



Statement on “Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in South Eastern Europe”

Following a workshop: “Sharing the experience – Capacity Building on Legal Instruments for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in South Eastern Europe” (12 – 13 December, Bolzano, Italy),

organized by BFSF, UNEP and the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory and hosted by EURAC.

The participants from the South Eastern European countries and other stakeholders acknowledged that the mountain regions of South Eastern Europe are characterized by rich biological and cultural diversity.

At present the mountain regions in the Balkans face many problems, such as:

- u depopulation,
- u poverty,
- u high unemployment rate,
- u environmental problems,
- u communication and infrastructure problems
- u social and economic marginality

The specific features of mountain regions call for development approaches that duly take into account environmental, social and cultural values as well as the particular constraints, and that recognize mountains as providers of essential goods and services to national economies of the countries in the Balkan region.

The Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of Macedonia sent an official request for UNEP assistance to facilitate intergovernmental consultations aiming at enhanced regional cooperation for the protection and sustainable development of mountain regions in the Balkans in December 2004.

BFSF – Balkan Foundation for the Sustainable Development was established in the Republic of Macedonia with general aim to support the activities related to the Balkan Convention Initiative.

The experience of UNEP with the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory EURAC and REC in assisting the development of and exchange between the Carpathian and Alpine Conventions as existing tools for the sustainable development of mountain areas is well





known and could serve as a potential example for cooperation in the South Eastern European region.

The mountain regions of the Balkans are very fragile due to their particular political, economic and ecological situation. The sustainable development of these regions is crucial.

Therefore, we the participants of the: *“Sharing the experience – Capacity Building on Legal Instruments for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in South Eastern Europe (Balkans)” workshop* reached the following conclusions:

- Governments may consider to develop a regional legal functioning framework for cooperation between relevant national authorities and regional/local stakeholders.
- National authorities should support the protection and sustainable development of the mountain regions in the Balkans through good governance, by recognizing the specificities of the mountain regions in their legislation and by applying multi-sectoral approaches.
- The regional and local stakeholders and their involvement in the participatory planning process has to be identified;
- The International Mountain Partnership provides a good framework for this initiative, and interested international organizations and other potential partners should be invited to take part in it;
- A coordination body has to be established and focal points should be appointed in participating countries;
- Preparation of the required scientific base for decision-making that will analyse the current situation and needs of cooperation on the protection and sustainable development of mountain regions/areas in South-Eastern Europe (Balkan region) should be elaborated;
- A multi-sector survey should be conducted by consultants or scientific institutions, addressing e.g. the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, agriculture, forest land use, management of water resources, transport, tourism, energy, etc. and the different trends in the development of mountain technologies;
- There should be increased networking among the protected areas in the Balkan region;





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- A bottom up approach should be used with adequate involvement and participation of NGOs and local governments, the European Mountain Forum is invited to facilitate networking in support of this cooperation;
- The intergovernmental process of cooperation between the Balkan countries for the protection and sustainable development of mountain regions should continue with follow-up meetings, with the support of UNEP (The Republic of Macedonia offered to host the following meeting).

Bolzano - Italy, 13 December 2005

