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

CO-DBP

Group of specialists - European Diploma

Bieszczady National Park
(Poland)

APPLICATION

Evaluation report
by Mr Charles ZIMMER
(Luxembourg)

APPLICATION

The Polish Government presented the application of the BIESZCZADY National Park at the meeting of 24-25 April 1997 of the Group of specialists — *European Diploma*. The Group acknowledged the interest of this application for the European Diploma and recommended that the expert appraisal on site should be carried out by the same expert and at the same time as that of the Slovak Protected Landscape Area of VÝCHODNÉ KARPATY which borders the Polish National Park to the south and forms part, with the Ukrainian Reserve of STUZICA to the east, of the MaB Transfrontier Biosphere Reserve of the East Carpathians.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Group entrusted the expert with the following tasks:

- confirm the European interest of the National Park;
- compare the way the two protected areas, Bieszczady and Východné Karpaty, are managed in particular as regards the maintenance of the vegetable populations, and more especially the conservation measures for the pastures of the subalpine stage, the poloniny;
- study the cooperation mechanisms between the two protected areas at a joint meeting of the Polish and Slovak services.

SITUATION

Bieszczady National Park is located in the southeast tip of Poland. The nearest large town is Krakow, some 370 km to the west.

Bieszczady National Park forms part of a total area of 108 000 ha which includes, in addition to the Bieszczady National Park itself (27 064 hectares), the San Valley Protected Landscape Area (35 635 hectares) and the Cisniansko-Wetlinski Protected Landscape Area of (46 025 hectares). These three entities constitute the Polish part of the MaB Biosphere reserve of the East Carpathians.

Created in 1973, it is the third largest National Park in Poland.

It comprises a strictly protected area of 18 536 hectares, mountain slopes and crests, and a buffer zone of 9 298 hectares encompassing the central valleys of the Wolosatka and Rzeczyca. This buffer zone, running NW-SE is paradoxically situated in the middle of the National Park containing these valleys and the main road linking the villages of Wolosate; Ustrzyki Górne, Brzegi Górne and Wetlina.

On either side of this buffer zone are the strictly protected slopes rising to the crests, to the north the Polonina Wetlinska, P. Carinska, P. Bukowska and to the south the forests of the Puszcza Bukowska. The real buffer zones of the National Park are: to the north and east, the San Valley Protected Landscape Area San; to the south, the Ukrainian Stuzica Reserve and the Slovak Východné Karpaty Protected Landscape Area; and to the west, the Cisniansko-Wetlinski Protected Landscape Area.

The vertical zoning of the vegetation begins in the valley bottom with elder and willow along the streams, and a few peat bogs, which give way as the ground rises to the hay meadows and pastures of the slopes, partly abandoned to recolonisation by pioneer shrubs and trees.

The forest cover now occupies over 80 % of the hills and mountains: beech woods, and to a lesser extent fir, and patches of ferns.

The last stage beyond the upper limit of the forest is made up of the particular vegetation of the mountain pastures, the poloniny, which occupy the shelves of the summits and which characterise this region of the Carpathians. A curious feature in this zoning is the absence between the broad-leaved forest and the alpine meadows of the conifer belt (picea, mountain pine).

It is a region of mountains of modest height (the highest summit, Mount Tarnica rises to 1 346 metres) with very attractive landscapes ranging from open valleys and ravines, to peaks and rounded summits easily accessible by the many forest roads and rambler's paths. A more complete description of Bieszczady National Park is contained in the application document *PE-S-OF (97) 60*. The organisation of nature conservation in Poland is summarised in document *PE-S-OF (97) 56*, Appendix II.

THE VISIT TO THE SITE

During the visit the expert was accompanied by Mrs Françoise BAUER of the Directorate of Environment of the Council of Europe. We arrived in the Bieszczady National Park on Friday, 4 July and stayed until 7 July, when the joint meeting with the Polish and Slovak services was held.

During the visit to the Park we were guided by:

- Mr W. Wojciechowski, Director of the Bieszczady National Park,
- Mr Z. Niewiadomski, responsible for the management and facilities of the Park,
- Mr T. Winniki, Deputy Director of the Bieszczady National Park and Director of the Ustrzyki Dolne Museum and Research and Education Centre.

Also taking part in the visit were:

- Mr L. Lubczynski, Deputy Director of the National Parks Council,
- Mr Zemank, Scientific Advisor of the Park,
- Mr M. Misakiewicz, Head of the brigade of mounted wardens of the National Park,
- Mr A. Gorka, Director of the mountain rescue service,
- Mr Wilczynski, Vice-President of Ekofundusz.

4 July: Arrival at Katowice Airport, transfer to Bieszczady National Park and accommodation at the Wolosate station. The last part of the trip was to the very heart of the Park, between Ustrzyki Górne and Wolosate, over an old tarred but badly potholed military road which it would be worth while converting to a properly stabilised road better adapted to the Park.

5 July: The morning was devoted to a meeting with local elected representatives and personalities involved in the economy of the region i.e. the territory of the two communes of Cisna and Lutowiska comprising, in addition to the National Park, the two protected landscape areas of San Valley and Cisniansko-Wetlinski.

Taking part in the meeting, besides the people associated with the Bieszczady National Park, listed above, were:

- Mr T. Wrona, Mayor of Cisna,
- Mr St. Werminski, Chairman of Cisna municipal council,
- Mrs M. Rypyst, regional planner and member of Lutowiska municipal council,
- Mr W. Podyma, Chief Forestry Officer of the district of Lutowiska.

The discussion brought out the considerable economic difficulties of the region. After the second world war, because of a latent war between the Polish (communist) army and elements of the Ukrainian insurrectional army (1945-1947) virtually all the villages of the present Park were razed to the ground and the inhabitants evacuated. The destroyed villages, the fields and even the roads were taken over by forest vegetation, alder and birch. An initial turnaround in a region practically devoid of any human presence was, in the 1970s and 1980s, the installation of collective farms raising cattle. The clearing and draining of meadows and marshes by the army for the installation of these collective farms again destroyed many natural habitats.

The recent changes in the political situation in Poland have again had serious social consequences in the local communes through the elimination of the collective farms, condemning to unemployment a labour force that had been introduced from other regions of Poland, while the original local peasant population evicted from its villages has practically disappeared. The people now present on the site are those directly involved in the management and activities of the National Park.

This difficult economic situation affects in particular the commune of Ludowiska, which has remained largely dependent on agriculture and forestry. The farms are now being sold off for the promotion of second homes.

The second commune of the National Park, Cisna, has resolutely turned towards the new and promising activity of tourism. The fact is that these medium mountains with their pleasant and varied landscapes are easily accessible to ramblers. It is interesting to cite an extract from a Cisna tourist brochure:

The commune of Cisna has 18 villages with 1 640 inhabitants. Cisna offers several forms of recreational activity throughout the year: mountain walks, horse riding, fishing, hunting, skiing and sledding. The main tourist attractions are the forest railway in the Bieszczady forests, the mountain tracks, the quality of the soil, air and water, the richness of the fauna and flora, hunting and local crafts.

Cisna is now planning to install ski lifts to develop winter tourism. These installations will require the clearing of 30 ha of forest in the Park.

A Bieszczady Region Development Agency, which includes representatives of the National Park, is responsible for promoting and controlling the new economic activities in the two communes.

— Short walk and visit to the Wolosate-Tarnica educational nature trail. Starting from the site commemorating the Wolosate church and cemetery destroyed in 1946, this trail climbs up to the summit of Mt Tarnica (1 346 metres) and has 26 information points describing the culture, history, geology, climate, vegetable associations, fauna and flora of the region.

An illustrated pamphlet documents this trail in exemplary fashion. There is a similar didactic nature trail in the valley of the Wolosatka river between the Ustrzyki Górne Centre and Wolosate.

— Afternoon, visit to the Ustrzyki Dolne research and education Centre and the Natural History Museum of the Bieszczady National Park, whose characteristics: history, populations, habitat, natural and cultural heritage, fauna and flora, etc. are exhibited and documented in several rooms. The Museum also has a geology department and a pedology laboratory.

We were able to visit a room devoted to hunting, containing magnificent stag trophies awarded medals by the CIC.

The overall plan for the Park was presented and commented upon by Mr Winniki, Director of the Museum and Deputy Director of the Park. This Conservation Plan for the National Park is an extremely ambitious and detailed document, considered as the pilot plan for the Polish national parks. This plan is partly reproduced and specifically adapted for each unit of the area.

The annual management plans for the Park are drawn up by the Park Director to implement this overall plan. Attention should be drawn to the importance attached to information and education. The associated activities concern both cooperation with the local decision-makers involved and nature conservation programmes for the different levels of education, from pre-school to university.

This Conservation Plan has been submitted to the Ministry of the Environment for approval.

6 July: The morning was devoted to a guided tour of different sites and installations of the National Park, led by Mr Wojciechowski.

— Mountain walk to the summit of Mt Rozsypaniec (1 273 metres) with a view over Ukrainian valleys. The frontier between the two countries is marked by a simple fence that does not impede the passage and movement of the large mammals in any way.

— The poloniny cover an area of some 1 700 hectares in the National Park. These mountain pastures, unique habitats characteristic of this region of the Carpathians, result from the combination of their altitude and the action of grazing and mowing. If people abandon these activities, then this results in their becoming overgrown and losing their botanical diversity. The administration of the Bieszczady National Park has introduced the European bison from the Bialowieza National Park, considering that grazing by the bison combined with the action of the deer will permit these grasslands to be maintained.

The poloniny constitute a particular tourist attraction: situated on the highest crests, they afford magnificent views over the mountain landscape. On these crests, erosion has sculpted rock and stone formations unique in this part of the Polish Carpathians, forming natural monuments, the goloborza.

— **The forests:** Over 85 % of the area of the Park is covered by forest. Bieszczady National Park includes several primeval forest sites, both within the National Park and in the Cisniansko-Wetlinski Protected Landscape Area, along the ridge forming the frontier with the Slovak Protected Landscape Area of Východné Karpaty. The greater part of the forest cover is made up of beech woods typical of the Carpathians. At higher altitudes there are also fir and mixed pine and spruce forests. In some wet valleys there is a rare association of maple and *Phyllitis scolopendrium*. On the lower slopes and along the streams there are typical alluvial habitats of the alder (*Alnus incana*) and willow.

The greater part of the forests that were previously exploited have now been abandoned to natural evolution.

— Trip up the valleys of the Rzeczyca and the Wetlinka, visit to a shepherd's hut in Berehy where goat cheese is made (concession from Bieszczady National Park).

The low altitude hay meadows have in many places become overgrown through lack of use and are evolving towards wooded formations. This degradation is detrimental both to the quality of the landscapes, which are closing in, and to the biological diversity of the many meadow associations. The National Park is therefore encouraging extensive grazing by flocks of sheep to stop this evolution and to provide activities and jobs for the local population.

— Visit to the Moczarné valley (Puszcz Bukowa Mts.) whose beech woods, still exploited until recently (old narrow gauge forest railway), are managed as a strict reserve with no access for the public. The Gorna Solinka which runs through this reserve, like all the streams in the small valleys, has conserved a natural bed marked by diagonal steps typical of the layers of flysch.

This stream is home to several families of otter.

— Car tour of the Carynskie valley and the valley of the San, a large river flowing through the very picturesque landscape area of the same name. Unfortunately a few unauthorised houses have been built in his valley. The valley has the only peat bogs with forest relics of Scots pine of the Bieszczady mountains; it also has the biggest population of Esculape grass snakes (*Elaphe longissima*) in Poland. This part of the landscape area has already in the past been proposed for inclusion in the National Park.

— Visit to an education station at Suche Rzeki, a mountain hut for students at Koliba and an old farm entirely converted for agro-tourism (Mr Rusin). The farm even has a small lift for the skiing that the owner plans to develop.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Like all Polish National Parks, Bieszczady has a very well structured service of 60 officials and employees. The Park has a management section with its administrative, technical and financial services, a research, education and public information department organised around the Museum, and external services divided into in two districts of 4, and 5 management units respectively. An unusual feature is that the Park also includes a Hucul horse stud.

The Park has its own scientific advisory council. Scientific research is supported by several institutes (botany, biology, geography, etc) of the university of Krakow, among other institutions.

The administration owns the land of the entire territory of Bieszczady National Park as well as the buildings and infrastructures built in it: administrative buildings, hotels, restaurants, camping sites, souvenir shops, car parks, grocery shops, forest houses, refuges, water treatment stations... The Park thus has to manage a substantial property investment, the condition and quality of which, in view of the construction materials available and the difficult situation, often leaves much to be desired.

Some of these installations are run by concessionaires. A good many of the buildings come from the former collective farms handed over to the Park. The administration is aware of this situation and it would be desirable to give the Park the resources necessary both for the integration and improvement of the existing buildings and for future restoration or rebuilding based on the traditional architecture of the region; the fact is that the cultural and architectural capital represents a major asset for the quality tourism that the Park wishes to develop.

The Park has a stud farm breeding Hucul horses, small robust Carpathian horses used for riding and for the tourist carts and sledges.

There is a very developed network of forest tracks and walking trails. A recent initiative in the Cisniansko-Wetlinski Protected Landscape Area, in 1997, was to restore for tourist purposes the 90 km of narrow-gauge forest railway dating from 1898.

The Bieszczady National Park thus has a substantial infrastructure and, despite its remoteness, enjoys a growing reputation among the mainly Polish tourists. The Park receives almost 400 000 visitors a year.

In the Park they find 8 hotels and inns, 3 fully equipped camp sites, 4 camping grounds, 3 information and documentation centres, several shelters and car parks. Car traffic is limited to the public roads and access to the National Park is subject to a charge. Rambling is authorised on the paths and the two informative nature trails. There are bridle paths for riding (Hucul horses can be hired). In winter cross-country skiing is authorised on tracks open to this sport. Mountain bikes are authorised on certain signposted forest tracks.

A ski lift for downhill skiing is installed at Wierch Wyznianski in the National Park. The administration should seriously consider dismantling this installation and moving it outside the National Park. The fact is that downhill skiing presents a serious threat to its environment: destruction of the grass cover, concentration of skiers, heavy equipment, ancillary installations such as restaurants, refreshment stands, inns, etc.

At present the Park authorities control the influx of tourists very well thanks to the personnel of the Park also by providing visitor information. However pursuing a policy of tourist development may become a significant threat to the future integrity of its easily accessible natural sites.

Similarly, the maintenance, the architectural arrangement and the integration into the landscape of buildings which are often of considerable size constitutes a challenge in a region where the traditional architecture was almost totally destroyed by the war and the difficult conditions of post-war reconstruction.

Rather than pursuing the development of its infrastructure, the Park should concentrate its efforts on improving the existing facilities.

7 July: Departure for the Slovak Republic and meeting with the Polish and Slovak services of the two protected areas of the international MaB Biosphere reserve.

THE EUROPEAN INTEREST OF THE NATIONAL PARK

A major interest is no doubt its participation in the creation of the UNESCO MaB Biosphere Reserve of the East Carpathians.

This Biosphere Reserve occupies an area of 164 000 hectares and brings together: in Poland, the Bieszczady National Park (27 800 hectares), the Landscape Areas of Doliny Sanu/San Valley San (36 000 hectares) and Cisniansko-Wetlinski (46 000 hectares); in the Slovak Republic, the Východné Karpaty Protected Landscape Area (67 000 hectares); and in Ukraine, the Stuzica Forest Reserve (2 500 hectares). The Polish sites thus represent over half of the total area of the MaB Reserve.

This trilateral Reserve stems from a proposal made in 1990 at the MaB Conference in Kiev. This transfrontier Reserve is at the western extremity of the East Carpathians and occupies a pivotal position in the middle of the Carpathian arc.

This complex includes at the same time unique fauna and flora, very picturesque landscapes and a particular central European cultural heritage. The creation of the Biosphere Reserve will make it possible, across the political frontiers of the three countries, to manage a region forming an important and characteristic European biogeographical heritage. The region possesses, among other things, vast primeval European beech woods.

Informal technical and scientific collaboration already exists between the administrations concerned in the three countries, and a draft trilateral agreement has been submitted to the governments with a view to the future management of the "MaB Biosphere Reserve of the East Carpathians".

The European interest is confirmed by the nature and quality of the landscapes and the particularities of the fauna and flora.

In the area covered by beech in Europe, the National Park has substantial primeval stands of this species, with the typical cortège of species of fauna and of flora belonging to the central European beech wood associations.

Since man is absent from the greater part of the National Park, the ecosystems are for the most part left to natural evolution. Thus the regulation of the big mammals, the carnivores present in the Park (wolf, lynx, brown bear, wildcat, etc.) and the herbivores (roe deer, red deer, bison, etc.) is left to natural competition. This situation should be compared with the management of certain of these species in the peripheral landscape areas where the size of the animal populations is determined by controlled hunting.

The poloniny, the high grasslands of the East Carpathians, represent both a natural and a cultural heritage to be conserved and managed. The Polish Park plans to leave the maintenance of this biotope to the grazing of the large herbivores, red deer and bison; while the management of the Slovak side envisages the continuation of traditional pasturage to maintain the typical vegetable cover.

For some decades the forest plantations have been abandoned to natural evolution. The Park's policy is to encourage this return towards primeval forest and natural associations. The study of this evolution can certainly prove interesting in the context of present considerations regarding silviculture in Europe.

CONCLUSIONS

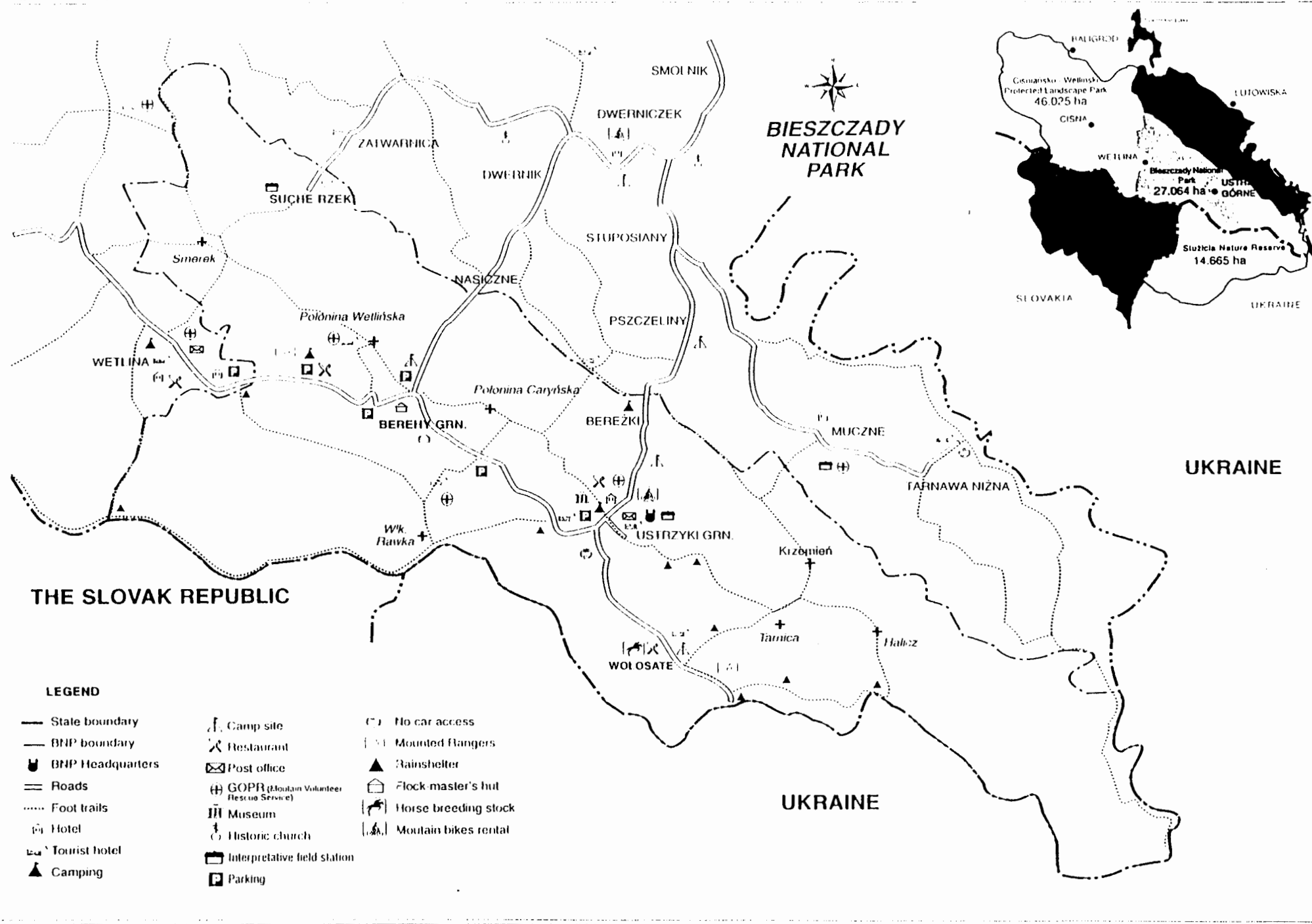
Bieszczady National Park without a doubt merits the award of the European Diploma of the Council of Europe in the same way as the Ukrainian Biosphere Reserve and the Slovak Východné Karpaty Protected Landscape Area, now the Poloniny National Park.

The category B Diploma should be awarded even though it is a National Park with a strict protection regime. The fact is that the Park's policy opens it up to tourism and the configuration of the terrain in the National Park permits easy access to most places.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ratify the agreement concerning the management of the MaB Biosphere Reserve of the East Carpathians;
- hasten the adoption by the Ministry for the Environment and the implementation of the Conservation Plan for the National Park and provide a budget sufficient for the execution of this Plan;
- pay particular attention to the conservation of the pastures on the crests, the poloniny, and to the extensive and traditional management of the valley meadows;
- pursue the conversion of the conifer plantations towards the associations of the natural forest;
- also pursue the efforts already made for the conservation and restoration of the architectural and historical heritage destroyed or badly damaged by the second world war and its aftermath;
- prohibit any large tourist, sports or recreational facilities likely to impair the landscapes of the Park and transfer out of the Park the Wierch Wyznianski ski lift;
- ensure that the buildings and infrastructures in the buffer zone of the park and in the neighbouring landscape areas are in conformity with the provisions of the regional development regulations in force.
- promote a social and economic development strategy, particularly in the fields of agriculture, forestry and tourism in the Bieszczady National Park and the two adjoining landscape areas, which is consistent with the objectives of the Conservation Plan of the Park;
- set up the scientific and technical body provided for by the Agreement between the services of the three bordering protected areas, in order to monitor the management of the ecosystems of the biogeographical complex and to coordinate the research activities in the MaB Reserve;
- accord to the Polish primeval forests of Krajobrazowy next to the Slovak forest reserves of Rabia Scala and Pl'asa the same protection status;

- maintain the state-owned status of the lands situated in the Valley of the River San, through making them subject to the forest administration or including them in the Bieszczady National Park;
- coordinate the management of hunting in the two peripheral landscape areas of Cisniansko-Wetlinski and of the San Valley with the conservation of the fauna in Bieszczady National Park.



BIESZCZADY NATIONAL PARK



THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

UKRAINE

LEGEND

- State boundary
- BNP boundary
- 🏠 BNP Headquarters
- == Roads
- ⋯ Foot trails
- 🏨 Hotel
- 🏨 Tourist hotel
- ⬆️ Camping
- 🏠 Camp site
- 🍴 Restaurant
- ✉️ Post office
- 👫 GOPR (Mountain Volunteer Rescue Service)
- 🏛️ Museum
- ⛪ Historic church
- 🏠 Interpretative field station
- 🚗 No car access
- 👮 Mounted Rangers
- ⚡ Rainshelter
- 🏠 Flock master's hut
- 🐎 Horse breeding stock
- 🚲 Mountain bikes rental
- 🚫 Parking

COMMENTS BY THE SECRETARIAT

The representative of the Secretariat approves the content of the expert's report.

The Park meets the criteria for the award of the European Diploma, from the standpoint of its European interest as well as that of its protection regime and good management practice.

She wishes to stress the following points:

- the need to control the development of tourism;
- the role that the Park is called upon to play in the implementation of an overall local development strategy in order to keep the local population in place;
- the need to develop transnational cooperation with the Slovak and Ukrainian authorities in order to harmonise the protection status, management methods and research activities of the three protected areas that belong to the same biogeographical complex.

Greater coordination would give the occasion to study the implementation of joint projects, for example in the field of tourist development.

The award of the European Diploma to these transfrontier areas should also have a symbolic value through favouring the rapprochement of the peoples of these three entities, thus helping to promote the ideals and principles upheld by the Council of Europe.

Appendix I contains the draft resolution on the award of the European Diploma to the National Park.

APPENDIX I

DRAFT RESOLUTION (98) ...

on the award of the European Diploma
to the Bieszczady National Park

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

Having regard to Resolution (65) 5 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 Poland,

After deliberation,

Solemnly awards the European Diploma, Category B, to Bieszczady National Park,

Places the aforesaid zone under the patronage of the Council of Europe until

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

- ratify the cooperation agreement concerning the management of the MaB Biosphere Reserve of the East Carpathians;
- hasten the adoption by the Ministry of the Environment and the implementation of the Conservation Plan for the National Park and provide a budget sufficient for the execution of this Plan;
- pay particular attention to the conservation of the pastures on the crests, the poloniny, and to the extensive and traditional management of the valley meadows;
- pursue the conversion of the conifer plantations towards the associations of the natural forest;
- also pursue the efforts already made for the conservation and restoration of the architectural and historical heritage destroyed or badly damaged by the second world war and its aftermath;
- prohibit any large tourist, sports or recreational facilities likely to impair the landscapes of the Park and transfer out of the Park the Wierch Wyznianski ski lift;
- ensure that the buildings and infrastructures in the buffer zone of the park and in the neighbouring landscape areas are in conformity with the provisions of the regional development regulations in force;

- promote a social and economic development strategy, particularly in the fields of agriculture, forestry and tourism in the Bieszczady National Park and the two adjoining landscape areas, which is consistent with the objectives of the conservation Plan of the Park;
- set up the scientific and technical body provided for by the Agreement between the services of the three bordering protected areas, in order to monitor the management of the ecosystems of the biogeographical complex and to coordinate the research activities in the MaB Reserve;
- accord to the Polish primeval forests of Krajobrazowy next to the Slovak forest reserves of Rabia Scala and Pl'asa the same protection status;
- maintain the state-owned status of the lands situated in the Valley of the River San, through making them subject to the forest administration or including them in the Bieszczady National Park;
- coordinate the management of hunting in the two peripheral landscape areas of Cisniansko-Wetlinski and of the San Valley with the conservation of the fauna in Bieszczady National Park.