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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 for Protected Areas

20-21 January 2003
Room 2, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg

**Dobročský National Nature Reserve
(Slovakia)**

RENEWAL

Expert report by
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*Document established by
the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage*

The European Diploma for protected areas was awarded to the Dobročský National Nature Reserve (Slovakia) for the first time in 1998. This is the first renewal.

The Secretariat did not accompany the expert on his visit to the site.

Appendix I reproduces Resolution (98) 28 concerning the award of the Diploma. In Appendix II the Secretariat presents a draft resolution for possible renewal.

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1. Programme

- Monday 8 July: arrival, welcome by Mr Peter Straka from Bratislava
- Tuesday 9 July: general discussion at the headquarters of the State Department of Nature Conservation, in Cierny Balog, hosted by the local director, Mr Slavik, with the participation of Mr Straka, from the Ministry of the Environment, Mr Burkovsky, Mr Rybar, Mr Valach and their assistants, representatives of local authorities and of a particularly active NGO (The Otter)
 - visit to the Bystrianska Jaskyna cave
- Wednesday 10 July: walk through the buffer zone and the nature reserve
 - conclusions

2. Carrying out of the expert appraisal

2.1 Introductory discussion

2.1.1 Protected landscape

The expert raised the problem of the establishment of a protected landscape area (stipulated when the Diploma had been awarded in 1998) with a view to expanding the reserve's current buffer zone, which was relatively small (100.44 ha) compared to the reserve (103.85 ha).

According to the Slovak representatives, establishing a "protected landscape area" would encounter considerable administrative difficulties, as different departments wielded certain powers and prerogatives which they wished to bring to bear. But the area did exist in *de facto* terms. At the request of the Ministry of the Environment, the forestry department had decided to change its forestry policy around the Dobroč main road in order to create a semi-natural forest. This new management policy (of which I requested a copy) contains strict regulations governing aspects such as forest paths and the reduction of monocultures, and provides *de facto* protection for the primary forest that appears to be effective.

On our various trips, it was noticeable that these vast areas of forest and fields, with a few scattered villages, and above all the expanses of forest around Dobroč had not changed in 5 years and furthermore were remarkably clean. The three protected areas mentioned in Resolution (98) 28: Ballocke hills, Klenovsky Vepor and Klenovska Blata posed no problems; Klenovsky Vepor had even gained natural reserve status.

Arriving at the present situation has been possible only thanks to excellent cooperation between the local and regional forestry and environmental departments, and of course the local authorities and NGOs. That does not seem to be the case throughout the country (as in a number of others).

2.1.2 Information, education, publicity

Should there be maximum publicity for the reserve and the buffer zone? Should they be heavily signposted and publicised on television? This is perhaps not such a good idea, given certain recent mishaps where a blaze of publicity for a natural site (coming from Prince Charles in the event) resulted in a flood of uncontrollable visitors.

But the importance of informing local communities, young people, planning managers and politicians of the existence of these natural wonders and the necessity of protecting them are equally clear.

At present, there are a few large, well-designed and highly educational signs, alas only in Slovak, around the buffer zone. Since the natural reserve is not open to the public except for special, guided visits along a single path, it contains virtually no signposts.

Around the reserve, the number of tourism and teaching initiatives continues to grow.

The small tourist train at Cierny Balog, managed by the NGO "The Otter", has enjoyed increasing popularity. At the terminus of the railway (originally used to transport wood) there is a sizeable open air museum, whose foundation stone was ceremonially laid in June 2002 by the Slovakian Minister of Agriculture. The idea of the museum is to demonstrate forest management *in vivo* and provide a point of departure for the guided visits run by NGOs. The museum is well situated in that it is located at the beginning of a walking path skirting the reserve. One point (all too often forgotten) was well made by an NGO: one discovers nature not only by seeing, but also by hearing, smelling and touching.

2.2 Visit to the Bystrianska Jaskyna cave

This cave, open to the public, is one of a series of 12, located in the southern karstic region of the Low Tatras. It is 1,000 metres long and 490 metres of it are physically accessible. Eight species of bat have been inventoried. The route through the cave and the explanations given by the young guides are educational and raise public awareness of an ecosystem that is too little known.

It should be noted that 14 day-long "speleotherapy" sessions are organised, with patients spending 3 hours underground each day. This therapy, known since ancient roman times, is used to treat allergies and chronic respiratory diseases.

2.3 Walk through the nature reserve and buffer zone

In the last 30 years, I have visited a number of virgin forests, in Russia, Ukraine and Poland, but the Dobroč forest is particularly impressive because of its extremely varied landscapes and great beauty, enhanced by the sunbeams playing through the branches of century-old trees onto logs of a wild beauty seldom encountered, symbolising the primitive forest in all its splendour. The exceptional biological diversity does not need to be described here in detail. It is listed in Mario Broggi's expert appraisal of 1997.

The walk ended with an excellent venison goulash, the traditional feast of Slovak foresters, accompanied by the no less traditional slivovic and soured ewe's milk. An eloquent statement of complementary biodiversity and regional specialities.

2.4 Polana Biosphere Reserve

During our trip we stayed in the "Polana" hotel, at the summit of a large forest massif whose original feature is that its waters are purified by a reedy marsh at the edge of an artificial pond. It is located in the Protected Landscape Area of the Polana Biosphere Reserve, a vast 160 km² expanse with a great diversity of fauna and flora: 172 bird species, all the large predatory mammals and others, not to mention a remarkable catalogue of coleoptera. With its 120 km of paths and capacity for 450 visitors, this zone is a perfect illustration of how tourism and leisure facilities can be sustainably developed. It is less than 10 km from the Dobroč reserve.

3. Conclusion

The Dobroč Prales nature reserve and its surroundings are home to exceptional biological assets, particularly given the simultaneous presence of large European predatory mammals: brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), lynx (*Lynx lynx*), wildcat (*Felis catus*) etc, and also of black stork (*Ciconia nigra*) and Ural owl (*Strix uralensis*).

As the nature reserve and its immediate surroundings do not pose any particular problem and, on the contrary, are well managed, we propose that the European Diploma be renewed, with few conditions and recommendations attached, namely:

Condition: pursue if not step up the transformation of the forest around the nature reserve into semi-natural forest, and well beyond the current buffer zone;

Recommendations: develop, in an appropriate manner, information and visitor facilities around the reserve, particularly

- via the accelerated construction of the Open air museum at Cierny Balog,
- via installations in the cottage at the Predskalicov picnic site.

APPENDIX I

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (98) 28

**ON THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
TO THE DOBROCKY NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE**

(Slovakia)

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 18 September 1998
at the 641st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

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 A, to the Dobrocský National Nature Reserve;

Places the aforementioned reserve under the auspices of the Council of Europe until 18 September 2003;

Attaches the following conditions to the award:

1. That the level of protection in the surrounding area be increased by the time of renewal in 2003, by the establishment of a "protected landscape area" encompassing the Ballocke Hills, the Klenovsky Vepor virgin forest and the Klenovske Blata wetland;
2. That the management of the reserve and the buffer zone be guaranteed the necessary resources for achieving its objectives;
3. That a management plan be drawn up for the reserve and the buffer zone;

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.

APPENDIX II

Draft resolution on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Dobročský National Nature Reserve (Slovakia)

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 of Protected Areas, as amended by Resolution (98) 29 on the Regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas;

Having regard to Resolution (98) 28 awarding the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Dobročský National Nature Reserve (Slovakia);

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists - European Diploma of Protected Areas on 20 and 21 January 2003;

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);

Renews the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Dobročský National Nature Reserve (Slovakia) until 18 September 2008;

Attaches to the renewal the following condition:

- pursue if not step up the transformation of the forest around the nature reserve into semi-natural forest, and well beyond the current buffer zone;

Attaches to the renewal the following recommendation:

- develop, in an appropriate manner, information and visitor facilities around the reserve, particularly
- via the accelerated construction of the Open air museum at Cierny Balog,
- via installations in the cottage at the Predskalicov picnic site.