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24 January 2017

IUCN Evaluation of Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe – Nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List

Progress report of IUCN evaluation

Dear Ambassador,

Further to the above nomination to the World Heritage List, I am writing with information on progress with the IUCN evaluation. As noted in previous correspondence, IUCN seeks to develop and maintain a dialogue with States Parties during the evaluation process of all nominations. As per the Operational Guidelines (paragraph 149 and Annex 6 - *Evaluation procedures of the Advisory Bodies for nomination*), this letter also provides the short interim report outlining the status and any issues relevant to evaluations, which is requested to be sent by IUCN before 31 January 2017.

The five IUCN World Heritage technical evaluation missions to Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe were undertaken as follows:

Route 1: Spain and Belgium, from 28 September to 4 October 2016, by Ms Josephine Langley

Route 2: Italy, from 2-9 October 2016, by Ms Lu Zhi

Route 3: Austria, Slovenia and Croatia, from 4-11 October 2016, by Mr David Mihalic

Route 4: Albania and Bulgaria, from 1-9 October 2016 by Mrs Elena Osipova

Route 5: Romania and Ukraine, from 26 September to 5 October 2016, by Ms Kumiko Yoneda

All of IUCN's evaluators greatly appreciated the excellent support and co-operation provided by your colleagues in the preparation and implementation of the mission to your components of the nominated property, and the kind welcome of the State Parties throughout. Please convey our sincere thanks to all of the officials, scientists and contributors that assisted the missions.

The IUCN World Heritage Panel is in the course of examining World Heritage nominations for natural and mixed properties, and cultural landscapes. This process will conclude in March/April 2017, following which the IUCN evaluation report will be issued to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. At its first meeting held in the week of 5 December 2016, the IUCN Panel examined in detail each nomination dossier, reports and desktop reviews of field evaluators and external reviewers, as well as other references regarding the nominated properties.

The Panel took note of the extensive efforts that have been made in relation to this nomination, as well as the past requests of the World Heritage Committee. The Panel has noted several points that will require further consideration by the World Heritage Committee. There are no further specific written questions where further information is required at this point in time. However, the IUCN Panel will be continuing to study this file and will consider and finalise its view at its second meeting in March 2017. We would however like to provide the following feedback and seek further dialogue with the State Parties on these more fundamental matters.

Conceptually the IUCN Panel understood the rationale of the transnational serial extension as ensuring a site which "represents the history and evolution of the European beech and its forests as a prominent example of the post glacial evolution and on-going biological and ecological processes of a main terrestrial ecosystem, which has shaped an entire continent" (as quoted from the series of preparatory technical workshops). The Panel therefore considers that the eventual serial property should be one which provides for ongoing dynamic evolutionary processes consistent with criterion (ix) and not simply a collection of remnant forest areas which lack the ecological development viability to retain the stated Outstanding Universal Value. The Panel also noted the trend with progressive extensions to this serial site of smaller components and corresponding buffer zones. In this context, the Panel wishes to understand better the buffering arrangements which are proposed for the property's components and which will be critical to ensure resilience to threats and thus viability.

The Panel also wishes to clarify the question of what will constitute a finite series of components consistent with past Committee decisions. Despite statements in the nomination dossier to the effect that the "whole spectrum of the European beech forests can (now) be unified in one World Heritage Site", it is clear that there are areas that are not included in the series in other countries that would need consideration to define what a finite series would include. In this regard the nomination does not appear to be fully responding to the past requests of the Committee. Regarding the component selection, more analysis is also needed to the approach regarding replication of forest values within the clusters and individual components within the series.

The Panel's view was that a number of the nominated components do not pass the standards for inclusion in a serial World Heritage Site, on grounds of values, integrity and/or protection and management. However, at this stage, and given the site selection process undertaken over several years, the Panel considered it inappropriate to "pick and choose" components within the series to include, exclude or modify. The Panel instead considers these matters need to be further reflected upon and clarified by the nominating and other States Parties.

Specifically, IUCN considers that the following matters require further reflection and clarification:

- The need to better understand the protection context of each component and its buffer zone. Maps would be helpful to show the overlap of each component and cluster plus their World Heritage buffer zones within larger protected areas and in relation to the wider zoning systems in those protected areas.
- The feasibility and interest of States Parties in simplifying where possible the proposed World Heritage buffer zones: for example, in some cases by the amalgamation of individual component buffer zones or alignment with existing protected area zoning systems.
- Additional information on how the proposed World Heritage buffer zones surrounding components will operate in practice. How will they ensure the mitigation of potential surrounding threats to safeguard the integrity of the nominated components and ensure there is room for the continued evolutionary development of relevant forest values?

The Panel also noted a range of concerns regarding the long-term effective management of such a large series, which is clearly an unprecedented undertaking. The questions that will need to be considered include:

- How effective coordination will be achieved across the transnational serial property including how the anticipated Integrated Management System will be operationalized.
- More explicit information on the proposals to establish an effective property-wide management scheme, and ongoing management process.
- Measures to guarantee adequate and stable funding for the long term, which is essential for the coordination and cooperation required between all the participating State Parties.
- A reflection on how the existing site integrates with the nomination, and including consideration of the existing and current State of Conservation issues that are being considered by the World Heritage Committee.

The Panel was firmly of the view that the range and scope of issues raised extend beyond the timelines for the statutory deadline for supplementary information (28th February 2017) and believes at this point in time a process of deeper dialogue would appear to be required, before a more precise set of requests could be made across many components within this complex serial nomination.

In the interest of ensuring full transparency and dialogue regarding the IUCN evaluation process, we are happy to respond to any questions you may wish to raise regarding IUCN's work on the World Heritage Convention, including the above points. Given the complexity of this transnational serial extension we consider that a face-to-face dialogue would be a more constructive way to exchange on the issues raised by our Panel. I am traveling to Paris on a regular basis and could be available to meet if this would be helpful, or would be pleased to organise a meeting via skype or conference call as an alternative. I would also emphasise that both you or your representatives, and/or a delegation of the State Party experts are also most welcome to visit IUCN's headquarters in Switzerland to meet in person if you wish, on this nomination, or on any other matter of interest.

Please do not hesitate to contact Ms Christelle Perruchoud, World Heritage Evaluations and Operations Officer (Tel: +41 22 999 0358; Fax: +41 22 999 0002; email: christelle.perruchoud@iucn.org) if you have any questions regarding this request, or if you would wish to arrange a meeting or phone call to discuss this request.

Please allow me to reiterate our thanks for your support of the World Heritage Convention and for the conduct of IUCN's recent mission. We look forward to further discussions of the above mentioned points.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'T' and 'B' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Tim Badman
Director - World Heritage Programme

Cc. Austrian Commission for UNESCO, Ms Gabriele Eschig, Secretary-General
Mrs Hasler, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management of Austria
UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Mrs Isabelle Anatole-Gabriel and Mr Alessandro Balsamo
IUCN European Regional Office, Mr Luc Bas, Director
9 other nominating State parties, as per attached list
3 existing State parties

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