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Office fédéral de l'environnement OFEV  
Mr Carlo Ossola  
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29 January 2021

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

Dear Mr Ossola,

First of all, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the authorities of all ten States Parties and to E.C.O. for having provided IUCN with substantive supplementary information so promptly in response to our letter of 12 January 2021.

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 nominations'), 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 2020.

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 2021, following which the IUCN evaluation report will be issued to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. At its extraordinary meeting held on 18 and 22 January 2021, the IUCN Panel examined in detail above-mentioned nomination, including reports of field evaluators and desktop reviews of external reviewers, as well as other references regarding the nominated properties. They also examined the extensive supplementary information received via email on 15 January 2021, noting that this provides a large amount of detailed information to be considered in the final evaluation.

The Panel greatly appreciated the efforts that have been made in relation to this nomination, and will be discussing the nomination again at its second meeting, to be held in March 2021. Reviewing the 37 component parts contained in this nomination, the Panel notes there is a wide variability across the nominated component parts in terms of their values, integrity, protection and management arrangements and boundary design, and wishes to clarify a number of points regarding the serial approach as a whole, and points specific to the nominated component parts as set out below.

1. **Selection of component parts:** IUCN notes that the "Vienna shortlist" has undergone significant changes since 2016 and would appreciate if the States Parties could explain in more detail why thirteen additional areas have been added to the Vienna Shortlist and why one area has been replaced. Please also provide explanations for any sites that have previously not been included on the Longlist presented in supplementary information to the 2016 nomination, regarding the reason they are now considered suitable for inclusion in the series.

IUCN further recalls that the States Parties of the existing property noted, in 2017, that *"the European screening process conducted by the scientific panel of Beech Forest Specialists has come to the conclusion that there are NO large natural beech forests left in the Atlantic region. Neither in UK nor in FR sites have been suitable for extension"* (see document WHC/17/41.COM/INF.8B4), including specific comment by the States Parties on Fontainebleau. Following this reasoning, IUCN would be grateful if the States Parties could clarify why further component parts from the Atlantic Beech Forest

Region have been added to the Vienna Shortlist and to the present nomination. Please also provide details on the scientific criteria for inclusion on the Vienna Shortlist compared to 2016.

2. **Buffer zones:** IUCN notes that buffer zones, and the extent of strictly protected areas therein, vary significantly in size and design across the ten nominating States Parties, including cases where the zones of strict protection are very narrow. Whilst the nomination file envisages enhanced connectivity and a reduction of impactful activities, including logging, in the landscape conservation sub-zone, recommendations on land use in the nomination file indicate that almost all considered activities (including clear-cuts and shelterwood cuts up to one hectare) are permitted in the landscape conservation sub-zone. The Panel considers that this relative lack of restrictions could be of serious concern for the future state of conservation of the nominated component parts.  
Could the States Parties please indicate their commitment (or willingness to make commitments) to modifying the set of permitted activities in buffer zones, with the aim of strengthening the protection regime in the landscape conservation sub-zone to support undisturbed natural processes, including (but not limited to) extractive forestry operations?
3. **EU policy:** The Panel noted that the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (COM/2020/380) endorsed by the Council of the European Union on 16 October 2020, includes a commitment to strictly protect all primary and old-growth forests in Europe.  
Please would the States Parties involved in the nomination, and to which the EU Biodiversity Strategy applies, indicate whether it implies any amendments in relation to the conservation and management of the nominated property and its buffer zones?

#### **France:**

4. The nominated component part of Fontainebleau is located in proximity to the cultural World Heritage property "Palace and Park of Fontainebleau", and contains forests that demonstrate a history of use that appears to directly and indirectly relate to this existing property. The IUCN mission further understood that consideration is being given, at least locally, to the possibilities of extensions to the existing property to include the wider associated forest landscape.  
Could the State Party of France please clarify the status of possible discussions in this regard, the relationship of the values of this component part to the existing World Heritage property, and the approach regarding the protection of the cultural values in the nominated component part and in relation to its stated values within the nomination?
5. The supplementary information submitted on 15 January 2021 includes proposals to change the boundaries of the nominated component parts of Grand Ventron, Massane (increased areas) and Py-Pas de Rotja (decreased area).  
If the States Parties wish to proceed with a definitive adjustment to the boundaries of the component parts included in the nomination, please provide a complete and updated explanation of the intention and rationale regarding each of these potential modifications of the nomination? Please also submit maps of the proposed revised component part and buffer zone boundaries with the mapping in conformity with the Operational Guidelines and in line with the nomination file.

#### **North Macedonia:**

6. IUCN takes note of the confirmation by the State Party of North Macedonia that there are no plans for hydropower plants in the valley of the Dlaboka Reka nominated component part. As the Panel considers that any type of hydropower infrastructure in the valley could be of serious concern, could the State Party of North Macedonia please also confirm that there is no possibility for the construction of water pipelines inside or near the component part, including its buffer zone?
7. IUCN further notes that the Dlaboka Reka nominated component part and its buffer zone overlap not only with the strict management zone but also with the active management zone, and has taken note of the respective regulations.  
Could the State Party of North Macedonia please confirm if the entire Dlaboka Reka nominated component part is subject to a non-intervention regime and clarify which activities may be conducted specifically inside this nominated component part and buffer zone?

#### **Republic of Serbia:**

8. Following supplementary information provided on 15 January 2021, IUCN notes that forestry interventions and/or timber extraction are not possible within the nominated component parts of the State Party of the Republic of Serbia. However, IUCN understands that, partly supported through the new forest road in Tara National Park, logging is planned in the landscape conservation buffer zone and, prior to potential inscription, is still possible in some areas adjacent to the boundary of the nominated component parts located in Tara National Park.

Could the State Party of the Republic of Serbia please indicate the maximum frequency and extent of logging that could be legally possible in the buffer zones of all nominated component parts in the Republic of Serbia, including the type and size (in ha) of any such intervention? Could the State Party of the Republic of Serbia also indicate its willingness or commitment to minimise or completely phase-out logging in the entire buffer zones of the nominated component parts in the Republic of Serbia?

#### **Slovakia:**

9. Following supplementary information provided on 15 January 2021, IUCN understands that the integrated management plan detailing the management regime of the component parts in Slovakia is still under preparation.  
Could the State Party of Slovakia please submit the draft of the integrated management plan, or, in case the draft is not yet available, outline the key management provisions of the integrated management plan and timelines for completion?
10. IUCN notes that the complete protection of the proposed revised component parts in Slovakia is still pending approval as also noted in the January 2021 update of the State Party report on the state of conservation of the existing World Heritage property.  
Could the State Party of Slovakia please officially confirm and unequivocally commit to the strict protection (non-intervention regime) of the nominated component parts in their entirety? Please also provide a map detailing the protection levels within the nominated component parts and buffer zones applicable as of 28 February 2021.

#### **Switzerland:**

11. The IUCN Panel has expressed its concern regarding the windfarm planned in the immediate vicinity of the nominated Bettlachstock component part and its impact on the integrity of the site. Could the State Party of Switzerland please confirm whether the wind farm planned in the direct vicinity of the nominated component part could be relocated and whether the buffer zone could be expanded westwards in order to be consistent with the other sections of the buffer zone?
12. The IUCN Panel also expressed its concern regarding the power line planned through Valle Maggia and its potential impact on the integrity of the nominated component part Valli di Lodano, Busai and Soladino Forest Reserves. Could the State Party of Switzerland please officially confirm that the power line planned in the Valle Maggia will be routed underground and outside of the nominated component part and buffer zone?

We would appreciate your response to the above points as soon as possible, in order to facilitate the evaluation process, but **no later than 28 February 2021**, as per paragraph 148 of the Operational Guidelines. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by IUCN in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while IUCN will carefully consider any supplementary information submitted, it cannot properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or large amounts of new information submitted at the last minute. So we request to keep your response concise and respond only to the above requests.

**Supplementary information should also be submitted officially in two copies to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in order for it to be registered as part of the nomination.** An electronic copy of all completed and submitted supplementary information to both the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Mr Alessandro Balsamo ([a.balsamo@unesco.org](mailto:a.balsamo@unesco.org)) and IUCN Headquarters, Mr Clemens Küpper ([clemens.kupper@iucn.org](mailto:clemens.kupper@iucn.org)) would also be greatly appreciated.

Taking into account your response, IUCN will formulate its final recommendation to the World Heritage Committee, which will meet in June/July 2021 in Fuzhou, China.

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. We would be pleased to organise a meeting via conference call.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mr Clemens Küpper, Evaluations & Operations Officer ([clemens.kupper@iucn.org](mailto:clemens.kupper@iucn.org)) if you have any questions regarding this request, or if you would wish to arrange a conference 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 thank you for your cooperation in providing this very important information, which will facilitate the Panel in making its recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to be 'TB', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Tim Badman  
Director - World Heritage Programme

cc. Commission suisse pour l'UNESCO, Mr Nicolas MATHIEU, Secretary-General  
9 other nominating States Parties as per attached list and 12 other States Parties of the existing World Heritage property  
UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Mrs Isabelle Anatole-Gabriel and Mr Alessandro Balsamo  
IUCN European Regional Office, Mr Luc Bas, Director  
IUCN Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Mr Boris Erg, Director

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