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PE-S-DE (98) 67

**COMMITTEE FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
IN THE FIELD OF BIOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY**

CO-DBP

Group of specialists - European Diploma

Dobročský National Nature Reserve
(Slovakia)

APPLICATION

Expert report
by Mr Mario F. BROGGI
(Liechtenstein)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

At its meeting on 24 and 25 April 1997, the *European Diploma* Group of Specialists confirmed its interest in awarding a European Diploma and recommended that an on-the-spot appraisal be carried out. I was asked to conduct the appraisal in the company of Dr Jean-Pierre Ribaut of the Environment Conservation and Management Division. Our task was to determine whether the reserve was of European significance and to analyse the measures taken to protect and manage the region.

The appraisal was carried out between 19 and 22 September 1997. I had already had occasion to visit virgin forests in eastern Slovakia, including Dobroc Forest, in 1990.

BRIEF DETAILS OF VISIT

19.9.97

Arrived in Bratislava.

20.9.97

Travelled to Banska Bystrica with Kamil Vilinovic from the Environmental Conceptions and Planning Department of the Slovak Ministry for the Environment (who accompanied us throughout the visit). Meeting at the Slovak Environmental Agency, where the Dobrocsky Virgin Forest National Nature Reserve management and protection approach was presented by Mr Burkovsky, Mr Krystof, Mr Rybar, Mr Valach and Ms Cvachova.

21.9.97

Visited the virgin forest along with Mr Burkovsky and Mr Krystof from the Environmental Agency, Mr Engler, forest manager for the Cierny Balog region, Mr Sulek from Dobroc Forestry Office, and Ms Zacharova from the Ministry for the Environment. Then made train journey (old Ciernohronska-Zeleznica forest railway in the Cierny Balog area).

22.9.97

Final discussions attended by local and regional authorities and NGO representatives from Cierny Balog, namely Ms Zacharova from the Ministry for the Environment, Mr Burkovsky and Mr Kassa from the Agency, Mr Jasik (Banska Bystrica regional government), Ms Gregorova, Mr Koren and Mr Halgas from Brezno district authority, Mr Kovacik, Mayor of Cierny Balog, Mr Engler and Mr Sulek from the Forestry Office, Mr Bilek from Ciernohronska-Zeleznica-Chz, Ms Galvankova (Nadacia Vydra NGO, Cierny Balog) and representatives of the Slovakian media and press.

We then travelled via Kosice and the Ukrainian border to the Transcarpathians to conduct our next appraisal.

We should like to express our gratitude to all those mentioned above and to everyone else involved for their help and assistance during our visit.

ASSESSMENT OF THE EUROPEAN SIGNIFICANCE

The reserve's natural assets are listed in document *PE-S-DE (97) 64*.

Slovakia still has over 1 000 ha of typical natural beech forest that can be regarded as virgin forest. The Dobrotsky National Nature Reserve is a section of virgin forest made up of beech and fir. It is located in the western Carpathians, at an altitude of 700 m to 1 000 m, 15 km south-east of the town of Brezno and 6 km south of Dobroc. The core area of the reserve covers 103.85 ha, and is surrounded by a buffer zone of 100.44 ha. The average standing crop is between 720 m³/ha and 750 m³/ha, and trees at all the stages of maturity of a virgin forest are present. The reserve includes 170 trees with a diameter at chest height of over 100 cm and 13 with a diameter of over 130 cm. Major predators such as bears, wolves, lynxes and wildcats are found in the region.

The reserve is of European significance for the following reasons:

- it is an example of an unspoiled virgin beech and fir forest in the western Carpathians;
- strict protection is applied (Act No. 83/93);
- natural and dynamic growth is guaranteed, as demonstrated by the presence of trees of exceptional size.

PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE RESERVE

The reserve is state-owned and is managed by the Slovak Environmental Agency in Banska Bystrica. Some areas were placed under protection as far back as 1913, during the Austro-Hungarian era, at the same time as Badin virgin forest. In 1972, the core of the virgin forest was extended by 50 ha to approximately 100 ha with the addition of an area of natural forest (76% abieti fagetum, 23% maple and beech). No excessive browsing damage has occurred in the reserve, and air pollution would not appear to have had a serious impact. In recent years, large areas of the neighbouring spruce forest, some of which is planted, have suffered damage from wind and the weight of snow on several occasions (Cierny Balog forest, 30 000 ha, 63% spruce, 14% fir, 18% beech, 4% other broad-leaved, 1% other conifers). The core area is partly surrounded by a buffer zone in which forestry activities are allowed providing they do not alter the climate within the core area. Economic aspects do not therefore play any role in the reserve and no hunting takes place there. Research has been carried out in the region for around fifty years, and is a major objective in the reserve. Zvolen Forestry College has established permanent monitoring zones in the forest, and there is abundant literature on the region, although most of it is not very recent. Fruitful co-operation takes place between the nature conservation bodies and the forestry industry. The reserve has received many visitors, and it is believed that the dieback of a number of giant trees was caused by visitor traffic. It was therefore decided in 1997 to restrict access to the reserve by closing the footpath that led into the core area and allowing only guided visits. Monitoring of the core area has also just been put in place.

There are plans to establish a large protected landscape area in the Ballocke Hills, which would be covered by uninterrupted forest. The Dobrotsky Reserve itself, another virgin forest in Klenovsky Vepor and a wetland area in Klenovske Blata are significant concentrations of biodiversity (see appendices). In this planned protected landscape area, it will be necessary to promote planting of species suited to the region and to stop clear cutting. Particular attention will be paid to the protection of species.

A public information brochure is under preparation and there is a small visitor centre beside the forest railway station in Cierny Balog. Information panels on the significance of virgin and natural forests are to be put up near the reserve.

A number of shortcomings do need to be pointed out, however:

- The Dobrotsky Reserve is somewhat isolated at present and ought to be integrated into a larger protection scheme.
- The buffer zone around the reserve still seems to be inadequate. In particular, the size of the zone and the forestry activities allowed there need to be looked at again.
- The research findings seem to be fairly old and ought to be updated.
- The awareness-raising and information activities should be continued and, above all, stepped up. The chances of success in this area appear good.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the appraisal visit, many conversations and the relevant documents and research literature, I feel able to support the Slovakian authorities' application for the award of a European Diploma to Dobrotsky Nature Reserve. I agree with the arguments in the application as to the reserve's European significance, which derives mainly from the presence of virgin forest, a kind of ecosystem that is rare in Europe.

In view of the present situation, the expert believes that the following conditions should be attached:

1. The reserve management must be guaranteed the necessary resources for conducting their organisational and management tasks.
2. A management plan should be drawn up for the reserve and the buffer zone and it should be established whether the spruces within the reserve that are not native to the site could be left to grow naturally and whether the buffer zone is large enough.
3. The protection measures in the surrounding areas must be improved: before the renewal of the award, other interdependent concentrations of biodiversity should be declared reserves within a protected landscape area.

In view of the present situation, the expert believes that the following recommendations should be made:

4. Monitoring and research should be continued in the region.
5. The study of the possibilities for ecological tourism should be continued and speeded up; for instance, the nature centre could be expanded, information leaflets on the guided walks could be distributed and other facilities could be provided.

6. Before the diploma is renewed, it will be necessary to determine whether it should be awarded to a planned protected landscape area in the Ballocke Hills or to a virgin forest network in central Slovakia.

Lastly, the Council of Europe is invited to pay particular attention to the purpose of conserving virgin forest when awarding the diplomas and to the case for a suitably representative network. Here, too, cross-border co-operation between the states in the Carpathian arc and between those of the former eastern and western blocs is important, and is an area for which the Council of Europe could provide a useful forum.

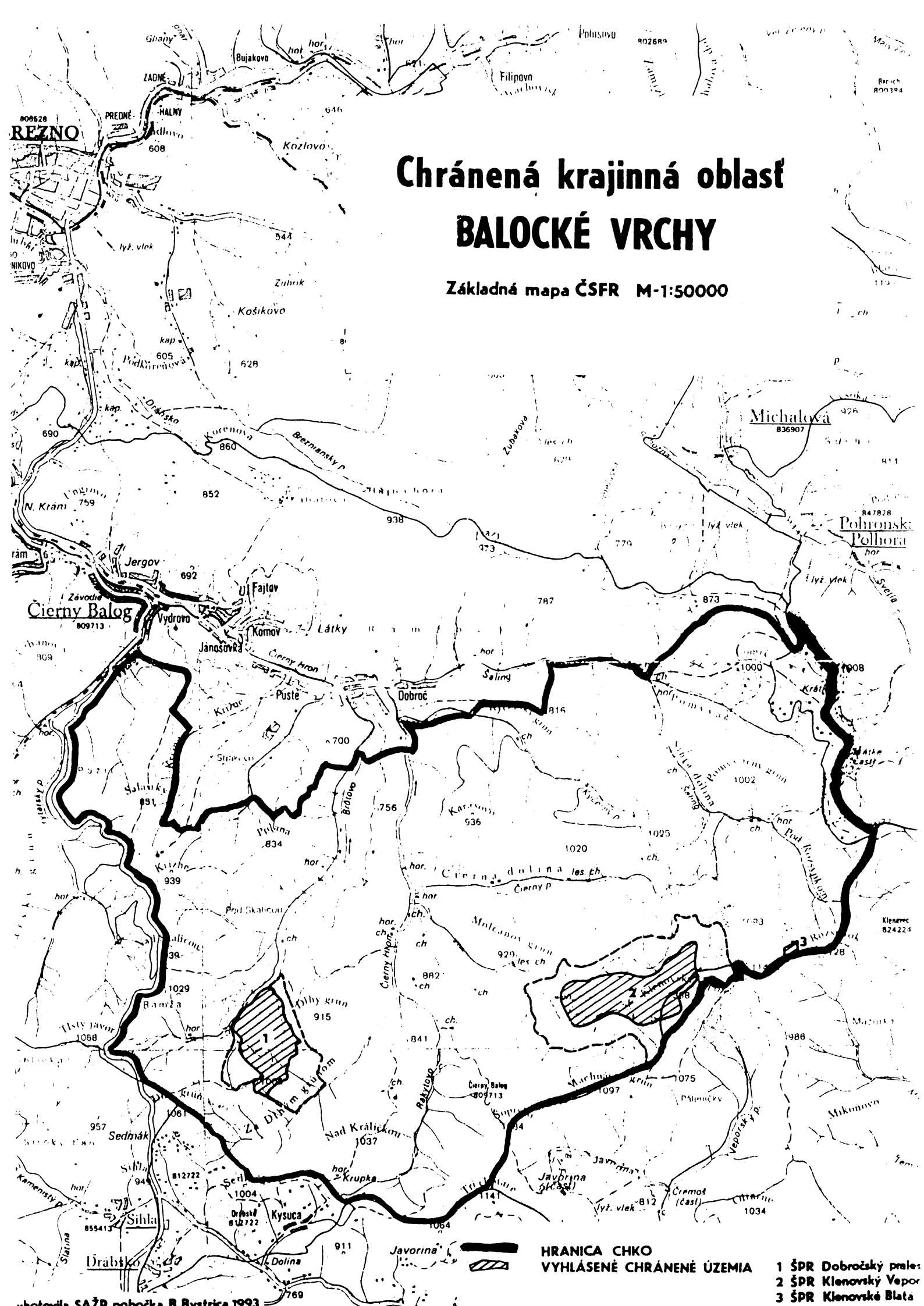
OPINION OF THE SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat's representative approves the content of the expert's report. The draft resolution containing his recommendations is set out in Appendix I.

Appendices: map showing the reserve and its possible integration into a Ballocke Hills protected landscape area.

Chránená krajinná oblasť BALOCKÉ VRCHY

Základná mapa ČSFR M-1:50000



HRANICA CHKO
VYHLÁSENÉ CHRÁNENÉ ÚZEMIA

- 1 ŠPR Dobročský prales
- 2 ŠPR Klenovský Vepor
- 3 ŠPR Klenovské Blata

APPENDIX I

DRAFT RESOLUTION (98) ...

on the award of the European Diploma
to the Dobročský National Nature Reserve

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to the proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP);

Having noted the Agreement of the Government of Slovakia;

After deliberation,

Solemnly awards the European Diploma, Category ..., to the Dobroc National Nature Reserve;

Places the aforementioned reserve under the auspices of the Council of Europe until...,

Attaches the following conditions to the award:

1. that the management of the reserve and the buffer zone be guaranteed the necessary resources for achieving its objectives;
2. that a management plan be drawn up for the reserve and the buffer zone;
3. that the level of protection in the surrounding area be increased by the time of renewal in 2003, by including well protected zones forming a "protected landscape area" encompassing the Ballocke Hills;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

1. that monitoring and research be continued in the region;
2. that the possibilities for the development of ecological tourism be studied.