

*“Conservation without Frontiers
-
Towards a new Image for the
Balkans”*

**A Strategic Plan for
the IUCN South-Eastern European
Programme**

May 2004

**Compiled by EURONATUR
for IUCN Regional Office for Europe (ROfE)
in cooperation with IUCN/WCPA**

IUCN
The World Conservation Union

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Note: Sections of this document are based on the IUCN Strategic Plan for the Mediterranean. The authors gratefully acknowledge this contribution of the IUCN Mediterranean Programme Office.

Acronyms and abbreviations

AL	Albania
BfN	Bundesamt für Naturschutz
BIH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BG	Bulgaria
CARDS	EU Assistance for Reconstruction, Democratisation and Stabilisation
CEC	IUCN Commission on Education and Communication
CEESP	IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy
CEM	IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management
CIM	Centrum für internationale Migration und Entwicklung
CMC	IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation
DCP	WWF Danube Carpathian Programme
ECAT	Environmental Centre for Administration and Technology
ECNC	European Centre for Nature Conservation
ELC	IUCN Environmental Law Commission
EU	European Union
GR	Greece
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
H	Hungary
HR	Croatia
I	Italy
IBA	Important Bird Areas
ICPDR	International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
HWI	Human well being index
KEC	Karst Ecosystem Conservation
MK	Macedonia
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PA	Protected area
PPA	IUCN Programme on Protected Areas
REC	Regional Environmental Centre
REReP	Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme
RO	Romania
ROfE	IUCN Regional Office for Europe
ROSTE	UNESCO Regional Office for Science and Technology
SAVE	Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe
S-EIA	Strategic – Environmental Impact Assessment
SCG	Serbia and Montenegro
SDC	Swiss Development Co-operation
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SI	Slovenia
SSC	IUCN Species Survival Commission
TR	Turkey
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP-MAP	United Nations Environmental Programme-Mediterranean Action Plan
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WCPA	IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas
WHC	UNESCO World Heritage Centre
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
ZGF	Frankfurt Zoological Society

1 Introduction

The IUCN Balkan Initiative Programme was initiated in 2002 at the European IUCN/WCPA meeting in Pörschach, Austria. Subsequently, a meeting held at IUCN headquarters in Gland in February 2003¹ identified the clear need for a special sub-regional programme concentrated on the Balkans. Based on the outcomes of these two meetings, a preliminary focus for the IUCN office in the Balkans was set on:

- 1) **transboundary protected areas;** and
- 2) **raising the profile of biodiversity conservation in the region on the regional and international policy agenda.**

As the result of the above mentioned efforts, the IUCN Programme Office for South-Eastern Europe² was established in spring 2004 in Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro. This document provides the necessary background information and analysis to put forward a clear rationale, niche and comparative advantage for IUCN to become active in the Balkan region. It represents the Strategic Plan for the development of a relevant and sustainable IUCN office and its programme in the Balkans. Furthermore, it is hoped that this Strategic Plan will help to identify those areas in which IUCN can have a longer-term impact in the Balkans in terms of addressing the key issues affecting conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

The outline of this Strategic Plan is based on the Strategy for the Mediterranean region and refers only to the special needs of the European sub-region on the Balkan Peninsula. It explains why Balkan Peninsula needs special attention in the future to be able to preserve its unique and important natural and cultural heritage. It takes into account the, consideration and recommendations of the sub-regional IUCN members as a result of discussions held at the IUCN Members Meeting in Novi Sad, 7-8 March 2004. The draft version of this Strategy was also reviewed by IUCN/WCPA members.

The central goals for IUCN in the Balkans are to:

- ◆ **Improve the network of protected areas in the region and expand protected areas coverage in relation to global coverage;**
- ◆ **Ensure the effective management of protected areas;**
- ◆ **Improve the information flow on biodiversity projects and key stakeholders, including an overview of state of implementation of Aarhus convention; and**
- ◆ **Create a joint regional understanding and co-operation of the IUCN members to ensure the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage and to foster a better international image**

¹ Meeting on the future of IUCN involvement in the Balkan region: Towards a Coordination Platform for Nature Conservation, Gland, IUCN HQ, 10 February, 2003.

² Note that this is how IUCN decided to officially name the new office in Belgrade, although the key focus of its programme lies within seven Balkan countries (listed in chapter 2.2). This decision was undertaken due to the specific focus of IUCN's programme which involves transboundary co-operation within the Balkan countries and in the larger context, with other South-Eastern European countries.

2 Situation Analysis – the European Context

2.1 The Balkan Peninsula as a Complex Part of Europe

It is not simple to give a definition of the Balkan region - or rather South-Eastern Europe (SEE), as it is more popularly known today - either geographically or in a geopolitical sense. Geographically, it refers roughly to the region bounded by the rivers Sava and Danube, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea (see map 2.1.). Geo-politically and even geo-historically, residing at the interface between the Orient and Occident, Christianity and Islam, the Balkans have been constantly changing throughout their centuries-old, turbulent history, which has witnessed the rise and fall of monarchies, dictatorships, communist social systems and democracies.

Map 2.1. The Balkan topography and borders



Source: GRID-Arendal Norway, 2000, Originator: Philippe Rakacewicz³

The Balkans have been described as the major crossroads between Europe and the Middle East and as a battle region between the major empires. The region has been depicted as a rich conglomerate of cultures and religions and as an ethnic and religious conflict zone. In recent years it has been viewed as both a critical security zone and as an unstable European periphery.

The invasion of the Ottoman Empire from the 15th to the early 20th century had a tremendous influence on this European region and caused interconnectedness of differing cultures and religions. Concerning the natural heritage, the military border between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire preserved a belt of important natural sites such as the karst area within the Plitvice National Park World Heritage Site in Croatia or the large alluvial wetlands along the Danube, Sava and Drava rivers. The Iron Curtain around former Yugoslavia, as well as the closed borders of Albania, preserved rivers (Danube-Drava-Mura corridor, Evros-Maritsa-Meric), lakes (Prespa, Ohrid, Skutari), mountains (Galicica, Prokletije, Rhodope), and coastal areas (Bojana-Buna delta).

³ www.grida.no

2.2 Geographical definition and IUCN's focus

In the broadest, geographical sense the Balkan Peninsula encompasses the area where there are today ten states: Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey, and five countries members of the former Yugoslavia: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Slovenia. Socio-economic studies of the Balkans frequently omit Greece and Turkey as countries that, unlike the other eight, are not countries in transition but have already been integrated for a long time in Western European political, economic and military structures. Slovenia is also often omitted from this group - either for geographic reasons or from a cultural and economic point of view. Romania has a special status among the Balkan countries since it has different political and cultural features, which is why it belongs more to the Carpathian region. However, at the IUCN Members Meeting in March 2004, it has been decided that Romania forms part of IUCN's core countries for future activities. Therefore, seven countries in total form the core countries of the IUCN South-Eastern European programme (see map 2.2.), namely: Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro. In consistency with the overall guiding idea of the IUCN regional programme, which is to enhance transboundary co-operation in protected areas, IUCN will work with most bordering countries of this core area in a regional transboundary context (map 2.3.).

In terms of IUCN's area of activity and due to the already existing IUCN office for the Mediterranean region, it has been decided that the Mediterranean office takes charge over Balkan conservation activities in the marine context. IUCN SEE will focus on the conservation and sustainable development of the terrestrial Balkan area.

Map 2.2. The core area of the IUCN Balkan initiative



While it is surrounded on three sides by water, the peninsula is not cut off from neighbouring regions to the east, west or south. To the east, the narrow straits of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles are a natural gateway between the Balkans and Anatolia, and Asia beyond. To the west, the Italian peninsula is only sixty-five kilometres away across the Adriatic from Albania, and influence from that direction has been another constant. Finally, the Aegean and Mediterranean islands to the south are stepping-stones to the eastern Mediterranean and Egypt. Not surprisingly, the Balkans have been a crossroads for the traffic passing to and from all these destinations.

Map 2.3. Regional context for transboundary co-operation in protected area management (*light brown*)



2.3 Population Groups in the Balkans

The mountains that divide the region are a prominent internal physical characteristic. The region takes its name from the Balkan mountain range in Bulgaria. On a large scale one long continuous chain of mountains crosses the region in the form of the reversed letter S, from the Carpathians south to the Balkan range proper, before it marches away east into the Anatolian Turkey. On the west coast, an offshoot of the Dinaride Mountains follows the coast south through Croatian Dalmatian area and Albania, crosses Greece, and continues into the sea in the form of various islands.

The first effect of these mountains is to divide the region into small units, in which distinct ethnic groups have been able to sustain themselves (see map 2.4.). This area, a little smaller in size than France and Germany together, is home to a dozen or more prominent ethnic groups.

Second, the mountains have been physical obstacles, hampering efforts at regional combination, whether political, economic or cultural. The ethnic groups have tended towards distinct national cultures, local economies, and political autonomy. However, in many cases, mountains have not represented an obstacle in ethnic groups' movements, as people moved due to wars or in search for a better life standard. It is therefore common to find mixture of different ethnic groups in various territories.

Third, the mountains have subdivided every district into vertical ecological zones, ranging from more valuable lowland farming areas to less valuable wooded or rocky uplands. This variety of ecological niches supports various cultures in close proximity: traders, farmers, nomadic or semi nomadic herders, and forest dwellers. In general, the higher up the zone the less productive the land, and so the upper regions of the mountains act as places of exile and refuge for defeated ethnic groups expelled from more desirable coast and valley lands. The mountain features of the Balkans have contributed to the continued fragmentation of human groups in the area⁴.

⁴ www.grida.no

Map 2.4. The Balkan Population Groups



Source: GRID-Arendal Norway 2003, Originator: Philippe Rekacewicz⁴

2.4 Protected Areas Management

The Balkan Peninsula as a geographical unit faces different nature conservation challenges to the Iberian and the Italian Mediterranean peninsulas. As both these peninsulas are part of the European Union (EU), they benefit from the EU's environmental legislation – primarily the Birds and Habitats Directives – and financial support structures. In the South-Eastern Europe, only Greece and Slovenia (in May 2004) are EU members, while Bulgaria and Romania are considered as pre-accession countries and will form part of the EU in 2007. For the rest of the region, membership is undefined (map 2.5.).

Protected areas (PA) coverage is considerably underrepresented in relation to the Iberian and Italian peninsulas (see Table 2.1.). With seven IUCN's core countries in the region, developing a coherent network of protected areas will be difficult (map 2.6.). Thus, transboundary co-operation between countries within the Balkans and with EU countries is a key target for future action and the main goal for the IUCN Balkan strategy.

⁴ www.lib.msu.edu/sowards/balkan/

Map 2.5. EU Membership and Accession Process



Members: dark blue, New Members 2004: blue, Members until 2007: light blue, Membership not defined: brown

There are currently two major effective transboundary programmes in the region – the Danube and Mediterranean⁵. However they emphasise the preservation of the alluvial and coastal/marine ecosystems and do not consider to the same extent the typical Balkan landscape as a unit consisting of a mix of mountains varying in their origin and altitude, karst phenomena, (glacial) lakes, rivers and coastal areas. Other related programmes focus only on the participating countries, which makes transboundary co-operation difficult.

Table 2.1. Protected areas on the Balkan, Iberian and Italian peninsulas

Peninsula	Size (km ²)	Number of PA	Size of PA (m ²)	% of the peninsula
Balkan peninsula	527 558	1 688	3 285 552	6,23
Iberian peninsula	581 463	669	5 498 236	9,45
Italian peninsula	301 302	708	3 651 947	12,12

Source: 2003 United Nations List of Protected Areas, UNEP-WCMC, IUCN

Protected areas management in the Balkan region has been neglected during the last 15 years of international progress and co-operation, primarily due to:

- i) Conflicts in the region during the last 15 years;
- ii) Difficult changes in political and economic situations; and
- iii) Unclear administrative situation in Europe and international conservation programmes.

⁵ Transboundary and Regional Environmental Cooperation [Balkans] Source: UNEP/DEWA/GRID-Geneva - http://www.grida.no/enrin/graphics.cfm?data_id=23488&country=balkan

Map 2.6. Geopolitical map of the three Mediterranean peninsulas



Thus, a much stronger support is required to create a successful strategy. **One of the central aims of the IUCN Strategic Plan is the promotion of the Balkan region as a treasure chest of Europe's cultural and natural heritage.** Unfortunately, the EU's Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe⁶ has not created a common understanding for this heritage and its importance for Europe so far.

Many activities have been started in the region without a clear assessment of the regional/local needs and without a strategy for a comprehensive network of protected areas. IUCN will aim to bring the different national organisations and protected area related programmes together into one framework and avoid doubling of activities. A good example for raising regional awareness for the region is quoted in the World Bank's Biodiversity Strategy for Europe and Central Asia⁷:

“In the **Balkans** our support to ecosystems conservation is just beginning, with operations just beginning in Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Bosnia. Given the global significance of the Balkan mountain ecosystems and the economic potential of the landscape, for tourism, forestry, agriculture, and livestock production, “niche” products and watershed protection, as well as the value of transboundary cooperation, we need to strengthen our program there.”

2.5 Current Human and Environmental Situation

Human situation

The Well-being Index⁸, recently developed by Prescott-Allen, includes and aggregates in a single Index a broad range of Human and Environmental Indicators. The Human well-being index (HWI) provides a useful overview of the current human socio-economic and cultural situation in the region. Table 2.2. shows that countries in the region have a medium to poor HWI.

⁶ See chapter 3.3.

⁷ The World Bank (2003) Biodiversity Strategy for Europe and Central Asia. The World Bank Environmental and Socially Sustainable Development Sector Unit Europe and Central Asia Region; pp 11.

⁸ The Well-being Index is built by aggregating 87 environmental, economic and social indicators. The Index has a 0 to 100 range, divided in five sections: Bad (0-20), Poor (21-40), Medium (41-60), Fair (61-80) and Good (81-100). The Index considers Human and Environmental Well-being together; therefore it is not possible to obtain a good overall ranking without performing well in both areas. Prescott-Allen, Robert. 2001. *The Wellbeing of Nations*. Washington and Ottawa: Island Press and the International Development Research Centre.

Table 2.2. Human Well-being Index

Human well-being index	
Medium	
Albania	42,0
Bulgaria	44,5
Croatia	45,0
Macedonia (FYROM)	44,0
Poor	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	34,5
Romania	40,0
Serbia and Montenegro	39,5

Environmental situation

Habitats

The list of unique and well preserved natural areas is long, covering many habitat types from coastal lagoons to the high altitudes of the Dinaride and Rhodope Mountains. During the last ice age the Balkan Peninsula was a place of retreat for many species. They have survived there, due to the presence of suitable niches (habitats) in the great variety of landscapes.

The Balkan Peninsula is particularly rich in wetlands (Table 2.3.), with 43 internationally designated Ramsar sites currently classified in the region. The fact that most of them are situated along the state borders or along the coastal lines, demonstrates the need for the development of international co-operation. Of particular interest are sensitive wetlands, the “karst polje” areas which are situated in the chain of the Dinaride Mountains. These are vast flat plains, covered periodically with water coming from subterranean rivers and the surrounding mountains.

The loss of wetlands has not been quantified for the region, except for the Danube floodplains, where 80% have been drained⁹. This has led to a general loss of biodiversity, but also to a loss of highly productive forests, retention capacities in cases of floods, and as a consequence a reduction of the self-purification mechanism of the rivers.

Table 2.3. Ramsar Sites on the three Mediterranean Peninsulas

Balkan	Total	Border	%	coastal	%	size (ha)
Albania	2	1	50	2	50	33 500
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	1	100	1	100	7 411
Bulgaria	10	3	30	7	70	20 306
Croatia	4	3	75	1	25	80 455
Greece	10	2	20	5	50	163 501
Macedonia	1	1	100	0	0	18 920
Serbia-Montenegro	4	2	50	0	0	39 861
Slovenia	2	1	50	1	50	955
Total	34	14	41	16	47	364 909
Iberian	61					239 222
Italian	46					51 137

A percentage of the Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Croatia and Slovenia is similar to the surface of IBAs in the EU countries (Table 2.4.). This may be indicative that the information on biodiversity

⁹ DPRP - Danube Pollution Reduction Programme (PCU UNDP/GEF) (1999): Evaluation of Wetlands and Floodplain Areas in the Danube River Basin, Final Report, May 1999 prepared by WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme and WWF Auen-Institut.

and important landscapes based on international criteria is insufficient or even missing in some of the other countries.

Table 2.4. IBAs on the Three Mediterranean Peninsulas

Country	Size of the country (km ²)	Number	Size of IBA (km ²)	% of the country
Albania	28 750	15	903	3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	51 130	3	67	0
Bulgaria	110 994	50	7 002	6
Croatia	56 540	23	7 546	13
Greece	132 000	196	34 332	26
Macedonia (FYROM)	25 715	10	1 907	7
Serbia and Montenegro	102 173	40	8 617	8
Slovenia	20 256	14	3 413	17
Turkey-Europe	24 378	5	694	3
Total	551 936	356	64 481	12
Without Greece	419 936	160	30 149	7

Iberian	581 463	425	167 110	29
Italian	301 302	192	46 270	15

Source: Heath M. F. and Evans, M. I. (2000): *Important Bird Areas - Priority sites for conservation. BirdLife Conservation Series. Vol 2 (8) Cambridge.*

Although protected areas cover many of the unspoiled terrestrial and marine representative areas/ecosystems in the region, many gaps still remain and the network of protected areas needs to be improved.

Species

Knowledge of the Balkan wildlife is currently fragmented, making it difficult to assess the status of many globally threatened species found in the region. Large mammals (e.g. wolf, bear, lynx) and birds of prey (Imperial Eagle, four species of vultures) are considered to be key European indicators for the value of large-scale semi-natural landscapes. The great Balkan lakes, lagoons and deltas host the most important colonies of the Dalmatian Pelican. They are the key sites for many European bird species migrating to Africa. Some species of bats, fish, reptiles, amphibians and some invertebrate species could also be considered as the umbrella species for purposes of long-term monitoring.

Table 2.5. shows that a diversity of vascular plants in the Mediterranean, including the Balkan Peninsula, is significant compared to other regions of the world.

Table 2.5. Diversity of vascular plants in four global hotspots

Region	Area (km ²)	Number of plant species	Number of endemic species	% of endemic species
Mediterranean	2 300 000	25 000	12 500	50
DR Congo	2 345 000	11 000	2 800 (approx)	30
India	3 166 000	15 000	5 000	30
Australia	7 682 000	22 000	7 600	34

Source: IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation Strategy, 2002

Transboundary aspects

The Balkans represent one of the most important areas for transboundary co-operation in protected area management worldwide. IUCN has strong potential to enhance this regional co-operation based on the institutional capacity to establish a programme for nature conservation and incorporate best practices.

One key reason why IUCN should have a strong involvement in the Balkans is the geopolitical structure of the region. There are seven countries in the region, compared to one and two for the similarly sized Italian and Iberian peninsulas. Within some of these countries there are significant local sub-divisions, and in many cases, nature conservation is constructed along these divisions. For example, Serbia and Montenegro have their own ministries and nature protection authorities in each republic, and Serbia also has nature protection units in each province. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is more complicated as, not only the state and the two entities, but also the cantons have competences in nature conservation.

The size of each of the Balkan countries is small relative to the main habitats in the region. For example the spacious mountain chains spread from the Northern Adriatic coast to Greece and further to the Black Sea. Often the mountain ridge forms the border between the countries. At least 50% of the sites of international importance in the region are transboundary, including all the large lakes like Skutari, Dojran, Ohrid and Prespa, many important rivers and important coastal zones (e.g. Neretva Delta, Bojana/Buna Delta).

A number of running activities has not been sufficiently communicated and third parties have not been familiar with the available knowledge. Initiatives such as the Balkan Green Belt and the European Green Belt and some other programmes have been started, but they need a common approach to become effective throughout the region. The European Green Belt scheme, of which the Balkan Green Belt will form part, is an initiative of several organisations under the lead of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and IUCN (map 2.7.). This initiative aims to transform the former Iron Curtain along the East-West divide of Europe into a protected areas corridor, thus acting as a symbol of union between East and West.

In line with the first assessment prepared during the preparation of this Strategic Plan, 37 priority sites have been identified for a transboundary co-operation (see Annex 2). This represents the backbone of the comprehensive Protected Areas Network throughout the region. To initiate transboundary co-operation, further projects need to be launched by different organisations (see Table 6.1.) and international support should be assured. This will then guarantee the formal basis for the development of a comprehensive network of protected areas in the entire region.

2.6 Specific Problems and Needs

Beside the geopolitical reasons, there are several other problems facing biodiversity conservation in the region. Therefore specific attention and an accompanying international assistance are required in the coming years to address the following issues.

Border Issues

Some borders of the former Yugoslavian territory remain unclear, which impacts some natural areas of high conservation value. In particular, this relates to Piran bay (SI/HR), the rivers of Drava and Mura (SI, HR, HU), and the Danube river (HR, SCG).

In other places reduced border control causes damage to biodiversity that was protected along the formerly strictly controlled border area. Until 1990, such areas were part of the Iron Curtain and the closed Albanian borders had very limited or no public access. Restricted access also related to parts of the Albanian and Croatian coasts and islands. Several highly endangered species survived in such natural areas protected by military or border control. Today these refuge areas are highly endangered and urgently require suitable management and protection using best practice to establish public access and environmental information systems.

Along some borders (HR/BIH, HR/SCG) and where the former first line of defence was during the recent war, there is a large number of minefields and unexploded ordnance left. This interferes with conservation efforts and development of local communities.

Map 2.7. The South-Eastern Part of the European Green Belt



Agriculture

Land-use within the Balkan Peninsula is still characterised by small farms and traditional farming practices including old breeds of domestic animals. Large temperate grasslands form a typical habitat in the mountains and the plains. Preservation of the most important ecosystems and sustainable use of sensitive areas should be one of the most important tasks of the Balkan programme, including pastoralism and transhumance and the related cultural heritage. Projects that involve domestic livestock breeds and cultivated plants, promoting organic agriculture and protecting genetic diversity of certain species/sorts, should be supported.

Tourism

One of the major anthropogenic pressures on natural resources in the Balkans is caused by growing development of tourism. Although tourism is needed in the region for economic reasons, some areas, such as the coastal parts of Croatia, Montenegro and Albania, suffer from uncontrolled construction of infrastructure. There is a need to develop more sensitive tourism programmes based on the preservation of the natural resources and well managed protected areas. There are, however, local programmes in some countries, which are building on eco-tourism objectives, but without a clear regional marketing strategy and very little acceptance by the overall tourism industry. With some kind of small grants programmes, local communities might improve their life standards and build on sustainable management of biodiversity and nature. For example, bird watching and photo tracking programmes could be introduced or reinforced.

Hunting

Bird hunting by local people, and more often by foreigners, is a significant problem throughout the region. Even globally endangered birds, such as Ferruginous Duck¹⁰, are being hunted. In addition, illegal hunting is widespread. Even the income of some National Parks is dependent on unsustainable

¹⁰ Schneider-Jacoby, M. (2003): Lack of Ferruginous Duck protection in Croatia - A reason for the decline in Central Europe? In: Petkov N., B. Hughes & U. Gallo-Orsi (editors). Ferruginous Duck from Research to Conservation, Conservation Series No 6 BirdLife International – BSPB – TWSG, Sofia: 44 - 53.

hunting. As a result, Ramsar sites in the region are rapidly losing their function as a retreat for breeding birds and a stepping stone for migrants.

In addition to birds, hunting seriously affects some large mammals, among which the bear population is particularly vulnerable. The bears are often sought by trophy hunters, and hunting itself is normally not planned on the basis of scientific knowledge, thus leading to serious negative effects on the viability of the last remnant populations in this part of Europe.

Illegal collecting of new subterranean species, medicinal plants, invertebrates, and snakes for foreign markets and scientists, is an additional difficult problem in the region.

Privatisation and Community Protected Areas

Large areas, not only in the mountains, but throughout the region are used as (public) pasture lands. One of the main features of the Balkan culture and landscape is practising of transhumance, the seasonal movement of livestock. With the growing privatisation process, these areas are becoming increasingly vulnerable. This problem is exacerbated due to the high financial compensation paid to private farmers, which does not favour the designation of their land for conservation purposes. In some countries, the privatisation process has not started yet. Further initiatives are required to preserve the pasturelands and develop best practices for environmental and rural management.

Infrastructure Development

Establishment of new Trans-European traffic corridors through roads, railways or navigation canals, is the key prerequisite for regional development and better communication between the countries¹¹. However, one has to ensure that appropriate (Strategic-) Environmental Impact Assessment (S-EIA) studies are undertaken to avoid unnecessary destructive impacts on the natural environment.

In some cases cost-benefit studies are needed to distinguish the best alternative between road, rail or water ways. Some countries, like Croatia, have started testing "green bridges" to avoid interference between new roads and large mammals, a method which should be used throughout the region to preserve the populations of large mammals.

Energy Sector

Throughout the Balkan Peninsula, reconstruction of energy circuit lines involves the utilisation of concrete constructions as replacements for wooden posts. These new constructions, often financed through international programmes, are highly dangerous to birds, and are in particular a threat to raptor and owl populations, as they cause electrocution. Electrocuted birds can also catch fire, which is a great problem especially in dry SEE areas.

The recently promoted use of water and wind energy as "green energy" is another potential factor towards natural degradation. The last European wild rivers are endangered as well as the most important flyways of birds in Europe for example at the Black Sea coast. Here better strategic planning and a comprehensive system of protected areas are needed to avoid damage to the natural heritage of the Balkan Peninsula.

Waste disposal

Waste disposal is a serious problem that has huge negative impact on water resources, especially in karstic areas which have low capacity for auto-purification. Organic, inorganic and hazardous waste is often disposed in karst pits and caves and locating the pollution source in cases where groundwater flow is not traced is virtually impossible. A clear strategy for groundwater tracing is needed in the near future, as well as education of local community concerning the consequences of illegal waste disposal.

Insufficient Knowledge

The main problem for the sustainable development of the region is a lack of sufficient information on biodiversity in the region as a whole, and specific sites in particular. The Balkan countries consist to

¹¹ European Commission (2003): Transport and Energy Infrastructure in SEE. Luxembourg.

a large extent of sensitive areas for biodiversity protection, but good information for physical planning, (strategic) environmental assessments and nature conservation is rare and new programmes have just been started. The region also does not have sufficiently represented support programmes for education of experts in the fields of taxonomy, conservation biology and environmental management. Yet it remains vitally important that natural habitats such as virgin forests, natural waters such as rivers, lakes, marshes, lagoons and alluvial wetlands and all kind of mountain habitats are preserved. In addition, the cultural landscape needs special attention. The preservation of the large flag-ship species like bear, wolf, lynx, eagles, vultures, marine mammals, and turtles, will only be possible if their habitats are used in a sustainable way.

3 Institutional Analysis

This section provides an overview of major IUCN constituents in the Balkans, including:

1. IUCN Members in the region
2. IUCN Commissions in the region
3. International and Regional organisations active in the conservation field
4. National and major non-governmental and governmental organizations active in the conservation field and sustainable development in their countries
5. Donors and funding organizations

This chapter does not provide a complete stakeholder analysis, but rather a brief overview of organisations working in the field of conservation and sustainable development. The stakeholder analysis, which will include local communities among others, will be made at a project level.

3.1 IUCN Member Organisations

Balkan countries are not represented in IUCN by many members. There are only a few governmental agencies that are currently IUCN members (Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, Romania). Additionally, there are seven NGO members.

Within the existing IUCN Statutes and taking into account the IUCN regional structure, the Director General of IUCN has designated special focus on individual thematic programmes for the IUCN SEE office while leaving membership and statutory issues to the existing regional structures.

The international NGO members such as BirdLife, EuroMontana, PlantLife, WWF, Euronatur, Europarc, Ligambiente, Eurosite will be important partners to develop and improve the Balkan network of protected areas and to promote the value of the region in Europe and worldwide.

3.2 IUCN Commissions

IUCN has six scientific Commissions and all of them have voluntary members in the Balkans. There are more than 100 Commission members in SEE countries (Table 3.1.).

These Commissions are:

- WCPA World Commission on Protected Areas
- SSC Species Survival Commission
- ELC Environmental Law Commission
- CEC Commission on Education and Communications
- CEM Commission on Ecosystem Management
- CEESP Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy

Table 3.1. IUCN Commission Members in the Balkans

IUCN Commission Country	Ecosystem Management. CEM	Environmental Law. CEL	Education & Communication. CEC	Environmental Economics & Social Policy. CEESP	World Commission on Protected Areas. WCPA	Species Survival Commission. SSC
Albania					1	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina						
Bulgaria			2		5	24
Croatia	1	1	3	1	2	12
Greece	2		3	1	6	35
Macedonia						1
Slovenia			4	1	17	13
Turkey		2	2		3	32

3.3 International and Regional Organisations

The international attention to this part of Europe has been increasing in recent years. Some Western European countries have been supporting various conservation projects in the Balkan countries. For example, Switzerland is involved in the transboundary protected areas programme as part of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme (REReP¹²), which is being implemented by the Regional Environmental Centre (REC). REReP is the main environmental component of the EU initiated instrument in 1999, the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. The Stability Pact plays major role in the region's stability and economic development, thus underlying a framework for co-operation between the EU, SEE and other countries.

The Italian government has started close cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Germany is supporting, for example, the Environmental Centre for Administration and Technology (ECAT) in Albania.

In addition to REReP, the EU has further strengthened its support particularly to the western Balkan countries by launching the Assistance for Reconstruction, Democratisation and Stabilisation (CARDS) programme in 2000. The environmental component of CARDS encompasses efforts in harmonisation of laws to EU norms and standards, strengthening of relevant institutions, and reduction of environmental health risks.

Harmonisation of laws to EU standards is one of the prerequisites for joining the EU, which is very important for the SEE as this region is seen as the mixture of accession and pre-accession countries. For example, Slovenia will join the EU in May 2004, while Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. This will enable extension of one of the major EU designations in conservation, NATURA 2000, into these countries. NATURA 2000 is a network of protected areas set up under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

Although the international involvement is growing, it is evident that these activities need better coordination and harmonisation.

On a regional level of cooperation, there is not much joint work as most countries are involved in either Danube or Mediterranean initiatives. For example, MedWet initiative, which is focusing on wetlands, covers the Mediterranean - Balkan countries. It has recently developed a project for capacity building on conservation of wetlands in Albania, while the project on Neretva river wetlands

¹² <http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REREP/>

is under development. UNEP-MAP together with its regional centres in Mediterranean is also active in coastal parts of the SEE region. UNEP-MAP is supported with the Barcelona Convention system.

Although there is not much joint effort at the SEE regional level, there are some bilateral cooperative agreements, for example between Serbia and Bulgaria for the management of protected areas, and multilateral agreements, for example between Albania, Greece and Macedonia for the conservation of Lake Prespa or the Lower Danube River.

There is a definite need to strengthen relationships between SEE countries in transboundary protected area management. Existing knowledge should be brought together in order to establish a comprehensive programme for nature conservation on a regional level. This joint presentation of the SEE region might be achieved through development and ratification of the SEE Heritage Convention.

3.4 National Organisations

Numerous NGOs are active within many Balkan countries. However, strong national organisations that can influence conservation policies are very rare or non-existent. It is important to strengthen and develop capacity within those NGOs in order to achieve conservation goals.

3.5 Donors and Funding Organisations

IUCN is currently compiling the list of potential funding organisations in the Balkans. Close co-operation with all international organisations such as the World Bank, UNDP, and UNEP is very important, as well as with the numerous national organisations from different states active in the region (for example USAID, GTZ, SDC).

4 IUCN's Niche and Comparative Advantage in SEE

As identified previously IUCN can provide an added value to the development of nature conservation in the SEE, through its unique structure and its inclusion of state and NGO members. The geopolitical situation in the region, far more complex than that of the other Mediterranean peninsulas requires the selection of work areas that take advantage of IUCN's core competencies. IUCN has to build on the strengths and comparative advantages of the members and partners and be able to attract long-term investment.

The key issues and trends affecting conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources include:

- The overall human well-being index in SEE countries is poor to medium;
- The general environmental situation should be substantially enhanced throughout the region;
- Biodiversity conservation needs to be improved
- The information on land use and important habitats is insufficient throughout the Balkan region.

4.1 Defining Roles for IUCN

The key role of IUCN in SEE is to promote and help establish a network of protected areas, and specifically, further develop transboundary protected areas. This goal will be based on the new paradigm for protected areas (Table 4.1.).

Table 4.1. A new paradigm for protected areas

As it was – protected areas have been	As it is becoming (will have become) - protected area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned and managed against local people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run with, for and – in some cases – by them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run by central government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run by many partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Set aside” from mainstream concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run with economic, social, environmental objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed individually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a part of national and international systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed as “islands” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed at landscape scale with networks (core/buffer/corridor)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established mainly for recreation or scenery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater emphasis on the provision of ecosystem services to people

Source: Kakabadse (2003)¹³

IUCN will have the following roles in SEE in close co-operation with the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (CMC):

1. Strengthening and supporting the work of the Union (Members, Commissions and their different structures) through networking, coordination, facilitation, training and technical assistance;
2. Supporting policy-making on conservation and sustainable development through advocacy, development of policy proposals and guidelines, participation in regional bodies and other means aimed to empower Union Members and Commissions participation in regional and national policy making;
3. Drawing on field activities and regional experience to demonstrate the feasibility and appropriateness of the IUCN approach to biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and equitable sharing of benefits coming from conservation and sustainable use.

The first two roles are linked with the distinctive feature of IUCN as an international member-based organisation that empowers its constituents to improve their capacities to influence policy. The third role draws on the IUCN record and expertise to promote innovative and practical approaches to address key human and environmental challenges, working with local communities, organisations and governments to convert policies into better daily life realities.

4.2 Capacity Assessment

Strengths and weaknesses of IUCN capacity to support SEE

A first rapid inventory of available technical capacities to assist in the improvement of IUCN strengths includes the following:

- a. The IUCN Balkan Task Force (proposed) created by the Director General to support the development of the co-ordination unit and programme. Members include representatives of the IUCN Global Thematic Programmes relevant to the region (Forests Programme, Wetlands Programme, Marine and Coastal Areas Programme, Protected Areas, Species, Social Policy Programme, Law);
- b. The technical and scientific capacities of the IUCN Commissions and Specialist Groups;
- c. The technical, scientific, financial and infrastructure capacities of members and partners (*that remains to be fully inventoried*);
- d. The institutional capacity and expertise of IUCN to bring together different organisations from different places and countries to address issues of common interest;

¹³ Kakabadse J. (2003) Linking parks and ecological networks; the challenge of the WPC. Strategic round table on the role of protected areas and ecological networks in biodiversity policy, The Hague, The Netherlands.

- e. The institutional capacity of IUCN to work at different levels (international, regional, national, local) and to connect processes between those levels allowing for mutual feedback and reinforcement.

Some areas require capacity improvement on the part of the Secretariat:

- a. Expertise in karst ecosystems
- b. Appropriate funding to support the activities
- c. Expertise in the political dynamic of the region.

5 Long Term Strategy

Building on the Mission of IUCN, the aim of the IUCN Balkan initiative is:

“To influence, encourage and assist Balkan societies in the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, thus contributing to new joined regional understanding and co-operation and a better international image and promotion of the region”.

The impact achieved by the gradual fulfilment of this Mission will be demonstrated by improvements in the well-being of the region’s people and ecosystems at the local and regional levels, as well as by progress at both levels in biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and the pertinent equitable sharing of the benefits from those activities.

This Mission is pursued through four strategic approaches, agreed at the Amman Congress, which are to strengthen:

- **Knowledge:** generating, integrating, managing, and disseminating knowledge for the conservation, sustainable and equitable use of nature and natural resources;
- **Empowerment:** building capacity, responsibility and willingness of people and institutions to plan, manage, conserve and use nature and natural resources in a sustainable and equitable manner;
- **Governance:** systematic improvement of laws, policies, economic instruments and institutions for the conservation and sustainable and equitable use of nature and natural resources;
- **Operations:** effective management, information, finance, human resources and communication systems as the foundations for effective delivery and use of knowledge, empowerment and governance.

5.1 Special Programme Objectives and Outcomes

In line with the goals for IUCN’s involvement in the SEE, the specific objectives and the outcomes are summarised in table 5.1. These specific objectives draw on the results of the IUCN Balkan members meeting.

Table 5.1. IUCN Programme Objectives and Outcomes for the Balkan

Programme Objectives	Outcomes
1. Comprehensive protected area network and expansions of PA coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of transboundary protected areas • Protection of migration corridors and important habitats • Increase in the number of populations of indicator species • Compliance with the international standards in nature conservation and protected area management (e.g. Europarc, European Diploma, EU Natura 2000) • Improved communication and education on the role and benefits of PAs for protected area staff, local communities and visitors
2. Effective management of protected areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of IUCN PA categories • Strengthened capacities of protected areas / conservation institutions and staff, NGOs • Improved management quality • Developed programmes for sustainable tourism and agriculture • Established Biosphere Reserves as a tool for regional development
3. Improved information flow on biodiversity issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make information and experience on biodiversity conservation, projects and key actors available for conservation and sustainable use efforts • State of implementation of Aarhus Convention is overviewed
4. Joint conservation and promotion of natural and cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened IUCN Members and Commissions • “Balkan/SEE Heritage Convention”¹⁴ as a basis for co-operation and joint action • Active exchange of experiences and views on conservation and development issues among the Members and Commissions across the region • Joint presentation of protected areas internationally (the latest at the VI IUCN World Parks Congress) • Better international image

5.2 Main Programme Themes

Six themes of IUCN SEE Programme are:

- Transboundary protected areas for the key ecosystems and habitats
- Biodiversity conservation (ecosystems, habitats and species)
- Sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. agriculture, tourism, hunting, landscape management)
- Water resources conservation and management
- Capacity building, training of protected areas staff and exchange of knowledge
- Collaborative management of protected areas, including traditional knowledge

¹⁴ Good examples for such regional conventions in Europe for neighbouring eco-regions are the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention.

6 Medium Term Plan (2004-2006)

The Medium Term Plan is a draft so far (Table 6.1). It needs to be compared with the programmes of the international organisations active in the region as the World Bank, UNEP, UNDP, KfW and the Council of Europe.

Table 6.1 Proposed Actions for the Balkan Region

Objectives	Potential Partners of the IUCN Balkan initiative (needs permanent updating)
Basic work	
Balkan GIS for a network of PAs	ECNC, UNESCO ROSTE, Italy, others
Networking the Balkan	IUCN Netherlands, REC, SDC, OSCE, UNEP, WWF MedPO, Euronatur, others
Thematic Work	
Coastal PAs and their protection status	IUCN CMC, MedWet, Ramsar, WWF MedPO, Euronatur
Freshwater ecosystems and their protection status	IUCN CMC, WWF DCP and WWF MedPO, Euronatur, ICPDR
Dinaride Park Europe	Legambiente, WWF MedPO, European Mountain Forum, EuroMonatana
Rhodope Park Europe, Balkan Green Belt	SDC, UNDP, Euronatur, Balkani Wildlife, Green Balkans
Biosphere Reserves (MAB Programme) and their contribution to transboundary co-operation in PA management	UNESCO ROSTE
World Heritage Sites – review of natural sites and cultural landscapes	UNESCO WHC, IUCN PPA, WCPA
Basic standards for transboundary co-operation in PAs	EUROPARC, EUROPARC members from the Balkan
Balkan Red List and Red Book development	IUCN SSC
Mapping of important biodiversity areas at landscape and seascape levels	IUCN SSC, WWF MedPO
Important Plant Areas, Publication of Balkan IPAs	PlantLife, others
Important Bird Areas review, Publication of Balkan IBAs	BirdLife International and national partners
European Green Belt	BfN, IUCN ROfE, Euronatur, BN, others
Agro-Diversity	SAVE, regional partners
Grassland and pastoralism	Eurosite, others
Karst ecosystems	IUCN, World Bank (KEC project), WWF, Euronatur
Training and management	IUCN CMC, Tour du Valat, WWF MedPO, MedWet
Flagship species (examples)	
Bear	Arcturos, Large Carnivores Initiative, WWF MedPO, Euronatur, IUCN SSC and national partners
Balkan Lynx	Euronatur, Large Carnivores Initiative, IUCN SSC and national partners
Bats	EuroBat, national partners
Imperial Eagle	Euronatur, national partners
Vulture	ZGF and national partners
Dalmatian Pelican	Tour du Valat, WWF, Euronatur, and national partners
Otter	IUCN SSC

7 Managing the Implementation of the Programme

7.1 IUCN Programme Office for South-Eastern Europe

The Office will start with one international expert and build on project funds and secondment opportunities with a plan to be extended to about 3-4 staff over three years. The Serbian Institute for Nature Protection in Belgrade will host the office.

The most important tasks of the Balkan office are to:

- Collect and circulate information
- Coordinate the work of international and national member organisations throughout the region
- Raise awareness on biodiversity protection
- Introduce the principles of the Pan-European Ecological Network
- Improve the image of the region by spreading information, with stress on biodiversity and protected areas.

7.2 Interaction between the SEE Programme and IUCN Statutory Regions

The staff of the office will report directly to the Regional Director at IUCN ROfE. The SEE Programme will work in cooperation with the Mediterranean Programme and ROfE and it will implement initiatives in the countries of the SEE sub-region. ROfE will be the IUCN platform for EU activities and policies relevant to the SEE and a focal point for policy processes or fund-raising issues concerning the EU. IUCN CMC will lead on the marine conservation projects in the Balkan countries.

The SEE Programme Office will have a specific objective to increase the regional IUCN membership of both statutory members and members of the IUCN Commissions.

7.3 Advisory Board

It is of high importance for the Balkan Programme to maintain the communication between IUCN Members and Commission members in the region. This is particularly a challenge as it cuts across two statutory regions - the Mediterranean and European - and requires effective participation with the membership without interference in existing planning and project implementation processes.

During the IUCN Members Meeting held in Novi Sad in March 2004, an Advisory Board was established in order to provide guidance on IUCN SEE strategic decisions. The Advisory Board constitutes of four experts from Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bulgaria. Additionally, UNESCO ROSTE is represented as an observer in the Board.

7.4 Financing the Start-up Phase

The Serbian Institute for Nature Protection will provide IUCN with space in its new building. The Italian government offered to support the work of the IUCN office, while the German government will contribute through the CIM. Additional funding is required for the regional work of the members and experts and the different programme activities.

7.5 Evaluation

The SEE Programme will undertake a mid term review in 2005 to allow a strategic alignment with IUCN European Programme 2005-2008.

8 Annexes

Annex 1: Important border areas concerning transboundary co-operation in protected area management



Annex 2: List of important transboundary sites in SEE (draft)

	<i>Countries</i>	<i>Border region</i>	<i>General Description</i>
1	A, HR, HU, SI, SCG	Danube-Drava-Mura	400 km alluvial corridor and alluvial wetlands
2	A, HU, SI	Goricko-Raab-Örség	Cultural landscape
3	AL, GR	Butrint-Thiamis-Kalamas	Lake and coastal ecosystems
4	AL, GR	Aoos/Vijose	Alluvial ecosystem from the mountains to the Adriatic coast
5	AL, GR, MK	Prespa-Ohrid	Old lake ecosystem and high mountains
6	AL, I	Canale d'Otranto	Costal and marine ecosystems
7	AL, MK, SCG	Sar Planina-Korab Mountain	High mountain ecosystems
8	AL, SCG	Prokletije Mountain	High mountain ecosystems
9	AL, SCG	Skutari-Bojana	Lake, coastal and alluvial ecosystems
10	BG, GR	Western Rhodope Mountains	Rich biodiversity (various endemic species and relicts), virgin forests
11	BG, GR	Central Rhodope Mountains and Nestos	Divers alpine biotopes including river valleys
12	BG, GR	Eastern Rhodope Mountains	Large, divers steppe and grassland areas and river
13	BG, GR, TR	Evros-Maritsa-Meric River	Important alluvial wetland
14	BG, TR	Strandja	Rich landscape with high diversity of vertebrates, unique flora
15	BG, RO, MO, UR	Lower Danube Green Corridor	Alluvial wetlands of high importance
16	BG, SCG	Balkan Mountain	High mountain ecosystems
17	BIH, HR	Central Sava Basin	Largest floodplain in the Danube Basin
18	BIH, HR	Dinara-Livanjsko Polje karst ecosystem	Large karst underground water system, largest karst polje world wide, high mountains
19	BIH, HR	Lower Neretva Valley and Delta	Large delta and marsh area, important littoral
20	BIH, HR	Plitvice - Una karst system	Specific karst ecosystems as rivers, lakes and waterfalls
21	BIH, SCG	Durmitor - Tara	High mountain and river ecosystem
22	BIH, SCG	Tara-Drina-Javor	Mountains forests
23	BIH, HR, SCG	Orjen-Snijeznica	Mosaic of mountains, waters and cultural landscape
24	HR, I	Central Adriatic islands	Island and high sea ecosystems, flyway protection
25	HR, SCG	Danube-Fruska Gora	Cultural landscape and (alluvial) forest ecosystems

26	HR, SCG	Sava-Spacva-Bosut Forests	Worldwide largest Pedunculated oak forest system, oxbows
27	HR, SI	Cicarija	Open karst grassland
28	HR, SI	Croatian-Slovenian high karst (Kras-Risnjak-Sneznik)	Karst mountain forest and relict alpine ecosystems
29	HR, SI	Kupa-Kolpa-Kocevje Valley	Natural river and forest ecosystems
30	HR, SI	Piran bay	Coastal wetlands
31	HU, SCG	Selevin-Suboticka sands	Steppe habitats and wetlands
32	HR, SI	Kozansko-Sava-Zumberak	Forest and wetland habitats
33	MK, GR	Lake Dojran	Important freshwater lake, endemic and relict fauna
34	SCG, RO	Djerdap/Deliblatska Pescara-Iron Gate	Danube valley including large forest area and the biggest inland sand dune area
35	BG, MK, GR	Belasica -"Granichni Planini"- Belasitca-Ograzdhen-Maleshevska mountains	Mountain ecosystem
36	MK, AL	Jablanitsa-Shebenik	Mountain ecosystem, significant species refuge
37	MK, GR	Kozuf-Nidge-Kajmakcalou	Mountain ecosystem, significant species refuge
38	BG, RO	Dobrudja-Hagieni forest-Durankulak lake	Steppe habitats with wetlands and forests

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