposes.

Also extensive agriculture provides an important contribution to preserving biodiversity: farms are a habitat for many species and also act as corridors, and then the ancient species of plants grown and livestock form an integral part of biodiversity.

Lastly it is necessary to make the tourism sector increasingly aware about the importance of biodiversity.

4.5 TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY

Transiting and leisure transport is considered to be the main source of noise and pollution in the Alpine space. The Alps are particularly sensitive to traffic pollution because the topographical conditions (the V or U shape of the valleys) and the climate conditions (a tendency for a temperature inversion during winter) impede the dispersal of harmful substances. In some positions of the valley areas, atmospheric and ozone pollution can reach extremely high levels. Also noise pollution is, in some places, considerably worsened by the formation of the valleys. Atmospheric pollution and noise impact do not just have negative consequences on the environment but are also a risk to people's health. At the same time, the emissions from vehicles help to hasten the change in climate.

The transport infrastructures help to connect the various points of the territory and are therefore very important to the population's quality of life. At the same time, however, they are a strain on and cut across the urban areas and the landscapes. Modern lifestyles – such as the fact of living and working in a multi-local way – now imply increasing mobility, while space becomes increasingly scarce. It will be necessary to preserve and improve the quality of life in the long-term for the population and the wildlife of the Alpine space, which also includes guaranteeing connections by means of efficient and sustainable transport systems and providing information to users. It also means adjusting the existing transport infrastructures to new social trends and the environmental conditions such as climate change. It is precisely the increase in natural hazards caused by climate change that shows how fragile the trans-

port infrastructures are in the mountain regions. Their safety therefore implies growing costs to society.

To reduce environmental and noise pollution and limit consumption of the land, it will be necessary to develop or maximise clean alternatives to road traffic. Sustainable and innovative mobility plans such as electrically powered vehicles or smart transport infrastructures must gradually replace the inefficient and polluting transport systems. This will mean creating incentives to increasingly transfer road freight to rail. It will also be necessary to analyse the impact of leisure time traffic and the through traffic on the potential for regional development and to put it even more at the centre of discussions.