

## Road Map for a low carbon economy

### Contribution of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention to the Public Consultation by the European Commission

The Alpine Convention is an international treaty between the Alpine nations (A, CH, DE, F, I, FL, Monaco, SI) and the EU. Its aim is to ensure sustainability in the Alpine territory. The Convention sets out basic principles in relation to twelve topics (land planning, nature conservation, agriculture, forestry, tourism, soil protection, energy, transport, water, waste, population and culture and air pollution. On 8 of these, the principles have been further complemented by thematic protocols. The Convention entered into force in 1995, its protocols in 2002. its Permanent Secretariat is based in Innsbruck (Austria) and Bolzano (Italy).

The VIIIth Alpine Conference (COP), held in 2006 in Alpbach, adopted a declaration on climate change, calling for the preparation of an Action Plan on mitigation and adaptation to climate change in the Alps. This Action Plan was eventually adopted by the IXth Alpine Conference in Evian in 2009 (full text on [www.alpconv.org/climate](http://www.alpconv.org/climate)).

#### The Alpine Convention Climate Action Plan and the 2050 EU Low-carbon Economy objective: convergent objectives

Concerning the mitigation objectives, all Contracting Parties of the Alpine Convention, including non-Member States to the EU (Liechtenstein, Monaco, Switzerland) have signed the Copenhagen Accord and have endorsed the 20-20-20 EU targets.

Moreover, in the Decision of the IXth Alpine Conference (Evian March 2009), by which the Action Plan on Climate Change was adopted, the Parties agreed to “launch a survey on whether the Alps could become a carbon-neutral zone by 2050”.

Therefore, the concept of low-carbon economy by 2050 mirrors the objectives inscribed in the Action Plan on Climate Change in the Alps. In this context, synergies could be created between the Alpine Region and other regions (whether mountainous or not). Other regions could benefit from the experience of the Alpine regions (and vice-versa).

#### The content of the Action Plan on mitigation strategies

*The parties state that mitigation measures “are part of a comprehensive policy in terms of spatial and land planning. Transports and households consumption of fossil fuels – particularly for residential heating- offer great potential to reduce CO2 emissions. In the Alpine context, the tourism industry should contribute in a noticeable way to the efforts aiming at reducing emissions in both sectors (transports and building consumption of fossil fuels). Taking into consideration their resources in wood and water and their potential in terms of solar, wind and geothermal energy, the Alpine regions could lead the way by using mainly renewable energies to cover their needs.”*

The key sectors for developing Mitigation Strategies in the Alps are therefore:

- Spatial Planning
- The energy industry, in particular heating

- Transport
- Tourism

Under each of these sectors, one or two general objectives are set out, further detailed with specific measures. For example under Spatial Planning, the two most important objectives are: a) ensuring sufficient space management, promote urban densification, b) promoting CO<sub>2</sub> efficient urbanisation and planning;

Under Energy, the two overall objectives are: a) to significantly reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, b) to promote the use of renewable energy sources; 5 more measures then specify these general goals putting emphasis on the energy efficiency of buildings, the promotion of renewable energies and their use of heating purposes.

Under Transport and Tourism, to a general objective to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions correspond many detailed measures ( see pp.3-10 of the Action Plan).

### The Specific actions towards a carbon-neutral Alpine region in 2050

As mentioned the Parties agreed to launch a survey on whether the Alps could become climate-neutral by 2050. There are two important contributions already deriving from this objective.

#### *1. The Pilot study “Climate Neutral Alpine Region by 2050”*

DE financed a pre-feasibility study on the issue, carried out by the Wuppertal Institute for Climate Environment and Energy. The exchanges between scientific experts on climate neutrality illustrated the complexity of the issue, and the difficulty to agree on a definition and common methodologies among 8 countries. The pre-study was distributed in October 2009 as a “Summary for policy-makers”<sup>1</sup>. This pilot pre-study (30 pages long) on the feasibility of a more complete study on climate change, that would then become a real road-map for the Alps to “turn Climate Neutral”, contains indications on how to proceed towards achieving climate neutrality in the Alps. Its conclusions concerning a complete study on climate-neutrality read as following:

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<sup>1</sup> Stefan Lechtenböhrer, Gröne M.-Ch., Venjakob J. & others, Pilot Study “Climate Neutral Alpine region by 2050: Summary for Policy-makers”, Wuppertal Institut, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2009

▪ **The topic of “How to become climate neutral” is regarded to be highly relevant** as well as very urgent, given the size of the global challenge.

▪ Specifically for the Alps not only the potentially significant threats for human and ecosystems are at stake but also the functioning of the Alps as a significant common CO<sub>2</sub>-sink. **The challenge not to lose this sink function** should be a major motivation to analyse the issue of climate neutrality in the Alps

▪ **A comprehensive and cross-disciplinary main study is needed** to better structure the topic and to improve on the significant data gaps existing in almost every thematic cluster. It should, however, balance data needs and the necessary effort for data generation in a pragmatic way.

▪ **The Alps do have assets which put them into the forerunner position.** These should be evaluated and further analysed in the main study.

**The scope of the main study should be structured alongside the three dimensions and nine topics identified by the Wuppertal Institute and follow four principles:**

– **Inclusive**, i.e. cover GHG emissions on the territory, GHG emissions embedded in products and services used in the Alps and include potential mitigating effects of alpine goods and services outside the Alps.

– **Target oriented**, i.e. oriented at the target to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and ultimately climate stability in the Alps, in Europe and globally.

– **Forward looking**, i.e. by assuming offsets only as a limited potential for mitigation, not as an excuse for business as usual in the region itself and within a truly advanced and ambitious framework.

– **Flexible**, i.e. taking into account the specific situation, data availability and potentials for action of Alpine actors in every thematic cluster, boundaries should be flexibly defined by cluster.

**Appropriate targets to be further analysed and which offer options to obtain forerunner positions should be:**

– **Climate neutrality should be understood in a strong sense in the main study**, i.e. as a first step towards a climate stability target combined with adapted targets per thematic cluster. In this context also very ambitious targets could be analysed (e.g. renewable energy autonomy plus potential exports from the Alps, an active role in the development of a Pan/European renewable electricity system, optimisation of the net sink function of soils, analysing significant changes in Alpine economy and provision of climate neutral goods and services to the Alpine population and tourists and potentially for exports).

– Overall it be appropriate to use a **combination of a comprehensive approach and exemplary approaches in the main study, depending on the thematic cluster and the data availability as well as the potentials for action for Alpine actors.** The main study should thus focus on sectors where mainly municipal and private groups in the alps have potentials to act. It should analyse concepts for a „100% best practise“ approach i.e. making current good or best practise standard everywhere in the Alps and it should retrieve ideas for the Alps to provide good example for other regions. Approaches for the implementation orientation could be:

– **To make 100% best practise minimum standard**, e.g. analysing approaches to disseminate and broadly implement best practises in tourism, building, energy etc. by developing networks, benchmarks, competitions etc. for dissemination discussing and proposing municipal instruments to support and direct action towards 100% best practise.

– And to **empower local and regional administrative and planning capacities to become facilitators and actors of change** – also as an example for the Alpine countries. Here proposals should be developed on how to enable local and regional administrations to implement strategic thinking and action and to better enable them to take up a forerunner role. Further the creation of new regional actors as change agents for combining local organisations could be analysed.

**On the basis of this pre-study as well as of national experiences, the Alpine Convention States are currently drafting a report to the next Ministerial Conference (March 2011, Brdo, Slovenia) in order to reply to the question on whether it is feasible for the Alps to become a carbon neutral area by 2050.**

## 2. the Project proposal ALPSTAR

After the release of the above-mentioned pre-study, based on one of the core messages of the study, i.e. “to make best practice minimum standard”, DE and SI promoted an ETC project to be submitted to the next call of the Alpine Space Programme. The proposal takes note of the fact that several alpine pilot regions are wishing to start developing and implementing some of the ideas contained in the pre-study as soon as possible. The proposal is called “CARBON NEUTRAL ALPS. MAKE BEST PRACTICE MINIMUM STANDARD” - ALPSTAR”.

### **Thematic areas chosen as “main problems or challenges to be addressed” in the ALPSTAR project:**

- Transport (increasing number of vehicles, increasing GHG emissions from transport, increasing rate of new roads construction)
- Buildings and construction (energy efficiency in public, private and industrial buildings; low energy and passive new buildings; use of energy in the construction product life-cycle)
- Energy (renewable energy sources and energy efficient heating and cooling)
- Land use and agriculture (reduction of sink function of the natural soils and vegetation, emissions from agriculture)
- Tourism (emissions from transportation, energy inefficient accommodation facilities, unsustainable food supply chain)
- Other industries, services and trade (reduction of GHG emissions from production and transport, energy efficient production)
- Spatial planning (reaction on the impacts of climate change and risk prevention)

In these thematic areas many measures were already developed and implemented in Alpine regions and have proven to be effective. On the other hand regions have knowledge needs in the areas in which they wish to develop toward the carbon neutrality. Specifically this project is addressing the following challenges in the scope of social, institutional and management factors:

- The operational framework to encourage and accelerate the mainstreaming and implementation of proven best practice measures is needed (from best practice to normal practice).
- The lack of capacity of local and regional administrators to implement stronger strategic actions toward carbon neutrality.
- Lack of integrative and participatory approach in coping with climate change in terms of national and regional boundaries, different sectors and policy levels.
- Insufficient awareness on climate change issues and the need to act among administrative actors.

### **Main objectives of the ALPSTAR project**

The aim of this project is to provide the Alpine area with a best practice transfer platform as a framework for operational implementation of proven measures in managing climate change and reduction of climate damaging emissions.

Specific objectives:

- To interlink regions providing the best practice measure knowledge and experience and regions where the knowledge and best practice transfer need exists.
- To ensure reproducibility of best practice measures.
- To improve transboundary, cross-sectoral and inter-policy-level cooperation in coping with climate change effects and reduction of GHG emissions.
- To empower local and regional administrative and planning capacities to become facilitators and actors of change toward carbon neutrality.
- To promote integrative and participatory approach to development of action plans for best practice implementation.
- To encourage pooling and transfer of innovative and most efficient best practices from and to other Alpine regions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The experience of the Alpine Convention Parties on their road towards a low-carbon economy is that theoretical debates on the concepts, as necessary as they are, may sometimes complicate extremely the agreement among different countries with different climate change policies (although all of them have the same mitigation objectives), and that the best approach might be a practical one, through the dissemination of best practices that are already into place, through the improvement of the local knowledge on climate change and clearly, through the thorough and coherent implementation of sustainable development policy, focusing on certain agreed priority sectors of action.

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