

**Europe / North America**

# **Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region**

**(proposed minor boundary modification)**

**Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

## WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

### NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE OHRID REGION (THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA) – ID No. 99

IUCN carried out a desk review of the proposed modification to the boundary of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region (The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) taking into consideration comments from three external reviewers.

#### 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The property was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979 under natural criterion (vii). The property was extended in 1980 and cultural criteria (i), (iii) and (iv) were added: thus the property which was initially inscribed as a natural property is now inscribed as a mixed property. No buffer zone was identified at the time of the original inscription or the renomination.

At its 32<sup>nd</sup> Session (Québec City, 2008), the World Heritage Committee considered a proposal from the State Party for a reduction in the surface area of the property. Following evaluation, ICOMOS considered that this minor boundary modification was acceptable, but IUCN did not consider that it was justified without further consideration. The World Heritage Committee decided in decision 32 COM 8B.49 to refer the minor boundary modification back to the State Party for reconsideration. Following the IUCN evaluation, the Committee requested the State Party to consider realigning the boundary of the property, preferably along topographic or other features recognisable in the field, to include all of Galičica National Park and other critical areas, and to create an appropriate buffer zone to protect the catchment of Lake Ohrid.

The State Party submitted a revised proposal for a minor boundary modification to the World Heritage Centre in January 2009, which was received by IUCN on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2009. The new proposal included a revised topographic map showing the boundaries of the World Heritage property and the proposed modification, together with a range of supplementary information and an explanatory letter. However a number of points were not clear from this revised submission, including that no information was provided on the surface area change entailed by the proposed modification. IUCN transmitted a number of questions where additional information was required from the State Party to the World Heritage Centre on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2009.

On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2009, the World Heritage Centre wrote to the State Party to request supplementary information in relation to IUCN's request, and further information was received from the State Party and transmitted to IUCN on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2009. This information

clarified the explanation of the justification for the proposed modification, included improved maps and provided additional information on the natural values within the proposed area to be added to the property.

This process illustrates that there are a number of points regarding the process of consideration of minor boundary modifications which could be improved. These issues should partly be addressed by the adoption of a revised and standard format for the submission of information in support of a minor boundary modification. This has been prepared by the World Heritage Centre in conjunction with the Advisory Bodies, and it is proposed that this will be included as a new annex to the *Operational Guidelines*. IUCN considers that the provisions of paragraph 148(h) of the *Operational Guidelines* should be strictly applied in the case of evaluations of new nominations and extensions, however there is a need to consider the correct process in relation to the submission of minor boundary modifications, to ensure that there is opportunity for some dialogue with the State Party in cases where the initial submission is not clear. This is necessary in order to avoid repeated and unnecessary referral of such proposals. IUCN is grateful for the rapid response of the State Party to the eventual request for supplementary information in this case.

#### 2. SHORT SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

In its revised proposal the State Party again proposes to reduce the overall terrestrial surface area of the property along the northern, north-western and north-eastern boundary of the property. However unlike the previous submission the proposal includes the addition of areas, including parts of Galičica National Park along the south-eastern boundary of the property (where previously small extensions and reductions were proposed). The revised proposal will still retain a boundary that cuts through Galičica National Park, although the level of this issue is reduced, and it also appears to create a boundary that is better related to natural features. As with the previous proposal, no changes are proposed to the section of the boundary that cuts through the middle of Lake Ohrid,

which coincides with the border between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania. The proposal does not appear to consider the need for a buffer zone for the property.

The proposal will result, according to the supplementary information provided by the State Party, in a change of area from 84,040 ha for the currently inscribed property, to 83,350 ha for the area enclosed by the proposed modified boundary. This represents a small overall reduction in size of the property (in relation to its natural values) of 690 ha or c.0.8%, a figure that is much less than the estimated reduction proposed in the previous suggested modification.

### 3. IMPLICATIONS FOR OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE AND INTEGRITY

The State Party suggests that the addition to the boundary in the south and east sides contributes to the protection of biodiversity and geodiversity in this region, including in relation to values for flora, karst and glacial features. A short summary of key biological values in the area to be added to the property is annexed to the supplementary information provided by the State Party and makes reference to values recognised in national and international systems for assessing conservation priorities. The State Party also asserts that there are no areas of significant natural values in the areas proposed for exclusion from the property in its northern part. Based on input from reviewers, IUCN considers that the extension would appear to enhance slightly the natural values of the property, and unlike in the previous proposal, there is a compensation for reduction in the exclusion of areas to the north of the property by the addition of areas that lie within **Galičica National Park**. The fact that the additional areas are already within the competence of the National Park also suggests that there will be no impact regarding the manageability of the property. Thus taken on its own terms, IUCN considers that the proposed extension has a neutral to slightly positive impact on the Outstanding Universal Value and Integrity of the existing inscribed property, in relation to natural values.

The proposal does not make a significant contribution to addressing the wider integrity issues related to the property. In its technical evaluation of the property in 1979, IUCN noted concerns that the original boundary of the property does not meet the conditions of integrity required of natural World Heritage properties, as only the Macedonian (former Yugoslav) part of Lake Ohrid and a small part of its watershed are included. The proposed revised boundary does not address these issues. The significant concern remains that the World Heritage property only covers the Macedonian part of Lake Ohrid, missing out on the Albanian part. Nor does the proposal consider the buffering of the

property, including the related hydrological links in the subterranean karst systems.

The State Party does, however, report a number of points of progress in regard to these broader issues. A **negotiation procedure between the parties** has been initiated at the fourth regular meeting of the Bilateral Ohrid Lake Committee, and a bilateral meeting was scheduled between the respective Ministries of Environment for 6 February 2009 in Ohrid. The **State Party indicates its willingness to give full support, including expert and technical support, to the preparation of the file for the Albanian part to be included in the World Heritage List.** IUCN is also ready to provide advice to assist this process if required.

The State Party notes the preparation of a Management Plan for the Natural and Cultural Heritage of Ohrid Region has been initiated, through a workshop held in Ohrid in **October 2008**. In the **44<sup>th</sup>** Session of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia held on 2 January 2009, an **action plan for the preparation of this plan** was defined, and the competent ministries have been **requested to establish working teams** for the preparation of the management plan. It is anticipated that a draft version of the Management Plan will be prepared and submitted to the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies for review by the end of 2009, and prior to its adoption.

Finally, the State Party requested assistance in legal aspects of the protection of the property. IUCN was pleased to put the State Party in contact with an expert on protected areas law within the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law to assist their consideration of the relevant issues.

In summary, IUCN does not consider that the proposed modification addresses the long standing issues relating to the integrity of the property in relation to natural values. However as the proposal appears to have a neutral or slightly positive impact on the natural values and integrity of the property, IUCN therefore considers that the boundary modification can be approved, on the assumption that ICOMOS remain supportive in relation to cultural aspects of the property. **However, IUCN continues to encourage the States Parties of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania to consider a new nomination for a transboundary extension of the property to include the Albanian part of Lake Ohrid and its watershed, in order to strengthen the values and integrity of the property.** In this regard the continued dialogue between the two relevant States Parties is be welcomed. It is also positive that the management plan for the property is being reviewed.

#### 4. RECOMMENDATION

IUCN recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopt the following decision:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents WHC-09/33.COM/8B, WHC-09/33.COM/INF.8B1 and WHC-09/33.COM/INF.8B2,
2. Approves the proposed modification to the boundary of the **Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**;
3. Encourages the States Parties of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania to cooperate towards the preparation of a new nomination for a transboundary extension of the property, to include the Albanian part of Lake Ohrid and its watershed, in order to strengthen the values and integrity of the property.

**Map 1: Existing and proposed boundaries of property.**

