The programme of work on mountain biological diversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recommends establishing new transboundary protected areas with the objective to enhance conservation of biological diversity, implement the ecosystem approach, and improve international cooperation.

The feasibility study by UNEP-Vienna on the potential for establishing a transboundary protected area in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region

- Provides a brief overview on the local context for transboundary cooperation, natural values and protected areas;
- Describes the state of the environment and potential threats, legal and administrative frameworks for the development and improving the connectivity and continuity of protected area networks in the region;
- Identifies priorities for biodiversity conservation and international cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area.

The objective of this study is to:

- Provide for better understanding of the situation across the border in the region, and identify possible added values of transboundary cooperation;
- Analyse and evaluate the current status of transboundary initiatives, identify current shortcomings and impediments for cooperation, and recommend actions aimed at facilitating transboundary cooperation;
- Assess the potential for success under the local conditions;
- Indicate what kind of external support is indispensable for the success of this initiative.

The label of a transboundary protected area of exceptional natural values and sustainable tourism development would increase the tourist attractiveness of the region, facilitate marketing of the regional tourist product abroad, and help to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative stereotypes resulting from the past armed ethnic conflict.
FEASIBILITY STUDY
ON ESTABLISHING A TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREA

PROKLETIJE / BJESHKËT E NEMUNA MOUNTAINS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area expected to involve Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Montenegro and Serbia is one of the three “priority areas in focus” of the ENVSEC-SEE project, identified during the 1st sub-regional meeting organised by UNEP in June 2006 in Podgorica.

The Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains encompass areas of unique landscape and are one of the most important regions for the protection of biodiversity in the Balkans and the whole Europe. Their name (in English: cursed mountains) best describes the character of this region, considered to be the most inaccessible mountain range in Europe and the wildest range on the Balkan Peninsula, with extremely harsh mountain environment providing for the extremely hard living conditions for their inhabitants. The highest peaks are Maja Jezercë (2694 m) in Albania and Đeravica/Gjeravica (2656 m) on the territory of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. Zla Kolata (2534 m), Dobra Kolata (2528 m) and Rosni Vrh (2525 m) in Prokletije Mountains are the three highest peaks of Montenegro. The number of glacial ponds in this area is rare for the European mainland and can only be compared to the Alps.

The natural values of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains include the diversity of alpine and sub-alpine mountain habitats, alpine meadows and pastures with species rich vegetation, and large forest complexes including primeval treestands of the endemic Balkan pine and Bosnian pine. The region is the mainstay for a large number of fauna species, which includes endangered species of the common European importance, like the brown bear, wolf and Balkan lynx, having their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state border. These unique values should be taken into account when deciding on the future of this region and protecting its natural treasures for the next generations.

In addition to the natural and landscape values the mountain region of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna harbours important cultural and historical heritage sites, like the monastery of Visoki Dečani (built in 1327-1335) designated in 2004 as the UNESCO World Heritage Site, or the 13th century Patriarchate of Peć. In several remote areas of Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains the traditional “kulla” (in English: “tower”) family stone houses dating back to the times of the Ottoman Empire can still be found.

During the last decades human impact and pressures on environment and biodiversity of the region has significantly increased. Moreover, the recent wars and armed ethnic conflicts in this region, in particular the war in Kosovo in 1999 resulted in the situation when the control by the state inspections in the remote mountain border areas became either impossible or ineffective for several years. As a consequence of the above situation – different illegal activities boosted at that time in the border areas of the region, which included poaching on wildlife and illegal fishing,
illegal timber felling, overuse of medicinal plant species and uncontrolled land development, with adverse effects on the biodiversity of the region.

Furthermore, the discontinuation of traditional land use practices in previously inhabited and cultivated mountain areas is directly resulting not only from the general demographic trends, but also from the continuous presence of landmines in the border areas of the Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains, excluding such areas from either economic use of nature management. The natural forest succession to non-cultivated post-agricultural areas would further decrease the landscape diversity, limit the suitable hunting areas for several birds of prey and decrease grazing areas for the hoofed animals being prey to large carnivore species, which may additionally threaten the viability of the populations of species of the common European importance also in this region.

Last, but not least, techniques used for landmines removal often result in land degradation and deforestation, while vast areas on the Albanian side which served as location of refugee camps already turned into polluted wastelands. Thus, the adverse effects of the armed ethnic conflict which ended ten years ago remain visible in Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains until today.

One of the major threats to habitats and species populations and main causes of the decline in biological diversity in Europe is the fragmentation and isolation of habitats and the effect this can have on the viability of species populations. The favourable conservation status of different species and natural habitats depends on the size of protected areas. Migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species depends on the existence of ecological corridors linking particular protected areas of different protective categories designated at national level. The continuity and connectivity of habitats in the border areas requires transboundary linkages, ecological corridors which link protected area networks of neighbouring countries.

Establishing large-scale transboundary protected areas seems to be a feasible solution for the relatively small South Eastern European countries. Such transboundary protected areas represent a commitment of two or more countries to common management of their frontier regions and shared ecosystems, help to reduce possible tensions and are a symbol of peace with great political visibility.

In the light of their expected accession to the European Community in the future - involved countries are proceeding with the harmonization of their nature protection standards with the EU. The presence of habitats and species listed under relevant Annexes to the Council Directive 92/43/EEC (“Habitats Directive”) whose protection in the Member States of the European Community requires the designation of special areas of conservation constituting the Natura 2000 network, and bird species listed under Annex I to Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds (“Birds Directive”) should be a decisive argument for the extension
of existing and designation of new protected areas in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Montenegro and Serbia, in the proposed transboundary protected area.

The mountain range of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains forms the natural ecological corridor connecting the whole region, but at present the integrity and continuity of habitats stretching across the state borders or corridors allowing migrations of fauna species is not yet ensured. However, there are several recent governmental initiatives on all three sides of the state borders, additionally confirmed by official statements of commitment during the CBD COP9 in May 2008, which could change the present situation and provide for the enhanced ecological connectivity and continuity of protected area network in this region.

In August 2009 part of the Montenegrin side of the region became protected due to the designation of Prokletije National Park. The Albanian Government plans to connect the three existing protected areas through the designation of a large-scale “Alps National Park” in 2010-2011. The new proposal for the designation of Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is currently being elaborated and prepared for consultations. Moreover, there are plans for the designation of other three new protected areas in the border areas of Montenegro: Regional Parks “Komovi Mts.,” “Turjak - Hajla Mts.” and “Vistitor and Zeletin Mts.”, each adjacent to one of the planned national parks, thus suitable for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area “Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains”.

According to the best possible scenario the ecological continuity and connectivity of landscapes and habitats in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains would be ensured in the whole region, linked through the possible ‘SEE northern ecological corridor’ - a tract of protected areas stretching from Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains across the territory of Montenegro into Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area can involve as many as six protected areas (three national parks of IUCN Category II and three regional parks of IUCN Category V) and encompass the total territory up to some 205’174 ha, which will then make it the one of the largest protected areas in the South Eastern Europe.

Moreover, Serbia planned the designation of the neighbouring Mokra Gora (2155 m) mountain range as protected landscape area adjacent to the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park, thus suitable for inclusion into the proposed transboundary protected area.

The rural depopulation resulting in abandonment of traditional land-use practices in the region is a common challenge for the further sustainability of the local economy in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e
Nemuna Mountains. Sustainable tourism development in the region could bring new employment opportunities and new sources of income, thus mitigating the economic reasons for the current exodus of mountain populations.

The label of a ‘transboundary protected area of exceptional natural values’ as well as ‘one the largest protected area in South-Eastern Europe’ could provide for the ‘unique selling point’ for sustainable nature-based tourism development, increase the tourist attractiveness of the region, facilitate the broad recognition of the region and marketing of the regional tourist product abroad, and help to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative stereotypes still common among some Europeans, resulting from the past armed ethnic conflicts.

Due to the fact that the main tourist attractions of this transboundary region are the exceptional landscape and natural values of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains – the development of sustainable tourism in the region would require close cooperation of the tourist services providers with the authorities of the protected areas in the region.

The added value and possible benefits for all involved countries deriving from the establishment of the proposed transboundary protected area are that the trilateral or even quadrilateral transboundary cooperation in this region would largely facilitate:

- Achievement of their nature protection and biodiversity conservation objectives,
- Mitigation of the present threats to environment and nature of the shared region,
- Promotion and implementation of sustainable development at local and regional level,
- Establishing a long term transboundary cooperation mechanism serving the local stakeholders.

The following feasibility study by UNEP-Vienna provides a brief overview on the local transboundary context for cooperation in the region, e.g. border context, socio-economic context, the state of the environment of the region and potential threats.

Further the study describes existing legal and administrative frameworks and compares the development of protected area networks in particular countries, provides a brief overview of the natural values and protected areas of the region, and initiatives aimed at improving the connectivity and continuity of protected area network.

Finally, the study suggests priorities for biodiversity conservation and transboundary cooperation in the region, and concludes with the analysis of different opportunities and challenges for transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”.
The programme of work on protected areas under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recommends to “strengthen existing and establish new TBPAs (transboundary protected areas) to enhance conservation of biological diversity, implement the ecosystem approach, and improve international cooperation”, and in particular to “enter into dialogue to establish, where appropriate, new TBPAs with adjacent Parties and countries, bearing in mind the ecosystem approach and the importance of ecological networks”.

The CBD work programme on mountains calls

- To establish regional and transboundary collaboration and the establishment of cooperative agreements for mountain ranges,
- To promote the appreciation and conservation of mountain biological diversity as a means of reducing human conflict, i.e., through peace parks.
- To promote integrated transboundary cooperation, strategies for sustainable activities on mountain ranges through mutually agreed-upon arrangements by countries concerned.
- To promote and strengthen regional and transboundary cooperation for research, adaptive management, fair and appropriate allocation of water to ecosystems, and exchange of expertise to improve the conservation and management of mountain biodiversity.

Europe, and in particular its Balkan region is characterised by many borders that cut across ecosystems and areas of high natural values, often dividing the continent along natural barriers like mountain ranges. Border areas are often the most favoured regions in biodiversity terms, partly as a result of their peripheral location or political factors banning in the past the development of areas adjacent to political borders.

However, natural areas shared by neighbouring countries are not only a common treasure, but also a common responsibility. Ecological problems occurring in border areas can not be solved by one country alone, and require transboundary and regional cooperation.

Since 2005, UNEP Vienna is coordinating the project entitled “Improving regional cooperation for risk management from pollution hotspots as well as the transboundary management of shared natural resources” supported by ADA (the Austrian Development Agency) and the Canadian Development Agency (CIDA), as a contribution to the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative.

The ENVSEC Initiative founded in 2003 is a partnership between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) and the associated North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
The ENVSEC programme area in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, which have been directly or indirectly involved in the ethnic conflicts that escalated in the past ten and more years in the Balkan region.

These war-torn nations, where ethnic tensions still exist, have been also subject to economic crises as a result of their isolation from the global economy and the impacts of the transition from socialist economic policies to free market economies. Simultaneously biodiversity loss was recognised as posing additional security risk in South East Europe, whereas good technical cooperation in the field of natural resource management would contribute to stability and prosperity of the region.

Protecting larger parts of the most important ecosystems and habitats, and in particular viable populations of its wildlife is possible only in ‘large-scale’ (as for Europe) protected areas of around 100 thousand hectares in size, while smaller areas are rather suitable only for protection of e.g. landscape phenomena or a single threatened plant species. Currently in the ENVSEC-SEE programme area there are only eleven national parks exceeding the size of 10 thousand hectares and only one nature park exceeding 100 thousand hectares.

Designation of a large-scale new protected area by one country alone is often not feasible, while concerted efforts of two or more partners may result in a spectacular success for biodiversity protection at the regional and European levels.

This is why establishing large-scale transboundary protected areas seems to be a solution more acceptable from the point of view of the state budgets of particular countries of the South Eastern Europe.

Such areas represent a commitment of two or more countries to common management of their frontier regions and shared ecosystems. Moreover, transboundary protected areas help to reduce possible tensions and are a symbol of peace with great political visibility. Transboundary protected areas (TB-PAs) provide for the ecological continuum beyond these virtual political boundaries and a tool for international cooperation.

As stressed by the IUCN: “Natural systems that straddle political boundaries can be most effectively managed as functional units at the scale of the regional landscape and would therefore benefit from appropriate mechanisms for long-term transboundary co-operation. While the establishment of TBPAs for integrated conservation and development can enhance environmental protection, it can also reinforce political security and provide multiple benefits to local communities and indigenous peoples. The existence of TBPAs and their buffer zones can help reduce tensions, rebuild divided communities, promote freedom of movement and create new opportunities for sustainable development, including low-impact regional tourism. Such areas can also make an important contribution to regional biodiversity conservation programmes, especially where they form part of a coherent ecological network. Neighbouring States, which often have different levels of technical expertise, knowledge, capacity and financial resources, can benefit by combining their respective strengths through transboundary co-operation.”
This is why one of the aims of the ENVSEC Initiative in SEE is to encourage and facilitate regional cooperation on nature protection issues, with a particular emphasis on supporting transboundary cooperation and establishing new protected areas in border regions, which could also serve as a tool to mitigate current tensions and re-establish friendly neighbour relations between formerly conflicted nations and ethnic groups.

UNEP under the ENVSEC initiative promotes raising awareness on the common responsibility for the border regions, thus providing for the greater European integration in nature protection and translating the common European vision into practice.

As the first step, a rapid regional assessment of the general state-of-environment, as well as managerial problems experienced by the administrative bodies responsible for the protected areas’ management was carried out in 2005-2006, based on country-specific reports. The resulting regional report “Enhancing Transboundary Biodiversity Management in South Eastern Europe” provides an overview of the biological diversity, protected area system, legal and policy framework, existing and planned institutional structures for nature protection, threats to biological diversity, examples of transboundary cooperation as well as socio-economic factors, and recommendations for actions to be taken in particular countries of the region and for the region as a whole.

During the first regional ENVSEC-SEE workshop “Enhancing Trans-boundary Biodiversity in Mountains of South Eastern Europe” organized by UNEP in Podgorica (Montenegro) in June 2006 representatives of the Governments of the region jointly identified eight potential transboundary protected areas: • Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains (Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Montenegro, Serbia)
• Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Deshat/Dešat (Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, FYR Macedonia)
• Durmitor - Sutjeska (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro)
• Tara Mountains - Drina Gorge (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia)
• West Stara Planina (Bulgaria, Serbia)
• Orjen / Sniježnica (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro)
• Vlahina / Maleševska / Belasica (Bulgaria, Greece, FYR Macedonia)
• Osogovska Planina (Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia).

and selected three of them as “priority areas in focus”, perceived as most urgent from the biodiversity point of view.

One of the “priority areas in focus” identified in June 2006 is the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area expected to involve Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and Montenegro.

During CBD COP9 in May 2008 the Government of the Republic of Albania committed itself to continue to work towards establishment of this transboundary protected area and later prepared the proposal for the designation of “Alps National Park” incorporating three existing protected areas on the Albanian side. Simultaneously the Govern-
Map 2. ENVSEC mountain biodiversity project: potential transboundary protected areas
ment of Montenegro committed itself to support the establishment of Prokletije National Park. Later the ecological assessment of the Prokletije area was carried out, the proposal for designation of the new national park was submitted for consideration by the Parliament of the Republic of Montenegro in spring 2009, and finally Prokletije National Park was designated in August 2009. Furthermore, Montenegro plans the designation of the three regional parks in the region. On the Kosovo (UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) side the proposal for establishing a new national park is currently elaborated.

Should the initiatives on all three sides of the state borders in this region be successful - the proposed “Prokletije / Bëshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area could cover the total area up to some 205'174 ha, thus providing for improved ecological connectivity of the region and adequate conditions for protection of its mountain ecosystems, habitats, and wildlife populations.
In June 2009 within the framework of the ENVSEC Initiative UNEP organized the 2. sub-regional meeting on “Transboundary Cooperation of Mountain Protected Areas in South Eastern Europe: Towards the Dinaric Arc and Balkan Network of Mountain Protected Areas” with the objectives:

- To initiate and enhance exchange of experience gathered under the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions with the stakeholders from the South Eastern European region (SEE);

- To support the initiatives of the Governments towards transboundary conservation of biodiversity in the mountain regions of the SEE, and their commitments expressed during the 9th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP9) in May 2008;

- To foster partnerships on technical cooperation and capacity building for the stakeholders from the SEE;

- To promote, facilitate and encourage the establishment of the sub-regional network of mountain protected areas in the Balkans / Dinaric Arc;
• To identify priority actions which shall be undertaken in proposed transboundary areas in SEE;

• To facilitate synergies and build on projects and activities of the partners of the ENVSEC and Dinaric Arc Initiative (DAI), e.g. UNDP, UNESCO-BRESCE, UNEP, SNV and the WWF Mediterranean;

• To foster working contacts for transboundary and sub-regional cooperation on biodiversity issues in the Balkans / Dinaric Arc.

The objective of this study on the potential for establishment of a proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” is to:

• Provide for better understanding of the situation across the border in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region, and identify possible added values of transboundary cooperation;

• Analyse and evaluate the current status of transboundary initiatives, identify current shortcomings and impediments for cooperation, and recommend actions aimed at facilitating transboundary cooperation;

• Assess the potential for success under the local conditions in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region;

• Indicate what kind of external support is indispensable for the success of this initiative.
Landscape in Thethi National Park, Albania.

© Courtesy of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration of Albania
1.1. Border context

The proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area is located in the border areas of Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. The confluence of the Albanian and Montenegrin state borders with the border of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is at the peak of Mt. Boriqe (2330 m) in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains.

The delineation of the state borders between Albania and the countries neighbouring Albania from the North and East (which later formed the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia – SFRJ) was evolving after the fall of the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan wars, and finally established by the Conference of Ambassadors held 1913 in London, with the participation of Great Britain, France and Russia. However, already in 1915, there were attempts to change the border line, namely the city of Shkodër was attacked by the army of Montenegro. This military conflict was settled by the decisions of the Congress in Lushnja in 1920, and since then this state border between Albania and Montenegro remains stable.

The present demarcation of this border between Albanian and the former SFRJ in the terrain was carried out after the 2nd World War in 1945. In the recent years these borderlines were additionally confirmed, between Albania and Montenegro after the proclamation of independence of Montenegro from Serbia in June 2006, as well as Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 after its proclamation of independence from Serbia in February 2008. Due to the above – the borders between Albania and Montenegro, and between Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 may be perceived as the “old state borders”, established as the result of a historical long-term process, and there are no remaining unresolved claims to land areas or water bodies on either side of the present state border.

Contrary to the above, the current state borders between Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 are to some extent the “new borders”. In the times of e.g. the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia or the federation including Serbia and Montenegro between 2003 and 2006 the administrative border between Serbia and Montenegro (parts of the Federation) also passed along these mountain ridges. The current route of the borderline reflects the outcomes of the census survey carried out in 1953/1954 in the times when both above countries were parts of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ).

The delineation of the border was regulated by the provisions of the SFRJ Law on the Demarcation of Municipal cadastre units, Districts and Republics of 1953/1954 and its subsequent regulations. As this was very much a purely internal administrative and “virtual” border inside the common country, no border infrastructure
was present there, no border regimes existed, and local populations paid little attention to its exact demarcation. None of the sides objected to the final delineation in 1953/1954, and there were neither remaining unresolved claims to land areas or water bodies on either side of the present state border, nor attempts to change its present route. In 2006 this former internal administrative border became the state border of Montenegro with Serbia and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

In general the state borders follow natural physical features of the area (like mountain ranges and crests with trigonometric measurement points at mountain tops) and are demarcated in the terrain by the border stones, e.g. so called “pyramids” erected in 1 km distance from each other along the Albanian state border.

The authorities responsible for border area control and patrolling in Albania is the Border Police and Migration operating within the organisational framework of the Ministry of Interior, in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 - the Border Police (part of the Kosovo Police, founded in 1999) in cooperation with KFOR, and in Montenegro - the Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The former entrance visa regime between Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 has been abolished. The current border regimes include the customs, veterinary and phytosanitary regulations, and certain restrictions on e.g. hunting or fishing in the near vicinity of the border line (300 m wide zone) on e.g. the Albanian side without informing the Border Police and Migration 24 hours in

Satellite view 2. Region of planned transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”. 
advance (other human activities or presence in the border areas can additionally be prohibited by the Decision of the Council of Ministers). According to some sources – permits are often required for trekking in the border areas of the Albanian Alps in the Bjeshkët e Nemuna region. Crossing the state borders in other locations than the official border crossing points is forbidden and threatened by a financial fine.

As for 2009, there are no physical limits at the borders in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region, often associated to the presence of the state border in some other regions (e.g. barbed wire entanglements, wire or electric fences). In the past the border zone on the Albanian side had a several meters wide stripe of ploughed soil and sand cleared from vegetation, in order to show the traces of possible trespassers, but such is no longer maintained.

However, there is a strong anxiety and distrust among the society concerning the presence of landmines and unexploded shells remaining in the border areas since the times of the war in Kosovo in 1999.

According to reports used for this study - some 25 per cent of the 120-kilometres long border between Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 are still areas remaining non-accessible due to e.g. the presence of landmines, mine fields or unexploded shells and ammunition. The first assessments carried out by the Army Forces of Albania in 1999 in this border area indicated the presence of as many as 102 mine fields covering almost 15 million m² of land, e.g. anti-personnel landmine fields entering the Albanian territory up to 1 kilometre depth from the state border, in addition to the above some anti-tank landmines and ‘surprise mines’ were found.

Since 1999 as much as 12051 of such dangerous objects (8560 anti-personnel landmines, 132 anti-tank landmines, 84 unexploded bombs and missiles, 3275 pieces of other kinds of unexploded ammunition) were found on the Albanian side of the border. Between 1999 and 2005 as many as 268 inhabitants of the border Kukës prefecture (including 72 children) were either killed or seriously injured or disabled in result of landmines and ammunition explosions.

Throughout the last ten years since the war in Kosovo the majority of areas (approx. 85 per cent) in the border Kukës prefecture were cleaned from remaining landmines. Albania received considerable international financial assistance for de-mining of its territory, e.g. from the USA, the European Community, Canada, Switzerland, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, UNDP, ITF, the British DFID.

However, it should be emphasised here that the techniques used for landmines removal (which is indeed a pre-requisite for the continuity of human presence and economy in the area in the long run) often result in short-term adverse effects on the resources and environment, such as land degradation and deforestation. The preparation of surfaces and soil for de-mining and mechanical demontation destroy the so much needed and scarce resources such as fuel woods, forest fruits and pasture for livestock.

Thus, once the areas are cleaned from landmines – the financial support rehabilitation of arable land, restoration of pastures and reforestation would urgently be required in the border Kukës prefecture.

The major part of unexploded shells, grenades and ammunition still remaining in the region results from military operations (e.g.
artillery bombardments) inside Kosovo area, which affected also the Albanian territory (more than 3350 missiles were thrown over the border villages, up to 25 kilometres into the territory of the border Kukës prefecture). However, according to some sources, there were also some 6 cases when NATO dropped missiles by mistake on the Albanian territory, as well as attacks of the Serbian paramilitary forces inside the territory of Albania.

At that time, during 79 days of bombardment as many as 39 border villages in the border Kukës prefecture of Albania suffered from the armed ethnic conflict in Kosovo: 11 villages in Kukës district (Bardhoc, Bele, Borje, Gjegjan, Kolsh, Morin, Novosej, Orgjost, Pakishi, Shishtavec, Zapod), 14 in Has district (Cahan, Dobrunë, Golaj, Helshen, Kishaj, Krumë, Letaj, Myc-Has, Nikoliq, Peraç, Pogaj, Vlahën, Zarisht) and 14 in the Tropojë district (Çerem, Bucaj, Bytyc, Gegaj, Kamenicë, Kasaj, Padesh, Papaj, Stobërdë, Tropojë, Viçidol, Vjetër, Zherkë, Zogaj).

In result of the above, tens of families and individuals abandoned their houses. The village of Zherkë was mined by the paramilitary forces and the inhabitants were forced to leave their houses. At the same time, during and after the 79 days of bombardment the border district of Kukës hosted some 140 thousand of expatriates from Kosovo. Out of 418,135 refugees from Kosovo who passed through the border crossing points with Albania, as much as 368,688 went through Morin of Kukës district, further 110 went through Padesh and Qafë Morina in Tropojë district.

The above had adverse results on the environment of the Kukës district, e.g. environment pollution, tons of plastic waste dumped into the Fierza Lake, or transformation of the numerous areas which served as refugee camp locations into wastelands. Last, but not least, the local infrastructure had to serve to hundreds of thousands of these additional temporary residents of the area. The consequences of the above are visible in the field until today.

It should be reminded here that the international community which provided so much appreciated and indispensable financial support for de-mining of the border areas and was truly concerned by the refugee issues simultaneously paid much less attention to the challenges of environment rehabilitation after the war of 1999, or the need for the reconstruction of damaged local infrastructure.

Until today the local infrastructure remains not only underdeveloped but still not yet rebuilt from the damages caused by the armed ethnic conflict across the border (which ended 10 years ago). Thus, the local economy still suffers from the effects of the war in Kosovo, and the potential for e.g. tourism development in these villages located in the Kukës prefecture is hampered until today by the damaged infrastructure and the presence of anti-personnel landmine fields nearby. The final clean up of the area, both from landmines and waste would definitely contribute to the development of sustainable tourism capacities of this region, part of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area.

Nature and environment of the Kukës prefecture are truly a source of pride for its inhabitants. High mountains, forests, vast alpine meadows, clear streams and postglacial mountain lakes provide for the tourist attractiveness of this region. Nevertheless, the prefecture of Kukës is still not only an underdeveloped and poor community compared to other parts of Albania, but its environment of exceptional natural beauties remains polluted since the war of 1999, while the eco-tourism development remains very much a dream for the future.
Detailed data on the effect of war on the side of Kosovo (currently UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) were not made available for the purposes of this study. However, according to some sources the effects of the war and of the post-war period on the environment and habitats, e.g. in the Rugova Canyon Natural Monument have been immense throughout the last ten years.

The direct adverse effects of intensive war activities in Kosovo on the environment of Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains included e.g. massive felling of trees with the intention of altering the whole environment, illegal hunting on wildlife (e.g. on the brown bear, wolf, wildcat, chamois and roe deer) in addition to killing domestic animals, or intentional burning of the forests (in particular along the state border with Albania) and setting up minefields in several areas; by the members of either the armed forces as well as paramilitary forces or resistance groups.

Last, but not least, a significant part of village infrastructure was destroyed (e.g. some 90 per cent of houses in the Rugova Canyon area were burnt down), which resulted in abandonment of several villages by its former population (30 mountain settlements within the boundaries of the proposed Bjeshkët e Nemuna national park have been partially abandoned), which led to abandonment of larger mountain areas and discontinuation of the traditional land-use agricultural practices, with all negative consequences to the landscape and biological diversity, in particular on some of the man-managed habitats.

Some of these illegal practices continued well after the war, e.g. poaching on the golden eagle and vulture by the “visitors” to the area, illegal “fishing” by the locals with the usage of dynamite, chlorine or electricity, or illegal logging in the forests (up to 20 30 thousand cubic meters per year solely in the Pejë/Peć Forestry). Furthermore, the armed conflict resulted in the situation when the control on the use of natural resources by the state authorities in remote border mountain areas became either impossible or ineffective, either during the conflict or throughout the next few years. The lack of police presence facilitated the operations of crime gangs, which was another serious reason for the exodus of the local population.

Moreover, in general the presence of the state border does not result in explicit legal obstacles limiting civilian access to the border areas on either side of the state border (which could potentially impair e.g. the implementation of possible common field projects in the proposed transboundary protected area). This is also why this border is to some extent a “soft” one, easy to cross in the afforested mountain terrain without being noticed by border police patrols. In result of the above, illegal activities associated with the presence of the state border were, and still are present. The most frequent are those related to smuggling illegal immigrants (incl. cross-border human trafficking), drugs and weapons, as well as illegal logging in the forests located at or across the state border. Moreover, smuggling contraband (incl. animals, tobacco and gasoline), cross-border poaching, crossing the state border in search for endangered medicinal plants, and illegal construction or uncontrolled industrial developments were, and most probably still are, also a problem in this border region.

The above illegal activities boosted in the times of the recent war of 1999 and armed ethnic conflicts in the region, which resulted in the situation when the control by the state authorities in the remote border areas became either impossible or ineffective for several years. This is why some of the border areas in this region gained the reputation of dangerous areas not
only harbouring anti-personnel landmines but in addition controlled by criminal gangs. However, this situation significantly improved throughout the last few years, especially during the last three to four years. In the future, with the increased welfare of the inhabitants and stronger surveillance of the area by the Border Police – some of the above illegal activities would either no longer be profitable or possible.

There is no evidence made available for the purpose of this study of damages to the cultural heritage objects inside the Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountain range area, however in some neighbouring parts of Kosovo (currently UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) numerous religious buildings (mainly mosques) were destroyed during the war time, many of them are now being rebuilt or repaired.

In general, the 1999 civil war in Kosovo and its long-lasting effects are the only delicate and sensitive issue in the region of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area. However, this armed ethnic conflict did not result in any kind of “inherent animosity” or negative stereotypes between the local populations across the border, currently inhabiting this particular region, which could prevent or become a serious obstacle to developing transboundary cooperation on such ‘politically neutral’ issue as the conservation of the shared natural values of this transboundary region.

Of course, the independence declared by Kosovo (UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) not recognised by Serbia as well as by several member states of the European Community would remain such delicate and sensitive issue for long, in particular in the case of cooperation between the future administration of the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park and their Serbian counterparts in the possible Mokra Gora protected landscape area.

It should be noted that the refugees from Kosovo who escaped to Albania and became temporary residents of the Kukës prefecture were of the Albanian ethnicity and language spoken. Simultaneously the Kukës region has traditionally been considered as the natural continuation of the natural ecosystem starting in Kosovo, which resulted in spiritual and cultural connections, as well as friendly and strong relationship and collaboration between the inhabitants of the Kukës region and the Kosovo population.

Furthermore, no matter that at the times of the war in Kosovo and Serbia Montenegro was a federal part of ‘Serbia and Montenegro’ - the Montenegrin population was not involved in this conflict, and helped the Kosovo refugees (which is since then highly appreciated by the Kosovars). This assistance provided to Kosovo refugees of the Albanian ethnicity further improved the Montenegrin relations with Albania, which became even better since the proclamation of the independence of Montenegro.

Moreover, once the long lasting administrative barriers and political obstacles for cooperation in the region (imposed between 1945 – 1999 by either the communist or post-communist regimes) disappeared – the local population of all ethnic groups are willing to communicate and cooperate, which is another factor which could largely facilitate the development of trilateral transboundary cooperation on ‘politically neutral’ conservation of the shared natural values of the shared transboundary region.

As for today, there are in general no more potential conflict issues between the local
populations in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”. On the contrary, the idea of establishing a common protected area is perceived as an important factor which could mitigate the adverse effects of the past ethnic tension and create a much stronger sense of the common regional identity.

The existence of the state borders in the region does not provide an obstacle to wildlife migrations and has no negative influence on the connectivity and continuity of habitats present on both sides of the border in the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area.

Furthermore, the presence of the state border in this proposed transboundary protected area seems to have no adverse effect on the availability of information on the area, e.g. detailed maps indispensable for e.g. mapping of the habitats in border areas or planning common activities; the access to such information sources is not restricted by security measures. Moreover, its existence is not a factor which could hamper the development of transboundary cooperation, for instance by limiting possibilities for direct and regular contacts between cooperation partners, e.g. protected area managers or the representatives of municipality authorities from all involved neighbouring countries.

The only reservation to the above is that the state border regimes paired by the absence of official border crossings inside the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area and disparities in road network development on different sides of the mountain ranges result in relatively long (at least for the local conditions) distances between the possible future headquarters of authorities expected to become partners of transboundary cooperation in the region. There are also no settlements located within the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area either divided by the state border or paired by an adjacent settlement across the border which could become locations of any possible common visitor centres or joint committees facilitating cooperation in the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area. Last, but not least, the existing road system mainly serves the citizens of neighbouring countries, due to its poor development.

As for 2009, all official state border crossing points between Albania and Montenegro are located outside the areas planned for designation as parts of the proposed transboundary protected area. The only border crossing between Albania and Montenegro located “close” to Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains is on the main road E762 linking the city of Shkodër in Albania with Podgorica – the capital of Montenegro. There are no other border crossings in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains at the state border between Albania and Montenegro, on mountain roads and paths which formerly connected border villages on both sides. It should be emphasised here, that the state borders changing and evolving in this region throughout the 19th and 20th century blocked the communication along the traditional ancient tracts linking the town of Plav via Gusinje in the Vermosh valley with Podgorica and Shkodër, which was in the past the shortest route connecting the villages in Prokletije Mountains with Skadar Lake (the Skadar Lake) and Adriatic Sea region. Since then commuting between the municipality of Plav and the central region of Montenegro or the northernmost part of Albania became quite complicated. Thus, most probably the direct personal contacts of protected area managers from Montenegro and Albania would mostly be possible by us-
ing transport corridors across the territory of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

The two official state border crossing points between Montenegro and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 are located on the main roads linking the city of Pejë/Peć either along the Rugova Canyon and then through the mountain pass Čakor (1849 m) on the Montenegrin side with the city of Berane and Plav community, or further to the North connecting Pejë/Peć through the mountain pass dividing the Hajla mountain range range from the Mokra Gora mountain range with the city of Rožaje in Montenegro (with regular public bus communication).

The nearest border crossing between Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is located to the south from Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains on the road linking the town of Bajram Curri in Albania with the city of Gjakova/Dakovica in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, with regular public bus communication and increased traffic in the summer, when the citizens of Kosovo traditionally visit the Albanian side. There are no border crossings in Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains at the state border between Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, on mountain roads and paths which formerly connected border villages on both sides.

1.2. Local socio-economic context

1.2.1. Local demographic context

The region of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area is located in the border areas of Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and includes:

- Two prefectures in the northernmost region of Albania – Shkodra prefecture (districts Shkodra and Malësia e Madhe) and Kukës prefecture (district Tropojë);
- Four municipalities in the westernmost region of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99: Pejë/Peć, Deçan/Dečani, Gjakovë/Dakovica, and Istog/Istok;
- Several municipalities in the easternmost region of Montenegro (including the Municipality of Plav which encompasses the area of Prokletije National Park).

The population size in the territory proposed for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area on the side of Albania can not precisely be provided due to the fact that the official statistics provide information on the population size for particular communes, while very often not all of the villages forming the particular commune are included into the area proposed for the Alps National Park (e.g. only three or four villages of a commune encompassing eight villages in total). However, the rough estimation is that the population concerned accounts for some 32 thousand people on the Albanian side of Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains: some 22 thousand inhabitants of Shkodra district (out of 248’480 inhabitants of the whole Shkodra prefecture, including three districts: Shkodra, Puke and Malësia e Madhe), some eight thousand inhabitants of Malësia e Madhe district (out of 54’522 inhabitants), and some two thousand in Tropojë district (out of 116’590 inhabitants of the Kukës prefecture).
The density of population in the described region is the highest in the district of Shkodra, whilst in the district of Malësia e Madhe the population density is amongst the lowest in the country. Furthermore, the demography of these mountain areas is characterised by the negative trend caused by migration of the inhabitants to the cities and better developed southern regions of Albania.

The exact data on the population of the area concerned on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 was not yet available for the

purposes of his study, due to the fact that the provisional census was carried out in 2008/2009, and the official results were not yet published. Simultaneously, the older data would no longer be reliable, as the previous census was carried out 1981, thus well before the civil war of 1999. Therefore, the information from the 1981 census, according to which 18 villages in the part of Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains currently proposed for inclusion into the planned national park were inhabited by 4'354 inhabitants can no longer be correct for 2009. In 1981 the most densely inhabited area of Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains was the Rugova Canyon region encompassing 197 km² (32 per cent of the territory of Pejë/Pćem municipality) with 2'449 inhabitants, thus the highest population density in this mountain region accounted for 12.4 pers./ km². However, even at that time the demographic trends in the mountain areas were negative, due to migration of the inhabitants to better developed regions of the SFRJ, with better infrastructure (roads, water supplies, electric power networks etc.), and providing better access to health services, education or employment opportunities. Nowadays, the above given numbers are most probably much lower, taking into account both the continuing rural depopulation and the adverse effects of the armed conflict in 1999.

As for Montenegro – according to the census of 2003 the Plav municipality was inhabited by 13'725 people in total (where urban population accounted for 5'228 and rural population for 8'497 inhabitants), and the negative demographic trend caused by migration of the inhabitants to better developed regions of Montenegro, with better infrastructure and better access to higher education or employment opportunities was quite visible – between 1991 and 2003 the population of the Plav municipality decreased by as much as 13 per cent. Throughout the last six years since this last census the rural depopulation most probably continued. Therefore, the overall size and density of the population in “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area is can not be precisely defined in this study, as some numbers must have changed since 1981 or 2003, due to the rural depopulation demographic trends common for mountain regions worldwide.

To summarise - in general, the demographic situation of the local populations on each side of the state borders is similar, characterised by its low size and density of population, negative demographic trends, population ageing, migration to towns paired by rural depopulation.

1.2.2. Local economic context

The land-use and economic development pattern on each side of the state borders in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” is very similar. The inhabitants of this mountain region can be best described as the predominantly rural population with low income, and seriously affected by structural unemployment, while the situation in the adjacent plain or foothill areas is considerably better. Thus, the territories in the region of the proposed transboundary protected area belong to the less developed and poorest regions of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and of Montenegro. According to some sources, the Albanian part of Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains seems to be the least developed among these three border areas.

Moreover, the civil war and the break down of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia resulted in immediate temporary decrease of welfare and living standards in Serbia (incl. Kosovo) and Montenegro, due to the overall unstable political situation affecting the economy of almost all former parts of the
SFRJ. Last, but not least, the economy in Albania and Kosovo (currently UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) was further disturbed in result of the war in 1999. Last, but not least, a large part of this trilateral border area has been abandoned and left out of management in result of the above armed conflicts, and also due to the long-term administrative trespassing ban enforced in some parts of the region.

There is no industry in this mountain region. The main sectors of the local economy in these mountain border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and Montenegro are extensive agriculture and forestry, while the most important traditional land- and natural resource uses of predominant importance for subsistence and meeting the economic demands of the local inhabitants include sheep breeding and extensive grazing of mountain meadows and pastures, hay mowing, farming and animal husbandry (sheep, cows and goats), fresh fruit and vegetables production, beekeeping, medicinal plant and berry collection. The traditional local products in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains are cheese, honey, raki/rakija beverage, berries and medical herbs, as well as local handicrafts.

The official (either permanent or temporary) employment opportunities in the mountain areas are insignificant, compared to the size of population, and limited to teaching at local schools, civil service in local offices or sometimes also tourist services (e.g. restaurants or scarce tourist facilities). Thus, the unemployment rate is currently...
very high. Abandonment of traditional land-use practices due to the rural depopulation trend and abandonment of several mountain settlements in result of the armed ethnic conflict in 1999 resulted in decrease in the number of sheep grazing in the mountain pastures of the region, with adverse effect on the local economy. This situation even worsened due to the recent worldwide financial crises. Due to the above, illegal activities are frequent, including illegal hunting and fishing, and illegal forest felling.

The above activities can hardly meet the growing economic demands of the local population and provide for the growth of welfare, therefore the emigration rate is high, and some of the inhabitants of the region are dependent on financial support from their family members working either in towns and cities, or abroad, in the Western European countries.

The above adverse effects on the condition of the local economy in this mountain region can not be mitigated in the near future by e.g. the rapid development of tourist services, no matter the exceptional landscape and natural values of these mountain ranges for mountain-eering, nature-based tourism or recreation. The capacity of tourist accommodation is very limited, particularly when compared to the size of the vast transboundary region and the exceptionally high tourist attractiveness of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.

In fact, depending on the national part of this transboundary region, the tourist infrastructure (e.g. hotels and mountain huts, boarding facilities, visitor facilities, tourist trail network) is either very scarce, or missing. The large (274 beds) hotel in the town of Plav was closed down for reconstruction, while the nearby mountain huts are partially demolished and non-functional anymore. On the Montenegrin side overnight accommodation is usually available at roadside restaurants, furthermore there is a huge number of private recreational houses developed around the Plav Lake. There are also some private motels, restaurants, summer cabins and ski lifts on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99; in particular in the Rugova Canyon (the most visited area in this part of Bjeshkët e Nemuna due to easy road access) with several motels, fancy restaurants and other recreational facilities, or in Bogaj, located not far from the border with Montenegro.

The underdeveloped road network, often blocked by the snow in wintertime, as well as the lack of marked tourist hiking trails successfully prevents intensive visitation of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains considered to be the most inaccessible mountain range in Europe and the wildest range on the Balkan Peninsula. This is why many parts of this region are in fact not yet discovered by tourists, and according to the belief common among the locals – many of the sharp peaks of the Albanian Alps have never been climbed by a foreign visitor. Tourist, in particular foreign visitors are warmly welcomed here, as the local population is famous for being very friendly and hospitable. But with the current road infrastructure the Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, or the “Cursed Mountains” would remain inaccessible for longer.

The settlement pattern is very similar on each side of the state borders. It should again be noted that there are no settlements (towns or villages) located within the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area which are either divided by the state border, or paired by an adjacent settlement across the border. Thus, no present settlement could be perceived as key for the development of the transboundary cooperation, to become e.g. the potential seat for common consultative bodies or location of a common visitor centre.
1.2.3. Transport infrastructure

The transport infrastructure in the region is in general not well developed and considered to be insufficient on each side of the state borders, however the road network and road conditions on the Montenegrin side are much better than in Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. Furthermore, remote rural areas close to the border, which are connected with the lowlands by the narrow (and usually unpaved) local mountain roads are very hard to reach, while the situation in winter is even worse, when the local mountain roads are blocked by the snow. Last, but not least, the existing road and border crossing network mainly serves the citizens of neighbouring countries, due to its poor development.

The main road E762 running to the South from Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains with the border control point on the shore of the northernmost gulf of Skadar Lake connects the city of Shkodër in Albania with Podgorica – the capital of Montenegro. There are no other roads or border crossings in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains at the state border between Albania and Montenegro, e.g. on old mountain roads and paths which formerly connected border villages on both sides, like the currently non-accessible traditional ancient tracts linking the town of Plav via Gusinje in the Vermosh valley with Podgorica and Shkodër.

The scenic mountain road linking the city of Pejë/Pć in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 along the Rugova Canyon and later through the mountain pass Çakor (1849 m) on the Montenegrin side with the city of Berane and Plav community is in fact the only road across Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, and the only “international transport corridor” (however of the local importance). The other road (with regular public bus communication) is connecting Pejë/Pć through the mountain pass dividing the Hajla mountain range from the Mokra Gora mountain range with the city of Rožaje in Montenegro. Most recently the Kosovo Government started an investment programme including construction of new roads and other rural infrastructure, with the objective to mitigate the depopulation of remote rural areas.

Another road, well to the South-East from the proposed protected areas, is linking the town of Bajram Curri in Albania with the city of Gjakova/Dakovica in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, with regular public bus communication and increased traffic in the summer, when the citizens of Kosovo traditionally visit the Albanian side. Further to the South a construction of the international highway “Durrës-Kukës-Morine” which will link Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 with the Albanian coast of the Adriatic Sea is currently ongoing. This highway will cross the state border near the city of Kukës, and its route across the territory of Albania (Durrës-Vorë-Fushë-Krujë-Milot-Rrëshen-Thirrë-Kalimash-Kukës) will largely facilitate the much shorter access from Prizren or Kukës to the southern regions of Albania (incl. Tiranë); as running far to the South from the described region – it will have no environmental impact on the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”.

The railway network in the region of the proposed transboundary protected area is available on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, with the nearest station in Pejë/Pć, thus very much in the outskirts of the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park; and in Mon-
tenegro to the North-West from the planned Komovi Regional Park, with the nearest station in Kolašin.

The nearest airports are in Podgorica (international) and Berane in Montenegro, and in Kosovo Polje near Pristina in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

1.2.4. State of the environment of the region, and potential threats

The region of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and Montenegro is in fact very homogenous from the natural and environmental point of view. The natural environment of the region is in general well preserved, mostly due to its peripheral location far from the urban and industrial centers, railroads or highways as well as its natural character, presence of big forest complexes and inaccessibility of the vast mountain areas.

Simultaneously, the above factors resulted in the low level of economic development in the region, and the low welfare and living standards of the inhabitants of the ‘Cursed Mountains’, while the outstanding natural and landscape assets of the ‘Albanian Alps’ are not yet commonly perceived as the potential development factor, and key for the tourist attractiveness of this region, mostly due to underdeveloped tourist and road network infrastructure. This is why, as for today, the tourist pressure on the vast natural areas of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains is rather negligible.

Thus, the general state of environment in the region is relatively good, e.g. the air and water quality, meet both the national and the EU standards. However, during the last decade human impact and pressures on environment and biodiversity of the region has significantly increased. These are mainly problems related to e.g. the insufficient sewage treatment and urban solid waste management, uncontrolled land development, illegal timber felling and unsustainable forest harvesting, fragmentation or loss of habitats, decrease of natural water retention capacity of deforested areas, forest fires, overuse of medicinal plant species, illegal fishing and poaching, long-lasting environmental effects of the former refugee camps, abandonment of traditional land-use practices in depopulating mountain areas (sometimes inaccessible to the still remaining minefields) as well as damages to environment in the course of de-mining, and the recent climate changes.

Last but not least, the low level of ecological awareness of the local population is paired by insufficient capacities of the local municipal authorities to address the above environmental threats. Not much has been done so far with the objective to mitigate or control different environmental threats in the last years. On the contrary, the negative environmental trends seem to be stronger than in the past, especially after the civil war in Kosovo in 1999.

The presence of three bigger protected areas on the Albanian side, namely National Park “Thethi” (2’630 ha) established already in 1966, National Park “Lugina e Valbones” (8’000 ha) and the Strict Nature Reserve “Lumi i Gashit” (3’000 ha) established in 1996, also contributed to the preservation of high biological and landscape diversity of this transboundary region, still harbouring a large number of important rare, endemic, relic, threatened or endangered species of flora and fauna. However, according to the country reports used for this study – the habitat loss and fragmentation as well as forest degradation are ongoing, thus threatening the continuity of the above positive picture.
Moreover, the different **adverse impacts of the armed ethnic conflict** - the civil war in Serbia and Kosovo in 1999 continue to threat-en the environment and biological diversity of Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains until today.

The immediate direct adverse impacts of the armed ethnic conflict on the environment and biological diversity of this region were massive felling of trees and intentional burning of the mountain forests, as well as illegal hunting on wildlife (e.g. on the brown bear, wolf, wildcat, chamois and roe deer) by the members of either the armed forces as well as paramilitary forces or resistance groups. However, these losses would sooner or later be compensated, due to the enormous regeneration potential of the ecosystems of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.

Much more alerting are the **long-lasting effects of the armed ethnic conflict** on the environment and biological diversity of the Bjeshkët e Nemuna region. The negative demographic trends typical for the mountain regions worldwide boosted in this particular area by migrations of the former inhabitants during and after the armed conflict, in addition to the above large border areas of this mountain region remain inaccessible until today due to the presence of landmines, and cannot be managed.

The above resulted in the **discontinuation and abandonment of traditional land use practices** in previously inhabited and cultivated mountain areas, in particular in the area proposed for inclusion into the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park. Resulting from the above change the former pastures, meadows and orchards become gradually overgrown by the bushes and trees, in the course of the natural forest succession to non-cultivated post-agricultural areas. In the future, should this process continue, the former mosaic of the ‘agri-cultural’ mountain landscape would slowly fade away, and turn into a simple forest landscape with the dominant forest vegetation, once the formerly cultivated or managed areas gradually turn into a dense forest. Thus, the landscape diversity in some of the mountain areas would decrease, with foreseeable adverse effect for the biological diversity of plant and animal species.

The disappearance of the current pastures and open spaces would not only mean the disappearance of several plant species of the meadows and grasslands, but would also limit the suitable hunting areas for several birds of prey, and decrease grazing areas for the hoofed animals (ungulates), thus limiting the current size of populations of e.g. the roe deer. In result, some of the important bird and large carnivore species would become even more rare in some parts of the region.

This is why due to the abandonment of traditional land use practices in abandoned mountain rural areas - the composition of flora and fauna species contributing to the currently high biological diversity of the region, which evolved throughout the centuries of permanent human presence and management of the mountain areas, may significantly change in the near future. Therefore, the management plans of protected areas in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” (both the existing and planned ones) should carefully address the challenge of either supporting the traditional land use practices of the inhabitants still remaining in the mountain settlements, or implementing relevant management measures substituting the traditional agricultural practice in the abandoned post-agricultural areas.

On one hand, cleaning the area from the remaining landmines is the pre-requisite for undertaking such management measures as
The other long-lasting adverse effect of the armed ethnic conflict on the environment of the Bjeshkët e Nemuna region is the pollution of the environment and transformation of large areas into wasteland in the locations of the former refugee camps, paired by damages to the local infrastructure. It should be reminded here that the number of refugees from Kosovo temporarily hosted in the Kukës prefecture on the Albanian side was over three times higher than the number of its permanent residents (some 370 thousand of refugees versus some 117 thousand inhabitants), and therefore the infrastructure of this region (including quite scarce, outdated and ineffective environmental infrastructure) not designed to serve well above the usual capacities was either seriously damaged or destroyed in the short period.

Another direct adverse impact of the armed ethnic conflict on the environment was the long-lasting hiatus in management or mismanagement of some areas, where the state control preventing illegal activities became ineffective for longer periods. The above situation was even worse in the border areas considered for several years after the conflict as dangerous due to the operations of crime gangs or the presence of landmines.

The serious threat to the environment of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region is the illegal forest felling and timber harvesting, currently the most visible effect of the human activities pressure on the environment of the region, in particular around mountain villages, where forests are illegally cut down for fire wood, or with the aim to extend the present area of the nearby pastures. The almost immediate adverse effects of illegal forest felling and timber harvesting are the habitat fragmentation, degradation or loss of forest habitats, the drastic decrease of natural water retention capacity of deforested areas, and the disappearance of several wildlife species.

Changes in forest habitats resulting from intensive or illegal forest exploitation always result in the disappearance of those animal and bird species, which require larger undisturbed forest complexes. Thus, illegal forest felling and timber harvesting should be perceived as common potential threat to the ecosystems and their continuity in some parts of the region, thus a serious threat to the biodiversity of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.
Other, even more direct threats to the biological diversity of region of the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” are either illegal or uncontrolled activities which may lead to the extinction of the most rare and important plant and animal species, most often those of the common European importance, thus listed either under Annex II to Council Directive 92/43 EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, or under Annex I to Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds; or incorporated into relevant national Red Lists, and subject to different international and global Conventions.

One of such direct threats to biodiversity of the region is the overuse of species of medicinal and aromatic plants, collected either illegally or beyond the control of relevant authorities. A good example of such species could be Gentiana Lutea, but there are many other plant species collected in the region for commercial purposes, and not exactly for private use.

Another serious direct threats to the biological diversity of the proposed transboundary protected area Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains resulting from illegal human activities are the uncontrolled hunting and fishing, but in particular poaching on wild animals and birds. Some of these illegal practices continued well after the war, e.g. poaching on the golden eagle and vulture by the “visitors” to the area, illegal “fishing” by the locals with the usage of dynamite, chlorine or electricity.

The situation would be less alerting in a case when such illegal practices could partially be excused by e.g. important subsistence needs of the local population, and targeted solely on e.g. the common game species, like the wild boars or roe deer. However, by significantly decreasing the population of such common game species – the potential of the region for maintaining the viable populations of other species, e.g. the large carnivores, would also decrease. But poaching in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains is not limited to e.g. the wild boars. Other animals particularly threatened by poaching in the region are the brown bear, lynx, wolf, and the rare Balkan subspecies of chamois, as well as some rare bird species.

Due to the above, the populations of animals and birds of the common European importance are also decreasing in the region, as the direct consequence of poaching.

Therefore, proclaiming the legal protection of new areas in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains paired by increased operational capacities of the forestry and park rangers could possibly prevent or mitigate further damages to the biological diversity of the region, caused by human activities such as illegal forest felling and timber harvesting, dumping trash, overusing the resources of medicinal and aromatic plant species, or killing the animal and bird species of the common European conservation importance.

In general, the level of air pollution is low, with very few remote ‘air pollution hot spots’ located away from the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area. Transport infrastructure is in general underdeveloped and the low traffic intensity density in the whole region does not contribute to air pollution.

As for the water pollution – all watercourses in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains can be classified as mountain streams with clean water and mostly natural status of the river bed and banks. But the major continuous threat to the environment, and in particular to the biodiversity along the watercourses...
of the whole region is the generally missing sewage treatment system paired by the underdeveloped and insufficient water supply system. Sewage systems are present only in the larger municipality centers, while the villages (in particular the mountain ones) have no sewage systems and wastewater treatment plants, therefore in many areas untreated sewage is discharged directly into streams, or in better cases into tanks or septic dumps.

The similar, continuous and still increasing common environmental threat results from the unsatisfactory collection and treatment or disposal of solid urban waste, both in towns and in rural areas of the region. The current management and local capacities to cope with this challenge do not seem to be adequate. In result, dumping trash into the forest or a stream is a common practice in rural areas. An awareness campaign on these issues has recently been carried out on the Albanian side by the Balkan Peace Park Project (B3P), an UK-based charity organisation.

As already mentioned, the tourist pressure on the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains is currently for many reasons negligible. But in the longer perspective the potential threat to the environment and biodiversity of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region is the uncontrolled land development, either in the vicinity of the present settlements, or in the mountain locations most attractive for tourism and recreation. These illegal activities are to a large extent facilitated in some areas of the region by the absence of valid land development plans. The uncontrolled land development in mountain areas of the region for the purposes of either residential or recreational housing, or large tourist infrastructure projects would even accelerate the current management problems and threats to environment resulting from e.g. the adverse effects of insufficient sewage treatment and solid waste management, the limited capacities of the water supply systems, underdeveloped road network in the mountains, or the soil erosion near the construction sites and on the ski slopes.

The pressure on uncontrolled land development is the highest in the most visited areas, e.g. the Rugova Canyon in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, or in the neighbourhood of the town of Plav in Montenegro, where local inhabitants or external investors try to develop either new overnight accommodation facilities for tourists, or recreational houses for their own pleasure. Thus, this pressure is in general limited to the few locations in areas already developed for tourism and recreation.

Therefore, the land management regulation is another challenge in the region. Sustainable tourism development would potentially bring many more visitors to the region, also international visitors from the current EU countries. This is why the tourist accommodation facilities should also meet the European environmental standards (concerning e.g. sewage and waste management), follow the local traditional architectural patterns, and be harmonised with the mountain landscape. Last but not least, such facilities should be located outside of the most fragile protected areas.
Landscape in Thethi National Park, Albania.
Satellite view 3: Region of planned transboundary protected area "Prokletije - Bjeshkët e Namuna Mountains"
PART 2. NATURE AND ITS PROTECTION IN THE AREA

2.1. Brief overview of the natural values of the region

The Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains is one of the most important regions for the protection of biodiversity of the Balkans and in the whole Europe. Their name (in English: cursed / damned mountains) best describes the character of this region, considered to be the most inaccessible mountain range in Europe and the wildest range on the Balkan Peninsula, with extremely harsh mountain environment providing for the extremely hard living conditions for their inhabitants. This 70-kilometre long mountain range, stretching between the Zeta-Shkodër valley in southwest and the cities of Rožaje and Pejë/Peć in the northeast forms the watershed of the Adriatic and Black Sea drainage basins.

The Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains are located in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and Montenegro, gradually rising from the southwest in the territory of Albania, then reaching their highest altitudes (Maja Jezercë 2694 m) at the state border between Albania and Montenegro, and further continuing along the state border towards northeast to the confluence of the Albanian and Montenegrin state borders with the border of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 at Mt. Boriqe (2330 m), and the Rugova Pass dividing the main range of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains from the Hajla (2400 m) mountain border ridge, located northwards, and Mokra Gora (2155 m) mountain range stretching further to the northeast across the state border between Montenegro and Serbia.

The westernmost section of the state border between Albania and Montenegro runs along the mountain ranges parallel to Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains, to the east from the peaks of Surdup (2182 m) and Maglić (2141m) up to Komovi mountains, where the border rapidly turns towards southeast, towards Prokletije Mountains. Thus, the Komovi mountain range, with the highest peak of Komovi Kučki (2484 m, in the Montenegrin part) located to the north from the main ridge of Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains across the distinctive Vermosh and Ljuča river valley is shared by Montenegro and Albania. The extension of the Komovi mountain range towards the East are the Visitor-Zeletin mountains, with the highest peaks of Visitor (2211 m), Goles (2033 m), Zeletin (2126 m) and Greben/Velji Vrh (2196 m) stretching between the Komovi mountain range and the Plavsko Lake, which is the largest postglacial lake in the Balkans (located at the altitude of 907 m with the area of 199 ha, 9 meters deep).

The highest peaks of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains are Maja Jezercë/ Jezerski Vrh (2694 m) in Albania, Mt. Deravica/Gjeravica (2656 m) on the territory of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. Zla Kolata / Kolata e Keq (2534 m) and Dobra Kolata (2528 m) of the Kolac/Maja Kolata mountain are the two highest peaks of Montenegro, while Mt. Bjelić with its highest peak Rosni Vrh / Maja Rosit (2525 m) is the third highest in this country.
Other distinctive peaks of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains exceeding the altitude of 2000 metres over the sea level include Maja Fort (2499 m) on the Albanian side in the Zastan range; Veliki Vrh/Kremenii Vrh (2480 m), Severni Vrh/Maja Bals/North Peak (2460 m), Juzni Vrh/Zlovrrh (2441 m), Karanfil Ljuljasevica (2240 m) and Podgoja (2029 m) in the Karanfil massif; Krs Bogicevica (2374 m), Maja Bor (2149 m) and Maja Scapica (2044 m) in the northeastern part, as well as numerous peaks on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, e.g. Marjashi (2530 m), Guri i Kuq (2522 m), Maja e Ropsit (2505 m), Maja e Koprivnikut (2460 m), Maja e Qenit (2406 m), Maja e Rusolisë (2381 m), Maja e Strellcit (2377 m), Malet e Liçenakut (2341 m), Rrasa e Zogut (2296 m) and Mali Ishtedim (2271 m).

The precipitation reaches 2291 mm per year, and no matter the ‘Mediterranean’ location of the region the temperatures in winter drop down to -20° C and the snow cover can reach 280 cm. The most intensive glaciation of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains compared to the other parts of the Balkans highly contributed to the postglacial relief of this region, with deep glacial valleys and cirques, moraines, and tens of post-glacial lakes. The number of glacial ponds in this area is rare for the European mainland and can only be compared to the Alps. The best known are Plavsko (the largest), Visitorsko (located at the altitude of 1820 m) and Ridsko (considered as one of the most beautiful mountain lakes in Montenegro) lakes, but there are tens of other post-glacial mountain lakes located in less accessible and visited locations, e.g. in the beautiful Lake Valley.
The natural values of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains include the diversity of alpine and sub-alpine mountain habitats, large forest complexes, alpine meadows and pastures with species rich vegetation. The region is the mainstay for a large number of fauna species, which includes endangered species of the common European importance.

Forests of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains are predominantly natural, in some cases primeval. The slopes below the alpine meadows vegetation storey are mostly covered with deciduous forests, mainly beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), sometimes mixed forests with the European silver fir (*Abies alba*) and Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*). In some smaller areas coniferous treestands of the Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) and Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) which are rare for this part of the South Eastern Europe are present, while in higher altitudes the treestands of the endemic and relic Balkan/ Macedonian pine (*Pinus peuce*) and endemic Bosnian pine (*Pinus heldreichii ssp. leucodermis*) can also be found.

The high altitude areas located at the mountain crests above the upper forest limit harbour diverse habitats (e.g. alpine and sub-alpine limestone rocks and rocky habitats and screes, alpine and sub-alpine silicate rocks and rocky habitats, alpine and sub-alpine meadows and pastures on either limestone or silicate bedrock, mountain grasslands) and different plant communities relevant for particular altitudinal vegetation belt, exposure to sunshine, soil conditions and rock substrate (e.g. limestone or silicate rock vegetation communities).

The size of the area, its geomorphologic, geological, soil and microclimatic conditions together with the diversified mountain relief, high elevation difference and abundance of mountain streams and post-glacial lakes contributed to the diversity of habitats and species. According to results of researches on the floral diversity – the mountain range of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna harbours over 1’500 vascular plant species, including a high number of endemic (255 Balkan endemics and 18 local endemics), relic, rare or endangered (approx. 70) species. Nineteen plant species occurring in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains are included in the Red List of Threatened Plants (IUCN, 1997).
This border region constitutes an important habitat of several threatened fauna species of the common European importance which require large undisturbed forest ecosystems, including big carnivorous mammals. The fauna of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains includes the brown bear (Ursus arctos), wolf (Canis lupus), lynx (Lynx lynx), European wildcat (Felis silvestris), Eurasian badger (Meles meles), otter (Lutra lutra) and the Balkan subspecies of chamois (Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica). In 2000 Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains were declared as the bird habitat of international importance due to presence of over 200 bird species, which include the golden eagle (Aquila chrysaetos), imperial eagle (Aquila heliaca), griffon vulture (Gyps fulvus), peregrine falcon (Falco peregrinus), rock partridge (Alectoris graeca), black grouse (Lyrurus tetrix) as well as rare bird species requiring larger natural forest complexes as their habitats, e.g. the western capercaillie (Tetrao urogallus) and hazel grouse (Tetrastes bonasia). All these wildlife species which have their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state borders between Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and Montenegro would largely benefit from transboundary cooperation on their protection, in the proposed large-scale transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”.

In addition to the unique natural and highmountain Alpine landscape values the mountain region of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna harbours important cultural and historical heritage sites, like the monastery of Visoki Dečani.
(built in 1327-1335) designated in 2004 as the UNESCO World Heritage Site, or the 13th century Patriarchate of Peć. In several remote areas of Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains the traditional “kulla” (in English: “tower”) family stone houses dating back to the times of the Ottoman Empire can still be found. Some of the traditions are cultivated until today, like for instance the traditional annual meetings of Plav valley inhabitants at Ali Pasa’s springs near the town of Gusinje.

2.2. Legal and administrative framework for protected area designation and management

In the times of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) numerous symposiums and congresses focused on biodiversity conservation issues, and resulted in so-called “long-term projections” for nature protection in the whole region, and recommendations for designation of new protected areas. Many of these recommendations were consequently translated into different planning documents (e.g. physical plans, sector strategies and policies) but very few of them were later implemented.

Since 1990’s, the times of the civil war and armed ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, the progress in establishing new protected areas considerably slowed down. Biodiversity conservation has not been the priority for the new independent countries which emerged after the break down of the SFRJ, confronted with many other urgent needs and severe problems, in particular those resulting from the economic crises caused by war damages, several years of isolation of several countries of this region from the global economy, and ongoing transition from socialist economic policies to free market economies. Moreover, in some regions of the South Eastern Europe the recent ethnic tensions are still a possible obstacle for developing sub-regional and transboundary cooperation on biodiversity conservation issues.

Once the political and economic situation became more stable - the climate for nature conservation became more favourable. This positive trend is reflected in e.g. the Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro declaring the country as an ‘ecological state’ and resulting plans for designation of several new protected areas, or the numerous initiatives towards biodiversity conservation recently undertaken by the Albanian Government, which allowed for the significant extension of the Albanian protected area network since 2006.

Secondly, several South Eastern European countries demonstrated their commitment to protect the biodiversity of their shared bio-region by the successful ratification of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), including the Convention on biological diversity, the Convention on World Heritage Sites, the Convention on the international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora, the Convention on wetlands of international importance especially as water-fowl habitat (Ramsar Convention), the United Nations Convention to combat desertification and land degradation, and the United Nations Framework Convention on climate change.

Current legislation related to nature conservation issues in South Eastern European countries is already to a large extent quite similar and compatible. Furthermore, the national legislation related to nature conservation in several countries of the South Eastern Europe is currently being harmonized with the EU nature
protection standards, in the light of their expected accession to the European Community in the future.

On the other hand – the legislative and institutional framework for nature conservation in SEE countries often remains relatively complicated, as the competencies of different Ministries and institutions are sometimes overlapping.

Albania

The legal framework in Albania directly related to, or relevant for protected area designation and management includes a number of legal acts. The law “On protected areas” (No.8906, dated 6 June 2002), the law “On biodiversity protection” (2006) and the recently approved law “On wild fauna protection” are the main legal acts related to nature protection, supplemented by several Decrees adopted by the Council of Ministers, in particular “On the procedures of designation of Protected Areas and buffer zones” (No.267, dated 24 April 2003, published in the Official Journal No.35, dated 21 May 2003, page 1228), “On the Administration of Protected Areas (No.266, dated 24 April 2003), “On the Protected Areas Committee” (No.81, October 2005) as well as “On the Designation of Nature Monuments”, “On the Regulations of Cave Usage” and “On the Approval of the List of Protected Albanian Flora and Fauna Species”. Other relevant legal acts are those related to e.g. environmental protection, transboundary lakes, and protection of the marine environment from pollution and damage.

The thematic scope of the law “On protected areas” (2002) includes proclamation, protection, administration, management and sustainable usage of protected areas and their natural and biological resources; facilitation of conditions for the development of environmental tourism; informing and educating the community, as well as direct and indirect economic incomes for the local community and business entities. The goal of this legal act is to ensure special protection for specific important natural assets of biodiversity and nature, by proclamation of protected areas for the protection and regeneration of natural habitats, species, reserves and natural landscapes. This legal act also distinguishes different protective management levels for protected areas, in accordance to six IUCN categories of protected areas.

The procedures for the designation of a protected area in Albania are set up by the Government Decree “On the procedures of designation of Protected Areas and buffer zones” (No 267 of 24 April 2003, published in the Official Journal No 35 on 21 May 2003, page 1228). According to this decree the Nature Protection Policies Directorate (NPPD) of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) shall prepare the study for the proposed area, based on the recommendations of the Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (2000), and following the governmental programme providing for extension of the protected area network in Albania. The study shall include the GIS map and the detailed zoning of the proposed area. An important phase of this designation procedure is the presentation of the proposal to the local communities and local authorities, for their comments and approval.

Once the new protected area is officially designated by a Government Decree (Decision of the Council of Ministers) its administration is established. Protected area administrations operate under the supervision of the MEFWA Directorate of Forestry Service, and of the management committee established according to the requirements of the decree “On the Protected Areas Committee”. Another authority supervising the implementation of activities carried out in the protected area is the Forestry Police of the regional Forestry Service Directorate.
The legal powers and duties delegated to the protected area administration are defined by the decree “On the Administration of Protected Areas” (2003). Pursuant to its Article 4 the administration of the protected zone is charged with the following tasks and duties:

a) Administration of the protected zones;
b) Guarding of the protected zones;
c) Oversight of the implementation of the zone’s management plan;
d) Oversight of the implementation of annual monitoring and bio monitoring plans in conjunction with institutes and structures specialized to monitor and publish environmental data;
e) Designing regulation for the administration and protection of the area, and the regulation for local fishing and hunting; for the protection of forests, pastures, and medicinal plants where such plants occur;
f) In cases of infringements - administering and collecting fines;
g) Collecting fees for the use and exploitation of protected zones;
h) Liaising with users of facilities and objects;
i) Controlling visitors and users;
j) Requesting the use of appropriate instruments from subject who use and/or utilize protected zones;
k) Building the regional environmental index, as part of the national index;
l) Ensuring the efficient use of funds allocated for the protected zone;
m) Publishing annually the information on the condition of the zone;
n) Instituting effective book keeping on activities, investment and scientific research carried out in the protected zone;
o) Preparing the annual report on the condition of the zone and submitting it to the Ministry of the Environment, Forests and Water Administration, the General Directorate of Forests and Pastures and the local government structures;
p) Interacting with scientific research institutions, environmental NGO-s and the community for the protection of the zone and the conservation of its biodiversity;
q) Holding awareness and publicity campaigns and events in conjunction with the local government, research institutions, educational and cultural structures, environmental NGO-s and local communities: preparation of publications aiming at promoting the values of the protected zone;
r) Coordinating the celebration of environmental days and events that relate to the specific protected zone.

Thus, the legal powers and duties of the national park administration in Albania include the management of the state-owned forests within the borders of the national park.

Furthermore, according to the decree “On the Protected Areas Committee” protected area administrations are expected to supervise the implementation of the management plan, which corresponds to Article 4/c of the decree “On the Administration of Protected Areas”. Taking into account that the land management in different protective zones is one of the components of the protected area management plan, it has to be noted here that the land-ownership issues in Albania still needs to be resolved, which could make this task of the protected area administration even harder to execute.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) of Albania is the main institution in charge for nature protection, including protected areas. The MEFWA Nature
Protection Policies Directorate is responsible for the development (in cooperation with the Directorate of Services - Legislation Sector) and implementation of nature protection policies and strategies, as well as for the implementation of the legal provisions related to nature protection, one of which is the designation and extension of the protected area network. The executing agencies of the MEFWA include the regional Environment Agencies and Directorates of Forestry Service (DFS) in each prefecture, which competencies include protected area administration.

In the field of nature conservation the MEFWA cooperates with other Ministries, e.g. the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection on Agricultural Biodiversity; the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunication (e.g. concerning land management planning), the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports (e.g. on tourism development issues), and the Ministry of Interior (concerning the management of local natural resources).

Therefore, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) of Albania and the local municipal (prefecture) authorities are the decisive bodies for the designation of new protected areas in Albania, while the bodies responsible for their management are the local prefecture administration and Directorate of Forestry Services.

Thus, in the case of the Alps National Park the responsible authorities and the main partners for transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” on the side of Albania would be the protected area administration, the Forestry Police of the three concerned Regional Forestry Service Directorates (Shkodra, Malesi e Madhe and Tropoja) and the authorities of the Shkodra Prefecture and the Kukës Prefecture.

Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99

In Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 the legal framework related to protected area designation and management includes the Law on Nature Protection No 2006/20 (a new legal act is currently being drafted) which provides the basis for the proclamation of new national parks by adopting a special legal act (e.g. the Law on Mali Sharr / Sharr Mountain National Park), in correspondence with the Law on Environment Protection (No 2009/03/L-025, currently in the parliamentary procedure), the Law on Physical Planning, the Law on Waste, the Law on Forest, the Law on Water, the Law on Hunting and the Law on Fisheries and Aquaculture.

The Law on Nature Protection lays down the basic requirements for the conservation and sustainable use of nature, in particular:

a) Conservation, renewal and sustainable utilization of nature and renewable natural resources;

b) Restoration of damaged nature conservation zones and of their natural habitats and species;

c) maintenance and restoration of the ecological balance of nature;

d) establishment of planning, management, information and funding systems for nature conservation;

e) accomplishment of the goals determined within the policies on nature conservation;

f) reduction of the over-use of and damage to flora and fauna, especially important species, and their habitats;

g) public access to information and the right to participation in nature conservation;
h) ensuring the right of citizens to a healthy environment, and to natural amenities for relaxation and recreation;

i) protecting biodiversity through the conservation of important natural habitats and important species of wild flora and fauna, with a favourable conservation status;

j) bringing environmental standards in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 in line with those of the European Union, pursuant to Section 5.7 of the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government.

The Law on Nature Protection introduces “Nature Conservation Zones” as spatial conservation areas, designated with the purpose of protecting and maintaining the biodiversity, landscapes, natural characteristics and cultural heritage within, and of providing effective management through judicial and other means. Furthermore, this Law classifies protected areas accordingly to the IUCN categories.

Pursuant to the Law on Nature Protection, the categories of protected areas in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 are as follows:

I. Strict nature reserve - protected zone primarily designated for scientific purposes;

II. National park - protected zone mainly for the purpose of protecting ecosystems or as a recreational area;

III. Natural monument - protected zone mainly for the purpose of preserving specific natural characteristics;

IV. Managed zone of habitats or protected species - protected zone for preserving habitats or protected species;

V. Protected landscape - protected zone for the purpose of preserving the landscape;

VI. Protected zone of natural resources - protected area aiming to prohibit the unsustainable use of natural resources in natural ecosystems.

The authorities decisive for the designation of a new protected area are the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) and local authorities, while the final ratification of the relevant legal act is reserved for the Kosovo Assembly. The designation procedure includes developing the official proposal with scientific justification for proclaiming the protected area, consultations with the local authorities and groups of interest, adoption of the special legal act, its announcement, and ratification by the Kosovo Assembly.

Once an area has been included on the list of proposed nature conservation zones, any deterioration of the conservation status of any part of that area is prohibited. The protected area authority responsible for managing the national park, natural monuments or protected landscapes is then established by the Government, pursuant to Article 37 of the Law on Nature Conservation.

The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) is the main institution responsible for biodiversity conservation and most aspects of environmental protection, including nature protection and protected areas. The MESP Environment Department has divisions responsible for policy, environmental protection, and nature protection. The Nature Protection Division of the MESP Environment Department has units responsible for biodiversity conservation, protection of natural values, soil protection, and consistent use of natural resources.

The unit responsible for protection of natural values within the MESP Nature Protection Division is directly responsible for management of national parks, thus part of its staff is based in
Mali Sharr National Park (at present the only national park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) forming the National Park Administration.

Another central authority relevant for protected area management is the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD), and its Kosovo Forest Agency (KFA) managing all public forests (including forests in Mali Sharr National Park) and responsible for overseeing forest management on privately owned lands. Local authorities are in charge for the municipal administration offices for nature conservation, cooperating with the MESP coordinators (in five regional offices).

Additionally, the Kosovo Environment Protection Agency (KEPA), currently under development, will provide scientific and administrative support to the MESP concerning environment, biodiversity protection and hydrometeorology. Its responsibilities shall include supervising the implementation of the Kosovo Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development Strategy, preparation of reports on the state of the environment, evaluation of spatial plans, issuing opinions on environmental impact assessment (EIA) studies, and issuing opinions on areas proposed for nature protection.

Therefore, the Kosovo Assembly, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP), in particular its Nature Protection Division of the Environment Department, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD) are the decisive bodies for the designation of Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park, while the main partners for transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 would be the future Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park Administration within the MESP organizational structure, the Kosovo Forest Agency within the MAFRD structure, the municipal administration offices for nature conservation (Pejë/Peć, Deçan/Dečani, Gjakovë/Đakovica and Istog/Istok), the Kosovo Environment Protection Agency, and the University of Prishtina.

Montenegro

The legal framework related to protected area designation and management in Montenegro includes the new Law on Nature Protection of 2008 (Zakon o zaštiti prirode, published in the official gazette Sl. list Crne Gore No 51/08), and the recently adopted new Law on National Parks (Zakon o nacionalnim parkovima, published in the official gazette Sl. list Crne Gore No 56/09), which came into force on 14th August 2009.

The Law on Nature Protection of 2008 defines the objectives and principles of nature conservation, provides for the establishment of the Natura 2000 sites in Montenegro (Articles 30 to 34), defines the categories of protected areas (e.g. nature reserves, national parks, regional parks and nature parks, nature monuments, protected sites) and their protective status categories (Articles 49 to 53), the protective status levels of different zones (Article 54: 1st level – strict protection zone, 2nd level – active protection zone, 3rd level – sustainable use zone, plus the protective belt zone). Furthermore, the Law on Nature Protection defines the authorities, procedures and requirements related to protected area planning (including also in Article 60 the provisions allowing for the preventive protection prior to the final designation), legal designation, management and financing.

The Law on National Parks of 2009 defines the borders of the five national parks
of Montenegro as well as the required contents of their management plans (Article 15) and programmes, lists the prohibited activities incompatible with the protective status of national parks (Article 16), delegates the land and forest management rights to the national park authority (Articles 22 to 23), and defines the responsibilities of different bodies in charge for protected area management and supervision.

In Montenegro the main authorities with competencies related to environment and nature conservation are the Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environmental Protection (MSPEP) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM).

The Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environmental Protection (MSPEP) is the key environmental authority in the Republic of Montenegro, responsible for the implementation of the Law on Environment and its subsequent regulations. The competencies of MSPEP include the system of environmental protection, air, noise and vibration, radiation and hazardous substances, nature conservation and protected areas management, waste management, inspection and enforcement, and international cooperation.

Until spring 2009 the Ministry of Tourism and Environment was responsible for nature protection, including establishment of Natura 2000 network, environmental protection and tourism development in Montenegro. The responsibilities of this ministry included drafting and implementation of strategic documents, plans and programs in the area of environmental protection, sustainable development and sustainable use of natural resources; protection of nature and conservation of biodiversity; protection of national parks and protected natural resources; protection of unprotected wild animal species (with the exception of game species), marine and river organisms; defining environmental protection standards; rehabilitation programs in environmental protection; drafting laws, secondary legislation acts and other regulations; monitoring and enforcement of regulations from respective areas, as well as international contracts and agreements; implementation of activities in the process of approximation and joining the European Union; monitoring of the process of harmonization of the legal system in the area of environmental protection and sustainable development with the legal system of the European Union; cooperation with nongovernmental organizations; international cooperation; preparation and enforcement of international bilateral contracts and agreements; and administrative supervision from the area of environmental protection.

Most recently, in June 2009 the competencies of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment related to nature conservation and protected areas in Montenegro were passed to the Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environmental Protection (MSPEP), which became the supervising authority for the Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro (PENPM).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM) is responsible for forestry, agriculture and fishery, water resources exploitation, protection and use. Thus, its range of responsibilities includes management of natural resources, including protected areas, protected plant and animal species, forests management, fishing and hunting, as well as control on collection and trade of wild plant species classified as ‘forest but non-timber products’. The Ministry is tasked with preparation of legal acts, policies and plans for the management of forest resources, and for their implementation. According to the draft National Forest and Forest Land Administration Policy developed in 2008 as part of approximation of
the national legislation to the EU standards the principles related to environmental, economic and social functions of the forests include ecological sustainability and the ecosystem approach towards forest management. This strategy aims, inter alia, at integration of national and international environment protection objectives into forest management practice, improvement of conditions for wild fauna in forest ecosystems and increase in the number of game and protected species.

The Forest Management Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM), established on the basis of the Law on Forests of 2000 (Sl. list Republike Crne Gore No 55/00) governs the activities of fifteen Forest Management Services, located in municipalities. Forests in Montenegro cover some 620'872 ha (44.95 per cent of the country area), where state-owned forests constitute 67.25 per cent of the total. According to the Law on Forests the state forest administration is mandated to manage state-owned forest but also to supervise planning and protection of private forests. The responsibilities of the forest administration include conservation of natural values of the forests as well as prevention and elimination of harmful impacts of biotic and abiotic factors, which could put those values at risk.

The Institute for the Protection of Nature based in Podgorica with the staff of 22 people plays the leading role in developing proposals for the designation of new protected areas, being mandated to prepare Studies for protection (Studije zaštite) and provide expertise in the course of legal procedures for establishing protected natural assets or revisions of their status (articles 53 and 56 of the Law on Nature Protection of 2008). The Institute is authorized to assess the state and conditions of the habitats for the Natura 2000 network (article 30), maintain and update the register of protected natural assets, develop the Red Lists of species, and carry out risk assessment on nature (article 87). The Institute is also in charge for the biodiversity monitoring programme launched in 2001.

Moreover, the Environmental Protection Agency of Montenegro is currently in the process of establishment. Once it becomes operational, its responsibilities would include issuing environmental permits, inspection and law enforcement concerning activities regulated by the environmental legislation, collecting and processing data received from environmental monitoring, establishing environmental databases, dissemination of information and facilitating the public access to the information on environment and reporting on the state of the environment to the Government and international organisations.

Last, but not least, local self-governments would have to play the leading role in developing proposals for the designation, planning and managing the planned regional (nature) parks. It has to emphasised here that the “regional nature park” is a new legal category of protected areas in the Republic of Montenegro, and no experience on their governance of functioning has been gathered so far.
As for the planning procedures and documents at the national level – the most important on the side of the Republic of Montenegro are:

Physical Plans of Montenegro (1986, 1991, 1997, 2008) which always include proposals for extending the protected area network. The current “Spatial Plan of Montenegro until 2020” developed in 2008 proposed the designation of Prokletije National Park (21’000 ha), Bioč-Maglić-Volujak Regional Park (7’200 ha); Ljubišnja Regional Park (7’800 ha); Sinjavina Regional Park (42’400 ha); Komovi Regional Park (21’000 ha) as well as the territorial extension of Durmitor National Park.

Physical Plans of Special Purposes for National Parks, which define general biodiversity conservation measures, functional zoning and directions for management of key natural assets in each of the national parks. The Physical Plans of Special Purposes for National Parks are subject to periodic revision after each ten years. Current plans for Biogradska Gora, Lovcen and Durmitor were prepared in 1997, and in 2000 for Skadarsko Jezero.

Management Plans for National Parks, including those developed for the period of five years, which translate the directions provided in “Physical Plans of Special Purposes for National Parks” into planning management activities and biodiversity conservation measures in each national park, and resulting annual operational management plans, which take into account available financial resources and reflecting the budgetary situation of each national park. These documents are prepared by the Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro and approved by the Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environmental Protection.

Other relevant planning documents at the national level in Montenegro are the strategies, action plans and self assessments concerning, or related to nature and biodiversity conservation, as follows:

Biodiversity Strategy and resulting Action Plan, which are currently finalised, for the review by the Steering Committee and later adoption by the Government. This work has been undertaken by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and UNDP, with the financial support of the World Bank GEF. Previous experiences on development of similar strategies for biodiversity conservation include preparation of SAP BIO Report developed in 2004 as a Preparatory Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (however only for the Mediterranean region of Montenegro). Moreover, the first national report to the CBD Convention is currently in preparation, which allows for synergies and harmonisation of different strategic planning documents.

National Country Self Assessment, undertaken by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and UNDP, with the financial support of the World Bank GEF, where the national assessment of conditions for implementation of biodiversity-related conventions was one of three main thematic fields in focus.

National Strategy for Sustainable Development, prepared and adopted in a participatory process between 2005 and 2007 in cooperation with the National Council for Sustainable Development supported by UNDP and UNEP. According to this Strategy – protected areas should reach the coverage of 10 per cent of the national territory of Montenegro, and the priority areas include proposed Prokletije National Park and two proposed Regional Parks: “Bioč, Maglić, Volujak” and “Komovi”.
Finally, due to the fact that forest areas encompass a significant part of both existing and planned protected areas in Montenegro, as well as the legal mandate for the forestry administration (Forest Districts and Forest Management Units) to play the role of a managing body for protected areas (e.g. regional parks) proclaimed in forest areas – planning documents related to forest management are highly relevant, and provide additional source of information for planning the proposed new protected areas.

According to the Law on Forests (2000), forest management is based on the following planning documents:

**Basic Forest Management Programme** (Opšta osnova gazdovanja šumama) developed for the period of ten years and adopted by the Government. This Programme describes the current state of both state-owned and private forests; directives, goals and objectives of their management, including measures for implementation; purposes and functions of certain parts of forest, management plans which need to be implemented; financial and economic analyses, and maps of Forest Districts.

**Special Forest Management Programme** (Posebne osnove gazdovanja šumama) prepared for each Forest Management Unit for the period of ten years, adopted by the Directorate for Forest Management and later approved by the Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environmental Protection.

**Programme for afforestation of barren mountainous terrains** (Program pošumljavanja goleti) developed for the period of ten years and adopted by the Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environmental Protection. This Programme describes the state of barren mountainous terrains and other devastated and degradation areas which need to be afforested, areas threatened by e.g. erosion and avalanches, the state of their nature; prescribes methods and techniques for measures to be undertaken in these areas, and defines required financial resources.

**Forest Management Programme** (Program gazdovanja šumama) developed for the period of ten years for private forests and adopted by the Directorate for Forest Management. Such Programmes must be harmonised with the Basic Forest Management Programme, and their scope may include one or more plots of privately owned forests. The contents of such Programmes includes the description of the current state of forests, data on the owners and relevant administrative units, forestry management measures applied, and prescription of measures to be undertaken.

Annual Operational Plan (Izvodjački projekat), developed for the state-owned forests, harmonised with the Basic Forest Management Programme and Special Forest Management Programme. The annual operational plan is adopted by the Directorate for Forest, and contains detailed prescriptions for all forest management measures to be applied in a particular location, and defines the timeframe for their implementation.

Therefore, the main partners for transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” on the side of Montenegro would be the Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, the Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro (PENPM) including Prokletije National Park administration, relevant Forest Management Services units, the Environmental Protection Agency of Montenegro, the Institute for the Protection of Nature in Podgorica, and the municipalities concerned, in particular their Secretariats for physical planning and environmental protection.
2.3. Comparison of protected area networks

The protected area network in Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and Montenegro can be best described as having a large potential to grow, due to the natural values remaining outside the presently protected areas, and also in the light of the expected accession to the European Community, requiring harmonization of their nature protection legislation and standards with those of the EU.

As for June 2009 the protected area system of Albania covers 361’569 ha (which accounts for some 12.58 per cent of the country’s territory). Large-scale protected areas in Albania include 14 national parks (of the total area of 176’584 ha), managed nature reserves (82’530 ha) and protected landscapes (95’884 ha), while some 200 nature monuments supplement the ecological network of Albania.

In Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 the protected area system encompasses some 46’504.6 hectares (which accounts for 4.27 per cent of the territory). As for 2009 the only national park is Mali Sharr (Sharr Mountains) National Park, located in the southernmost region at the border with Macedonia. The national park encompasses 39’000 ha, which accounts for some 84 per cent of the total acreage protected in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. Other protected areas are eleven small-scale nature reserves (covering together only 954.8 ha), 35 nature monuments (covering together some 4’868 ha), two protected landscapes - the Mirusha River Gorge and the Germia Mountains (together covering only 1’681.8 ha), and two forest parks. Natural Monuments and Protected Landscapes are declared and managed by the local municipalities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land surface (km²)</th>
<th>Protected area (km²)</th>
<th>Protected area share in land surface (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>28 750</td>
<td>3 615.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99</td>
<td>10 887</td>
<td>465.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>13 812</td>
<td>1 247.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>53 449</td>
<td>5 328.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Share of protected areas in territories of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and Montenegro in 2009.
As for August 2009 the protected area system of Montenegro encompasses some 124'788 ha, and includes five national parks Biogradska Gora (5'400 ha), Durmitor (33'895 ha), Lovcen (6'400 ha), Prokletije (16'038 ha) and Skadar Lake (40'000 ha), 43 natural monuments (7'733 ha in total), four areas of exceptional natural values (322.5 ha in total), as well as the Kotor-Risan Bay (15'000 ha) protected by the municipal law. Durmitor National Park is part of the UNESCO-MaB Tara River Basin Biosphere Reserve (182'889 ha, designated in 1976) and together with the Tara river canyon was in 1980 inscribed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites (WHS). Kotor-Risan Bay was designated as the WHS already in 1979, while the National Park Biogradska Gora has been nominated for inclusion on this list. The Skadar Lake national park was in 1995 included on the List of Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar list).

As for August 2009 there is still a significant disparity between Albania, Kosovo (UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) and Montenegro in terms of the size of territories legally designated as protected areas, and resulting disparity in the share of protected areas in their land surfaces.

Currently protected areas in Albania constitute 67.85 per cent of the total acreage of protected areas in this region, protected areas of Montenegro account for 23.42 per cent, and those protected in Kosovo (UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) only for 8.73 per cent of the total. Moreover, taking into account differences in
size of land surfaces - the ‘spatial density ratio’ of the protected area network in Albania is the highest. The territory of Albania is approximately twice bigger than of Montenegro, but the acreage under legal protection in Albania is almost thrice (approx. 2.9 times) bigger than in Montenegro. Similarly, the territory of Albania is less than thrice (approx. 2.6 times) bigger in size than of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, but the acreage of areas protected in Albania is almost eight (approx. 7.8) times bigger.

2.4. Development of the ecological network in the region

Responding to the threat of fragmentation and isolation of habitats - the governments of the South Eastern European countries committed to enlarge their protected area networks and establish new protected areas. In the light of their expected accession to the European Community in the future – several SEE countries are proceeding with the harmonization of their nature protection standards with the EU. The new national laws aim to ensure the compliance of the national legislation with Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, and Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds. After becoming the Member States of the European Community these countries would have to identify, propose and establish a network of Special Protected Areas and proposed Special Areas of Conservation that will form part of the Natura 2000 network.

Throughout the last three years Albania has made a significant progress in developing its protected area network, compared to 2006 when the acreage of protected areas in Albania was more than twice smaller (166,691 ha, thus only 5.8 per cent of the country’s territory). The above increase resulted from the different initiatives recently undertaken by the Albanian Government towards biodiversity conservation, including extension of protected areas, database development, digital mapping, as well as GIS mapping of boundaries, habitats, threatened and endangered flora and fauna species, land use; activities towards the development of the EMERALD network of ASCI-s (so far 20 proposed sites covering 410’197 ha); identification of core areas, buffer zones and ecological corridors; and preparatory work for the implementation of Natura 2000. By the end of the year 2020 protected areas in Albania are expected to cover 588’817 ha, thus the share of protected areas in country’s territory is expected to increase to some 20.48 per cent.

In Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 the progress in development of the ecological network has so far been relatively slow, compared to the countries of the ENVSEC-SEE project area. The vast majority of protected areas was established at the times of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ), while the recent proposals to extend the protected area network have so far not been successful.

For instance, Šar Planina / Sharr Mountain National Park (39’000 ha, nowadays Mali Sharr NP) was established in 1986, and the Rugova Canyon (4’301 ha, located within the proposed "Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains" transboundary protected area) is protected since 1988. The above protected areas: Mali Sharr National Park and the Rugova Canyon Natural Monument, both established more than twenty years ago, are the only two protected areas in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.
which exceed 1’000 ha in size; together accounting for as much as some 93.1 per cent of the total acreage of protected areas. The remaining 6.9 per cent include either small-scale (very few bigger than 100 ha in size) protected natural areas (eleven nature reserves of IUCN Category I and other 34 nature monuments of IUCN Category III) preserving particular landscape phenomena or plant species, or areas of low legal conservation status like protected landscapes of IUCN Category V.

At the times of the former SFRJ the significant extension of the ecological network was planned. The former SFRJ administration proposed expanding the territory of Šar Planina / Sharr Mountain National Park by 80’000 ha into the mountains to the south (thus to some 119’000 ha). According to the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia - the park area was planned to be significantly extended to the north and southwest, and stretch in the Dragash municipality along the border with Macedonia to the southernmost point of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 territory at the border with Albania, as well as westwards up to the Koritnik mountain ridge at the state border with Albania. Such significant extension of the national park territory would then establish a direct spatial linkage between Šar Planina / Sharr Mountain National Park and Mavrovo National Park in Macedonia (at that time part of the SFRJ). Later, based on the protocol on cooperation
signed in 1995 - a joint proposal by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia and the Macedonian scientists planned the extension of Šar Planina / Sharr National Park by additional 60'000 hectares, with the objective to reach the desired size of 99’000 ha in total, thus almost three times the actual size (39’000 ha). According to the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Kosovo (UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) the possible extension of Mali Sharr National Park area is currently being considered.

As for the region of the proposed “Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains” transboundary protected area - the idea of establishing a national park (IUCN Category II) in Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains dates back to April 1970, when the Kosovo Office for the Protection of Cultural Monuments submitted the first proposal to the Assembly of Kosovo (at that time – the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo within the former SFRJ) for the designation of a national park in the municipalities of Pejë/Peć and Deçan/Dečani.

The same proposal was re-submitted in 1985 by the Kosovo Office for the Protection of Nature (est. 1974), but the Municipality of Deçan/Dečani opposed to the proposal. Therefore, a new proposal was prepared by the Kosovo Office for the Protection of Nature, where the pro-
posed national park was expected to include 32'492.96 ha located solely in the Pejë/Peć Municipality. The Kosovo Office for the Protection of Nature developed the required “Study on the social justification of the declaration of a part of the Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains in the municipality of Pejë/Peć as the National Park”, but in the course of formal procedures the relevant Law designating Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park has not been adopted.

It should be mentioned here that if designated already in 1985 - Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park would then become the first national park of Kosovo, as the Mali Sharr (“Sharr Mountains”) National Park was officially designated a year later – in 1986 ( “GZK” 11/86).

The proposal for the designation of a national park in Bjeshkët e Nemuna was also developed in 1999 by the Institute for Nature Protection of Serbia, which suggested that this new
national park should encompass the total area of 95'999.60 ha, including also the Mokra Gora mountain range adjacent to Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains from the North. But the growing ethnic tensions in the region and the civil war of 1999 in Serbia and Kosovo soon made this proposal no longer feasible.

After the war the Kosovo Institute for Protection of Nature has taken the initiative to designate the Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains National Park. In 2002 three public debates focused on the national park proposal were organized (in Pejë/Peć, Deçan/Dečani and Prishtinë/Priština) with broad participation of local authority representatives and land owners. The initiative for the national park designation has duly been consulted with the concerned Municipality Assemblies, which gave consent to the new proposal developed by the Kosovo Institute for Protection of Nature (Pejë/Peć Municipal Assembly in resolution No 352-5339/2002; Deçan/Dečani Municipal Assembly in resolution No 01/63/2002; Gjakovë/Djakovica Municipal Assembly in resolution No 01/372/2002; and Istog/Istok Municipal Assembly in resolution No 01/41/2002) and supported by the Government of Kosovo. During the session held on 3rd April 2003 the proposal for Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains National Park was conditionally approved by the Kosovo Assembly. Then the expert working group appointed by the Kosovo Government prepared the “Study of the Proclamation of Bjeshkët e Nemuna mountains as a National Park”, where the area proposed for inclusion into the national park selected in accordance with scientific criteria accounted for 62'488 hectares.

Designation of the proposed Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park (with an area of 62'488 hectares) would then more than double the territorial size (currently 46'504.6 hectares which accounts for only 4.27 per cent of the territory) of the ecological network in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. However, unfortunately the proposed Law designating Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains National Park was rejected in 2007 by the Kosovo Assembly.

Most recently the experts from Prishtina University carried out assessment of natural values of Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Kosovo proposed the inclusion of Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains National Park designation procedure in the Legislative Strategy of the Government of Kosovo for 2010, which can provide for the designation of Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park (62'398 ha) in 2010.

Finally, according to the USAID report (2003) different municipalities have submitted 150 new proposals for natural monuments.

The Republic of Montenegro, declared by Article 1 of its Constitution as an ‘ecological state’, has already completed the process of identifying sites relevant for the Emerald network, and prepares for the development of Natura 2000 network. During the CBD COP9 in Bonn held in May 2008 the Government of Montenegro stated that the Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Montenegro will continue to work towards establishment of the national park in Prokletije Mountains, and several marine protected areas (islands Katici, Stari Ulcinj and Platamuni). In July 2008 the Parliament of Montenegro adopted a new Law on Nature Protection, ensuring the compliance with the EU legislation in this respect.

The Physical Plans of Montenegro (1986, 1991, 1997, 2000, 2008) always include proposals for extending the protected area network. The current “Spatial Plan of Montenegro until 2020” developed in 2008 proposed the designation of Prokletije National Park (21'000 ha, adjacent both to the planned Alps National
Map 10. Planned protected area network of Montenegro
Park in Albania and proposed Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99), Bioč-Maglič-Volujak Regional Park (7'200 ha); Ljubišnja Regional Park (7'800 ha); Sinjavina and Šaranci Regional Park (42'400 ha); and Komovi Regional Park (21'000 ha) as well as the territorial extension of Durmitor National Park by some 20’000 ha towards the state border with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There are also plans for the designation of another new national park in Montenegro - Orjen Mts. National Park (19’000 ha) in the Orjen mountain range at the state borders with Bosnia and Herzegovina / Republic of Srpska and Croatia. Other planned new protected areas in Montenegro include three Regional Parks: Rumija Mts. (12’200 ha), Turjak - Hajla Mts. (14’600 ha, adjacent to the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99), and Visitor and Zeletin Mts. (proposed as Emerald site with the area of 13’680.26 ha, adjacent to Prokletije National Park in Montenegro and the planned Alps National Park in Albania, thus suitable for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area).

In August 2009 Prokletije National Park with the area of 16’038 was officially designated by the revised Law on National Parks (Zakon o nacionalnim parkovima, published in the official gazette Sl. list Crne Gore No 56/09), thus establishing the first large-scale protected area on the Montenegrin side of the transboundary region. Currently the feasibility study for the establishment of Komovi Regional Park (approx. 21’000 ha) in the area adjacent to the planned Alps National Park in Albania is in the preparation phase.

Should these plans and initiatives be successfully implemented - a number of new protected areas of different national protective categories would be designated in regions much less attractive for urban or industrial development than the central region of Montenegro. In case the above planned national and regional parks become effective parts of the protected area network of Montenegro – a continuous tract of areas protected by national legislation, supplemented by areas included into the Tara River Basin Biosphere Reserve, would provide for an ecological corridor and landscape linkage across the country, spanning areas located at the state border with Bosnia and Herzegovina / Republic of Srpska with those located at the border with Albania, Serbia and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

The above potential 175-kilometers long ecological corridor could therefore link protected areas of the four countries of the South Eastern Europe - Bosnia and Herzegovina / Republic of Srpska, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. This ‘northern ecological corridor’ could stretch from Sutjeska National Park in the Republic of Srpska, through Durmitor National Park (both above national parks to be extended in order to include the state border section of the Tara river canyon), Ljubišnja and Sinjavina Regional Parks, Tara River Basin Biosphere Reserve and Biogradska Gora National Park to Komovi Regional Park located at the state border with Albania, where the planned extension of already existing national parks would then provide for ecological connectivity with the new Prokletije National Park in Montenegro and potentially also with another recently proposed Visitor and Zeletin Regional Park in Montenegro.

A similar, almost non-interrupted tract of protected areas would then stretch in the southern region of Montenegro, including the planned
Orjen Mts. National Park, the Kotor-Risan Bay World Heritage Site, the Skadar Lake National Park / Ramsar site and Rumija Regional Park. Such a ‘southern ecological corridor’ could therefore link the southeasternmost regions of Croatia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina / Republic of Srpska, across the territory of Montenegro, with Albania, where transboundary protected area of Skadar Lake would provide for the continuity of protected areas.

In other words – implementation of the above mentioned plans and initiatives could largely contribute to the development of Natura 2000 network in Montenegro, provide for the establishment of ecological corridors stretching across Montenegro and linking its protected areas with the protected area network of other SEE countries, and for ecological coherence in border areas. The above would largely contribute to fulfilment of Article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro, declaring it an ‘ecological state’.

2.5. Protected areas in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region

As for August 2009 in the region of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area there are already five legally designated protected areas exceeding 1’000 ha in size, namely the three National Parks (NP “Lugina e Valbones” and NP “Thethi” in Albania, and NP “Prokletije” in Montenegro), one strict nature reserve (SNR “Lumi i Gashit” in Albania), and one natural monument (NM “Rugova Canyon” in Kosovo.
UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. The total acreage of the above five protected areas together accounts for 33'968 ha (13'630 ha in Albania, 4'300 ha in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and 16'038 ha in Montenegro), however the spatial connectivity of these areas at present is still limited. Several smaller protected areas (e.g. nature reserves and memorial parks) supplement the ecological network in the region of the proposed transboundary protected area.

Albania - National Park “Lugina e Valbones” (Valley of Valbona)

National Park “Lugina e Valbones” was established in Albania on 15 January 1996 by the Decision of Council of Ministers No. 102. The area of the national park encompasses 8'000 ha, its administration operates within the organisational framework of the Directorate of Forestry Service of Tropojë district. The national park is located in the highest part of the ‘Albanian Alps’ at the border with Montenegro.

The park protects the upper section of the Valbona River valley, special for its morphology, landscape phenomena, forests, plant and animal species, and for its unique scenic val-
ues. The valley spreading in the south from the highest peak of the whole Prokletije mountain range, Mt. Maja Jezercë (2 694 m) was formed by glaciers and tectonic detachments. The Valbona River has its springs on the eastern slope of Qafa e Valbones, and right after the Waterfall of Valbona the river disappears under the calcareous gravel on a seven-kilometre long riverbed section.

National Park “Lugina e Valbones” encompasses one of the most afforested valleys of the ‘Albanian Alps’, covered by either beech or spruce forests, with several treestands made of Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris), Austrian pine (Pinus nigra) and the European silver fir (Abies alba). The valley harbours the Albania’s largest treestands of the Norway spruce (Picea abies) characteristic rather for the central Europe than the Balkans. The flora of the park includes numerous threatened plant species, e.g. Achillea grandifolia, Minuartia baldaccii, Plantago reniformis, Scrophularia bosniaca, Teucrium arduini and Trifolium pilezzi or the endemic Lunaria telekiana.

The fauna of the park includes the brown bear (Ursus arctos), wildcat (Felis silvestris), otter (Lutra lutra), pine marten (Martes martes), the European polecat (Mustela putorius), wolf (Canis lupus), chamois (Rupicapra rupicapra) and the roe deer (Capreolus capreolus). The forests of Valbona are home to many different birds including the capercaillie (Tetrao urogallus) and hazel grouse (Tetrastes bonasia).

The crystal clear waters of the river Valbona, provide a healthy environment for fish, such as...
the salmon trout (*Salmo trutta marmoratus*). Amphibians and reptiles are represented here by the spotted salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*), alpine newt (*Triturus alpestris*), yellow-bellied toad (*Bombina variegata*), common grass frog (*Rana temporaria*) and the adder (*Vipera berus*).

### Albania - National Park “Thethi”

The National Park “Thethi” was established in Albania on 21 November 1966 by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 96. The area of the national park encompasses 2'630 ha. The administration of the national park operates within the organisational framework of the Shkodra Directorate of the Forestry Service of Albania.

Thethi National Park encompasses the upper part of the Shala River valley, including its source - the springs of Okoli. The glacier-shaped valley of Thethi is located to southwest from the nearby Valbona valley, and is surrounded by the peaks of Mt. Radohima, Mt. Arapi and Mt. Alise. In the Thethi village the valley forms the famous Grunasit canyon, with massive calcareous formations. Forests occupy almost 64 per cent (1'680 ha) of the national park area, whilst the rest consists of meadows and rocky areas. Fauna of Thethi National Park includes the wolf (*Canis lupus*), pine marten (*Martes martes*), the European polecat (*Mustela putorius*), red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) and red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*).

### Albania - Strict Nature Reserve “Lumi i Gashit” (Gashi River)

The Strict Nature Reserve “Lumi i Gashit” was established in the Tropojë district of Albania on 15 January 1996 by the Decision of Council of Ministers No. 102, with the area of 3'000 ha. “Lumi i Gashit” Strict Nature Reserve is located in the northeasternmost part of the Albanian Alps at the confluence of the Albanian state border with the borders of Montenegro and Kosovo (UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99). The nature reserve area is important for the protection of numerous endemic and sub-endemic plant species.

### Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 - “Rugova Canyon” Natural Monument

The area of Rugova Canyon Natural Monument encompasses 4’301 ha and stretches between Mt. Guri i Kuq (2 532 m) in Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains and Mt. Maja e Hajles (2 400 m) in the Hajla Mountains, along the road linking the city of Pejë/Peć with the Plav municipality in Montenegro. The area’s most prominent geological feature is the spectacular 30-kilometres long and 200 to 250 metres deep Rugova Canyon of the Bistrica (Mbusthria) River, including six-kilometres long Rugova Gorge (Gryka e Rugoves).

The area is rich in springs, waterfalls and caves, and harbours a wide variety of habitats and vegetation, including endemic, sub-endemic and relic plant species. The fauna of Rugova area includes the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), lynx (*Lynx lynx*), wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) and the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*). It should be noted here that human settlements in the Rugova area seriously suffered during the last war of 1999, it is estimated that up to 90 per cent of the village infrastructure was burnt down.

The idea of protecting the landscape and natural values of Rugova Canyon dates back to the proposal by the Executive Council of Pejë/Peć in 1985, followed by biodiversity assessment carried out by the Kosovo Institute for Nature Protection (currently part of Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency). In 1988 the Rugova Canyon was designated as a Natural Monument by the Pejë/Peć Municipal Assembly.
in order to protect its geological, hydrological, landscape and floristic values.

Other protected areas in the region of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 are much smaller than the Rugova Canyon Natural Monument, and include strict nature reserves and natural monuments protecting e.g. Bistrica Gorge (200 ha, est. 1976), the sources of Drini i Bardhë River with waterfall and cave in Radavc (89.94 ha, est. 1983), Acer heldreichii on Mt. Prejlepi/Prilep (0.92 ha, est. 1963), Forsythia europea on Gubavci hill (38 ha, est. 1959), habitat of chamois in Kozhnjari (161 ha, est. 1958), and the Rops peak (“Maja e Ropsit” of 25 ha, est. 1955).

Montenegro - Prokletije National Park

Prokletije National Park (16’038 ha) was designated on 14 August 2009 by the Law on National Parks (Zakon o nacionalnim parkovima, published in the official gazette Sl. list Crne Gore No 56/09) in the border areas of the Municipality of Plav, adjacent to National Park “Lugina e Valbones” and “Lumi i Gashit” Strict Nature Reserve in Albania (to be included into the planned Alps National Park) as well as to the area of the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

Prokletije National Park protects a large part of “Plavsko-Gusinjske Prokletije” moun-
tain range, consisting of series of peaks surrounding the glacial valley of Grebaje glacial valley. The national park area is an excellent example of postglacial relief forms, with diverse hydrological, geological and geomorphologic phenomena.

The forests of this national park include Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) and Macedonian pine (*Pinus peuce*) treestands. The natural habitats protected in Prokletije National Park include five types of habitats from Resolution 4 of the Bern Convention (Beech forests 41.1; High oro-Mediterranean pine forests 42.7; Riparian willow formations 44.1; Boreo-alpine riparian galleries 44.2 and Montenegrine spruce forests 42.243) as well as 49 species from Resolution 6 of the Bern Convention. The diverse and rich flora of Prokletije National Park encompasses a high number of rare, relic and Balkan endemic species, including *Alchemilla vincekii*, *Centaurea gjurasinii*, *Draba bertiscea*, *Lunaria telekiana*, *Rumex balcanicus*, *Silene macrantha*, and *Wulfenia blecicii*. According to the results of researches on ornitofauna Prokletije is an important nesting place for more than 43% of total bird species registered in Montenegro. This is why Prokletije region was designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA).

According to Article 39 of the Law on National Parks - the Physical Plan of Special Purpose for Prokletije NP shall be adopted no later than 18 months from the date of its
Therefore, the ultimate protective zonation of the area has not yet been officially adopted. Similarly, Prokletije National Park director and staff members will be appointed until August 2010, as the new part of the Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro (PENPM).

2.6. Planned new protected areas in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains

The proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area is expected to involve Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Montenegro and Serbia is one of the three “priority areas in focus” of the ENVSEC-SEE project, identified during the 1st sub-regional meeting organised by UNEP in June 2006 in Podgorica.

Two years later, during the CBD COP9 in May 2008 the Government of the Republic of Albania committed itself to continue to work towards establishment of this transboundary protected area. Simultaneously the Government of Montenegro committed itself to support the establishment of Prokletije National Park.

In order to fulfill the above commitments the Albanian Government prepared the proposal for the designation of “Alps National Park” incorporating three existing protected areas on the Albanian side. On the side of Montenegro the ecological assessment of the Prokletije area was carried out, the proposal for designation of Prokletije National Park (adjacent both to the planned Alps National Park in Albania and proposed Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) was submitted in spring 2009 for consideration by the Parliament of the Republic of Montenegro, and finally Prokletije National Park was designated in August 2009. The new proposal for the designation of Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is currently in preparation.

Should the above initiatives on the three sides of this region be successful - the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area could incorporate three national parks of IUCN Category II and cover the total area up to some 155,894 ha, thus providing for the improved ecological connectivity of the region and adequate conditions for protection of its mountain ecosystems, habitats, and wildlife populations. This will grant the similar protective status to border territories on each side of the borders, thus enhancing protection and connectivity of landscapes and habitats in involved countries and territories.

Moreover, there are plans for the designation of other three new protected areas in the region of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area on the side of Montenegro: Komovi Regional Park (21’000 ha in the area directly adjacent to the planned Alps National Park in Albania), Regional Park Turjak - Hajla Mts. (14’600 ha...
in the area adjacent to the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) and Regional Park Visitor and Zeletin Mts. (the planned ultimate size of this planned protected area is not yet known, but it was planned to become an Emerald site with the area of 13'680.26 ha, adjacent to Prokletije National Park in Montenegro and Alps National Park in Albania, thus suitable for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area). These three planned Regional Parks could together encompass no less than 49'280.26 ha.

Therefore, in the case when the establishment of Alps National Park in Albania and Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is paired by the designation of the three Regional Parks (Komov, Turjak – Hajla Mts. and Visitor and Zeletin Mts.) neighbouring Prokletije National Park in Montenegro – the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area could incorporate as many as six newly established protected areas.

Under this best possible scenario the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area could encompass the total territory up to some 205'174 ha, which will then make it the one of the largest protected areas in South Eastern Europe.

Last, but not least, the above initiatives may be complemented by the possible designation of the adjacent Mt. Mokra Gora as the protected landscape area in Serbia.

**Albania - Alps National Park**

According to the current Governmental proposal - the planned “Alps National Park” expected to incorporate the three existing protected areas on the Albanian side (National Park “Thethi”, National Park “Lugina e Valbones” and a Strict Nature Reserve “Lumi i Gashit” of the total area of 13'630) shall encompass the total area of 77'458 hectares, which would then mean the significant extension of the legally protected areas on the Albanian side of the Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains by 63'828 ha.

However, the overall size of the planned national park as well as its proposed internal division into different protective and functional zones shall still be perceived as provisional, and will still be revised and improved on the basis of the still ongoing biodiversity assessment and valuations. The designation of the Alps National Park is planned for 2010-2011.

In result of the planned Alps National Park designation the acreage of protected areas on the Albanian side of the proposed transboundary protected area would most probably be increased by almost 6 (5.68) times, and thus the challenge related to the currently missing ecological continuity and connectivity of protected area network would to a large extent be solved in the Albanian part of the Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains.

The area proposed for the planned Alps National Park is highly afforested, forests and forestry areas account for some 60 per cent of the total area, while the remaining 40 per cent is constituted by mountain meadows and rocky areas. The share of agricultural areas in the total territory of the planned national park is negligible, as the soil conditions paired by the cold mountain climate with long harsh winters are not favourable for intensive agricultural use of the land.

The area proposed for the planned Alps National Park is predominantly privately owned
(over 82.4 per cent of the territory within the proposed boundaries of the planned protected area) while the state land ownership (currently less than 17.6 per cent) is basically limited to the existing two national parks (Lugina e Valbones and Thethi) and “Lumi i Gashit” Strict Nature Reserve. However, the above proportions between the different forms of land-ownership and land management rights may change in the near future, in case the land use and management rights concerning currently state-owned forests are passed to local communities in result of the recent Governmental initiative.

The planned Alps National Park harbours a great variety of mountain landscapes, including high mountain peaks towering up to 2694 m (Mt. Maja Jezercë), postglacial relief shapes, deep gorges, and rock formations. The size of the area, its geomorphologic, geological, soil and microclimatic conditions together with the diversified mountain relief, high elevation difference and abundance of mountain streams and postglacial lakes contribute to the diversity of habitats and species. The natural values of the planned Alps National Park include the diversity of Alpine and mountain habitats, large forest complexes, Alpine meadows with species rich vegetation. The planned national park is the mainstay for a large number of fauna species, which includes endangered species of the common European importance.

The range of altitudes in the planned Alps National Park vary between some 1200 and 2694 m over the sea level, which results in the variability of climatic factors and presence of different altitudinal vegetation zones, from the

Landscape of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.
deciduous oak forests in lower locations, then the mesophyllous broadleaved or mixed forest belt up to the Alpine meadows and rocks on top of the mountain crests and ridges.

Forests of the planned Alps National Park are considered as natural, in some cases primeval. The slopes below the mountain meadows are mostly covered with deciduous forests, mainly beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), sometimes mixed forests with the European silver fir (*Abies alba*) and Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*). Other tree species contributing to the diversity of forest ecosystems in this region are e.g. the dwarf mountain pine (*Pinus mugo*), sycamore maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), European ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), European hophornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*), oriental hornbeam (*Carpinus orientalis*), European filbert (*Corylus avellana*), walnut tree (*Juglans regia*), trembling poplar (*Populus tremula*), verrucose birch (*Betula verrucosa*), prickly juniper (*Juniperus oxycedrus*), willow (*Salix sp*). In lower altitude locations black oak (*Quercus petraea*) with sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) forests are common.

The Valbona valley harbours the Albania’s largest treestands of the Norway spruce (*Picea abies*), considered unique for this country, as well as Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) treestands, also rare for Albania. In the higher altitudes the endemic and relic Balkan/Macedonian pine (*Pinus peuce*) and endemic Bosnian pine (*Pinus heldreichii ssp.leucodermis*) can also be found.

The alpine meadows and pastures with their high number of different plant associations constitute an important habitat in the planned Alps...
National Park both from the point of view of the landscape and biodiversity value, and for the management of wild fauna species populations. The Alpine meadows belt in the planned Alps National Park is dominated by *Sesleria comosa* Velen. and panicled fescue (*Festucetum paniculatae* (L.) Schinz & Thell.), the rich meadow vegetation on the mountain crests include *Sesleria autumnalis* and *Wulfenia baldaccii*.


Satellite view 5. Region of the planned Alps National Park in Albania.
The fauna of the planned Alps National Park includes the brown bear (Ursus arctos), wolf (Canis lupus), European wildcat (Felis silvestris), Eurasian badger (Meles meles), red fox (Vulpes vulpes), otter (Lutra lutra), pine marten (Martes martes), the European polecat (Mustela putorius), red squirrel (Sciurus vulgaris) chamois (Rupicapra rupicapra), wild boar (Sus scrofa), brown European hare (Lepus europaeus) and the roe deer (Capreolus capreolus).

Additionally, in the rocky and high altitude areas flocks of wild sheep are found.

Birds of the planned national park include the golden eagle (Aquila chrysaetos), imperial eagle (Aquila heliaca), griffon vulture (Gyps fulvus), peregrine falcon (Falco peregrinus), rock partridge (Alectoris graeca) and black grouse (Lyrurus tetrix). The forests of Valbona valley are home to birds characteristic for larger natural forest complexes including the western capercaillie (Tetrao urogallus) and hazel grouse (Tetrastes bonasia).

Fish species include the marble trout (Salmo trutta marmoratus). Amphibian (8) and reptile (10) species in the planned Alps National Park include the spotted salamander (Salamandra salamandra), alpine newt (Triturus alpestris), yellow-bellied toad (Bombina variegata), common grass frog (Rana temporaria) and the adder (Vipera berus).

Based on the expert field research on flora, fauna and habitats as well as desk studies, following the outcomes of ongoing biodiversity assessment and valuations the internal protective and functional zonation of the planned Alps National Park would be decided, pursuant to Article 2 of the Decision of the Council of Ministers "On the procedures of designation of Protected Areas and buffer zones" (No. 267, 2003) stating that “For the designation of a Protected Area, its status, boundaries and zoning, the buffer zone surrounding it, the administration for the protection of the area and its dependence, have to be determined in advance". The rationale for the proposed zonation pattern is the prepared assessment of natural values – the current state of flora, fauna and natural ecosystems, as well as the management ob-

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jectives for a protected area of IUCN Category II, following the provisions of the law ‘On protected Areas’ (No.8906, 2002).

It should be emphasized here, that the proposed internal functional zonation of the planned Alps National Park in Albania is taking into account the conservation requirements for adjacent areas across the state borders, especially on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. This was possible due to the common research activities as well as experience sharing between the Albanian experts from the Botanical Garden of Tirana on flora species as well as habitats and natural ecosystems stretching across the border, and experts from the Museum of Natural Sciences of Tirana on wild fauna species with their partners in the scientific institutions in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. The following zoning system is proposed for the planned Alps National Park:

Core Zone (CZ):
Includes the central and the uppers parts of the national park area, in particular the virgin forest of beech (*Fagus sylvatica* L.), European silver fir (*Abies alba* Mill.), Norway spruce (*Picea abies* (L.) Karsten), dwarf mountain pine (*Pinus mugho* Turra), Balkan pine (*Pinus peuce* Griseb.) stands, and the upper altitudes of the mountains (above 1500 m over the sea level.). This zone is divided into the main four parts by the rivers and valleys (Çerem Valley; Valbona Valley, Thethi Valley and Vermosh Valley).

Purpose:
The purpose of the Core Zone is to provide an undisturbed, natural reference area. It includes natural habitats, natural and old growth forests.

Management intention:
Emphasis is put on minimum disturbance, usually no access except for approved scientific research. A buffer protection zone of 100 metres shall be established around CZ; this requires that there is no access for whatever purpose except for the actions that take place in the zone itself. Extensive areas which are representative for each of natural habitats will be maintained in their natural state. Dispersed activities allowed providing experiences consistent with resource preservation, such as educational guided walks, bird and mammal watching and where appropriate, visitations allowed providing experiences consistent with resource preservation objectives.

Permitted activities:
- Access for scientific monitoring as part of the national park ecological monitoring system and essential management such as fire-fighting, control/removal of non-native species, removal of rubbish and maintenance of trails may be undertaken. Access is allowed for scientists/managers undertaking prescribed targeted monitoring to assist management objectives. Limited and controlled public access for education and nature based activities, including where appropriate guided public access is also permitted.

Incompatible activities:
- Activities conflicting with the purposes of the core zone, including hunting, harvesting, unauthorized collection, destruction, or disturbance of the specimens of indigenous wild fauna and flora; habitat management other than control/removal of non-native species; livestock grazing and any other form of agricultural practices; forestry operations; unauthorized access by vehicle; storage of waste; construction and operation of industrial facilities; construction of dwellings; use or application of chemicals (fertilizers, biocides, etc.), removal of aggregates and introduction of non-native species.
Activities requiring NP Management approval:
Activities which are neither permitted nor clearly incompatible with the purposes of the zone, including non-prescribed scientific monitoring and research which is not part of the national park ecological monitoring system, provided their effects are not conflicting with the purposes of the national park.

Recreation use Zone (RZ):
Includes five areas located in the valleys of the national park territory, designated for summer vacation and winter sports, e.g. Çerem, Thethi, Valbona, Razma and Vermoshi.

Purpose:
Areas that can accommodate a broad range of education activities, outdoor recreation opportunities and related facilities in a way that respects national park functions, ecological values and natural/cultural landscape.

Management intentions:
Areas of recreation use designed with minimum impact on the natural environment or areas maintained as natural environments but which can sustain limited low recreational density activities where the emphasis is on minimum disturbance and public access for the quiet enjoyment of the park. Qualifying activities: self-guided walking, pony trekking trails, sports, etc.

Permitted activities:
Surface hardening in sensitive areas to accommodate visitor numbers allowed subject to agreements, facilities including serviced pic-

nic sites, national park service buildings and visitor centres, car parking, serviced camping grounds, mini field sports areas, small hotel and restaurant facilities, unrestricted access for walking, hiking, horse-back riding and other ecological and nature based recreation activities. Development of community based tourism developments such as conversion of existing traditional buildings into tourist accommodations. Overnight camping will be permitted in designated areas according to certain rules. Access for the purposes of research, education and training, prescribed targeted monitoring. Management will be limited to essential activities such as fire-fighting, control of non-native species and to management of visitor effects including removal of rubbish, maintenance of trails and erosion control, maintenance of camping areas.

**Incompatible activities:**
Activities conflicting with the purposes of the zone, including hunting, harvesting, unauthorized collection, destruction, or disturbance of the specimens of indigenous wild fauna and flora; habitat management other than control of non-native species; livestock grazing and any form of agricultural practice; forestry operations; construction of dwellings other than those specifically authorized for Park-managed tourist use; construction of commercial hotels, restaurants, car parks, play grounds and sports fields, construction and operation of industrial facilities; quarries, mining, removal of aggregates and introduction of non-native species.

**Activities requiring NP Management approval:**
Activities which are neither permitted nor clearly incompatible with the purposes of the zone, including: non-prescribed monitoring and scientific research provided their effects are not conflicting with the purposes of the national park, construction of dwellings and other associated structures prescribed for Park-managed tourist use, other prescribed visitor facilities and infrastructure related to community based ecotourism activities.

**Sustainable-use Zone (SZ):**
Includes seven zones of the national park, especially designated for pasturing, particularly Alpine pastures and the upper altitudes of the Albanian Alps Mountains.

**Purpose:**
Subject to relevant permissions - enables existing and new economic activities to take place within the national park provided such are of a sustainable nature. Production of fire-wood (bio-energy) and the development of silvo-pastoral principles in a sustainable manner would be the most important activity as well as harvesting of medicinal plants.

**Permitted activities:**
Allow currently ongoing economic activities subject to compliance with all environmental and planning control regulations, but discourage further development other than those related to the tourism industry.

**Incompatible activities:**
Activities conflicting with the purposes of the zone, including unauthorized collection, destruction, or disturbance of specimens of indigenous wild fauna and flora, storage of waste, removal of aggregates, construction and operation of industrial facilities (without EIA study and environmental license) and introduction of non-native species.

**Activities requiring NP Management approval:**
Activities which are neither permitted nor clearly incompatible with the purposes of the zone, including harvesting forest products (e.g. medicinal plants, fungi, honey), non-prescribed monitoring and scientific research provided their effects are not conflicting with the purposes of...
the Park. Activities requiring EIA prior to possible approval by the Park Management Authority include construction of dwellings, visitor facilities and tourist infrastructure, construction and re-construction of dwellings for local inhabitants, farm buildings, field boundaries including fences, walls and hedges, any use or application of chemicals (fertilizers, biocides, etc.) and forestry operations not subject to approved community forest and forest pastures management plan. Controlled hunting by local people subject to scientific monitoring.

**Traditional-use Zone (TZ):**

Includes the lower part of Alps National Park, particularly zones surrounding villages and agricultural areas, as well as typical and natural silvo-pastoral systems.

**Purpose:**

Enables national park area residents, both permanent and seasonal, to continue maintenance of their livelihoods through traditional means. The zone allows public access subject to respecting resident’s field boundaries and economic activities. Visitors can enjoy the same activities and values as in the Recreation Zone but also learn about traditional farming methods and ways of living.

**Management intentions:**

Emphasis on traditional livelihoods and public access for the quiet enjoyment of the national park values by visitors and encouraging the development of agri-tourism activities, local overnight accommodation capacities, revitalisation of village heritage centres and revival of traditional festivals. In some areas of the national park emphasis will be put on environmental improvements and management of large areas of degraded rural landscapes (soil erosion and degraded pastures and forests).

**Permitted activities:**

Livestock grazing and all traditional forms of agriculture; use of forest and forest pastures subject to approved community management plans for the area, or specific national park plans could be the main activities. Harvesting fire-wood and non timber forest products (e.g. fungi, medicinal plants, honey), as well as unrestricted access for walking, horse-back riding, bird-watching. Overnight camping will be permitted in designated areas according to certain rules. Access for the purposes of education and training and prescribed targeted monitoring, habitat management including fire-fighting, control/removal of non-native species and management of visitor effects, maintenance of erosion control, maintenance of camping areas.

**Incompatible activities:**

Activities conflicting with the purposes of the zone, including harvesting, unauthorized collection, destruction, or disturbance of indigenous wild fauna and flora, commercial forestry operations, storage of waste, construction and operation of industrial facilities, mining and removal of aggregates (without EIA study and environmental license) and introduction of non-native species.

**Activities requiring NP Management approval:**

Activities which are neither permitted nor clearly incompatible with the purposes of the zone, including non-prescribed monitoring and scientific research provided its effects are not conflicting with the purposes of the national park. Activities requiring EIA prior to possible approval by the Park Management Authority include construction of dwellings prescribed for Park-managed tourist use, other prescribed visitor facilities and infrastructure, construction and re-construction of dwellings for local inhabitants, farm buildings, field boundaries including fences, walls and hedges and any use or application of chemicals (fertilizers, biocides, etc.).
Last, but not least, the law “On protected Areas” No 8906 (2002) defines the buffer zone as “the limited area in the periphery of a Protected Area, that serves to prevent or mitigate negative ecological impacts in the area and the important elements of a PA”.

In the situation when the core zone of the planned Alps National Park would to a large extent be buffered by other zones (e.g. traditional-use and sustainable use zones) such buffer zone (not yet designed) should be provided in areas where the currently proposed core zone is not yet surrounded / buffered by any other zone within the proposed boundaries of the planned national park.

Once the Alps National Park is officially designated – the issue of establishing its operational administration would have to be solved and decided. Protected area administrations in Albania operate under the supervision of the MEFWA Directorate of Forestry Service, and of the management committee established according to the requirements of the decree “On the Protected Areas Committee” (No.81, October 2005). Another authority supervising the implementation of activities carried out in the protected area is the Forestry Police of the regional Forestry Service Directorate.

According to the provisions of the Decision of the Council of Ministers “On the Administration of Protected Areas (No.266, dated 24th April 2003) – the administrations of protected areas which belong to Category II (national parks) or Category IV (Managed Nature Reserves) are established by the relevant Directorate of Forestry District, in which such areas are located. In case when the protected area encompasses forestry areas of more than one Forestry District – the relevant one would be the Directorate of Forestry District responsible for the prevailing part of the protected area territory.

As for June 2009 there are already the two administrations of existing national parks, of Lugina e Valbones National Park (8’000 ha, est. in 1996) within the framework of the Directorate of Forestry Service of Tropojë district, and of Thethi National Park (2’630 ha, est. in 1966) within the framework of the Directorate of Forestry Service of Shkodra district. Each of the above two protected area administrations operating for many years (as for 2009 - either 13 years in the case of Lugina e Valbones NP or already 33 years in the case of Thethi NP) is responsible solely for its own protected area, relatively small compared to the size of the planned Alps National Park (77’458 ha). It has to be noted here that at present the personnel of these two national park administrations together accounts for only eight people.

Moreover, the planned Alps National Park is to be located in the territory of three districts in two prefectures, thus will fall under the competencies of the several Directorates of Forestry Service (in this case of Shkodra, Malësia e Madhe and Tropojë). Therefore, the personnel of the future Alps National Park would most probably incorporate the staff of existing two national park administrations of Lugina e Valbones NP and Thethi NP as well as recruit from among the staff of the Directorate of Forestry Service of Malësia e Madhe district.

Resulting from the above, the two main challenges would be to (a) facilitate cooperation and communication among the three relevant Directorates of Forestry Service and design effective administration model for the planned Alps National Park (b) provide adequate resources and build the operational capacity of the Alps National Park administration to operate in the extensive area of 77’458 ha, thus over seven times bigger than the total area of the existing national parks on the Albanian side of Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains. Moreover, in a
hypothetical case when the Government of Albanian decides that the new Alps National Park should have its single own administration – the location of such would have to be decided.

**Kosovo**
*(UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99)* - **Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park**

The proposed Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park (62'398 ha) is to be established in the area adjacent to the state borders of Montenegro and Albania, involving the territories of four local municipalities (32’500 ha in Pejë/Peć municipality, 22'000 ha in Deçan/Deçani, 5'065 ha in Istog/Istok and 2’833 ha in Gjakovë/Dakovica municipality). The proposed Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park will include the spectacular six kilometres long gorge in the Rugova Canyon of the Bistrica River (a Natural Monument since 1988), numerous peaks reaching over 2000 m including the highest peak of Mt. Gjeravica, (2 656 m), and nine scenic alpine lakes.

The public land ownership is prevailing, and accounts for approx. 75 per cent of the total area of the proposed national park. Forests and forestry land constitute some 65 per cent of the territory planned for inclusion into the planned national park, where the state-owned forests constitute 72 per cent and the privately owned forests account for 28 per cent of the total afforested area. Many mountain settlements have been destroyed in the war of 1999, this is the reason why the 30 villages within the boundaries of the proposed park have been partially abandoned. For the above reason the traditional livestock grazing in the mountain meadows is no longer continued, which may result in the loss of certain habitats in result of the spontaneous forest succession.
It should also be noted here that the area proposed for the national park is very important for biodiversity conservation, but simultaneously has a high recreation potential, which may result in potential land-use conflicts unless the spatial zonation of the area is based on resource inventory and the visitor access is harmonised with the conservation requirements.

Some personal communication sources indicate that the official reason for rejecting the previous proposal were the complaints by the local municipal authorities as well as the explicit disagreement from the side of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development, due to the valuable timber stock of forests in Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains remaining under the man-
agement of the Kosovo Forest Agency paired by enormously high prices for timber and firewood in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

Therefore, the failure of the proposal for establishing a national park in Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains in 2007 partially resulted from the missing public awareness campaign and inadequate involvement of the local municipal authorities in the early planning phase, which together caused the lack of support by local communities concerned.

Secondly, the disagreement of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development might have been resulting from the proposed internal division of the proposed park area into functional zones, in particular the size and composition of the strictly protected core conservation zone. The Kosovo Forest Agency (KFA) manages public forests (such are prevailing in the proposed park area) including forests in national parks. Therefore the designation of Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park would not exclude its forests as such from the KFA competencies, however putting e.g. the majority of forests within the boundaries of the proposed national park under the strict conservation regime would immediately exclude large forest areas from regular commercial forestry management, and automatically limit the incomes of both the KFA and the local inhabitants employed in forestry operations.

Therefore, a public awareness campaign involving local non-governmental organisations and enhanced consultations with the local communities should be undertaken well in advance to public hearings and submitting the official proposal for designation, with the objective to raise the public support for establishing the proposed national park and to find the compromise between the conservation requirements and the development needs of the local communities and stakeholders (e.g. the KFA) concerned.

The public awareness campaign should possibly focus on the potential benefits of national park and/or transboundary protected area designation for the local economic development. For instance, the label of a ‘national park, part of a trilateral transboundary protected area of exceptional natural and recreational values’ and of ‘one of the largest protected areas in Europe’ could increase the tourist attractiveness of the region and promote its tourist services, enhance the recognition of the region abroad, and help to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative stereotypes still common among some Europeans, resulting from the past armed ethnic conflicts.

Furthermore, the new proposal for national park designation should duly take into account both the biodiversity conservation requirements and the local conditions, e.g. the current land use, which should result in a balanced and scientifically sound and justified functional zonation of the proposed protected area, taking into account the economic development functions of this protected area.

In particular the division of the proposed park area into functional zones (strict/passive protection, partial/active protection, buffer and
“transition/cooperation” zones) and the proportions between the size of particular zones (e.g. of those strictly protected versus those where forestry management operations would be continued) would be key for finding the proper balance between the needs for biodiversity conservation and the needs for sustainable use of natural resources of the region, and for the local economic development.

The decision on the division of the proposed park area into functional zones should also take into account the size of the protected area. Excluding larger areas from the economic use and enforcing more or less strict nature protection over larger areas could be unrealistic under the South Eastern European conditions.

Designation of new protected areas is always a “several small versus one big” dilemma. For obvious reasons designation of the large-scale Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park with the area of e.g. 62’398 ha would be much more effective from the biodiversity conservation point of view. On the other hand – a large-scale protected area can also mean social conflicts, in the case when the spatial design of the protected area does not respect the economic development needs of its inhabitants.

Last, but not least, in a relatively small national park its strictly protected areas (e.g. nature reserves) would usually constitute a prevailing part of the whole park territory, which would automatically strengthen the common negative public perception of the national park as an “area excluded from human use, imposing constraints and banning the local economic development”.

Contrary to the above situation, the designation of a larger national park where strict legal protection is granted to the most valuable areas (nature reserves) while the active protection and transition zones may constitute a significant portion of the national park territory would possibly allow for a different public perception of this initiative. Leaving relatively seen bigger areas of other functional zones under management would allow the continuation of the sustainable forest management and re-naturalisation of forest treestands inside the national park, thus providing employment opportunities for some part of the local population. Last but not least – the local population would gain enough time to gradually re-orientate their economic activities towards sustainable land uses, including the development of nature-based tourist services and facilities.

**Montenegro - Regional Parks “Komovi”, “Turjak – Hajla Mts.” and “Visitor and Zeletin Mts.”**

The current “Spatial Plan of Montenegro until 2020” developed in 2008 and other planning documents provide for the designation of three new protected areas in the region of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area on the side of Montenegro – three Regional Parks: ”Komovi”, “Turjak - Hajla Mountains” and “Visitor and Zeletin Mountains”. These three planned Regional Parks on the Montenegrin side could together encompass no less than 49’280 ha.

The most advanced are the preparations for the establishment of Komovi Regional Park (approx. 21’000 ha in the border area directly adjacent to the planned Alps National Park in Albania), the feasibility study for its designation is currently being prepared. This Regional Park would encompass areas in the municipalities of Podgorica and Andrijevica, while the relevant local Forest Management Services unit of the Public Enterprise “Crna Gora šume” would be Kolasin.
The other two planned Regional Parks would also be suitable for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area, as Regional Park Turjak - Hajla Mts. is expected to encompass some 14’600 ha in the area adjacent to the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, while Regional Park Visitor and Zeletin Mts. may encompass some 13’680.26 ha and be adjacent to two national parks of this transboundary region - Prokletije National Park in Montenegro and Alps National Park in Albania.

However, the designation and effective landscape and biodiversity protection in the planned Regional Parks (which is a new category of protected areas in Montenegro) would require the active involvement and contribution of relevant municipalities and their Secretariats for physical planning and environmental protection, and of the relevant local Forest Management Services units of the Public Enterprise "Crna Gora šume".

The new Law on Nature Protection of 2008 (Zakon o zaštiti prirode, published in Sl. list Crne Gore” No 51/08) delegates most of the duties related to the ‘regional parks’ to the local self-government (jedinica lokalne samou-prave), including the obligation to prepare and submit the proposal for conservation of the area (studije zaštite, article 56) and the proposed management plan (plan upravljanja, article 65) for the area of a regional park.

These duties result from the fact that according to article 55 it is the local self-government to proclaim the designation of the regional park or nature park, after obtaining the consent of the Ministry responsible for nature conservation and of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM). Resulting from the above, pursuant to article 111, financing nature conservation measures in a protected area designated by the local self-government is the duty of the local self-government. Last, but not least, according to article 62 in case the
protected area is established in a forest area – the forest authorities (organ uprave nadležan za šume) are mandated to play the role of a managing body for this area.

Resulting from the above – planning and management of the future regional parks or nature parks proclaimed by the local self-governments would require cooperation and coordination between the municipal Secretariats for physical planning and environmental protection, which are responsible for management of protected natural assets in each municipality (but have no established direct management authorities) and the local Forest Management Service unit. Furthermore, in case when the regional or nature park encompasses territories of more that just one municipality – its functioning would depend on the coordination of activities between several municipal Secretariats and several Forest Management Services units.

However, the above described situation concerning the management and funding for regional and nature parks may change with their inclusion into the Natura 2000 network, which will then grant them the status of internationally important areas, in the understanding of Article 35 of the Law on Nature Protection. Consequently, funds for conservation activities would have to be provided by the State Budget, following provisions of Article 111 (“Sredstva za zaštitu prirode obezbjeduju se iz budžeta Crne Gore za zaštitu prirodnih dobara od međunarodnog i državnog značaja”), no matter that the authority originally proclaiming the ‘regional park’ was the local self-government.

2.7. Connectivity and continuity of protected area network in the region

As for 2009 the protected area network in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, encompassing two relatively small national parks (“Thethi” and “Lugina e Valbones”) covering together 10’630 ha, and one large-scale strict nature reserve (“Lumi i Gashit”, 3’000 ha) on the Albanian side, one bigger natural monument (Rugova Canyon, 4’300 ha) accompanied by a number of much smaller natural monuments and strict nature reserves on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and one medium-sized (but not yet operational) national park in Montenegro (Prokletije National Park, 16’038 ha) can not yet be perceived as providing for the ecological connectivity and continuity in the region of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area.

First of all, the spatial linkages (either in-country or cross-border linkages) between these protected areas are often missing. The mountain range of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains forms the natural ecological corridor connecting the whole region, but at present the integrity and continuity of e.g. habitats stretching across the state borders or corridors allowing migrations of fauna species is not yet ensured by putting these connecting areas under the same or comparable level of nature and landscape protection, accordingly to national legislations. Thus, as for 2009, the connectivity and continuity of protected area network in this region remains an open question.

Secondly, as for 2009 the total acreage of the above five protected areas together accounts for 33’968 ha, which accounts only for some 18 per cent of areas remaining to a large extent
in their natural state in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains. Thus, the major part (approx. 82 per cent) of this transboundary region still remains non-protected. Resulting from the above - the vast areas of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains stretching along the state borders, including the highest mountain peaks and ridges, and adjacent areas of high conservation values in Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 currently have quite different legal protective status, being either included into the territory of a national park or a strict nature reserve on one side of the state border, or remaining without legal protection on the other side.

Last, but not least, as for 2009 there are only two protected areas in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region having their own administration (“Thethi” and “Lugina e Valbones” national parks). Both are located in Albania, while Rugova Canyon Natural Monument has neither its own administration nor directly responsible staff, and the administration of Prokletije National Park on the side of Montenegro will be constituted at the earliest in the second half of 2010, and will then begin to build its operational capacities.

Therefore, international cooperation on the biodiversity conservation issues concerning Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains is currently limited to cooperation between relevant Ministries and scientific institutions, while transboundary cooperation between protected areas of the region is not yet possible.

One of the major threats to habitats and species populations and main causes of the decline in biological diversity in Europe is the fragmentation and isolation of habitats and the effect this can have on the viability of species populations. Fragmentation is the breaking-up of continuous tracts of ecosystems creating barriers to migration or dispersal of organisms and reducing the size of homogenous areas. Fragmentation may be induced by human activities (e.g. road infrastructure) or by natural processes.

The negative effects of habitats fragmentation can be mitigated by establishing ecological networks: the fragmentation of habitats can be counteracted by creating buffer zones to protect the surviving natural areas, and connecting these core areas by stepping stones and corridors, which allow species to migrate or disperse.

Numerous conventions and initiatives emphasise the importance of ecological networks for biodiversity conservation, e.g. the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the European Community Biodiversity Strategy (1998) and the EC Habitats Directive, or the IUCN “Countdown 2010” initiative.

The Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN) is an important implementation tool of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy. As declared during the 3. Conference of Ministers “An Environment for Europe” in Sofia, on 25 October 1995: “The Pan-European Ecological Network will contribute to achieving the main goals of the Strategy by ensuring that a full range of ecosystems, habitats, species and their genetic diversity, and landscapes of European importance are conserved; habitats are large enough to place species in a favourable conservation status; there are sufficient opportunities for the dispersal and migration”.

The favourable conservation status of different species and natural habitats depends on the size of protected areas. Migration, dispersal
and genetic exchange of wild species depends on the existence of ecological corridors linking particular protected areas of different protective categories designated at national level. The continuity and connectivity of habitats in the border areas requires transboundary linkages, corridors which link protected area networks of neighbouring countries.

The Habitats Directive in Article 3.3 aims at maintaining and establishing spatial linkages between the Natura 2000 sites: “Where they consider it necessary, Member States shall endeavour to improve the ecological coherence of Natura 2000 by maintaining, and where appropriate developing, features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora, as referred to in Article 10.”

Article 10. of the Habitats Directive states that: “Member States shall endeavour, where they consider it necessary, in their land-use planning and development policies and, in particular, with a view to improving the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network, to encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora. Such features are those which, by virtue of their linear and continuous structure (such as rivers with their banks or the traditional systems for marking field boundaries) or their function as stepping stones (such as ponds or small woods), are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.”

Transboundary protected areas (TBPAs) are one of the possible solutions for preventing the fragmentation of habitats and isolation of species populations, thus for improving the ecological connectivity and continuity. TBPAs provide for the ecological continuum beyond the political boundaries, represent a commitment of two or more countries to common management of their frontier regions and shared ecosystems, and are the best available tool to improve the connectivity of shared habitats in border areas. Last, but not least – combining and concerting efforts of neighbouring countries allows for establishment of large-scale new protected areas, much bigger than feasible in a single country.

There are several governmental initiatives on all three sides of the state borders, additionally confirmed by official statements of commitment during the CBD COP9 in May 2008 which could considerably change the present situation and provide for the enhanced ecological connectivity and continuity of protected area network in the region of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.

Namely, the Albanian Government plans the designation of “Alps National Park” (expected around 2010-2011) stretching over the major part (77’458 ha) of the Albanian side of the region, which would then to a large extent solve the issues of ecological connectivity and continuity of protected area network in the Albanian part of the Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains. The new proposal for the designation of Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park (approx. 62’398 ha) in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is currently being elaborated and prepared for consultations.

Moreover, there are plans for the designation of other three new protected areas in the border areas of Montenegro: Komovi Mts. Regional Park (21’000 ha), Regional Park Turjak - Hajla Mts. (14’600 ha) and Regional Park Visitor and Zeletin Mts. (approx. 13’680 ha), each of the above three planned regional parks is adjacent to one of the existing or planned national parks, thus suitable for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area “Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains”.
The planned designation of new protected areas – three Regional Parks in Montenegro would contribute to the establishment of the ‘SEE northern ecological corridor’, linking the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region with the tract of protected areas stretching across the territory of Montenegro into Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The above described planned spatial extension of the protected area network, would potentially be implemented in the longer time perspective, thus it is not realistic to expect that all above mentioned planned protected areas would be designated at similar time. Furthermore, the designation of all above mentioned planned protected areas can not be taken for granted.

Taking into account the above – several different scenarios are still possible, for example:

“No progress” scenario – when no progress is achieved in coming years in terms of improved ecological connectivity of protected area network and transboundary cooperation, which is still possible in a hypothetical case when no new protected areas are designated in the region. In this case the vast border areas of high conservation values in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains stretching along the state borders would remain unprotected, in particular on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

Under this scenario the ecological continuity and connectivity in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains would partially improve compared to the current situation, and provide opportunities for bilateral cooperation on biodiversity conservation in some parts of the region.

“Bilateral connectivity and cooperation” scenario – bilateral cooperation on biodiversity and landscape conservation issues resulting from “bilateral spatial connectivity”, in a case when the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is either designated much later than Alps National Park in Albania, or not designated at all. In such case the connectivity would be limited solely to the Albanian and Montenegrin parts of the region, and transboundary cooperation could probably be based on bilateral cooperative arrangements between the administrations of directly adjacent protected areas - for instance between Alps National Park in Albania and adjacent Prokletije National Park, and possibly also Komovi Mts. Regional Park and Regional Park Visitor and Zeletin Mts. in Montenegro.

Under this scenario the ecological continuity and connectivity in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains would partially improve compared to the current situation, and provide opportunities for bilateral cooperation on biodiversity conservation in some parts of the region.

“Trilateral connectivity and cooperation” scenario – in the case of successful legal designation of new national parks currently planned in Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/9, with territories stretching to the boundaries of the other two neighbouring protected areas designated across the state border, which will then ensure the ecological connectivity and continuity of the protected area network of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region.

Under this scenario the ecological continuity and connectivity of landscapes and habitats
in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains would significantly improve compared to the current situation, and provide opportunities for trilateral cooperation, harmonisation of management approach and practices, and undertaking joint field projects and measures for biodiversity conservation in border areas between administrations of the three adjacent national parks.

In this case the proposed “Prokletije/ Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area would incorporate three national parks of IUCN Category II and cover the total area up to some 155’894 ha, thus providing either the same or at least similar protective status to border territories on all three sides, and adequate conditions for the protection of shared mountain ecosystems, to habitats, and to wildlife populations.

“Eco-regional connectivity and cooperation” scenario – in the best possible case when not only the two national parks currently planned in the region are successfully designated with territories adjacent to each other, but when in addition to the above - the three planned new regional parks (“Komovi Mts.”, “Turjak - Hajla Mts.” and “Visitor and Zeletin Mts.”) are designated in Montenegro, each with the territory adjacent to one of the national parks, and thus suitable for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area “Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains”.

Under this scenario the ecological continuity and connectivity of landscapes and habitats in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains would be ensured over the much larger area of the whole region. Furthermore, the region could be linked through the possible ‘SEE northern ecological corridor’ - a tract of protected areas stretching from Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains across the territory of Montenegro into Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sutjeska National Park).

Under this best possible (and still feasible) scenario - the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area could involve as many as six protected areas (three national parks of IUCN Category II and three regional parks of IUCN Category V) and encompass the total territory up to some 205’174 ha, which will then make it the one of the largest protected areas in the South Eastern Europe.

Last, but not least, the previously described initiatives may be complemented by the possible designation of the near Mokra Gora mountain range as protected landscape area in Serbia, adjacent to the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

It should be emphasised here that protected areas are centres of high biological and landscape diversity concentration, thus important reservoirs of the genetic material. Protected areas are in fact ‘banks’ where the highest natural and biodiversity values are ‘saved’ and kept for the future generations.

Each nation retains the full right to decide on the current and future land use of the country’s territory, also on the designation of protected area or, if need be, on the later withdrawal of its protective status, either in a situation when its natural values significantly deteriorate or in the case when the use of its natural resources is perceived as an absolute necessity for the benefit of the whole nation.
However, such strategic decision on safekeeping national treasures, to be independently undertaken by each Government, has to be taken in the proper time, as ongoing degradation of biological diversity values is most often irreversible. For example, a protected forest currently excluded from commercial use can later be harvested or turned into a residential area, but the recovery of its former biodiversity values would then become impossible.
Landscape of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.
One of the main purposes for establishing a transboundary protected area is to facilitate protection and sustainable use of its natural and landscape values in the eco-regional scale, perceived as one coherent natural unit. Harmonisation or coordination of nature and landscape management practices on each side of the border instead of managing natural and landscape values of several smaller protected areas in a conflicting or non-compatible mode is one of the major “added values” of establishing a transboundary protected area.

A similar approach has been applied for the mountain range of the Carpathians, under the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Kyiv, 2003). The 2. meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP2) to the Carpathian Convention adopted the first thematic Protocol to the Framework Convention - the Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity (Bucharest, 2009) already signed by all Carpathian countries, currently awaiting ratification. Pursuant to Article 16 of this Protocol each Party to the Carpathian Convention shall harmonise and coordinate measures, undertaken in its border area with the neighbouring Party, in particular in transboundary protected areas.

Furthermore, the Parties shall cooperate within existing transboundary protected areas and harmonise the management objectives and measures applied and, if need be, encourage the expansion of existing transboundary protected areas or creation of new transboundary protected areas. In a case where the natural habitat of the endangered species is located on both sides of the state border between the Parties, they shall cooperate on ensuring the conservation and, as may be necessary, recovery of those species and their natural habitats.

Ideally, resulting from harmonised or coordinated management practices in a transboundary protected area, protection of natural habitats located across or close to the state border should be enhanced, the migration of species across the state border should become uninhibited, continuation of natural evolutionary processes across the state border should be ensured, and common threats to nature and transboundary environmental hazards jointly identified and controlled.

Therefore, partners of transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area should jointly identify habitats, plant associations, species, landscapes and other values, protection of which would greatly benefit from enhanced transboundary cooperation in this particular region. Once such targets are agreed upon, the joint identification and assessment of present threats, and of possible common activities with the objective to mitigate and/or control such threats would then allow for the joint identification of common priorities for transboundary cooperation on biodiversity protection in this region.
It should be noted here that none of the involved countries is a Member State of the European Community. But in the light of the expected accession to the European Community in the future - the process of harmonization of national legislation and nature protection standards with those of the EU is ongoing in South Eastern Europe.


Last, but not least, it should be emphasised that relevant Annexes to the “Habitats Directive” as well as the appendices to the Bern Convention were elaborated without the inputs from e.g. Albania. Thus, as for 2009, the lists of habitats or species of the common European importance do not necessarily include all important, rare, endemic or threatened species of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region.

Therefore, the expert judgment is currently the sole available basis for defining conservation priorities, while the widely accepted European approach towards the evaluation of the biodiversity of this region can fully be implemented here only after the incorporation of e.g. additional important plant species of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains into these lists.

It should also be emphasized here that neither updated nor common databases and maps of habitats and species distribution for the whole transboundary region of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains involving Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Montenegro and Serbia are available so far. Thus, developing such databases in trilateral cooperation remains the task for the near future.

Taking all above into account – the identification of priorities for biodiversity conservation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”, in cooperation between scientists from Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Montenegro and Serbia should most probably combine three methodological approaches:

- Identifying habitats and species already listed in relevant Annexes to the Council Directives, Appendix II to the Bern Convention or national and IUCN Red Lists;
- Identifying “target species” (and possibly also habitats) of particular importance for biodiversity conservation in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region (e.g. local endemic, endemic and relic species) which are not yet included into internationally recognised lists;
- Focusing on habitats and species occurring in the border areas on Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, protection of which would greatly benefit from enhanced transboundary cooperation in this particular region.

**Target habitats**

The proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” encompasses a large diversity of natural habitats, including those of the European Community interest, whose conservation pursuant to the Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of
wild fauna and flora (the “Habitats Directive”) requires the designation of special areas of conservation in the Member States of the European Community. These habitats would greatly benefit from transboundary cooperation on biodiversity conservation issues in the proposed transboundary protected area.

Following the Habitats Directive approach the rare or unique natural habitats are those “which either are in danger of disappearance in their natural range, or have a small natural range following their regression or by reason of their intrinsically restricted area, or present outstanding examples of typical characteristics of this particular region”, taking into account the uneven distribution of such habitats throughout this particular bio-geographic region.

Priority shall be given to the “shared” habitats occurring in the border areas on Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, protection of which would greatly benefit from enhanced transboundary cooperation in this particular region. The majority of habitats in the border areas in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region, thus shared by two or more countries are those of the alpine or sub-alpine pastures on either limestone or silicate bedrock, alpine and sub-alpine limestone rocks and rocky habitats and screes, and alpine and sub-alpine silicate rocks and rocky habitats.

Several of them are listed under Annex I to the Habitats Directive, e.g. Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands (6150), Alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands (6170), Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels (6430), Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (8110), Calcareous and calcishist screes of the montane to alpine levels (8120), Eastern Mediterranean screes (8140), Medio-European calcareous scree of hill and montane levels (*8160), Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation (8210) or Alpine rivers and the herbaceous vegetation along their banks (3220).

As for the forest habitats (which do not necessarily occur across the state borders) – the last remains of primeval forests of the endemic and relic Balkan/Macedonian pine (Pinus peuce) and the sub-endemic Bosnian pine (Pinus heldreichii ssp. leucodermis) as well as treestands harbouring the Heldreich’s maple Acer heldreichii (endemic Tertiary relic species) would require special attention and common conservation efforts of partners involved in transboundary cooperation on biodiversity conservation in this region. Analysis of the target habitats should also take into account those listed under the Bern Convention, e.g. Beech forests (41.1), High oro-Mediterranean pine forests (42.7), Riparian willow formations (44.1), Boreo-alpine riparian galleries (44.1), Montenegrine spruce forests (42.243).

The identification of priority target habitats shall be subject to further consultations between partners from all countries concerned, in the course of their transboundary cooperation.

**Target plant associations and species**

The identification of priority target plant associations and species shall be subject to further consultations between partners from all countries concerned, in the course of their transboundary cooperation. Most probably such priorities should include some of the 255 Balkan endemic and sub-endemic species, in particular all 18 local endemic species, as well as the vast majority of some 70 endangered species present in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, in particular 19 species included in the Red List of Threatened Plants (IUCN, 1997).
The local endemic species are the most obvious “flagship species” of the region. However, many other species are already listed in Annexes to the “Habitats Directive”, which can become a sound argument for including them into the target species for cooperation, which could then facilitate fundraising for the common conservation projects. Nevertheless, the target plant associations and species which conservation could become subject of transboundary cooperation should include endemic, sub-endemic, and relic species, regardless whether particular species has already been listed in Annexes to the “Habitats Directive” or not.

For example, the tentative list of the potential target plant species for conservation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” could include *Wulfenia baldaccii*, *Diosconea balcanica*, *Minuartia baldaccii*, *Plantago reniformis*, *Scrophularia bosniaca*, *Teucrium arduini*, *Trifolium pilezzi*, Telekian’s honesty (*Lunaria telekiana*), yarrow (*Achillea grandifolia*), Albanian lovage (*Ligusticum albanicum*), Balkan maple (*Acer hyrcanum*), Albanian buckwheat (*Poligonum albanicum*), great yellow gentian (*Gentiana lutea*), Sharri’s alkanet (*Alkana scardica*), Dinaric columbine (*Aquilegia dinarica*), Albanian bellflower (*Campanula albanica*), Kernier’s thistle (*Carduus kernerii Simonkaj ssp. scardicus*), dalmat saffron (*Crocus dalmiticus*), big root cranesbill (*Geranium dalmaticum*), Albanian burnet (*Sanguisorba albanica*), Sharri’s saxifrage (*Saxifraga scardica*). Again, the decision on selecting target plant and fungi species for conservation projects shall again be subject to further consultations between partners from all countries concerned, in the course of their transboundary cooperation.

**Target fauna species**

The proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”, with rather negligible human pressures on the remote and inaccessible vast mountain areas is still a stronghold for several threatened fauna species of the common European importance, especially those which require large undisturbed forest ecosystems, including big mammals such as the brown bear, wolf, lynx, and chamois, listed under Annex II to Council Directive 92/43 EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

All these important fauna species which survived in this region have their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state borders, thus would greatly benefit from transboundary cooperation on their protection in the proposed large-scale transboundary protected area.

Again, the “absolute priority among many different priorities” should be given to species having their habitats in the border areas on Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, thus being of common interest to all partners of transboundary cooperation in this particular region.

However, the identification of the target species for protection, which could become subject of the common conservation projects would not always be easy, due to the abundance of fauna and multitude of important wildlife species in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains. Thus, any possible tentative list of fauna species which have their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state border in the planned transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” proposed as targets for common conservation activities would never be complete.
For obvious reasons, including on such tentative list species already listed in e.g. Annexes to both Council Directives would result in increased potential for raising both public and political support in particular countries, but also much broader European support, international partners and funding for the possible future common projects to be jointly undertaken in the proposed transboundary protected area.

Thus, the presence of at least several “Annex species” on any possible provisional ‘target species list’ is obvious. However, like in the case of plant species diversity, there are many other fauna species important for the biodiversity of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains which are not yet listed in above Annexes, e.g. endemic invertebrate species.

There are also other mammals and carnivores, e.g. the European wild cat *Felis silvestris*, badger *Meles meles* or pine marten *Martes martes* – not listed in Annexes to the European Council Directives, but already quite rare in numerous European countries, moreover indispensable for maintaining the fragile natural equilibrium of wildlife in the habitats of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.

Furthermore, some animal species which may not necessarily be considered to be important for conservation on the European or global scale (not listed in relevant Annexes, Appendices or Red Lists) could either be rare in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, or be crucial for the successful protection of the priority ‘target Annex species’. For instance, one could question the presence of the roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* on the tentative list of proposed ‘target fauna species’. Roe deer is quite common all over Europe, thus not particularly rare, threatened by extinction, or endangered. Roe deer is a popular game species for human beings, and thousands of roe deer individuals are hunted all around Europe each year. Thus, what is the reason of inscribing the common roe deer on the tentative list of proposed ‘target fauna species’?

The reason is simple – the roe deer is a prey not only for human hunters, but also a prey for e.g. the wolf, lynx or brown bear (in particular in autumn). Thus, the effective protection of the above rare, threatened and endangered “Annex II species” of the common European importance, and maintaining viable populations of the wolf, lynx, brown bear and many other smaller carnivores present in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains would never be possible without protecting their main animal prey and important food basis. This is why, in case when the ‘quite common roe deer’ is not protected at least in some areas of the region – wolves or brown bears may sooner or later become extinct in the whole region.

The decision on selecting target fauna species for common conservation projects shall be subject to further consultations between partners from the countries concerned, in the course of their transboundary cooperation.

Therefore, the Table 2. below neither includes all important fauna species in need for protective measures in the proposed transboundary protected area, nor shall be perceived as the ultimate list of target fauna species.

All these wildlife species which have their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state borders between Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Montenegro and Serbia would largely benefit from transboundary cooperation on their protection, in the proposed large-scale transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>English name</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mammals</td>
<td><em>Canis lupus</em></td>
<td>wolf</td>
<td>* HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Capreolus capreolus</em></td>
<td>roe deer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Felis silvestris</em></td>
<td>European wild cat</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lutra lutra</em></td>
<td>river otter</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lynx lynx</em></td>
<td>lynx</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Martes martes</em></td>
<td>pine marten</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Meles meles</em></td>
<td>Eurasian badger</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica</em></td>
<td>chamois (Balkan ssp.)</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ursus arctos</em></td>
<td>brown bear</td>
<td>* HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reptiles</td>
<td><em>Vipera berus</em></td>
<td>adder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphibians</td>
<td><em>Bombina variegata</em></td>
<td>yellow-bellied toad</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Salamandra salamandra</em></td>
<td>spotted salamander</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Triturus alpestris</em></td>
<td>alpine newt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td><em>Salmo marmoratus</em></td>
<td>marble trout</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td><em>Alectoris graeca</em></td>
<td>rock partridge</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Aquila chrysaetos</em></td>
<td>golden eagle</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Aquila heliaca</em></td>
<td>imperial eagle</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Falco naumanni</em></td>
<td>lesser kestrel</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Falco peregrinus</em></td>
<td>peregrine falcon</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Gyps fulvus</em></td>
<td>griffon vulture</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lyrurus / Tetrao tetrix</em></td>
<td>black grouse</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Tetrao urogallus</em></td>
<td>western capercaillie</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Tetrastes / Bonasa bonasia</em></td>
<td>hazel grouse</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As mentioned above - neither updated nor common databases and maps of habitats and species distribution for the whole transboundary region including Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Montenegro and Serbia are available so far. Therefore, updating, development, harmonization and maintenance of biodiversity-related databases, and development of the common database/s for the proposed transboundary protected area Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, in consultation and cooperation between involved countries seems to be the most urgent task.

This would require gathering and compilation of scientific data, national inventories and maps concerning rare or endangered natural and semi-natural habitat types, as well as plant communities and species, including endemic flora and fauna species native to the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.

In result of the above cooperation - areas significant for biological and landscape diversity of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, in particular those encompassing endangered natural and semi-natural habitat types as well as mainstays, priority connecting corridors and migratory routes of endangered migratory species should be delineated, and threats to their ecological functions assessed.

Only based on the analysis of such information the cooperation priorities for their future cooperation on biodiversity conservation issues can jointly be decided. This would later allow to develop common projects on e.g. coordinated protection of rare habitats and restoration of natural linkages across the state borders (ecological corridors) for migratory species, exchange of specimens of animal or plant species, establishing common ex-situ seed/gene banks and/or nurseries of rare and threatened species.

European context


According to the Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds Member States shall take the requisite measures to preserve, maintain or reestablish a sufficient diversity and area of habitats for bird species, while according to Article 4 the species mentioned in Annex I shall be the subject of special conservation measures concerning their habitat in order to ensure their survival and reproduction in their area of distribution. Pursuant to Article 3 concerning the preservation, maintenance and re-establishment of biotopes and habitats for birds - “creation of protected areas” is the first among all measures recommended by this Directive.

Thus, when deciding on the spatial plans for the border territories, the relevant authorities of all involved countries should take into account that:

- The region of the proposed transboundary protected area harbours a considerable number of natural habitats “shared” by countries concerned as well as numerous threatened or endemic flora and fauna species having their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state border;
- These habitats and species would greatly benefit from transboundary cooperation between both concerned countries on their conservation;
- These habitats and species include those listed under relevant Annexes to the “Habi-
tats” and “Birds” Directives, also priority species and habitat types;

- Such habitat types, animal and plant species of Community interest require the designation of special areas of conservation in the Member States of the European Community.

Therefore, the presence of habitats and species listed under relevant Annexes to the Council Directive 92/43/EEC (“Habitats Directive”) whose protection in the Member States of the European Community requires the designation of special areas of conservation, and bird species listed under Annex I to Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds which require special conservation measures concerning their habitats could become a sound argument for the designation of new protected areas in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Montenegro and Serbia, in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”.

3.2. Priorities for transboundary cooperation in the planned transboundary protected area identified by participants of the ENVSEC workshop in June 2009.

There is a wide range of potential joint activities, which can become the subject of transboundary cooperation between protected areas, local authorities and non-governmental organisations on each side of the state border. The potential for implementation of such joint activities depends to great extent on local conditions and identified common needs in a particular region.

As soon as both the legal and administrative frameworks for transboundary cooperation are in place, relevant partners, stakeholders and professional are involved, and potential funding sources are either made available or at least identified - the next important step is to decide on the priorities for cooperation which will later allow implementation of the first joint transboundary projects.

Priority actions which shall be undertaken in proposed transboundary areas in South Eastern Europe were one of the topics of the 2. subregional meeting on “Transboundary Coop-
workshop (Workshop 1: Priorities for common actions in transboundary “areas in focus”), where participants from Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and Montenegro were present.

It should be noted that the Montenegrin municipality of Plav (where the progress of initiatives towards establishing a national park was previously slow due to the disputes among the local community) was represented at the meeting by three participants, including the Mayor. They noted the progress towards establishment of the ‘Albanian Alps’ National Park on the Albanian side, supported the initiative of the Government of Montenegro to establish a new protected area including their community and expressed expectations that this designation could enhance sustainable development of the local economy and infrastructure, and that similar initiatives could be undertaken on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

Representatives of the Plav municipality commended the excellent quality of the feasibility study for the designation of Prokletije National Park prepared by the Institute for the Protection of Nature. They also expressed expectation that the new Law on National Parks establishing Prokletije National Park will be adopted soon, and recalled the fact that the Plav municipality authorities entered the dialogue with the central government concerning the potential for receiving the national park designation already in 1973. They suggested that the area of the proposed national park could extend even beyond the borders of Plav municipality. In response to that the representative of the Public Enterprise “National Parks of Montenegro” suggested keeping the area of Prokletije National Park like in the proposal already submitted to the Parliament, but indicated the possibility of designating new protected areas, e.g. regional parks in the neighbouring municipalities, thus extending the proposed transboundary protected area.

It has to be emphasized here, that this workshop had no legal mandate to e.g. decide on priorities, and was rather the first occasion to discuss such potential priorities in a group of participants from different countries, of different professional backgrounds and interests, in an informal manner.

Much more intensive, and much more formal consultations on potential priorities should be conducted in the future, among the future key partners of transboundary cooperation, in particular the relevant Ministries, protected area administrations, and local municipalities. However, the tentative list of possible priorities resulting from this workshop could potentially serve as a material for consideration, and a ‘warm-up’ for the future discussions.

Furthermore, the potential priorities identified in the course of this workshop prove that the representatives of nature conservation authorities, scientific institutions and non-governmental organizations from Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and Montenegro understand the possible benefits of transboundary cooperation on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, are willing to develop this cooperation, and have a clear vision for the potential common activities.

The outcomes of this informal workshop include the following tentative list of priorities for cooperation in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, as follows:

- Development of feasibility studies for the planned new protected areas in the region of the proposed transboundary protected area.
Legal designation of protected areas on all three sides as a precondition for developing transboundary cooperation, and reaching the similar starting point for cooperation on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

Developing common nature / species inventories and maps of the region of the proposed transboundary protected area, mapping of habitats.

Application of the harmonized research methodologies on wildlife species, such as the lynx or large mammals.

Improvement of road infrastructure, with the objective to establish road connections through the mountains across the state borders, and enhance direct personal contacts between the transboundary cooperation partners.

Promotion and marketing of the local agricultural (e.g. organic food) and handicraft products, e.g. during the annual transboundary ‘Olympic Games’ local event, or traditional meeting in Gusinje.

Monitoring of the implementation of the letter of intent / memorandum on cooperation signed by municipalities in 2006, and providing a follow up by concluding further cooperative agreements on particular issues.

Organising stakeholder meetings in e.g. Peć / Plav / Shkodër or Bajram Curri, with the participation of the local and central government authorities.

Clarification of the border regimes and status of border crossings in the mountains, with the objective to facilitate establishment of cross-border tourist hiking trails.

Continuation of the summer programs by B3P and their extension into all three involved territories, including environmental awareness programs, English language trainings, and youth exchanges.

Developing common funding applications to IPA (the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) concerning activities to be undertaken in the proposed TBPA, including establishment of new protected areas and development of their management plans, biodiversity conservation measures, cultural heritage protection and sustainable development.

It should be noted here, that the successful achievement of several priorities from the above tentative priority list is not feasible in short term, and would require both intensive preparatory works and consultations within all concerned countries, and bi- or trilateral consultations on e.g. inter-ministerial level.

The majority of the above tentative priorities is addressed as challenges for transboundary cooperation in the planned transboundary protected area in the next part of this study.
According to the best possible scenario for the further development of trilateral cooperation between the Governments and local stakeholders in Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and Montenegro - the ecological continuity and connectivity of landscapes and habitats in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains would be ensured in the whole region, linked through the possible ‘SEE northern ecological corridor’ - a tract of protected areas stretching from Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains across the territory of Montenegro into Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area can involve as many as six protected areas (three national parks of IUCN Category II and three regional parks of IUCN Category V) and encompass the total territory up to some 205'174 ha, which will then make it the one of the largest protected areas in the South Eastern Europe.

The Albanian Government plans the designation of a large-scale “Alps National Park” in 2010-2011, and the new proposal for the designation of Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is currently being elaborated and prepared for consultations. Moreover, there are plans for the designation of other three new protected areas in the border areas of Montenegro: Regional Parks “Komovi Mts.”, “Turjak - Hajla Mts.” and “Visitor and Zeletin Mts.”, each adjacent to one of the national parks, thus suitable for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area “Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains”.

Moreover, Serbia planned the designation of the neighbouring Mokra Gora (2155 m) mountain range as protected landscape area, adjacent to the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park, thus suitable for inclusion into the proposed transboundary protected area.

The abandonment of traditional land-use practices ongoing on all three sides is a common challenge for the further sustainability of the local economy in the mountains. Sustainable tourism development in the region could bring new employment opportunities and new sources of income, thus mitigating the economic reasons for the current exodus of mountain populations.

The label of a ‘transboundary protected area of exceptional natural values’ as well as ‘one the largest protected area in South-Eastern Europe’ could provide for the ‘unique selling point’ for sustainable nature-based tourism development, increase the tourist attractiveness of the region, facilitate the broad recognition of the region and marketing of the regional tourist product abroad, and help to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative stereotypes still common among some Europeans, resulting from the past armed ethnic conflicts.

Due to the fact that the main tourist attractions of this transboundary region are the exceptional landscape and natural values of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains – the development of sustainable tourism in the region would require close cooperation of the tourist services providers with the authorities of the protected areas in the region.
But the above “competitive advantages” for the development of sustainable tourism in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region will only be possible in the case when the initiatives on all sides of the borders provide for the full ecological connectivity and continuity of the protected area network of the region.

Opportunities

The achievement of the above vision for the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region could largely be facilitated by numerous similarities between the border regions of the three involved countries.

The settlement pattern, land-use and economic development pattern, and welfare of inhabitants on each side of the state borders in the proposed transboundary protected area is very similar. All three sides face almost the same infrastructural problems and common environmental threats. The territories in the region of the proposed transboundary protected area belong to the less developed and poorest regions of their countries. Furthermore, the negative demographic trends, population ageing, and migration to towns paired by rural depopulation are common challenges for all three sides of the state borders in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains. The abandonment of traditional land-use practices ongoing on all three sides is a common challenge for the further sustainability of the local economy in the mountains, as these traditional practices have so far been either the main or the sole source of incomes, and largely facilitated the subsistence of the local inhabitants. Last, but not least - the unemployment rate is currently very high on all three sides of this mountain region.

Hence, in general the local inhabitants do not have much to lose. They either have to find the way to generate new employment opportunities for themselves and for the younger generations, or the rural exodus from the mountain territories of the common transboundary region would continue, and lead to further depopulation of the mountain areas, with negative consequences for the currently high biological and landscape diversity of the region. The possible and most welcomed solution could be the sustainable tourism development in the region, which could bring new employment opportunities and new sources of income, thus mitigating the economic reasons for the current exodus of mountain populations. But the development of sustainable tourism in this region is still much more a future challenge, than the current opportunity.

As for 2009, there are in general no more potential conflict issues between the local populations in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”. On the contrary, the idea of establishing a common protected area is perceived as an important factor which could mitigate the adverse effects of the past ethnic tensions and create a much stronger sense of the common regional identity.

Furthermore, once the long lasting administrative barriers and political obstacles for cooperation in the region disappeared – the local population of all ethnic groups are willing to communicate and cooperate, which is another factor which could largely facilitate the development of transboundary cooperation on ‘politically neutral’ conservation of the shared natural values of the shared transboundary region.

The existence of state borders in the proposed transboundary protected area “ Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains does not provide an obstacle to wildlife migrations and has no negative influence on the connectivity and continuity of habitats present on both sides of the border.
Moreover, in general the presence of the state border does not result in explicit legal obstacles limiting civilian access to the border areas on either side of the state border, which could e.g. prevent the implementation of the common research or conservation projects in habitats crossed by the state border. It is also not a factor which could hamper the development of transboundary cooperation, for instance by limiting possibilities for direct and regular contacts between cooperation partners, e.g. protected area managers or the representatives of municipality authorities from all involved neighbouring countries.

The presence of the state border in this proposed transboundary protected area seems to have no strong adverse effect on the availability of information on the area, like detailed maps indispensable for e.g. mapping of the habitats in border areas or planning common activities; the access to such information sources is in general not particularly restricted by security measures.

The language spoken in the northern part of Albania and in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 part of the proposed transboundary protected area is the same local dialect of Albanian, understood in several villages on the Montenegrin side, whilst the inhabitants of border villages in Albania usually understand the Serbo-Croat language spoken by the Montenegrins, the same relates to the vast majority of inhabitants of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

Furthermore, the inhabitants of the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” share many elements of the cultural heritage, customs, folklore and traditions, which contributes to building the common regional identity.

At present, the ongoing approximation of national legislation on nature protection to the EU legislation and standards largely facilitates the use of the same methodological approaches. Moreover, the relevant Ministries of Albania and Montenegro already gathered some experience in transboundary cooperation. The objectives of protected area management, research methods and existing inventories and databases on the environment and natural resources, and legislation on nature protection are to a large extent compatible in all involved countries.

Last but not least - the currently proposed internal functional zonation of the planned Alps National Park in Albania is taking into account the conservation requirements for adjacent areas across the state borders, especially on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, which was possible due to the common research activities as well as experience sharing between the Albanian experts from the Botanical Garden of Tirana on flora species as well as habitats and natural ecosystems stretching across the border, and experts from the Museum of Natural Sciences of Tirana on wild fauna species with their partners in the scientific institutions in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

Moreover, a letter of good intent was signed by all concerned 6 municipality mayors on 15th November 2006 during the meeting in Pristina, largely facilitated by the “Balkan Peace Park Project”.

Challenges

The legal designation of protected areas on all three sides as a precondition for developing transboundary cooperation was placed by the Podgorica workshop participants on top
of this tentative priority list. It should be recalled here that, as for June 2009, only a small part of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains is protected, while the remaining areas of this mountain range located across the state borders remain outside the protected areas.

Taking into account the above – this first priority is also a precondition for improving the currently missing connectivity and continuity of protected area network in the whole region, which would then enhance direct personal working contacts between protected area managers and local stakeholders. By establishing new protected areas this connectivity and continuity of protected area network would be ensured, thus providing for a much stronger common regional identity, and providing incentives for the key stakeholders for developing and implementing a common vision for conservation and sustainable development of their shared transboundary region. Thus, this first priority on the list is also a precondition for establishing a transboundary protected area in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.

However, it should be recalled here that the designation of new protected areas in the region would still require political decisions on the central level (undertaken in parallel to a possible trilateral agreement between involved Governments, concerning their cooperation in the region) which have to be based on updated and sound scientific basis as well as consensus with the authorities of local municipalities, and other key stakeholders.

Thus, the above ‘top priority’ can not be achieved in the short term, as the decision-making and legislation process for proclaiming new protected areas in the region would require several years for official consultations and procedures, proceeded by developing required scientific justification, and consultations with the authorities of local municipalities and among local communities concerned.

Undertaking the political decision concerning the designation of new protected areas would require intensive preparatory works to be carried out in each country, utilising results of recent researches, e.g. update assessments of the natural values of the areas proposed for protection, evaluation of the socio-economic factors and possible benefits of establishing a protected area, spatial delineation of the boundaries of territories planned for protection as well as their internal functional zonation, digital mapping and developing the GIS database/s, as well as designing relevant organisational structures for the administrations of the new protected areas, and assessing their financial sustainability.

It is highly recommended that the above preparatory works are carried in consultation with the partners from across the state borders, e.g. with relevant Ministries of the neighbouring countries.

All the above activities would additionally require consultations with relevant stakeholders (e.g. local municipalities, forest services administrations and landowners) and launching sound public awareness campaigns (both in-country and possibly also on the regional level) which would require developing information and promotional materials targeted at different audiences and professional groups.

Furthermore, in a case when such political decisions on proclaiming the planned new protected areas are positive, the proposals for park management plans would have to be developed. Last, but not least, the newly established protected area administrations would require operational and professional/technical capacity building, which could include some
common trainings, study visits or organising joint thematic seminars gathering experts and managers from all involved countries.

Consultations in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 with relevant stakeholders for the designation of the **planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park** should officially be launched by the Nature Protection Division of the Environment Department of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP), and carried out by either the MESP itself, or by the Kosovo Environment Protection Agency; in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD) and its Kosovo Forest Agency, with the authorities of the local municipalities of Pejë/Peć, Deçan/Dečani, Istog/Istok and Gjakovë/Dakovica, the experts from the University of Prishtinë/Priština could largely facilitate such consultations.

According to some commonly expressed views, such consultations could to some extent be also facilitated by the involvement of the local environmental non-governmental organisations, and the presence of observers from the major international organisations, United Nations, and potential supporters to this process, e.g. international or foreign national assistance organisations, as well as environmental and development agencies.

Last, but not least, the presence of representatives of the Prokletije National Park in Montenegro, and in particular of the protected area administrations from Albania (either existing administrations of “Lugina e Valbones” and “Thethi” National Parks, or the planned Alps National Park) could largely catalyse the positive attitudes of the local municipalities towards developing transboundary cooperation in the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna” transboundary protected area, where the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park would be the key partner on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

Therefore, a public awareness campaign involving local non-governmental organisations and enhanced consultations with the local communities should be undertaken well in advance to public hearings and submitting the official proposal for designation, with the objective to raise the public support for establishing the proposed national park and to find the compromise between the conservation requirements and the development needs of the local communities and stakeholders concerned.

It should again be emphasized here, that such broad consultations in all three or even four countries must be based e.g. on **sound scientific research and justification** for putting particular areas under the legal protection, **analysis of the spatial planning documents, evaluation of the socio-economic factors** and careful assessment of the available resources and financial possibilities on each side.

Taking into account the possible different timing of planning activities on different sides of the state borders, the potential for developing an integrated management plan for the whole transboundary protected area is limited. However, the development of **harmonized management plans** is possible, but subject to necessary consultations between relevant authorities and scientific institutions of all countries concerned.

The above relates to the need for **developing a harmonised spatial design and internal functional zonation** of the proposed transboundary protected area on each side of the state borders.
Most protected areas as well as UNESCO biosphere reserves implement zonation pattern fulfilling nature and landscape conservation, and sustainable development objectives. The most important natural and landscape values are maintained in the strictly protected “core zone” where human interventions or influence on natural processes are limited. Such core zones are usually surrounded and linked by areas (“buffer zones/areas”) remaining under partial protection regime allowing management aimed at e.g. improving the current state of ecosystems and/or habitats, and preventing negative outside pressures on the “core zone”. Furthermore, in case of biosphere reserves a “transition zone /area of cooperation” is established outside the legally protected area, with the aim to harmonise sustainable development of the adjacent areas with protection of nature in the inner two zones.

In a case of a transboundary protected area – particular protected areas directly adjoining each other across the state border should be designed in a way allowing harmonised, compatible and complementary functional zonation. Preferably, all involved countries should implement the same or compatible functional zonation pattern, which means that each functional zone on one side of the state border should have its equivalent zone across the state border.

Furthermore, the core zones on each side of the state border should include all areas and habitats significant for maintaining biological and landscape diversity of the region (e.g. target natural habitats, priority connecting corridors in border areas, key mainstays and migratory routes of target animal species). Functional zones should later be precisely delineated with the use of the GIS (Geographic Information System) tools, and at least the core zones should be clearly signposted in the terrain.

The necessary ‘transboundary complementarity’ of the zonation pattern in a transboundary protected area means that the zonation on each side of the state border should provide for the ecological coherence of border areas, and grant similar protective status to areas located on both sides of the state border, with the objective to prevent the situation when e.g. a strict nature reserve designated on one side of the state border is directly adjacent to areas intensively exploited or developed across the border.

Such harmonised spatial design and internal functional zonation of the proposed transboundary protected area should duly take into account e.g. the landownership issues, the existing settlement network and development priorities of the municipalities on both sides of the state border, but also the conservation requirements for adjacent areas across the state border, the routes of the priority ecological transboundary connecting corridors (e.g. wildlife migration corridors) in the border areas.

It should be recalled here that the priority ecological transboundary connecting corridors, e.g. wildlife migration corridors in the border areas of the in the proposed transboundary protected area “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” are not yet adequately researched, clearly identified and delineated. Some research on the above issue is done by the experts of the Museum of Natural Sciences for Albania, but a lot more still needs to be done.

As for June 2009 only the currently proposed zonation of Alps National Park in Albania is known, but it may still change in result of the current management planning procedures, and therefore should rather be perceived as provisional, requiring revision and improvements in the course of the future planning activities, on the basis of the most update scientific studies and recent field researches. However, it should
again be reminded that the currently proposed internal functional zonation of the planned Alps National Park is taking into account the conservation requirements for adjacent areas across the state borders, especially on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

The future spatial design and internal functional zonation of the recently designated Prokletije National Park in Montenegro (adjacent to the two planned national parks) and of the planned Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 are not yet elaborated and approved. Thus, their internal zonation could potentially be easily harmonized with the zonation of the other protected areas to be designated across the state border. Developing the harmonised and compatible zonation pattern for the whole transboundary protected area in consultations between all involved countries remains one of the most challenging tasks for the near future.

Therefore, intensive exchange of information, scientific data, methodological experience and consultations between relevant authorities and scientific institutions of all countries concerned are indispensable, in particular in the early phase of drafting relevant spatial planning documents and proposals.

This task can be even more challenging due to the absence of common nature inventories or databases available for the whole region, including the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area. According to the country reports used for this study – special attention should be paid to habitat mapping and gathering and exchanging information on the population sizes of several threatened species, especially large mammals and birds. Therefore, updating, development, harmonization and maintenance of biodiversity-related databases, and development of the common database/s for the proposed transboundary protected area Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, in consultation and cooperation between all involved countries seems to be the most urgent task. This task would require gathering and compilation of scientific data, national inventories and maps concerning rare or endangered natural and semi-natural habitat types, as well as plant communities and species, including endemic flora and fauna species native to the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.

In result of the above cooperation - areas significant for biological and landscape diversity of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, in particular those encompassing endangered natural and semi-natural habitat types as well as mainstays, priority connecting corridors and migratory routes of endangered migratory species should be delineated, and threats to their ecological functions assessed.

Only based on the analysis of such information the selection of cooperation priorities for the future cooperation on biodiversity conservation issues can jointly be decided. This would later allow to develop common projects on e.g. coordinated protection of rare habitats and restoration of natural linkages across the state borders (ecological corridors) for migratory species, exchange of specimens of animal or plant species, establishing common ex-situ seed/gene banks and/or nurseries of rare and threatened species.

According to experts – this would require launching joint scientific research projects, particularly those important for the biodiversity of existing and planned protected areas (e.g. baseline research for establishing inventories of important taxonomic groups in the area,
biodiversity mapping of important species and habitats, preparation of regional Red List/s of rare, endemic, threatened or endangered species). Such common projects could largely benefit from, or build upon several research projects recently undertaken in the region, for instance those by the Albanian experts from the Botanical Garden of Tirana on flora species as well as habitats and natural ecosystems stretching across the border, and experts from the Museum of Natural Sciences of Tirana on wild fauna species with their partners in the scientific institutions in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

Last, but not least, there are several other 'success stories' in the region of the South Eastern Europe in implementing common transboundary projects, which could provide good practice examples and inspire the partners of transboundary cooperation in the Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains.

First of all, the most relevant example of transboundary cooperation is the successful cooperation between the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES) and the Association for the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment of Albania (PPNEA) focused on the establishment of “Jablanica – Shebenik” bilateral national park by implementing a common project within the framework of the Green Belt initiative, supported by the BfN (German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation) and coordinated by the German foundation Euronatur.

The original incentive for establishing this new transboundary protected area was the need for conservation of the Balkan lynx population on both sides of the border, where establishment of protected areas on both sides of the state border was perceived as a precondition and tool for successful conservation of the lynx. The project involved also the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) of Albania, which representatives contributed to the success of this common initiative. As for June 2009 – the Jablanica-Shebenik area has already received a legal protective designation on the Albanian side, while the procedure for the official proclamation of a protected area on the Macedonian side is expected to be completed by MEPP still in 2009, subject to some additional adjustments of the proposed boundaries and a field inspection to be carried out together with the MEPP representatives and experts. Later the proposal would be forwarded to the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.

This common project was immediately followed by a new one, implemented by the same partners from both involved countries, aiming on public relations aspects. In result several common communication materials (poster, leaflets) were developed and printed, several meetings of the local key stakeholders were organised, as well as a study tour to Croatia (for the local mayors, administration representatives and activists) and a study tour to Germany (for e.g. the representatives of MEPP and forestry companies).

The above success stories immediately resulted in increased support for the activities of the partner organizations, thus 14 more small projects are currently implemented in the Jablanica-Shebenik region, mostly targeted at raising ecological awareness among the local communities as well as some small-scale development projects.

However, it should be noted with concern that the original project for the “Jablanica – Shebenik” bilateral national park also tried to
facilitate the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) of Albania and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) of the Republic of Macedonia, both involved in the common project. This bilateral agreement has not been formalised until today.

Other examples of similar transboundary ‘success stories’ in the South Eastern European region could be the joint Prespa Park project aimed at sustainable management of the Prespa basin, involving Albania, Greece and Macedonia, the Shkodra Lake project involving Albania and Montenegro, or the joint initiative of Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, aimed at protection of the endangered Gentiana lutea species in Koritniku and Sharr mountains.

Another serious obstacle to intensifying transboundary cooperation in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains is the absence of official agreements on transboundary cooperation concerning the proposed transboundary protected area. There are also no official initiatives or cooperative agreements between local authorities and self-governments from either side of the borders concerning the proposed transboundary protected area.

In fact, there is e.g. a bilateral agreement between Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, signed on 4th July 2008 at the level of Ministries relevant for environmental issues, and related to their intended cooperation on e.g. nature protection and protected areas, spatial planning, sustainable use of natural and energy resources, and monitoring and control of the quality of air, water and soil. However, the implementation of this agreement remains another challenge for the future. Moreover, such bilateral agreements targeted at the broad scope of thematic fields of potential cooperation are very general, and are not directly addressing the expected cooperation in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.

As for today, the transboundary cooperation in this region is very limited, to say the least, while the exchange of data and information between partners is mainly based on good personal working contacts and strong voluntary informal collaborative relationships. Of course, such informal relationships are based on the initiative and consensus of all involved local partners, require less bureaucracy and no reporting, and may easily involve a wide range of partners including local non-governmental organisations. It is also true that friendly relations between partners across the borders may result in successful cooperation, even with little or no political and financial support of the Governments.

However, such informal relationships are not legally enforceable, are often affected by personnel changes (e.g. election of the new municipality mayor or nomination of a new park director, less committed to transboundary cooperation), do not provide for adequate track record (e.g. no minutes of meetings), and not always result in the support from the side of the central Governments.

This is why the success in transboundary cooperation requires both formal and informal cooperative agreements. Formal agreements provide complex interdisciplinary approach to conservation and sustainable development, are legally enforceable, can prescribe the period of agreement requiring re-commitment or re-negotiation, can involve governmental administrations and agencies, increase empowerment of protected area administrations and
staff, are less affected by personnel changes, provide for regular reporting and evaluation of the cooperation progress, provide for continuity of cooperation, can provide adequate funding from central budget for e.g. meetings, travel and communication, staff, joint activities and research, as well as encourage agreements on the local level. Last, but not least, formal agreements are indispensable as the legal basis for receiving official institutional and financial support as well as for official recognition of a particular TBPA by international organisations, e.g. UNESCO-MaB Programme or the Europarc Federation.

On the other hand - even an 'official high-level agreement' will not initiate successful transboundary cooperation alone, unless clear and feasible priorities and tasks for cooperation are identified by the partners and agreed, relevant consultative or governing structures established, and adequately budgeted.

As for 2009 the transboundary cooperation in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains cannot legally be based on any regional convention or a bi- or trilateral agreement / protocol on cooperation signed between the countries concerned, either at the governmental or at the ministerial level. There are also no legal agreements between nature conservation authorities, administrations of protected areas, scientific institutions or local municipal administrations of the region, except for the Letter of Intent, signed by municipality mayors in 2006. Last, but not least, the implementation of this letter of intent should be monitored, priorities for cooperation should jointly be jointly identified depending on available capacities, means and resources, and later concluding further cooperative agreements on particular issues would most probably be necessary in order to provide the follow-up to this meeting, held three years ago.

Preferably such agreement should clearly state the common vision, priorities and fields of work for cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area, allocate duties and responsibilities among different cooperation partners, delegate powers and designate authorities mandated to coordinate transboundary cooperation, authorise allocation of the part of the state budget funding for common transboundary activities. A possible agreement should also refer to the socio-economic context and well-being of local communities, linking such with the protection of common natural and cultural values. Last, but not least, such agreement should later officially be communicated to local stakeholders on each side of the state border. As suggested by the authors of the country reports used for this study - such agreement could also provide a legal basis for the possible establishment of a joint body coordinating transboundary cooperation (commission, committee), which at the early stages of transboundary cooperation could be a precondition for its successful planning and implementation.

Maintaining direct personal working contacts between different partners would be substantial for developing the future transboundary cooperation. As for today, there is little evidence of such contacts, which have not yet been particularly frequent or regular, however such are not restricted by e.g. the presence of the state border. According to the country reports used for this study – some kind of external assistance in the preparation of such regular meetings, logistic support as well as external expertise could be expected by the local stakeholders.

As suggested during the ENVSEC workshop in Podgorica – such stakeholder meetings could be organized in e.g. Pejë/Peć, Plav, Shkodër or Bajram Curri, with the participation
of the local and central government authorities. According to the reports used for this study – the traditional summer meeting in the Hajla mountain range could be useful for developing informal cooperation with Serbia.

However, probably due to the fact that cooperation has so far been developed mostly on informal basis – even these few meetings held so far have not been properly recorded and documented, thus no written record of such meetings (e.g. minutes, decisions, joint statements or declarations, except for the Letter of Intent from 2006) are available.

The lack of such records impairs the possibility of recalling the outcomes of particular common meetings, or making such outcomes available to other partners. Thus, documenting the ongoing cooperation to e.g. the Governments and/or potential donors is currently not possible. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the future meetings in transboundary cooperation in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region are properly documented in a written form.

Furthermore, due to the fact that the cooperation and meetings have so far been informal – the cooperation partners had to cover related expenses (e.g. costs of travel, accommodation and communication) from their regular operational budgets. An official agreement on cooperation could help to properly justify such expenses, or even generate some support from the central budget for the meeting costs, which would then enhance the frequency (and possibly also the regularity) of meetings gathering different partners from all sides of the state borders, influencing the intensity and efficiency of direct personal working contacts.

Last, but not least, it should be recalled that the scarce network of roads and border crossing points in the mountains of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, and in particular the absence of border crossing points in the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area other than between Montenegro and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 near the Rugova Canyon area could be a factor seriously impairing the frequency of the direct personal contacts between the authorities expected to become partners of transboundary cooperation in the region.

As already mentioned, the transboundary cooperation would largely be facilitated by establishment and designation of a special common ‘coordinating body’ for transboundary cooperation in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, as an official forum for consultations between all involved countries.

Such common coordinating body should have clearly defined range of competencies, tasks, rules of procedure allowing fair and balanced decision making between all partners, operational modalities and adequate operational budget to finance its meetings and work. A similar common coordinating body was established in the framework of the transboundary project of Montenegro and Albania concerning the protection of the Skadar Lake, based on the Memorandum of Understanding between responsible Ministries from both countries, later approved by respective Governments.

Different institutional, operational and technical capacities (e.g. imbalance in the number of staff, in degree of professionalism and expertise) between the partners may cause serious obstacles for developing transboundary cooperation, and result in need for mutual assistance and support in implementing agreed management objectives. For example, there are no biolo-
gists, ecologists or economists in the teams running the administrations of the existing National Parks “Thethi” and “Lugina e Valbones” in Albania, and forestry management is most probably the sole range of skills represented there.

Therefore, the capacities of different local partners for transboundary cooperation should be assessed and enhanced, in order to cumulate currently available resources and upgrade the professional skills and expertise possessed by the staff members of different institutions and authorities. Resources necessary for developing transboundary cooperation would include e.g. premises (offices, libraries, conference and meeting rooms), personnel (professional and administrative staff), equipment (e.g. computers, cameras, vehicles, or scientific and professional equipment).

The participants of the ENVSEC workshop in Podgorica considered the possibility of developing the common funding applications to IPA (the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) concerning activities to be undertaken in the proposed transboundary protected area in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, including establishment of new protected areas and development of their management plans, biodiversity conservation measures, cultural heritage protection and sustainable development.

It has to be emphasised here that local partners on both sides of the state border have little or even no experience in common fundraising, while most probably the future capacity building projects, trainings and exchanges for personnel of protected areas and local municipalities would be dependent on available external financial assistance. Similarly, local partners on either side of the state borders in this region have no previous experience in implementing and managing e.g. foreign assistance projects (such as the Prefecture of Dibra in Albania, which implemented part of the “Forestry Project”, funded by the World Bank and the Swiss Government between 1995 and 2002).

Last, but not least, foreign language skills (e.g. the knowledge of English or German) necessary for developing an application to foreign sources are scarce in the region. For example, there are no English-speaking persons in the administrations of the existing National Parks “Thethi” and “Lugina e Valbones” in Albania, which would also limit their chances for exchanges or training abroad.

But it has to be emphasised here that transboundary co-operation can not be developed in long-term only on the ‘project basis’, as the ‘project deadline’ may simultaneously become the ‘co-operation deadline’ and the continuity of cooperation could then be seriously threatened. Therefore providing a stable source/s of funding for at least the core activities in transboundary cooperation is indispensable. The example of fundraising activities for the transboundary project on the protection of the Skadar Lake showed that transboundary cooperation cannot solely rely on international donors and initiatives, therefore national sources are perceived as a more sustainable long-term solution.

Furthermore, joint actions will hardly be possible without allocating staff members as cooperation contacts and focal points, with the responsibility to facilitate transboundary cooperation from each cooperating side, of relevant capacities and skills to work together, or if appropriate - without designating transboundary cooperation programme coordinator/s for the whole transboundary protected area, or for each of its constituent national parts.
Some of the potential benefits of transboundary cooperation are crucial for nature and landscape conservation of the transboundary protected area, therefore much more motivating nature conservationists and scientists, who better understand the need for a coordinated approach in an eco-regional scale than the local inhabitants.

Other potential benefits of transboundary cooperation, in particular those for sustainable local economic development, could be more appealing and attractive for the local communities, thus potentially raising local support for establishing a transboundary protected area, perceived as a tool for improving the life standards and well-being of the area inhabitants.

Sustainable tourism development could probably be the most promising development opportunity for the local economy, the source of income of growing importance providing employment chances for the local inhabitants, and a factor which can mitigate or prevent the current alarming rural depopulation trends, and limit the ongoing migration of younger people to towns and cities. Development of tourism in Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains would simultaneously result in growing demand for local traditional food products or handicrafts.

However, it is important to emphasise that the exceptional landscape and nature values of this region are not ‘eternal and granted forever’, and their maintenance depends on the careful spatial planning providing for the wise and sustainable use of natural resources, and their protection. In case tourism develops in an uncontrolled and unsustainable way – it can also lead to e.g. the non-reversible changes of the pristine landscapes, degradation of fragile mountain habitats, loss of biodiversity, increased problems of water supplies, waste and sewage management, increased traffic on mountain roads and trails etc.

Should the above mentioned unique landscape, natural and recreational values of the region significantly deteriorate in result of e.g. uncontrolled development or illegal practices – the present high tourist attractiveness would immediately decrease. In result no new visitors (in particular not the international ones) would be attracted to come to the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains, while some part of the current visitors to the area may decide to chose other holiday destinations, where adverse effects of human economy on environment, landscape and nature are either none or better prevented, providing for better quality of recreation. The mountains of this region are indeed highly attractive for mountain trekking and skiing – but there are many other mountain ranges in Europe providing similar recreation opportunities, often paired by other attractions, e.g. historical towns, museums, spas, conference and wellness centers, and much better developed tourist, ski-lift and road infrastructure, like for instance in the Alps.

Thus, foreign tourists do need a strong incentive to choose Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains as their holiday destination, instead of traveling either to other mountain locations in Europe. In other words – should these natural values be gone, a considerable number of either the current or potential customers, in particular the foreign ones, could simply disappear forever or never be tempted to explore this region. With the decreasing number of visitors the local entrepreneurs in tourist services sector could simultaneously lose a corresponding part of their current incomes, and chances for further development and employment in the future.

Due to the fact that the main tourist attractions of this transboundary region are the exceptional
landscape and natural values of the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains – the development of sustainable tourism in the region would require close cooperation of the tourist services providers with the authorities of the protected areas in the region, e.g. on developing the common tourist hiking trails and the network of cooperating visitor centres in the planned protected areas. Therefore, the future and sustainability of the tourist business in the whole region of the proposed transboundary protected area Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains is to a large extent dependant on the cooperation of nature conservation authorities and protected are administrations with local municipality authorities and the tourism sector, on the maintenance, conservation and if need be, also the restoration of its natural assets as the main source of tourist attractiveness of the region.

Developing common tourist products and packages including visits and various tourist activities in different regions on each side of the state borders should be based on the commonly developed and implemented sustainable tourism development strategy for the region, which should involve tourist services providers from different municipalities of the neighbouring countries, thus providing for a more equal sharing of benefits and revenues from tourism by inhabitants of different parts of the proposed transboundary protected area, potentially resulting in a more harmonized and compatible development of services and facilities in the whole transboundary region.

As suggested during the ENVSEC workshop in Podgorica - promotion and marketing of the local agricultural (e.g. organic food) and handicraft products could commonly be organised during the annual transboundary ‘Olympic Games’ local event, or traditional annual meeting in Gusinje on the Montenegrin side.

Last, but not least, developing and publishing common promotional materials and a common map for visitors is indispensable, taking into account that the tourist or mountaineering maps are currently hardly available even for some selected smaller areas of the whole transboundary region, while the common detailed tourist map including areas on all sides of the state borders in the region of the proposed “Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains” transboundary protected area does not exist.
Landscape of Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains.
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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADA Austrian Development Agency
ASCI Area of special conservation interest
B3P Balkan Peace Park Project
BfN German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation
CBD Convention on Biological Diversity
CIDA Canadian Development Agency
COP Conference of the Parties
DAI Dinaric Arc Initiative
DEWA Division of Early Warning and Assessment
DFS Directorate of Forestry Service (Albania)
ENVSEC Environment and Security Initiative
EU European Union
FYR Former Yugoslav Republic
GEF World Bank Global Environment Facility
GIS Geographic Information System
GRID Global Resource Information Database
IBA Important Bird Area
IPA Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IUCN International Union for Conservation of Nature
KEPA Kosovo Environment Protection Agency
KFA Kosovo Forest Agency
KFOR NATO Kosovo Force
MES Macedonian Ecological Society
MAFRD Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (Kosovo)
MAFWM Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (Montenegro)
MEFWA Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (Albania)
MEPP Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (FYR Macedonia)
MESP Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (Kosovo)
MSPEP Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environmental Protection (Montenegro)
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO Non-governmental Organisation
NM Natural Monument
NP National Park
NPPD Nature Protection Policies Directorate (Albania)
OSCE Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe
PEEN Pan-European Ecological Network
PENPM Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro
PPNEA Association for the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment of Albania
REC Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe
SAP Strategic Action Plan
SEE South-Eastern Europe
SFRJ Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia
SNR Strict Nature Reserve
SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
TBPA Transboundary Protected Area
UK United Kingdom
UN United Nations
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNDPI United Nations Department of Public Information
UNECO United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP – ISCC UNEP Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Framework Convention
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNESCO-BRESCE UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
UNESCO-MaB UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme
USAID United States Agency for International Development
WHS World Heritage Site
WWF World Wide Fund for Nature
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was prepared in 2009 by UNEP Vienna - ISCC under the project “Enhancing Transboundary Biodiversity Management in South Eastern Europe” in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative - SEE with support of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and published in 2010 with support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

A special “thank you” to the many members of the ENVSEC - SEE family and friends of the Balkan mountains who contributed throughout the years with passion and dedication to the research and conservation of exceptional natural values of the shared region, and to developing transboundary initiatives for establishment of protected areas in the South Eastern Europe.

A particular “thank you” also to the colleagues and friends who contributed to the preparation of this study by completing country report questionnaires and providing additional information, materials and photos.

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Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration of Albania
Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Kosovo
Ministry of Spatial Planning and Environmental Protection of Montenegro
ALBAFOREST
Department of Public Information of the United Nations (UNDPI) Cartographic Section,
Kosovo Office for the Protection of Nature
UNEP / DEWA / GRID Europe
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PUBLISHED BY THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME
The programme of work on mountain biological diversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recommends establishing new transboundary protected areas with the objective to enhance conservation of biological diversity, implement the ecosystem approach, and improve international cooperation.

The feasibility study by UNEP-Vienna on the potential for establishing a transboundary protected area in the Prokletije / Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains region

- Provides a brief overview on the local context for transboundary cooperation, natural values and protected areas;
- Describes the state of the environment and potential threats, legal and administrative frameworks for the development and improving the connectivity and continuity of protected area networks in the region;
- Identifies priorities for biodiversity conservation and international cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area.

The objective of this study is to:

- Provide for better understanding of the situation across the border in the region, and identify possible added values of transboundary cooperation;
- Analyse and evaluate the current status of transboundary initiatives, identify current short-comings and impediments for cooperation, and recommend actions aimed at facilitating transboundary cooperation;
- Assess the potential for success under the local conditions;
- Indicate what kind of external support is indispensable for the success of this initiative.

The label of a transboundary protected area of exceptional natural values and sustainable tourism development would increase the tourist attractiveness of the region, facilitate marketing of the regional tourist product abroad, and help to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative stereotypes resulting from the past armed ethnic conflict.