the Dinaric Arc Initiative
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WWF, UNESCO-BRESCE, UNDP, IUCN, the Council of Europe, FAO, Euronatur and SNV are concerned with the future of the Dinaric Arc and are active in the region with a varied portfolio of projects and initiatives to secure the long-term conservation and sustainable development of this part of Europe. These institutions have joined forces and created the Dinaric Arc Initiative (DAI).
The Dinaric Alps (maximum height is 2,764m) run parallel to the eastern Adriatic coast, and are famous for their karstic geology – Livanjsko Polje in western Bosnia being the largest karstic field in the world. Towards the southern end of the region, the Prokletije Massif and the “Albanian Alps” are among the wildest mountains in Europe.

The Dinaric Arc hosts important freshwater ecosystems, including the most extended network of subterranean rivers and lakes in Europe, and wetlands of international importance, such as the Neretva delta (Bosnia and Herzegovina/Croatia), and Skadar/Shkodra lake (Montenegro/Albania). The river Tara is well known for forming a long and wild canyon, one of the deepest in the world. The Eastern Adriatic coast still includes unspoilt tracts, with limited major mass tourism development. Hundreds of islands characterise the eastern Adriatic coast, from Brioni to Sazan, giving way to a variety of seascapes and coastal-marine ecosystems. The extremely indented Bay of Kotor is unique in the Mediterranean, while the coast of Albania is amongst the wildest in the whole Mediterranean basin.
The Dinaric Arc Initiative (DAI) is a broad framework of collaboration which aims to add value to the ongoing programmes and activities of all its partners, and put in place new specific actions aiming at:

- The preservation of the wealth and integrity of the Dinaric Arc through the establishment of networks of protected areas and ecological corridors, and support to initiatives for the conservation of its biological diversity and the sustainable management of its resources
- The preservation and valorisation of the cultural diversity and the cultural heritage of the Dinaric Arc
- The promotion of intercultural dialogue, transboundary collaboration and scientific cooperation among the countries of the region
- The empowerment of local societies to foster local community development through rural development measures based on the valorisation of the natural and cultural heritage, without over-exploiting the capital of natural resources
- The integration of environmental policies across all the relevant sectoral initiatives.

The partners of the DAI expect to reach these ambitious objectives by encouraging the development of diversified initiatives and putting in place specific field projects, supporting policy and advocacy processes, helping build the capacity of key stakeholders in the region, and promoting awareness and education campaigns for target audiences in the countries of the Dinaric Arc.
Over the millennia, low-intensity farming practices have created semi-natural habitats throughout the Mediterranean region which integrate forest, pasture and cropland, and provide a home for unique sets of species. These complex mosaics are still present throughout the Dinaric Arc. Some of the most relevant conservation values and favourable conditions for conservation along the Dinaric Arc include:

- Large and well-preserved forests with high flora diversity of species and a high rate of endemism (10-20% of all the plants are endemic to the region)
- Unique karst ecosystems and cave habitats with a diversity of invertebrates, fish, amphibians, and reptiles
- The Dinaric mountains harbour important populations of large carnivores — lynx, brown bear, wolf, jackal — that use them as a crucial ecological corridor between the Alps and the mountains of south-eastern Europe
- The numerous wetlands and freshwater habitats host important nesting populations of endangered bird species, including the Dalmatian pelican, pygmy cormorant, collared pratincole, Baillon’s crake and many others, and are an important stop over and wintering site for migrating birds
- The variety of coastal and marine habitats — which include shallow reefs, Posidonia meadows, small rocks and archipelagos, high coasts, and caves — are feeding and breeding grounds for cetaceans, sea birds, and marine turtles
The eastern Adriatic is one of the richest fishing grounds of the Mediterranean. It also hosts the most diverse commercial marine species in the Basin. The presence of many nature-friendly, traditional economic activities, traditional forestry, and small scale fisheries form a valuable basis for the sustainable development of the rural and natural regions of the Dinaric Arc. A high diversity of crop varieties and local livestock breeds still exist, and are maintained thanks to typical and traditional farming and production systems.

Southeast Europe has historically been a rich ensemble of cultures and religions, mainly due to its position as a meeting point between Western Europe and the Middle East. This unique background is reflected in a wide and varied cultural heritage. The location and geographical distribution of many settlements reflect a search for harmony in the development of towns and their natural surroundings: Kotor and its bay, and Dubrovnik and the coastline, are two symbolic examples of this. Unfortunately, such symbols of cultural and natural unity have frequently been targets during the conflicts that have afflicted the region. Traces of the ancient borders (e.g. the Roman Limes along the Danube River) and more recent ones (the Iron Curtain) are relevant elements of cultural landscapes that are important to protect and value within local development frameworks.

Local heritage — the result of the long interaction between human settlements and their natural settings — can be an important factor in fostering mutual understanding between various communities and a means of focusing their rapid national socio-economic transitions. The Dinaric Arc Initiative intends to facilitate this process, serving as a cross-sectoral framework of cooperation, where natural and cultural assets are harmonized within common territorial and development frameworks.
Over the last twenty years the countries of the Dinaric Arc have experienced periods of high instability, conflicts, economic crises and transition towards a market economy and European integration. Environmental policies and institutions have suffered a long period of eclipse and are now being rebuilt, although with varying results. The whole region is currently undergoing rapid economic development, and the need to generate income and improve living standards, especially in rural areas, is leading to the growing exploitation of natural resources. Development is both a threat to and an opportunity for the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Dinaric Arc.

Among the major current and future threats are: illegal logging, deforestation, poaching, river damming and diversion, unregulated coastal development, unregulated exploitation of marine resources, unsustainable use of agricultural land and pastures. A complex governance system, the unsatisfactory level of enforcement of existing laws, and a widespread lack of capacity are limiting factors and additional challenges to the sound development of the region.