

**Statement on behalf of UNEP delivered by Mr. Bruno M. Pozzi, the Regional Director of UNEP at the Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention – 25 November 2020, online meeting**

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Delegates,

It is my pleasure to be here with you and I would like to start with thanking the Hungarian Presidency for successful 3-year term at the Head of the Carpathian Convention and welcoming the incoming Polish Presidency. It is a pleasure to see how active the Carpathian Convention is in its realizations and ambition.

I would like to take few minutes to first look at the work of UNEP at the global level with upcoming UN Environment Assembly 5 and give an update on its organization. Then, I would like to come back to the much-discussed EU accession to the Carpathian Convention and see how as the organization and the Secretariat we can support the Parties to reach this goal.

First of all, the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the strategic platform where we can address global environmental challenges and provide guidance on sustainable development worldwide. The Convention, in itself, provides an important platform for UNEP to engage, support and promote inter-regional cooperation and achieving of the global environmental agenda at local and regional level. And, therefore, we reach out to you the Member States, the Parties to further support these processes, which we all need, especially in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, having in mind also the biggest challenge of next century, which is climate change.

The fifth session of UNEA, being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, will be divided into two parts. The first part of UNEA5, which will take place on 22 February 2021, is expected to call for action but will look mostly at UNEP Programme of Work, the budget and the UNEP Medium-Term Strategy, at the same time giving space for discussing with the Members States of the very spot of the world on the political agenda of UNEA5 part 1. Then, the UNEA5 part 2, which will be held in 2022, will have a strong call for strengthening action to protect and restore nature, and in this framework, the Carpathian Convention is essential. Therefore, greater engagement by the Carpathian Convention in the activities of the UN Environment Assembly, enhancing synergies, strengthening programmatic cooperation between UNEP and the Convention are items that we would like to promote, if the Parties will agree to it.

The second part of my observation today is on the EU accession to the Carpathian Convnetion. We know, and we have heard that today several times, about the important role that the Convention plays in translating, implementing the policies, including those defined at the EU level. This role will grow even more now, as the EU adopted the Green Deal and 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy that will have impact on the Carpathian region as well. Therefore, we welcome and would like to see, as many speakers mentioned before, more substantive cooperation between the Carpathian Convention and the EU institutions. This shall be based on the achievement that we have had with the EU already, including the work on sustainable

transport and ecological connectivity thanks to TRANSGREEN, ConnectGREEN and SaveGREEN projects. Achievements include as well the Centralparks project and its support to the protected areas in the Carpathians. Furthermore, the Convention work closely with the European Environment Agency (EEA) on forests and climate change adaptation. Therefore, we see strong role of the Carpathians as part of European region. The Carpathian region hosts the most precious forests, including old growth forests in Europe, which are important carbon sinks, and they are needed to address climate change, as they are as well part of nature base solution to response to climate change. In this regard, we would like to finalize the Inventory of Virgin Forest in the Carpathian together with EEA. And I hope, in respect to the topic of climate change, to see the adoption of the Long-term Vision 2030 toward combating climate change in the Carpathians by the Carpathian Convention COP6 this afternoon.

Concerning the accession of the European Union to the Carpathian Convention, my call is, I believe in line with the Polish Presidency priorities, to have a strong engagement of the EU institutions in the work of the Convention, and as the Secretariat, as the UNEP Europe Office, we would like to support these efforts as much as we can, especially as seeing on examples of different Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), where the EU is a party to there is a great engagement and strong mutual benefit. I am taking here example of the Barcelona Convention but also the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Helsinki Convention, the Alpine Convention where EU is active member. Giving the long lists of MEAs where we the EU is a member to it would be just natural to see a formal engagement of the European Union to the Carpathian Convention. In this respect, the decision that the Parties will consider this afternoon to introduce a "Regional Economic Integration Organization Clause" into the Carpathian Convention is a step forward making it possible for the EU to join the Convention.

With this, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. President, I will conclude my remarks thanking you for giving me the opportunity to address the COP6 and sending you best wishes for the Presidency and all the best success for the Convention. Thank you.