

Peace Parks in the Balkans – Prokletije, Sar-planina

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Abstract

This presentation which directly relates to the subject of *Transboundary Protected Areas* of the Parallel Workshop 2.3 summarizes the operations, programmes and tasks in protecting and promoting the natural values of the transboundary areas, as initiated by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia.

It illustrates the exceptional importance and appraisal of natural and cultural values of the transboundary area in the Balkan region, with particular emphasis on the future Prokletije / **Balkan Peace Parks** which enjoys our full support and readiness for cooperation.

With its multi-disciplinary expert team, the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia has an extensive database, accumulated knowledge and the experience gained in years of research and studies providing for adequate scientific and professional background in protecting the remarkable scenery of the transboundary mountain chains of Prokletije (proposed for the future National Park) and Sar-planina (National Park).

In this respect, the presentation addresses a number of problems, and it stresses the desire expressed by our country and the Institute to support the implementation of Peace Parks concept, as an essential requirement for further unrestrained work of experts coming from all over the region, and with the key objective to protect the natural and cultural values, encourage peace and stability, and finally have the Prokletije National Park declared the **Balkan Peace Parks**.

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I would, first of all, extend my sincere thanks to all the experts of IUCN, especially to the coordinators of the *Transboundary Protected Areas* concept and programme which is, as we strongly believe, an absolute necessity in the process of implementing the timely and adequate protection of exceptional natural values, and promoting the peace and stability in the transboundary areas of the Balkan region, which is one of the most diverse and rich in natural heritage in the entire European continent.

The Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia has always tried to advance the international cooperation which is a prerequisite for professional work on realization of highly demanding objectives of nature conservation.

We are fully acquainted with the initiative launched in 1999 by Ms Antonia Young, anthropologist, and her husband, Mr. Nigel Young, for the purpose of creating the **Balkans Peace Parks** in the Prokletije and the Alps of the Northern Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo and Metohia.

This important initiative, with the principal objective to protect natural values, promote peace and stability, and support professionally organized operations within local communities, enjoys our full support and readiness for cooperation.

The mountain complex of Prokletije covers the boundary areas of Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania. A part of Prokletije within the territory of Kosovo and Metohia is under the UNMIK administration and, according to the UN Resolution 1244, is within the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

In this respect, we would particularly point out the efforts invested by the experts of the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia which, after years of professional, field and scientific work, collecting, processing and compiling numerous information coming from all relevant fields, and combined with their extensive experience, have resulted in the monograph and CD, "*Prokletije of Metohia – the Natural and Cultural Heritage*". The monograph and CD have been created as the result of a comprehensive study dedicated to the importance of natural values after the five-year research conducted by some thirty experts of the Institute up to 1999, and the proposal for the new National Park in Serbia to be declared on the area of 97,000 hectares.

The beauty of its natural and cultural values makes the Mountain of Prokletije unique and exceptionally important in terms of protection and scientific research. As the largest individual mountain chain in the Dinaric Region and with its remarkable morphological dominance, the Mountain of Prokletije hosts extremely diversified, rich and complex flora and fauna.

The flora with 255 endemic species and sub-species, with 28 per cent occurring in the high mountain areas (above 1,800 a.s.l.), makes the region outstanding as the heart of the European endemism. Nineteen taxa have been included in the Red List of Threatened Plants (1997 IUCN).

The past research in the area of ornithofauna in Metohia's Prokletije has revealed more than two hundred species of birds which makes the mountain one of the most significant ornithological sections in the Balkans and Europe. This was the reason for declaring Prokletije, under the IBA Project in 2000, the bird habitat of international importance.

In addition to the myriad of natural rarities which are typical for the mountain system, remarkably rich cultural and historical heritage of the Metohia's part of Prokletije should particularly be stressed. The outstanding are the monastery of *Visoki Dečani* (1327-1335), declared the cultural asset of major importance for the Republic, and the Patriarchate of Peć (13th century), as the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Both monasteries have been proposed to be included in the World Cultural Heritage List - UNESCO.

Within the projects dedicated to the protection of natural and cultural values in transboundary areas, in 1994 the borders of the protected area of the future Prokletije National Park were

proposed to be extended into the area of Montenegro, as initiated by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Montenegro and the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia.

As the Institute already has a comprehensive database, and was the first to launch the initiative for the cooperation among neighbouring countries within the projects aimed at the protection of natural and cultural values in transboundary areas, for the purpose of providing the best possible protection and conservation of nature in this exceptional area, we believe that the role of our country and the Institute, with its expert teams, is very important, if not necessary, in the implementation of the proposed plan and programme.

The key objectives and criteria in declaring the Prokletije National Park are studying, protection, development and planned use of natural resources through scientific, expert, and development and planning measures of protecting the geodiversity and biodiversity, i.e. integrity, autochthonous quality and stability of the region's ecosystems.

Unfortunately, with respect to the adverse political situation in Kosovo and Metohia, Prokletije has not yet been declared the national park; I would, therefore, seize this opportunity to express my regret at the fact that every stay of the Institute experts for professional purposes means exposure to considerable risks, and directly depends on the UNMIK's understanding. We would express the hope that the initiated idea »A Peace Park in the Balkans – Parks without Frontiers« will borne fruit in the future thus enabling the experts coming from all over the region to continue their work with no restrictions, and to focus on the protection of natural and cultural values, promotion of peace and stability, and final declaration of the integral Prokletije National Park, as the part of the Peace Parks.

Regarding the fact that most of the protected natural areas in Serbia are located in transboundary areas, I will name but a few of the most important transboundary areas in which the cross-border projects have been launched:

- The Ministry of Environmental Protection of the FYR Macedonia has recently initiated the project for the protection of the transboundary region of the Sar-planina National Park, and within the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia the proposal is being prepared for the borders of the Sar-planina National Park to be permanently extended whereby the area will cover 99,000 hectares instead of the existing 39,000 hectares. (The Protocol on Cooperation was signed in 1995);
- In 1993/94 the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, National park "Djerdap" and the Portile de Fier Nature Park of Romania signed a cooperation protocol on establishing the cross-border reserve »Man and Biosphere« (MAB-UNESCO);
- One more project within the transboundary cooperation has been underway for several years; the Protocol on Cooperation signed in 1997 between the Ministries of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Bulgaria covered the creation of the transboundary Stara Planina Nature Park and its nomination for the cross-border reserve Man and Biosphere (MAB-UNESCO). The promotion materials for the Stara Planina Nature Park in the Republic of Serbia are currently in preparation;

The especially important transboundary projects planned for the future activities in Vojvodina district should also be mentioned:

- Special nature Reserve “Gornje podunavlje” (Danube river-km 1433-1367) is the final part in the study of the formed protection zone. Also planned is cooperation with protected area “Kopacki rit” in Croatia;
- “Suboticka pescara” (Subotica sand plateau) at the end of 2003 was declared as Landscape of Especial Features. Active transboundary cooperation’s with National park “Kiskunsag” in Hungary is carried out for several years ago.

Solving of the problems pertaining to these areas as the basis for advancement of peace and stability in transboundary areas of the Balkans region will be one of the main objectives of the future Institute activities and IUCN Coordination Unit in Belgrade.

References

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