

The EU Nature Restoration Law and its significance in terms of cooperation in the Alps

Concept Note

1 The Alps and the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030

The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 sets out to build a coherent and resilient transnational conservation network in Europe, based on core indispensable conservation and restoration objectives. To achieve the goals of the strategy, transnational cooperation is important especially along the borders including mountain ranges which accommodate critical biodiversity hotspots.

The Alpine biogeographic region has a special role to maintain, as it is a central biodiversity hub linking the Mediterranean, Continental and Atlantic regions, hosting some of Europe's largest intact natural areas and biodiversity hotspots.

In the European mountain areas, various transnational cooperation frameworks facilitate synergistic actions among the countries involved for greater efficiency in protecting Alpine and more generally mountain biodiversity (e.g., Alpine Convention, Carpathian Convention, EUSALP, Interreg Alpine Space Programme etc.).

2 EU Nature Restoration Law: an opportunity for enhanced cooperation in the Alpine region

The EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL), adopted by the European Parliament on 27th February 2024 and currently awaiting the adoption by the European Council, requires countries to restore degraded habitats: at least 30% of habitats in poor condition should be restored in the EU by 2030, 60% by 2040, and 90% by 2050. To achieve this goal, each EU Member State will have to elaborate a national restoration plan within two years of the law's promulgation.

The Alpine Biodiversity Board (ABB) of the Alpine Convention (AC) welcomes the adoption of the EU Nature Restoration Law and the anticipated national restoration plans. ABB is convinced that the restoration efforts of the Alpine countries should be built on and benefit from the long history of transnational cooperation in the framework of the AC.

Indeed, cross border cooperation would enable to collectively achieve much more ambitious results and more relevant restoration programs by pooling human and financial resources. This way the restoration of degraded habitats by 2050 becomes a reachable target, according to an effective time scale.

The EU commission and the national Focal Points are currently working to define a template for the national restoration plans. ABB believes that this unified template is an ideal medium to address cross-border cooperation on restoration by aligning the approaches to planning restoration measures.

Considering this exceptional opportunity, AC through its AC Contracting Parties, including the European Union, should require for a truly transnational dimension to future national restoration plans.

2.1 The ABB's strategic potential contributions to the implementation of the EU NRL

As the objectives of the NRL cross lined those from the AC and in particular its Nature protection and landscape conservation protocol, ABB could act as a technical facilitator for implementing these transnational aspects into national restoration strategies specially through the national restoration plans.

The ABB could provide the Contracting Parties of the AC with valuable opportunities to **exchange on the topic of ecosystem restoration** in the Alps and to facilitate their efforts regarding targets and concrete measures. In particular, the EU Member States (Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia) could find significant benefit from the possibility of coordinating in Alpine Convention in fulfilling their obligations to the EU and harmonizing planned interventions. Similarly, Liechtenstein, Monaco and Switzerland can also participate in discussions on restoration planning and monitoring by bringing their national perspectives.

In practical terms, in its new mandate, the ABB could support for cross-border cooperation for restoration, including for example:

- Promoting exchanges between Alpine country experts and facilitating dialogue
- Encouraging coordination on cross-border nature restoration issues in terms of priorities for action and collective investment in these areas
- Offering technical support such as sharing of common innovative measures, data, knowledge and experience

2.2. The ABB's partnership with other transnational entities

The NRL is a great opportunity to give teeth to the contribution of mountain regions to the implementation of appropriate biodiversity measures. It also addresses the urgent need to deepen cooperation on a macro-regional scale. Close cooperation with other transnational contexts is essential for meaningful implementation and for raising European and international awareness of this issue.

EUSALP

Action Group 7 (AG7) of the EUSALP focuses on the topic of ecological connectivity and green infrastructure, providing further analysis crucial to biodiversity conservation in the Alps and complementary to ABB's work. The ABB looks with great interest at the AG7's work on NRL and welcomes its will to work on an initial inventory of useful documents, work, maps and data to support national authorities and EU authorities in charge of the national restoration plans. In the next mandate, ABB could officialise cooperation with AG7 on all initiatives based on these connectivity issues, including meetings, events, reports, workshops etc.

Carpathian Convention

The Carpathian chain has great importance of biogeographic continuity with the Alps, and the AC has been cooperating with the Carpathian Convention since its inception. Biodiversity is a major topic within the Carpathian Convention, which also has a dedicated working group. A Memorandum of Cooperation between both regional Conventions and the Convention on Biological Diversity was signed in 2008 and renewed in 2023, aiming at furthering the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in mountain areas. Exchanges and joint action around the NRL would constitute a concrete implementation of the memorandum: raising awareness about the opportunities of transnational cooperation to implement the NRL, organising specific events, sharing best practices etc.

2.3 Strategic next steps by the ABB

- Launching formal communication with Contracting Parties of the AC about this concept note
- Keep the Carpathian Convention Secretariat and AG7 informed of the process for a future joint or coordinated action towards the NRL