

1 Introduction

This document was prepared in the framework of the Carpathian Project. The Carpathian Project, again, is one of the projects approved and prepared in the framework of the CADSES (Central European, Adriatic, Danubian and Southeast European Space) trans-national spatial planning cooperation programme.

VASICA is accordingly a trans-national spatial-planning document. Similar synthetic documents have been prepared for several large cooperation areas in the last decade. The formerly prepared strategies developed a “standard” form and content of such documents. The first and best known of these documents was the “Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea, (VASAB)”, prepared in 1994. The idea of the title of the VASICA document was “borrowed” from these former trans-national spatial-planning documents. Nevertheless, VASICA is special and different from other similar documents, first because the Carpathian area is substantially different from other areas, second, because many years had passed since 1994.

The Carpathian Project had to face a pioneering task. A lot of planning documents were prepared for the individual national economies. There are also cross-country studies and strategic papers, dealing with some specific problems (macro-economy, environment, agriculture and so on). Due to the Carpathian Convention (see later), now the environmental and natural conservation problems of the Carpathian Mountains are better elaborated. Nevertheless, no common spatial planning document, plan or strategy was prepared so far on the complex economic, social and spatial problems of the Carpathian area as a whole. There are many reasons for that failure. Since 1918, the region was characterised by small state conflicts and rivalries. Even if there were sometimes efforts for coordination and common efforts, great power influence and disinterest brought about their failure.

In the last decade, several Europe-wide spatial documents had been prepared. Among them are the Leipzig Principles of EU member states (1994), the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP, 1999), the Guiding Principles for the Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent (2000), the Community Strategic Guidelines 2007–2013 (2006), and more recently the Territorial Agenda of the European Union and the Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union (both May 2007). Furthermore, there are guidelines for specific European policies, like transport, tourism, water economy, management of cultural and natural heritage, environment, and so on. The principles, guidelines and proposals contained in these documents are fully accepted and followed in the VASICA document. Nevertheless, these European documents do not fully cover the specific spatial development problems of the new member states generally, and those of the Carpathian regions specifically. On the one hand, a part of these documents were prepared before the accession of the Central European countries,

consequently their specific problems were not dealt with. On the other hand, the problems of Carpathian countries and regions were not sufficiently emphasised and dealt with even by the more recent documents, because they are too specific to include them in a Europe-wide document. Such problems as the territorial impacts of mass re-privatisation and de-collectivisation, of neglected city centres, mass poverty and minority problems are unique to the Carpathian and Southeast European countries and could not be fully covered in the All-European documents.

Therefore it has been decided, not to repeat the All-European general strategic principles of sustainable spatial development, however correct and important should they be also for the Carpathian area. The document is dealing first of all with the specific problems of the Carpathian countries and above all with those of the mountainous areas of the region. It means that in order to implement a successful spatial planning and policy in the Carpathian area, one should keep in mind not only specific proposals and recommendations (contained in VASICA), but the general principles and guidelines contained in European documents as well. None of them is sufficient alone.

The Carpathian Convention (Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians), which was adopted and signed by all seven Carpathian countries in Kyiv, in May 2003, was of special importance for drafting the VASICA document. The provisions of the Convention, necessarily, have reference to spatial planning, agriculture, forestry, industry, energy, tourism and cultural heritage as well. It is, at present, the only transnational document, adopted and signed by the respective governments and referring to the whole of the Carpathian area. Therefore, its significance cannot be exaggerated.

The function of the VASICA document is different:

- It is not a document requiring high level official approval;
- It is not a comprehensive long term plan or programme for the Carpathian area;
- It is not the all comprising document of the Carpathian project (though many contributions by other project partners are considered, some of them even included into the document) VASICA is only one of the only deliverable documents, prepared in the framework of the Carpathian Project, but it plays undoubtedly a specific role among the deliverables;
- It is a conceptual document based on a social-economic analysis, which is exploring some development opportunities in the Carpathian area and sets some priorities for development actions
- It is focusing on those problems and tasks which are specific to the Carpathian area.

There are different levels of Carpathian area addressed in the document. The first one is the proper mountain area with minimum elevation of 600 m and mini-

mum slope of 20°. The second one is the fore-land, or the foot of the mountains which are in direct connection to the mountainous area, and where a large part of the services, serving the mountain population are located. The third level is the wider region, including the NUTS3 (in Ukraine NUTS2) level administrative units to which the mountainous areas belong. Most of the statistical data and analyses refer to these latter units. This is a rather large area of 446 km² and 53–54 million inhabitants. Its role in the document is justified by several reasons. The first one is that a substantial part of necessary data is available only for this level of territorial units. The second one is that if recommendations and proposals are to be implemented, the responsible authorities, who can implement them, are acting on these levels. Finally, the third one is that the economic, social, transport, educational and even environmental problems of mountain areas can be solved only in this wider spatial context.

The VASICA document has 13 chapters: 1. Introduction, 2. The Carpathians in the European space, 3. Brief review of the situation and SWOT analysis, 4. Strategic objectives, 5. Demography, 6. Agriculture and Forestry, 7. Mining and Manufacturing, 8. Urban Network, 9. Cultural and Natural Heritage, 10. Transport, 11. Environment, 12. Tourism, 13. European Territorial Cooperation. With the exception of the first five, all chapters consist of two parts: the first part is the presentation of the problems; the second part contains the policy recommendations and proposals for actions.

During the preparation of VASICA the GIS databases and appropriate technologies were used to provide VASICA with maps and other cartographical materials, which were published on the Carpathian Geoportal¹. Interactive maps of development issues for the entire Carpathian transnational region (at a scale of 1:2,000,000) have been prepared jointly for the whole area. The document takes into account the joint development potentials for cross border areas.

At present, most of the Carpathian countries are reaping the first benefits of their accession to the EU. In this way, there is an opportunity for faster technical and socio-economic stabilisation and better development potentials for the transnational region. This must bring about a change in goals and strategies for development, which change would shift the transnational region from the role of a peripheral area to a much more engaged one. The benefits of this changed strategy should help in particular the decision-making processes of national and regional administrations. VASICA should help coordinate actions, especially those regarding cross-border areas. Benefits are also expected in the form of intensified international cooperation at multilateral and bilateral levels.

¹ www.carpathianproject.eu