



Sustaining Rural Communities and their Traditional Landscapes Through Strengthened Environmental Governance in Transboundary Protected Areas of the Dinaric Arc

A Western Balkans Environment & Development Cooperation Programme
Funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland



Photo: Tomasz Pezold/IUCN



Background

The Dinaric Arc is a region of South-Eastern Europe encompassing a large part of the Western Balkans between the Adriatic Sea and the Danube Plain. The Dinaric Alps form the backbone of the region, which is endowed with a natural and cultural heritage with a richness and variety that is almost unparalleled in Europe.

Over the past twenty years, the countries of the Dinaric Arc have experienced periods of political and social instability, economic crisis and transition towards a market economy and European integration. These difficult times have had a negative impact on the livelihoods of many rural communities in the most remote portions of the Dinaric Arc, as well as on the integrity of ecosystems and traditional landscapes. However, recent favourable events have created a unique opportunity to boost biodiversity, landscape conservation and sustainable rural development in the Western Balkans.

All the countries of the region are following, at a different pace, the path towards accession and, eventually, integration in the EU. This process requires the harmonisation of national legislation with the EU legislative framework and the adoption of EU policy and regulatory frameworks, which imply strong measures supporting environmental protection and rural development. Moreover, as the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Governments of countries in the Dinaric Arc region recognize the need for transboundary cooperation on protected areas, with the aim to create a well managed and ecologically representative protected area network, and to improve economic development in the region, based on natural and cultural values.

Programme Summary

Within the framework of the Dinaric Arc Initiative¹, IUCN has partnered with SNV-Netherlands Development Organisation and WWF-Mediterranean Programme Office to propose the programme *"Sustaining Rural Communities and their Traditional Landscapes Through Strengthened Environmental Governance in Transboundary Protected Areas of the Dinaric Arc"*. This cooperation programme has been designed to benefit from the currently favourable opportunity and momentum for improving transboundary environmental conservation and governance in the Dinaric Arc. The proposed programme aims to foster the sustainable development of rural communities on the basis of conservation of biological diversity and traditional landscapes in Transboundary Protected Areas by improving regional cooperation and strengthening environmental governance, including the involvement and empowerment of civil society and local communities. The programme is financed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

¹ The Dinaric Arc Initiative (DAI) is a broad framework of collaboration created in 2005 by several international institutions concerned with the future of the Dinaric Arc region and active in the area. Today, DAI includes the Council of Europe, Euronatur, FAO, IUCN, REC, SNV, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, and WWF.



The programme will undertake a broad range of actions at different levels, integrating the various layers of work so as to facilitate and support the realization of the commitment expressed by the Governments of the Dinaric Arc through the “Big Win” Joint Statement².

- At the **field level**, the programme will initiate a pilot model project in Prokletije Mountains, as well as initiate activities in some of the most outstanding transboundary nature areas in the Dinaric Arc such as Durmitor, Sutjeska, Tara and Una National Parks. The project aims at securing the conservation of biodiversity, ecosystem functions, and traditional landscapes while achieving tangible, sustainable improvement for the livelihoods of local rural societies in the concerned area.
- At the **policy level**, political will for transboundary dialogue will be increased by stakeholder participation and integration of activities into broader European frameworks for nature conservation. The programme will facilitate the creation of a platform for the fulfilment of the “Big Win” and other government commitments, where key decision makers from the different countries will interact and coordinate respective actions.
- At the **capacity-building level**, communication and know-how exchange mechanisms on trans-boundary natural resource management and development will be established. The programme will identify capacity building gaps as well as “empowerment gaps”, and will develop sound programmes targeting key issues and key actors, with a strong focus on gender and civil society.

Objectives

The overall programme objective is to promote sustainable development of rural communities in the Dinaric Arc region through increased transboundary cooperation in the management and conservation of biodiversity and cultural landscapes. Specific programme objectives are to:

- Create an effective platform for supporting trans-boundary collaboration initiatives agreed in the Big Win for the Dinaric Arc and transfer lessons learned to other locations in Dinaric Arc countries and beyond.
- Strengthen trans-boundary environmental management and governance capacity of governments and other stakeholders at regional and local levels.
- Demonstrate sustainable development options for rural communities in the trans-boundary areas highlighted in the Big Win for Dinaric Arc commitments by implementing action plans.

² On the occasion of the 9th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Bonn, Germany, on 29 May 2008 high representatives from six countries of the Dinaric Arc Ecoregion - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia - have signed a high-level joint statement also known as the “Big Win for Dinaric Arc”.



Workplan

The programme has started in 2009 and has a foreseen duration of three years. Its workplan will be implemented according to the following, three stages:

- An **inception phase** of 6 months, to establish the programme implementation team, plan the field work with local counterparts, establish communication, policy, and exchange platforms, and secure the support of institutions and regional stakeholders.
- An **implementation phase** of 24 months, during which all the field-based, capacity building, and policy work will be implemented in an integrated fashion.
- A **final phase** of 6 months, to complete and evaluate the work done, while setting the basis and planning for implementing the “knock on” effects of the programme in the Western Balkans.

Results

Upon successful implementation of a broad range of activities, the programme will result in further implementation of trans-boundary natural resource management and development objectives expressed in the inter-governmental Big Win statement for the Dinaric Arc commitment, strengthened capacity of public, private and civic actors in the pilot areas, as well as increased ecological, social and economic security of rural communities in the region. Last but not least, it is expected that the programme lessons are replicated in other parts of the region.

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