FEASIBILITY STUDY
ON ESTABLISHING A TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREA
SHARR/ŠAR PLANINA – KORAB – DEŠAT/DESHAT

The programme of work on mountain biological diversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recommends establishing new transboundary protected areas with the objective to enhance conservation of biological diversity, implement the ecosystem approach, and improve international cooperation.

The feasibility study by UNEP-Vienna on the potential for establishing a transboundary protected area in the "Sharr/Sar Planina – Korab – Desat/Deshat" region:
• Provides a brief overview on the local context for transboundary cooperation, natural values and protected areas of the region;
• Describes the state of the environment and potential threats, legal and administrative frameworks for the development and improving the connectivity and continuity of protected area networks in the region;
• Identifies priorities for biodiversity conservation and international cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area.

The objective of this study is to:
• Provide for better understanding of the situation across the border in the region, and identify possible added values of transboundary cooperation;
• Analyze and evaluate the current status of transboundary initiatives, identify current shortcomings and impediments for cooperation, and recommend actions aimed at facilitating transboundary cooperation;
• Assess the potential for success under the local conditions;
• Indicate what kind of external support is indispensable for the success of this initiative.

The label of a transboundary protected area of exceptional natural values and sustainable tourism development as well as of one of the largest protected areas in Europe could provide for the 'unique selling point' for the local and regional tourist packages, increase the tourist attractiveness of the region, facilitate the broad recognition of the region and marketing of the regional tourist product abroad, and help to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative stereotypes resulting from the past armed ethnic conflicts.
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SHARR/ŠAR PLANINA – KORAB – DEŠAT/DESHAT
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The region of the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Dešat” located in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia encompasses areas of unique landscape and natural values for Europe. This area harbours two mountain ranges of the alpine landscape, vast mountain grasslands and forests including primeval treestands of the endemic Macedonian pine and Bosnian pine. The highest mountain of this area is Mt. Korab (2764 m, the highest peak of Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), while the highest summit of Šar Planina is Titov Vrv (2747 m). Thirty nine post-glacial lakes located at altitudes up to 2340 m significantly contribute to the natural beauty of this trilateral border region, which also encompasses a considerable number of natural habitats and endemic, relic, rare and threatened flora and fauna species, including species of the common European importance like the brown bear, wolf and Balkan lynx, having their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state border. These unique values should be taken into account when deciding on the future of this region and protecting its natural treasures for the next generations.

In the light of their expected accession to the European Community in the future - involved countries are proceeding with the harmonization of their nature protection standards with the EU. The presence of habitats and species listed under relevant Annexes to the Council Directive 92/43/EEC ("Habitats Directive") whose protection in the Member States of the European Community requires the designation of special areas of conservation constituting the Natura 2000 network, and bird species listed under Annex I to Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds ("Birds Directive") should be a decisive argument for the extension of existing and designation of new protected areas in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in the proposed transboundary protected area.

During the last two decades human impact and pressures on environment and biodiversity of the region has significantly increased. Different environmental threats such as the insufficient sewage treatment and urban solid waste management, fragmentation or loss of habitats or forest fires are common for all involved countries of the region.

Moreover, the recent wars and armed ethnic conflicts in this region, in particular in Kosovo in 1999 and in the northern part of Macedonia in 2001 resulted in the situation when the control by the state inspections in the remote mountain border areas became either impossible or ineffective for several years. As a consequence of the above situation – different illegal activities boosted at that time in the border areas of the region, which included poaching on wildlife and illegal fishing, illegal timber felling, overuse of medicinal plant species and uncontrolled land development, with adverse effects on the biodiversity of the region.
One of the major threats to habitats and species populations and main causes of the decline in biological diversity in Europe is the fragmentation and isolation of habitats and the effect this can have on the viability of species populations. The favourable conservation status of different species and natural habitats depends on the size of protected areas. Migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species depends on the existence of ecological corridors linking particular protected areas of different protective categories designated at national level. The continuity and connectivity of habitats in the border areas requires transboundary linkages, ecological corridors which link protected area networks of neighbouring countries.

This is why establishing large-scale transboundary protected areas seems to be a solution more acceptable for the South Eastern European countries. Such transboundary protected areas represent a commitment of two or more countries to common management of their frontier regions and shared ecosystems, help to reduce possible tensions and are a symbol of peace with great political visibility.

According to the best possible scenario for the further development of trilateral cooperation between the Governments and local stakeholders in Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – the transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” could potentially cover the total area of up to some 255 306 ha, and become the largest protected area in South-Eastern Europe, and one of the largest in the whole Europe.

The abandonment of traditional land-use practices ongoing on all three sides of the region is a common challenge for the further sustainability of the local economy in the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains. Sustainable tourism development in the region could bring new employment opportunities and new sources of income, thus mitigating the economic reasons for the current exodus of mountain populations.

The label of a ‘trilateral transboundary protected area of exceptional natural values and sustainable tourism development’ as well as of ‘the largest protected area in South-Eastern Europe’, and of ‘one of the largest protected areas in Europe’ could provide for the ‘unique selling point’ for the local or regional tourist packages, increase the tourist attractiveness of the region, facilitate the broad recognition of the region and marketing of the regional tourist product abroad, and help to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative stereotypes still common among some Europeans, resulting from the past armed ethnic conflicts.
But this will only be possible under the ‘direct trilateral connectivity and cooperation scenario’ – in case when the initiatives on all three sides of the borders provide for the full ecological connectivity and continuity of the protected area network of the region.

In other words – this ambitious vision would become true when the significantly extended territory of Mali Sharr National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244 becomes spatially adjacent to the other three large scale protected areas in the region: existing Mavrovo National Park and planned Šar Planina National Park in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the planned Korabi Protected Landscape in Albania.

Due to the fact that the main tourist attractions of this transboundary region are the exceptional landscape and natural values of the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains – the development of sustainable tourism in the region would require close cooperation of the tourist services providers with the authorities of the protected areas in the region.

The added value and possible benefits for all involved countries deriving from the establishment of the proposed transboundary protected area are that the trilateral transboundary cooperation in this region would largely facilitate:

• Achievement of their nature protection and biodiversity conservation objectives,
• Mitigation of the present threats to environment and nature of the shared region,
• Promotion and implementation of sustainable development at local and regional level,
• Establishing a long term transboundary cooperation mechanism serving the local stakeholders.

The following feasibility study by UNEP-Vienna provides a brief overview on the local transboundary context for cooperation in the region, e.g. border context, socio-economic context (including ethnic and religious context, demography, land use, economic development and transport infrastructure, the state of the environment of the region and potential threats).

Further the study describes legal and administrative frameworks in the neighbouring countries, compares the development of their protected area networks, provides a brief overview of the natural values and protected areas of the region, and initiatives aimed at improving the connectivity and continuity of protected area network.

Finally, the study suggests priorities for biodiversity conservation and transboundary cooperation in the region, and concludes with the analysis of different opportunities and challenges for transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat”.

6 Feasibility Study: SHARR/ ŠAR PLANINA - KORAB - DESHAT/DEŠAT
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The programme of work on protected areas under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recommends to "strengthen existing and establish new TBPAs (transboundary protected areas) to enhance conservation of biological diversity, implement the ecosystem approach, and improve international cooperation"\(^1\), and in particular to "enter into dialogue to establish, where appropriate, new TBPAs with adjacent Parties and countries, bearing in mind the ecosystem approach and the importance of ecological networks"\(^2\).

The CBD work programme on mountains calls

- To establish regional and transboundary collaboration and the establishment of cooperative agreements for mountain ranges,
- To promote the appreciation and conservation of mountain biological diversity as a means of reducing human conflict, i.e., through peace parks",
- To promote integrated transboundary cooperation, strategies for sustainable activities on mountain ranges through mutually agreed-upon arrangements by countries concerned,
- To promote and strengthen regional and transboundary cooperation for research, adaptive management, fair and appropriate allocation of water to ecosystems, and exchange of expertise to improve the conservation and management of mountain biodiversity.

Europe, and in particular its Balkan region is characterised by many borders that cut across ecosystems and areas of high natural values, often dividing the continent along natural barriers like mountain ranges. Border areas are often the most favoured regions in biodiversity terms, partly as a result of their peripheral location or political factors banning in the past the development of areas adjacent to political borders.

However, natural areas shared by neighbouring countries are not only a common treasure, but also a common responsibility. Ecological problems occurring in border areas can not be solved by one country alone, and require transboundary and regional cooperation.

Since 2005, UNEP Vienna is coordinating the project entitled “Improving regional cooperation for risk management from pollution hotspots as well as the transboundary management of shared natural resources” supported by ADA (the Austrian Development Agency) and the Canadian Development Agency (CIDA), as a contribution to the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative.

The ENVSEC Initiative founded in 2003 is a partnership between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)

\(^1\) Goal 1.4. (Transboundary protected areas), CBD programme on protected areas.
\(^2\) Action 1.4.1., CBD programme on protected areas.
and the associated North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The ENVSEC programme area in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, which have been directly or indirectly involved in the ethnic conflicts that escalated in the past ten and more years in the Balkan region.

These war-torn nations, where ethnic tensions still exist, have been also subject to economic crises as a result of their isolation from the global economy and the impacts of the transition from socialist economic policies to free market economies. Simultaneously biodiversity loss was recognised as posing additional security risk in South East Europe, whereas good technical cooperation in the field of natural resource management would contribute to stability and prosperity of the region.

Protecting larger parts of the most important ecosystems and habitats, and in particular viable populations of its wildlife is possible only in ‘large-scale’ (as for Europe) protected areas of around 100 thousand hectares in size, while smaller areas are rather suitable only for protection of e.g. landscape phenomena or a single threatened plant species. Currently in the ENVSEC-SEE programme area there are only ten national parks exceeding the size of 10 thousand hectares and only one nature park exceeding 100 thousand hectares.

Designation of a large-scale new protected area by one country alone is often not feasible, while concerted efforts of two or more partners may result in a spectacular success for biodiversity protection at the regional and European levels.

This is why establishing large-scale transboundary protected areas seems to be a solution more acceptable from the point of view of the state budgets of particular countries of the South Eastern Europe.

Such areas represent a commitment of two or more countries to common management of their frontier regions and shared ecosystems. Moreover, transboundary protected areas help to reduce possible tensions and are a symbol of peace with great political visibility. Transboundary protected areas (TB-PAs) provide for the ecological continuum beyond these virtual political boundaries and a tool for international cooperation.

As stressed by the IUCN: “Natural systems that straddle political boundaries can be most effectively managed as functional units at the scale of the regional landscape and would therefore benefit from appropriate mechanisms for long-term transboundary co-operation. While the establishment of TB-PAs for integrated conservation and development can enhance environmental protection, it can also reinforce political security and provide multiple benefits to local communities and indigenous peoples. The existence of TB-PAs and their buffer zones can help reduce tensions, rebuild divided communities, promote freedom of movement and create new opportunities for sustainable development, including low-impact regional tourism. Such areas can also make an important contribution to regional biodiversity conservation programmes, especially where they form part of a coherent ecological network. Neighbouring States, which often have different levels of technical expertise, knowledge, capacity and financial
resources, can benefit by combining their respective strengths through transboundary co-operation.” 3

This is why one of the aims of the ENVSEC Initiative in SEE is to encourage and facilitate regional cooperation on nature protection issues, with a particular emphasis on supporting transboundary cooperation and establishing new protected areas in border regions, which could also serve as a tool to mitigate current tensions and re-establish friendly neighbour relations between formerly conflicted nations and ethnic groups.

UNEP under the ENVSEC initiative promotes raising awareness on the common responsibility for the border regions, thus providing for the greater European integration in nature protection and translating the common European vision into practice.

As the first step, a rapid regional assessment of the general state-of-environment, as well as managerial problems experienced by the administrative bodies responsible for the protected areas’ management was carried out in 2005-2006, based on country-specific reports.

The resulting regional report “Enhancing Transboundary Biodiversity Management in South Eastern Europe” provides an overview of the biological diversity, protected area system, legal and policy framework, existing and planned institutional structures for nature protection, threats to biological diversity, examples of transboundary cooperation as well as socio-economic factors, and recommendations for actions to be taken in particular countries of the region and for the region as a whole.

During the first regional ENVSEC-SEE workshop “Enhancing Trans-boundary Biodiversity in Mountains of South Eastern Europe" organized by UNEP in Podgorica (Montenegro) in June 2006 representatives of the Governments of the region jointly identified eight potential transboundary protected areas:

- Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat (Albania, FYR Macedonia, Kosovo 4)
- Durmitor - Sutjeska (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro)
- Prokletije / Bjeshtkë e Nemuna Mountains (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia)
- Tara Mountains - Drina Gorge (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia)
- West Stara Planina (Bulgaria, Serbia)
- Orjen / Sniježnica (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro)
- Vlahina / Maleševska / Belasica (Bulgaria, Greece, FYR Macedonia)
- Osogovska Planina (Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia).

and selected three of them as “priority areas in focus”, perceived as most urgent from the biodiversity point of view.

One of the three “priority areas in focus” identified during the 1st ENVSEC-SEE meeting is the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat”, expected to involve Albania, Kosovo 5 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

As for June 2009 - legally designated protected areas are present only in Kosovo 6 (Sharr Mountains / Mali Sharr National Park at the border with

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4, 5, 6 Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244
Map 2: ENVSEC mountain biodiversity project: potential transboundary protected areas.
FYR Macedonia) and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Mavrovo National Park) bordering Albania and Kosovo. However, there are plans to establish new protected areas in Albania and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as to extend the territory of the national park in Kosovo. In the best possible case, should all initiatives on all three sides described in this study be successful - the transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” could potentially cover the total area of up to some 255,306 ha, and become the largest protected area in South-Eastern Europe, and one of the largest in Europe.

In 2006 the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of Macedonia requested UNEP Vienna ISCC for the assistance concerning the establishment of a national park in the Shara Mountains. The Balkan Foundation for Sustainable Development (BFSD) was contracted by UNEP to prepare the “Feasibility Study for the establishment of the National Park on the Macedonian side of “Shara” Mountains”, completed in September 2006. As a follow up, a local stakeholder group and a lobby group in the Parliament of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were established, and in September 2006 UNEP carried out a field mission.

7, 8 Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244
on the Macedonian side. Furthermore, UNEP attended meetings in Kosovo\(^9\) concerning the potential for extension of the existing Sharr Mountains / Mali Sharr National Park. In September 2007 UNEP organised the Stakeholders Consultation Meeting on “Activities towards proclamation of Shara National Park” held at the State University of Tetovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

In June 2009 within the framework of the ENVSEC Initiative UNEP organized the 2. subregional meeting on “Transboundary Cooperation of Mountain Protected Areas in South Eastern Europe: Towards the Dinaric Arc and Balkan Network of Mountain Protected Areas” with the objectives:

- To initiate and enhance exchange of experience gathered under the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions with the stakeholders from the South Eastern European region (SEE);
- To support the initiatives of the Governments towards transboundary conservation of biodiversity in the mountain regions of the SEE, and their commitments expressed during the 9th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP9) in May 2008;
- To foster partnerships on technical cooperation and capacity building for the stakeholders from the SEE;
- To promote, facilitate and encourage the establishment of the sub-regional network of mountain protected areas in the Balkans / Dinaric Arc;

\(^9\) Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244
• To identify priority actions which shall be undertaken in proposed transboundary areas in SEE;

• To facilitate synergies and build on projects and activities of the partners of the ENVSEC and Dinaric Arc Initiative (DAI), e.g. UNDP, UNESCO-BRESCE, UNEP, IUCN, SNV and the WWF Mediterranean;

• To foster working contacts for transboundary and sub-regional cooperation on biodiversity issues in the Balkans / Dinaric Arc.

The objective of this study on the potential for establishment of a proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” is to:

• Provide for better understanding of the situation across the border in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” region, and identify possible added values of transboundary cooperation;

• Analyse and evaluate the current status of transboundary initiatives, identify current shortcomings and impediments for cooperation, and recommend actions aimed at facilitating transboundary cooperation;

• Assess the potential for success under the local conditions in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” region;

• Indicate what kind of external support is indispensable for the success of this initiative.
The interior of the older church in Lešok Monastery, left intact during the armed ethnic conflict of 2001.
PART 1. LOCAL CONTEXT FOR TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION

1.1. Border context

The region of the planned transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” is located in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The delineation of the state border between Albania and the countries neighbouring Albania from the North and East (which later formed the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia – SFRJ) was evolving after the fall of the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan wars, and finally established by the Conference of Ambassadors held 1913 in London, with the participation of Great Britain, France and Russia. The present demarcation of this border in the terrain was carried out after the World War 2 in 1945, after the break down of the SFRJ confirmed by Albania and the independent Republic of Macedonia. Thus, the state border running along the Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountain ridges can be considered as an “old border”, established as the result of a historical long-term process.

Contrary to the above, the current state border dividing Sharr/Šar Planina mountains into Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) and Macedonian parts is much more a “new border”. In the times of the SFRJ the administrative border between Serbia and Macedonia (parts of the Federation) passed along this mountain ridge. As this was very much a purely internal administrative and “virtual” border inside the common country, no border infrastruc-
ture was present there, no border regimes existed, and local populations paid little attention to its exact demarcation. This situation changed after the break down of the SFRJ, and Serbia passed some border territories to the new independent Republic of Macedonia. Later, during the war in Kosovo and Serbia this state border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had unclear status for several years, until its present shape was finally agreed between Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the FYR of Macedonia in September 2008. The delineation and demarcation in the terrain of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains basically follows the division line previously agreed between the FYR of Macedonia and Serbia. In some 80 per cent of its length the state border dividing the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains follows the tops of the border mountain ridges, which was not possible on the short section across the area located between Sharr/Šar Planina and Korab mountain ridges.

Thus, as for 2009, there are neither remaining unresolved claims to land areas or water bodies on either side of the present state border (in Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains since 1945, and in Sharr/Šar Planina mountains since 2008), nor attempts to change its present route. The borders of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia meet in the area of Mt. Sherupa (2 092 m).
The authorities responsible for border area control and patrolling in Albania is the Border Police and Migration operating within the organisational framework of the Ministry of Interior, in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 the Border Police (part of the Kosovo Police, founded in 1999) in cooperation with KFOR, and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - the Border Police operating within the organisational framework of the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

The border regimes include the veterinary and phytosanitary regulations, and in some cases the visa regime (however the entry visas are either not required, depending on the nationality, or can be issued immediately at the border crossing points), as well as several restrictions on e.g. hunting or fishing in the near vicinity of the border line (300 m wide zone) on the Albanian side without informing the Border Police and Migration 24 hours in advance (other human activities or presence in the border areas may be additionally prohibited by the Decision of the Council of Ministers); or hunting in the near vicinity of the border line (500 m wide zone) on the Macedonian side without prior written notification to the responsible police station at least 48 hours in advance. Crossing the state borders in other locations than the official border crossing points is forbidden and threatened by a financial fine or even (in FYR of Macedonia) by the penalty of imprisonment for up to 60 days. However, according to personal communication sources - these strict border regimes do not necessarily apply to e.g. shepherds, as people and sheep or cattle usually cross the border illegally, in particular in the vast mountain areas of Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat.

As for 2009, all official state border crossing points are located outside the areas planned for designation as parts of the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat”.

The border crossing between Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is located to the north from Sharr and Koritnik mountains in the Beli Drim river valley, near Vermicë/Veronica on the main road linking the cities of Kukës and Prizren, with regular public bus communication and increased traffic in the summer, when the Kosovars traditionally visit the Albanian side. There are no other border crossings in the mountains at the border between Albania and Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99).

There are two border crossing points at the border between Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, one in the Lepenac river valley separating Sharr/Šar Planina mountains from the Cma gora mountain ridge, at the international transport corridor E65 linking Pristina and Skopje, with intensive traffic. The other one is located on the easternmost slopes of Sharr/Šar Planina mountains, “Jažince-Blace” near Glloboqicë/Globočica, on the local mountain asphalted road linking the Kosovo section of the road E65 with Tetovo in the FYR of Macedonia, where the traffic is not particularly frequent.

In the past there was another border crossing point in the very heart of the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area – “LukoVO Pole” in the area located between Sharr/Šar Planina and Korab mountain ridges, on the local unpaved mountain road connecting the Gornica Reka region in the FYR of Macedonia via the mountain pass (approx. 1500 m above the sea level) with the village of Rastelica in the Dragash/Dragaš community and Prizren region. When this
border crossing was opened – the traffic intensity was very low, currently this former border crossing point is no longer functional, since the conflict in 2001.

The only border crossing point between Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is “Blato”, located in the valley at the southern limit of Dešat/Deshat mountains, to the south-west from Mavrovo National Park area, on the local road linking Debar in the FYR of Macedonia with Peshkopi in Albania, where the traffic is negligible, also due to the fact that the Albanian road section is not yet paved (some works begun in 2008). There are no border crossing points in the Korab or Dešat/Deshat mountains, within the proposed trans-boundary protected area.

As already mentioned, in general the state borders follow natural physical features of the area, like mountain crests, and is demarcated in the terrain by the border stones, e.g. so called “pyramids” erected in 1 km distance from each other along the Albanian state border in Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains, or border stones and concrete pillars/signposts along the “new” state border in Sharr/Šar Planina mountains. As for 2009, there are no physical limits at the borders in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region, often associated to the presence of the state border in some other regions (e.g. barbed wire entanglements, wire or electric fences).

In the past the border zone on the Albanian side had a several meters wide stripe of ploughed soil and sand cleared from vegetation, in order to show the traces of possible trespassers, but such is no longer maintained. However, there is some anxiety and distrust among the society concerning the possible presence of anti-personnel landmines on the Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) side of the borders (in particular with Albania) considered to remain there since the times of the war in 1999.

Hence, the existence of the border does not provide an obstacle to wildlife migrations and has no negative influence on the connectivity and continuity of habitats present on both sides of the border. Moreover, in general the presence of the state border does not result in explicit legal obstacles limiting civilian access to the border areas on either side of the state border.

This is also why this border is to some extent a “soft” one, easy to cross in the afforested mountain terrain without being noticed by border police patrols. In result of the above, illegal activities associated with the presence of the state border were, and still are present. The most frequent are those related to smuggling illegal immigrants and weapons, and illegal logging in the forests across the state border.

Moreover, smuggling drugs and contraband (incl. animals, tobacco and gasoline), cross-border human trafficking and cross-border poaching, and crossing the state border in search for endangered medicinal plants (e.g. Gentiana lutea, mostly in Korab mountains) were, and most probably still are, also a problem in this region.

The above illegal activities boosted in the times of the recent wars and armed ethnic conflicts in the region, which resulted in the situation when the control by the state authorities in the remote border areas became either impossible or ineffective for several years. This is why some of the border areas in this region gained the reputation of dangerous areas controlled by criminal gangs, and potentially harbouring anti-personnel landmines.

However, the above situation significantly improved throughout the last few years. In the future, with the increased welfare of the inhabi-
itants and stronger surveillance of the area by the Border Police – some of the above illegal activities would either no longer be profitable or possible.

The presence of the state border in this proposed transboundary protected area seems to have no adverse effect on the availability of information on the area, e.g. detailed maps indispensable for e.g. mapping of the habitats in border areas or planning common activities; the access to such information sources is not restricted by security measures.

Therefore, the state border in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” is to some extent “soft” and its existence is not a factor which could prevent wildlife migrations across the border or hamper the development of transboundary cooperation, for instance by limiting possibilities for direct and regular contacts between cooperation partners, e.g. protected area managers or the representatives of municipality authorities from all involved neighbouring countries.

The only reservation to the above is that the state border regimes paired by the absence of official border crossings inside the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area and disparities in road network development on different sides of the mountain ranges result in relatively long (at least for the local conditions) distances between the headquarters of authorities expected to become partners of transboundary cooperation in the region.

For instance, the city of Prizren in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 has relatively good road communication with the city of Kukës in Albania (36 km), but traveling from Prizren to Peshkopi in Albania would be much more complicated, to say the least. Furthermore, the aerial distance between Mavrovi Anovi in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Peshkopi is approximately 26 km, but the road distance is almost thrice bigger (73 km). Similarly, the aerial distance between Tetovo in the FYR of Macedonia and Prizren in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 (30 km) is three times shorter than the road distance (91 km). These distances may not seem to be a real impediment to visiting counterparts across the borders, but one has to remember that in some cases these are either poor quality or unpaved mountain roads.
1.2. Local socio-economic context

1.2.1. Local ethnic, cultural and religious context

In general, the history of different nations in the Balkans is a very sensitive issue, in particular issues related to their ethnicity or religion. Furthermore, in the region of the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Deštat/Deshat” located in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – the above local contexts differ much, between the two ‘sub-regions’ (either Sharr/Šar Planina mountains or Korab – Deštat/Deshat mountains) as well as between the situation in particular countries involved. Although such delicate issues as ethnic or religious differences are not the main topic of this study – such differences resulting from the history of the human settlement in the region have to be briefly mentioned, as ethnic or religious tensions between the two traditionally antagonistic rites may potentially prevent, or become a serious obstacle to developing transboundary cooperation on such ‘politically neutral’ issue as the conservation of the shared natural values of this transboundary region.

In general, the population in the Albanian part of the described region is much more homogenous in terms of the ethnicity and religious beliefs, while the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia – SFRJ has always been a multi-ethnic state, and this is why these issues have to be handled with particular care in the case of the nowadays Kosovo and Macedonian parts of the region. However, also in the territory of Albania (namely in its border areas of Korab and Deštat/Deshat mountains at the state border with the FYR of Macedonia) there is a considerable minority population of the Macedonian ethnicity, while traditionally the regions located on the opposite sides of these mountain ridges were antagonistic for centuries (incl. robberies and kidnapping by armed gangs). As for today this historical rivalry is not vital anymore, mostly due to the fact that the vast areas of Korab and Deštat/Deshat mountains on the side of the FYR of Macedonia (in Mavrovo National Park) are almost non-inhabited.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia harbours a strong ethnic Albanian minority (some 8 per cent of the total population of the country), which had an influence on bilateral relations between the two countries. However, the local population in Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range on both sides of the state border is of prevailing Albanian ethnicity, which results in strong cultural links and prevents potential conflict issues. Moreover, the recent official recognition of Kosovo independence by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had a strong positive influence on both the relations of the FYR of Macedonia with neighbouring Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, as well as reduced, at least to some extent, the past strong ethnic tensions in the northernmost border region of the FYR of Macedonia. It should also be noted here, that both sides of the central and northern parts of Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range are simultaneously inhabited by the Albanian Muslims and Macedonian Muslims, where only the native language makes the difference, while the customs and religion are shared by both above population groups. This should be an important asset for the future development of trans-
boundary cooperation in Sharr/Šar Planina mountains, while such similarities do not exist in the Korab – Dešat/Deshat ‘sub-region’.

Another positive aspect of the situation in Sharr/Šar Planina mountains is that the Macedonians in 1999 were not involved in the Kosovo war (which is since then highly appreciated by the Kosovars). Moreover, the Macedonians helped the refugees from Kosovo in a very friendly manner, which further improved the relations with the Albanian ethnic minority, with Albania and with Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244. However, it has to be noted here that some ethnic tensions still exist in the northernmost border region of the FYR of Macedonia, usually not developing spontaneously but rather provoked by different interest groups, in particular since the armed ethnic conflict which spread in 2001 to the North from Tetovo.

The armed ethnic conflict in 2001 had negative impact on the Macedonian side of the proposed transboundary protected area, where the mountain areas of Sharr/Šar Planina were the place of the most intensive war activities. The conflict resulted not only in increased ethnic tensions between the Macedonian and Albanian ethnic groups, but also in damages to the infrastructure and cultural heritage objects, as well as much more serious indirect consequences of the conflict in the post-conflict period.

Direct damages to the infrastructure and cultural heritage objects on the Macedonian side of Sharr/Šar Planina mountains include e.g. the destruction of almost all mountaineering huts in Šar Planina area in 2001 (except for the famous Ljuboten hut, built in 1932 at the

Ruins of the mountaineering hut Tri Vode (northern part of Šar Planina) destroyed during the armed ethnic conflict of 2001.
altitude of 1540 m), e.g. mountain huts Jelak, Lešnica and Tri Vode, which have not yet been rebuilt until today, thus limiting the potential for sustainable tourism development in the border areas. Another direct adverse result of the 2001 conflict was the destruction of the important Lešok Monastery, where e.g. one of the two churches was blown up during the armed operations (luckily, the older and much more valuable church in Lešok was left intact, while the destroyed church and damaged monastery have recently been rebuilt).

Due to the local character of the armed ethnic conflict in 2001 there were no damages to the infrastructure or cultural heritage on the Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) side of Sharr/Šar Planina mountains. It should also be recalled here that the environment did not significantly suffer in the course of the civil war in 1999 (except for some illegal hunting on wildlife by the members of either the armed forces or resistance groups), while some minor damages to the environment on the Albanian side resulted from the dispersion of the Kosovo refugees.

However, the adverse impacts of the armed ethnic conflict in 2001 were much serious in the post-conflict period, both to the local population and the environment of both Sharr/Šar Planina and Korab mountain regions. Damages in village infrastructure and ethnic tensions boosted in the time of the conflict resulted in some re-settlements of some part of the local population (solely in the northern part of Šar Planina mountains) paired by complete abandonment of several mountain settlements (e.g. villages Tanuše, Grekaj and Ribnica in Korab mountains) by its former population, which led to abandonment of larger mountain areas and discontinuation of the traditional land-use agricultural practices, with all negative consequences to the landscape and biological diversity.

Furthermore, the armed conflict resulted in the situation when the control by the state authorities in the remote border mountain areas became either impossible or ineffective, either during the conflict or throughout then next few years. The lack of police presence facilitated the operations of crime gangs (in particular in the Korab region), which included robberies and even murders, while the gangs immediately disappeared across the state borders. This was another serious reason for the exodus of the local population. Last, but not least, the either missing or...
ineffective control on the use of natural resources in the areas considered as dangerous resulted e.g. in increased illegal cutting of forests in Sharr/Šar Planina mountains, increased poaching and almost uncontrolled hunting and fishing, illegal residential and recreational housing development, illegal quarrying of gravel, dumping trash, and illegal water extraction from pristine water courses.

Another delicate issue related to the ethnic composition of the local populations of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains which should be treated with care are the current ethnic tensions on the Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) side resulting mostly from the adverse effects of Kosovo war in 1999, e.g. those related to the recent tensions and animosities between the native Albanian and native Serb ethnic groups. For centuries all autochthonous ethnic groups inhabiting the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains (Albanians, Gorans, Macedonians and Serbs) lived together in peace. Since 1999 this is no longer the reality, and the above tensions are mostly visible in the municipality of (Shtërpë/Strpce), which in the past had the population of prevailing Serbian ethnicity. This situation also led to conflicts concerning the biodiversity conservation management in Mali Sharr National Park, which area for several years was managed by two separate management bodies, one officially designated by the authorities of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 (national park directorate in Prizren) and the second one based in Strpce municipality (ethnically a Serbian enclave within the park area) contesting

\(^4\text{Source: UNECE Performance Review}\)
the legal mandate of Kosovo institutions to manage the park area, and therefore considered no longer legal.

However, as for 2009, there are in general no more potential conflict issues between the local populations in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat”. On the contrary, the idea of establishing a common protected area is perceived as an important factor which could mitigate the adverse effects of the past ethnic tension and create a much stronger sense of the common regional identity. Furthermore, once the long lasting administrative barriers and political obstacles for cooperation in the region (imposed between 1945 – 1999 by either the communist or post-communist regimes) disappeared – the local population of all ethnic groups are willing to communicate and cooperate, which is another factor which could largely facilitate the development of trilateral transboundary cooperation on ‘politically neutral’ conservation of the shared natural values of the shared transboundary region.

Due to the “ethnic mixture” which evolved throughout the history the local populations on each side of this transboundary region share numerous cultural values and traditions (in some cases also religion). There are also several local social events which often gather participants from different national parts of the proposed transboundary protected area. In particular the annual fair of shepherds and cheese producers (held in the neighbouring Bistra mountains, to the South of the Sharr/Šar Planina and to the east of Korab – Dešat/Deshat). Another example would be the “Galichnik” wedding event in the Mavrovo area.
1.2.2. Local demographic context

The region of the planned transboundary protected area "Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat" is located at the borders of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and encompasses:

- Two prefectures in the northeastern region of Albania - Dibra prefecture (bordering the FYR of Macedonia) and Kukës prefecture (bordering Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) and the FYR of Macedonia);
- Five municipalities in the southernmost region of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99: Dragash/Dragaš, Prizren Suharekë/Suva Reka, Shtërpcë/Strpce and Kaçanik/Kacanik, four out of these five municipalities are located at the border with the FYR of Macedonia, while the Dragash/Dragaš municipality additionally borders the Albanian territory;
- Seven local municipalities in the northwestern region of the FYR of Macedonia: Jegunovce, Tearce, Tetovo, Bogovinje, Vrapčište (located at the border with Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution), Gostivar (bordering Kosovo and Albania) and Mavrovo-Rostuše (located at the state border with Albania).

The population size in the territory proposed for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area on the side of Albania (Korabi Protected Landscape area) is roughly estimated at approximately 19 000 inhabitants in total (some 16 000 in Dibra Prefecture and some 3 000 in Kukës Prefecture), thus a very small part of the population of both prefectures concerned. For instance, the total population size of the Dibra Prefecture accounts for 235 243 inhabitants (27.3 per cent urban and 72.7 per cent rural population), thus only some 6.8 per cent of the population of this prefecture inhabits areas of the planned Korabi Protected Landscape.

The exact data on the population of the area concerned on the Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) side was not yet available for the purposes of his study, as the provisional census was carried out in 2008/2009, and the official results are not yet published. However the demographic trends in the mountain areas are confirmed to be negative, due to migration of the inhabitants to better developed regions of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, with better infrastructure, and providing better access to health services, education or employment opportunities.

The most accurate data on the population size and demographic trends is available for the territory proposed for inclusion into the planned transboundary protected area on the side of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, however it is not always the full or most update information (according to the census of 2002).

Therefore, the overall size and density of the population in either Šar Planina or Korab – Dešat regions of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia can not be precisely defined, as some numbers must have changed since 2002, due to the rural depopulation demographic trends common for mountain regions worldwide. According to the census of 2002 the overall size of the population in the different 'sub-regions' (including both mountain villages and those located in the plain areas, but having a significant impact on the natural resources of the mountains) accounted for 81,740 inhabitants in Tetovo and Polog sub-regions, while the Korab – Dešat foothills were inhabited by some 7,600 people.
The demographic trends within the Šar Planina mountains on the Macedonian side significantly differ, depending on the location: the northern and southern parts of this mountain range are getting almost abandoned, while the population of the central part of this mountain range is more or less stable, which is being explained by some scientists by the different spatial distribution of different religious rites within this mountain region, and resulting traditions and customs. The population of the villages in the central part of Šar Planina mountains are predominantly Muslim, and these villages are still large and mostly stable in terms of the number of inhabitants. The villages in the northern and southern parts of Šar Planina mountains are predominantly inhabited by the followers of the Orthodox Christian rite, and these villages are usually either small (except for e.g. Vratnica or Belovštë) in terms of the number of inhabitants, or getting abandoned.

Map 3: Population density in South Eastern Europe.© UNEP / DEWA / GRID - Europe

PART 1. LOCAL CONTEXT FOR TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION
The above disparities in the spatial distribution of the population among different parts are well illustrated by the demographic data and trends concerning the villages inside the area proposed for the planned Šar Planina National Park. According to the previous proposal for the national park designation its territory was expected to encompass the territories of seven municipalities, however all six still inhabited mountain settlements in this area belonged to only three municipalities. These were the four relatively big villages of Vejce (381 inhabitants), Bozovce (1,012), Brodec (553) and Vesala (1,045) in the municipality Tetovo (thus located in the central part of Šar Planina mountains), only one village of Gorno Jelovce (only 2 inhabitants in 1 household, while remaining 15 houses were abandoned) in the municipality of Gostivar (in the southern part of Šar Planina mountains), and one village of Duf (55 inhabitants in 11 households, while 64 remaining houses were abandoned) in the municipality of Mavrovo-Rostuše (again in the southern part of Šar Planina mountains).

In total the population of these six mountain villages proposed for inclusion into the planned Šar Planina National Park accounted for 3,048 in 438 households (while as many as 98 houses were abandoned). Over 98.1 per cent of the population inhabiting this area concentrated in the central part of the Šar Planina mountains (in Tetovo municipality), while the population belonging to the municipalities of Mavrovo-Rostuše and Gostivar located in the southern part of this mountain range accounted for only 1.8 percent and some 0.06 per cent of the total population. The remaining four Macedonian municipalities (Jegunovce, Tearce, Bogovinje and Vrapchište) were expected to contribute to the proposed national park solely with their uninhabited mountain areas.

In the Korab - Dešat region the situation is different. During the second half of the 20-th century almost all villages in the northern part of Korab - Dešat region were either abandoned or not growing in size (these villages were geographically and culturally connected to the southernmost part of Šar Planina, therefore the demographic trends were similar). At the same time the villages predominantly inhabited by the Macedonian Muslims, who settled in the central part of the Korab mountain massif and in the southern part of this region (Dešat mountains) were initially growing in size. However, during the last two decades these villages experienced the same fate as in the case of their northern neighbours – the rapid exodus of the mountain rural population, and migration in search for employment, e.g. to Italy.

It should be mentioned that the territory of this southernmost part of the proposed trans-boundary protected area in Mavrovo National Park is inhabited by a true mixture of people of different ethnic groups and religions: Macedonian Muslims, Albanian Muslims, Macedonian Christians and Albanian Christians.

To summarise - in general, the demographic situation of the local populations on each side of the state borders is similar, characterised by its low size and density of population, negative demographic trends, population ageing, migration to towns paired by rural depopulation.
1.2.3. Local economic context

The land-use and economic development pattern on each side of the state borders in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” is very similar. There is almost no industry in this mountain region (except for some mines, gravel quarries and the chromium smeltery in Jegunovce), and the main sector of the local economy in the mountains is extensive agriculture. The inhabitants of this mountain region can be best described as the predominantly rural population with low income, and seriously affected by structural unemployment, while the situation in the adjacent plain or foothill areas is considerably better. Thus, the territories in the region of the proposed transboundary protected area belong to the less developed and poorest regions of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Moreover, the civil war and the breakdown of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia resulted in immediate temporary decrease of welfare and living standards in Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) and Macedonia, due to the overall unstable political situation affecting the economy of almost all former parts of the SFRJ. Last, but not least, the economy in Kosovo was further disturbed in result of the war in 1999, while the armed ethnic conflict in the northernmost border region of the FYR of Macedonia in 2001 had its adverse effect on the traditional land-use practices.
and settlement network on the Macedonian side. Last, but not least, a large part of this trilateral border area has been abandoned and left out of management in result of the above armed conflicts, and also due to the long-term administrative trespassing ban enforced in some parts of the region.

The main sectors of the local economy in these mountain border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the FYR of Macedonia are forestry and extensive agriculture, while the most important traditional land- and natural resource uses of predominant importance for subsistence and meeting the economic demands of the local inhabitants include sheep breeding and extensive grazing of mountain meadows and pastures, hay mowing, farming and animal husbandry (sheep, cows and goats), fresh fruit, potato and vegetables production, beekeeping, medicinal plant and berry collection. The traditional local products are the “Sharr cheese”, milk and other diary products, meat products, honey, berries and medical herbs; while the traditional skills and crafts include shepherding, woodcarving and wood and stone constructions.

The official (either permanent or temporary) employment opportunities in the mountain areas are insignificant, compared to the size of population, and limited to teaching at local schools, civil service in local offices or sometimes also tourist services (e.g. restaurants or tourist facilities). Thus, the unemployment rate is currently very high, and the situation on the Macedonian side even worsened with the closure of the
chromium smeltery in Jegunovce (previously employing some inhabitants from the northern part of Šar Planina) due to the recent worldwide financial crises. Due to the above, illegal activities are frequent, including illegal hunting and fishing, and illegal forest felling.

The above activities can hardly meet the growing economic demands of the local population and provide for the growth of welfare, therefore the emigration rate is high, and some of the inhabitants of the region are dependent of financial support from their family members working either in towns and cities, or abroad, in the Western European countries (e.g. Germany, Italy), often in construction sector.

Abandonment of traditional land-use practices due to the rural depopulation trend and abandonment of several mountain settlements in result of the armed ethnic conflict in 2001 resulted in decrease in the number of sheep grazing in the mountain pastures of the region, with adverse effect on the local economy.

The above adverse effects on the condition of the local economy in this mountain region can not be mitigated in the near future by e.g. the rapid development of tourist services, no matter the exceptional landscape and natural values of these mountain ranges for mountaineering, nature-based tourism or recreation. The capacity of tourist accommodation, concentrated in few bigger summer holiday and winter skiing resorts is limited, at least compared to the size of the trilateral region and its exceptionally high tourist attractiveness.

Satellite view 2: Landscape of the afforested central part of Mavrovo National Park.
The holiday resorts of the region are: (1) Popova Šapka in the FYR of Macedonia, located at the altitude of 1750 m, the famous skiing resort with a cable car and ski lifts, two larger hotels, several smaller tourist accommodation facilities and a large number of privately-owned recreational houses; (2) the winter and summer sports resort Brezovica-Shtrpce in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, accompanied by a number of privately-owned smaller pensions and restaurants; (3) Mavrovo skiing resort in the FYR of Macedonia. The only remaining mountaineering hut in Šar Planina is Ljuboten, while all other mountain huts were destroyed during the conflict of 2001, and several mountain settlements were abandoned since that time. In lower locations tourist services are developing very slowly, also due to the drastically decreased number of both national and international visitors since 2001, as well as the infrastructural limitations (e.g. underdeveloped road network, difficult road conditions in winter, problems with water supplies, sewage and waste management) and poor marketing of the natural and cultural values of the region.

There are few marked tourist trails in the mountains, currently almost non-visited, and the tourist or mountaineering maps are avail-
able only for some smaller areas of the whole transboundary region, while the common detailed tourist map including areas in all three neighbouring countries does not exist. The above problems are even more striking in the Korab - Dešat/Deshat mountains, with no tourist infrastructure except the Mavrovo skiing resort located far from the Korab massif, commonly considered as a "wild, abandoned and forbidden border area".

The settlement pattern is very much the same on each side of the state borders. It has to be noted that there are no settlements (towns or villages) located within the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area which are either divided by the state border, or paired by an adjacent settlement across the border. Thus, no present settlement could be perceived as key for the development of the transboundary cooperation, to become e.g. the potential seat for common consultative bodies or location of a common visitor centre.

1.2.4. Transport infrastructure

The transport infrastructure in the region is in general not well developed and considered to be insufficient on each side of the state borders, however the road network and road conditions on the Macedonian side are much better than in Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. Furthermore, remote rural areas close to the border connected with the lowlands by the narrow (and usually unpaved) local mountain roads are very hard to reach, while the situation in winter is even worse, when the local mountain roads are blocked by the snow.

The main transport corridor of the region of the proposed transboundary protected area is the international transport corridor – road E65 (road No 2 in Kosovo and road No M3 in the FYR of Macedonia) between Pristina and Skopje, further continuing along the highway M4 to Tetovo (located in the foothills of the central part of Šar Planina mountains) and Gostivar (southern part of Polog plain, close to the southern part of Šar Planina mountains), and further to the South towards Ohrid in the FYR of Macedonia and the junction with the road E852 leading to the border crossing with Albania located to the South from Jablanica mountains, and the road towards Tirana. The territory of Mali Sharr National Park is intersected by the scenic main road running parallel to Sharr mountain range and connecting Prizren with the international transport corridor – road E65. This road across Mali Sharr National Park is also the shortest route connecting Skopje in the FYR of Macedonia across the territory of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 with the road No 25 connecting Prizren with the northern part of Albania, e.g. Kukës and Shkodër. Other roads on the Kosovo side of Sharr/Šar Planina mountains are of the local importance. Most recently the Kosovo Government started an investment programme including construction of new roads and other rural infrastructure, with the objective to mitigate the depopulation of remote rural areas. The only paved road across the Šar Planina mountain range (or rather its easternmost slopes) is the local mountain asphalted road linking the Kosovo section of the road E65 across the mountain pass (1090 m) on the Kosovo side with Taece and Tetovo in the FYR of Macedonia. The other road across this mountain ridge leading to the former (closed since 2001) border crossing point at Lukovo Pole mountain pass (1500 m) and connecting the Gorna Reka region in the FYR of Macedonia with the village of Rastetica in the Dragash/Đragnaš community and Prizren region is currently almost not used.
The territory of Mavrovo National Park is intersected by the scenic main road connecting the international transport corridor – road E65 with the city of Debar and the nearby border crossing with Albania. There are no roads (other than unpaved forestry roads) across either the Korab massif or Dešat/Deshat mountains, which could link the Macedonian part of this region with the Albanian part. In the Albanian part of the region the major road connect Kukës and Shkoder (northwards from the area planned for Korabi Protected Landscape) and another one links Peshkopi with Burrel, Milot and Tirana (far to the South from Korabi P.L. area), while commuting between Kukës and Peshkopi is possible only along the local mountain roads connecting the bigger villages, either the main road in the Drini i Zl river valley (westwards from Korabi P.L. area), or local mountain roads on the foothills of the Korab mountain massif, running along a very complicated route.

The railway network in the region of the proposed transboundary protected area consists of the local line linking Kičevo, Gostivar and Tetovo on the Macedonian side with Skopje, and part of the international railway corridor linking Skopje with Pristina in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99; there are no railways on the Albanian side of the region. The nearest airports are in Skopje and Kosovo Polje near Pristina.

### 1.2.5. State of the environment of the region, and potential threats

The region of the proposed transboundary protected area "Sharr/Sar Planina - Korab - Dešat/Desat" in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is in fact very homogenous from the natural and environmental point of view. The natural environment of the region is in general well preserved, mostly due to its peripheral location far from the urban centers, railroads or highways as well as its natural character, presence of big forest complexes and inaccessibility of vast mountain areas. The above factors resulted in the low level of urbanization, industrialization and economic development of the region.

The two large-scale protected areas, namely Mavrovo National Park (73 088 ha) established already in 1949 in the Macedonian part of the Korab - Dešat/Deshat region, and Mali Sharr National Park (39 000 ha) established in 1986 in the Kosovo part of Sharr/Sar Planina region also contributed to the preservation of high biological and landscape diversity of this transboundary region, still harbouring a large number of important rare, endemic, relic, threatened or endangered species of flora and fauna. Thus, the general state of environment in the region is relatively good, e.g. the air and water quality, according to the monitoring reports, meet both the national and the EU standards.

However, during the last two decades human impact and pressures on environment and biodiversity of the region has significantly increased. These are mainly problems related to e.g. the insufficient sewage treatment and urban solid waste management, water supplies, uncontrolled land development, illegal timber felling and unsustainable forest harvesting,
fragmentation or loss of habitats, decrease of natural water retention capacity of deforested areas, forest fires, quarrying gravel, overuse of medicinal plant species, illegal fishing and poaching, abandonment of traditional land-use practices in depopulating mountain areas, and the recent climate changes. Last but not least, the low level of ecological awareness of the local population is paired by insufficient capacities of the local municipal authorities to address the above environmental threats. Not much has been done so far with the objective to mitigate or control different environmental threats in the last years. On the contrary, the negative environmental trends seem to be stronger than in the past, especially after the civil war in Kosovo as well as the armed ethnic conflict in the northernmost border areas of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2001.

The direct adverse impact of armed ethnic conflicts on the environment was in general rather small, limited e.g. to illegal hunting on wildlife by the members of either the armed forces or resistance groups. The most important negative effect of these conflicts was the long-lasting hiatus in management or mismanagement of some areas, where the state control preventing illegal activities became ineffective for longer periods. The above situation was even worse in the border areas considered for several years after the conflict as dangerous due to the operations of crime gangs or the possible presence of landmines. The above resulted for instance in increased illegal cutting of forests in Shar/Shar Planina mountains, increased poaching and almost uncontrolled hunting and fishing, illegal residential and recreational housing development, illegal quarrying of gravel, dumping trash, and illegal water extraction from pristine water courses. It has to be emphasised that the above illegal activities had their adverse effects also on existing protected areas in the region. After the conflicts these problems were addressed in cooperation with the local municipal authorities (in Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) – also with KFOR), but the situation is still not satisfactory – although improving, but still quite fragile.

In general, the level of air pollution is low, with very few remote ‘air pollution hot spots’ located far away from the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area. The presence of the chromium smeltery in Jegunovce (located close to the northern part of Šar Planina) did not considerably threaten the air quality due to the direction of predominant northern winds, transporting polluting gases into the Polog plain to the south; most recently this plant was closed due to the worldwide financial crises. Transport infrastructure is in general underdeveloped and the low traffic intensity density in the whole region does not significantly contribute to air pollution. However, it should be mentioned that no air quality monitoring stations are present in the territory proposed for the trilateral transboundary protected area.

As for the water pollution – similarly to air pollution the local industry plants (located downstream) have no direct influence on the water quality in mountain areas. All watercourses in the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Desht mountain ranges can be classified as mountain streams with clean water and mostly natural status of the river bed and banks (except for the fact that the water quality of some streams is threatened by organic pollutants from sheepfolds). But the major continuous threat to the environment, and in particular to the biodiversity along the watercourses of the whole region is the generally missing sewage treatment system paired by the underdeveloped and insufficient water supply system. This threat is particularly visible in the dry summer season, when the watercourses of the re-
Feasibility Study: SHARR/ŠAR PLANINA - KORAB - DESHAT/DEŠAT

Region carry a much smaller quantity of waters compared to winter months, which results in a much higher concentration of pollutants in rivers and streams of the region during the summer season. Sewage systems are present only in the larger municipality centers, while the villages (in particular the mountain ones) have no sewage systems and wastewater treatment plants, therefore in many areas untreated sewage is discharged directly into streams, tanks, and septic dumps. Furthermore, mountain streams are sometimes polluted due to the presence of sheep-folds in the mountains. However, there is no evidence of the eutrophication of the mountain streams so far.

However, the much larger threat to the mountain streams in the region than pollution is the water extraction. In 1950s many streams in Sharr/Šar Planina and some streams in Korab mountains were captured at an elevation of about 1300-1400 m and directed to the Mavrovo Water Reservoir system, including three hydroelectric power plants. At present the water extraction (construction of water intakes and pipelines for the water supply systems) is illegally done with the objective to provide water for some mountain villages. In result Lešnica, the most attractive location in Šar Planina, with the confluence of three pristine mountain rivers, tributaries to the Pena river, was partly damaged by the construction of the water extraction facilities.

As for the soil pollution – no matter the generally missing data and maps concerning soils,

Bogovinsko Ezero - the largest glacial lake in the FYR of Macedonia, threatened by the organic pollutants from the sheep-fold located above the lake.

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and their potential pollution the conditions of soils in the mountains of Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat seem to be very close to the natural state, in the absence of either industry or intensive agricultural practices. Some areas of the insignificant size located in the vicinity of sheep-folds are eutrophicated, but there is no evidence of e.g. chemical pollution of soils in the mountains (the situation with chemical pollution is different in lower elevations, e.g. around mines).

The much larger, continuous and still increasing common environmental threat results from the unsatisfactory collection and treatment or disposal of solid urban waste, both in towns and in rural areas of the region, regardless of the location of particular settlement area either in the territory of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 or the FYR of Macedonia, also in the mountain areas. The current management and local capacities to cope with this challenge do not seem to be adequate. In result, dumping trash into the forest or a stream is a common practice in rural areas.

Another serious threat to the environment of the Sharr/Šar Planina - Korab - Dešat/Deshat region is the illegal forest felling and timber harvesting, currently the most visible effect of the human activities pressure on the environment of the region, in particular around mountain villages, where forests are illegally cut down for fire wood, or with the aim to extend the present area of the nearby pastures.

These illegal practices are much more affecting the forest ecosystems of Sharr/Šar Planina mountains than in the Korab - Dešat/Deshat region, due to the very low density of population and settlement network in Korab area, as well as the presence of the large-scale Mavrovo National Park in the Macedonian part of the Korab - Dešat/Deshat mountains. Illegal forest felling occurs also in protected areas, e.g. in 1999 there was a case of illegal felling of the endemic Bosnian pine (Pinus heldreichii) trees in the strict
nature reserve established within the Mali Sharr National Park boundaries, containing the best preserved primeval Bosnian pine treestands in Sharr/Šar Planina mountains.

The almost immediate adverse effects of illegal forest felling and timber harvesting are the habitat fragmentation, degradation or loss of forest habitats, the drastic decrease of natural water retention capacity of deforested areas, and the disappearance of several wildlife species. Changes in forest habitats resulting from intensive or illegal forest exploitation always result in the disappearance of those animal and bird species, which require larger undisturbed forest complexes.

Thus, illegal forest felling and timber harvesting should be perceived as common potential threat to the ecosystems and their continuity in some parts of the region, thus a serious threat to the biodiversity of the Sharr/Šar Planina - Korab - Dešat/Deshat region.

Another serious threat to the forest and meadow habitats, and consequently to their flora and fauna, resulting from the human influence are the human-induced fires in the Sharr/Šar Planina - Korab - Dešat/Deshat region. Burning the forest and pasture areas was considered in the region as a traditional management measure, in particular for keeping the pasture areas open by burning down e.g. the juniper bushes in the mountain meadows (common juniper Juniperus communis and mountain juniper Juniperus nana).

In the seasons out of the main vegetation season (e.g. in early spring or early autumn, but also in the summer) when the mountain grasslands are dry such human-induced fires may easily develop beyond the controllable limits, damage larger areas of mountain pastures and also spread on forests. In result large areas of meadow and forest habitats
may seriously be damaged or completely destroyed, and their whole biodiversity is lost, in some cases irreversibly. Moreover, the land becomes barren and exposed to increasing soil erosion. Last, but not least, such fires destroy the natural resources (e.g. timber) of the affected areas.

Most probably a human-induced fire was the original reason for the much larger forest fire in 2001 which partially destroyed the already mentioned best preserved primeval treestands of the endemic Bosnian pine (Pinus heldreichii) in Sharr/Šar Planina mountains, protected in the strict nature reserve inside Mali Sharr National Park (currently, eight years after the fire, these treestands are in the stage of revitalization).

It may be worthy to recall here the wave of forest fires which spread all over the Balkan Peninsula couple of years ago. According to the official sources the ‘climate change’ was the reason blamed for those wildfires, which destroyed a significant portion of forests in the South Eastern Europe, with obvious effects on the biodiversity of the region. However, according to some personal communication sources – some of these fires might have been the result of the human-induced fires, in particular in cases of the areas most suitable for e.g. residential or recreational housing development in attractive mountain locations, where destroyed forest habitats could then easily be excluded from the forestry use and offered to developers.

Other, probably the most direct threats to the biological diversity of region of the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina - Korab - Dešat/Deshat” are either illegal or uncontrolled activities which may lead to the extinction of the most rare and important plant and animal species, most often those of the common European importance, thus listed...

One of such direct threats to biodiversity of the region is the overuse of species of medicinal and aromatic plants, collected either illegally or beyond the control of relevant authorities. A good example of such species could be *Gentiana Lutea*, but there are many other plant species collected in the region for commercial purposes, and not exactly for private use.

Other serious direct threats to the biological diversity of the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina - Korab - Dešat/Deshat” resulting from illegal human activities are the uncontrolled hunting and fishing, but in particular poaching on wild animals and birds. The situation would be less alerting in a case when such illegal practices could partially be excused by e.g. important subsistence needs of the local population, and targeted solely on e.g. the common game species, like the wild boars or roe deer. However, by significantly decreasing the population of such common game species – the potential of the region for maintaining the viable populations of other species, e.g. the large carnivores, would also decrease.

But poaching in Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab, and Dešat/Deshat mountains is not limited to e.g. the wild boars – the populations of animals and birds of common European importance are also decreasing, as the direct consequence of poaching activities in the region. Other animals particularly threatened by poaching in the region are the brown bear, lynx, wolf, and the rare Balkan subspecies of chamois, as well as some rare bird species. In result, According to the most recent field researches and monitoring - the population of the rare Balkan subspecies of lynx is most probably already extinct in most of the mountain areas of Sharr/Šar Planina. Over-fishing of trout in mountain streams is another serious threat to biodiversity.

Poaching on the brown bear, lynx, wolf, or some rare bird species can not be ‘excused’ by e.g. “important subsistence needs of the starving local population”, as some of those animals are hardly edible or tasty in the common European understanding, to say the least.

The main reasons for killing these rare or endangered animals are (1) the level of their rarity in Europe, and (2) their high ‘decorative’ values. In result, the stuffed dead corpses of these internationally protected animals currently decorate private houses and public places (e.g. restaurants) in some villages of the region.
Satellite view 4: The city of Tetovo in FYR of Macedonia and the neighbouring part of Šar Planina mountains (top), with the Popova Šapka holiday resort (in the upper left corner) and rapidly developing recreational housing (above, enlarged)
“Uncontrolled hunting” is in fact illegal, and very close to poaching, while poaching itself is a crime, in all European countries. Furthermore, poaching on animals like the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*, listed as a “priority” species under HD Annex II), or wolf (*Canis lupus*, listed as a “priority” species under HD Annex II), or lynx (*Lynx lynx*, listed under HD Annex II), or the rare Balkan subspecies of chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica*, listed under HD Annex II) is in fact a crime against the common European and global biodiversity conservation priorities.

Therefore, proclaiming the legal protection of new areas in the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab, and Dešat/Deshat mountains paired by increased operational capacities of the forestry and park rangers could possibly prevent or mitigate further damages to the biological diversity of the region, caused by human activities such as illegal forest felling and timber harvesting, inducing forest fires, dumping trash, overusing the resources of medicinal and aromatic plant species, or killing the animal and bird species of the common European conservation importance.

As for today, the **tourist pressure** on the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains is for many reasons negligible. Firstly, the accommodation capacity of the very few mountain resorts is limited, compared to the size of the region. Additionally, the vast majority of mountaineering huts in Sharr/Šar Planina mountains were destroyed in the times of the recent armed ethnic conflict, while some previously inhabited mountain settlements and villages remain abandoned until today. The common fear of “criminal gangs and landmines” in the border areas after the conflict of 2001 considerably limited the mountaineering activities and the number of both national and international visitors to the most popular holiday resorts of the region (this is e.g. why the cable car to Popova Šapka skiing resort is out of operation, and many tourist accommodations have mainly the vacant rooms).

Another potential threat to the environment and biodiversity of the Sharr/Šar Planina - Korab - Dešat/Deshat region is the **uncontrolled land development**, either in the vicinity of the present settlements, or in the mountain locations most attractive for tourism and recreation. These illegal activities are to a large extent facilitated in some areas of the region by the absence of valid land development plans. The uncontrolled land development in mountain areas of the region for the purposes of either residential or recreational housing, or large tourist infrastructure projects would even accelerate the current management problems and threats to environment resulting from e.g. the adverse effects of insufficient sewage treatment and solid waste management, the limited capacities of the water supply systems, possible costs and negative effects of extracting even more water from the mountain streams, underdeveloped road network in the mountains, or the soil erosion near the construction sites and on the ski slopes.

The pressure on uncontrolled land development is the highest in the vicinity of the existing mountain holiday resorts, where the local inhabitants or external investors try to develop either new overnight accommodation facilities for tourists, or recreational houses for their own pleasure. Thus, this pressure is in general limited to the few locations in areas already developed for tourism and recreation, namely the winter and summer sports resort Brezovica-Shtrpce in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, Popova Šapka near Tetovo and Mavrovo in the FYR of Macedonia.
However, there were also plans for new recreational infrastructure developments, e.g. the proposed recreational zone Zapluxhe-Dragash on the Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) side of Sharr/Šar Planina mountains. According to some sources, there were also plans for construction of a huge tourist complex on the mountain pass Prevalac and on the Popovo Prase mountain ridge, therefore in one of the strictly protected zones of Mali Sharr National Park. This project raised in 2006 planned the development of two luxury “A” class hotels, 480 condominium buildings and a swimming pool in the area of the strict nature reserve protecting the primeval treestands of the endemic Bosnian pine (*Pinus heldreichii*).

Therefore, the land management regulation is another challenge in the region. Sustainable tourism development would potentially bring many more visitors to the region, also international visitors from the current EU countries. This is why the tourist accommodation facilities should also meet the European environmental standards (concerning e.g. sewage and waste management), follow the local traditional architectural patterns, and be harmonised with the mountain landscape. Last but not least, such facilities should be located outside of the most fragile protected areas.

The last threat to the biological diversity of the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina - Korab - Desat/Deshat” described here is the abandonment

![Shrubs taking over the abandoned village](image)
of traditional land use practices, resulting both from the ongoing rural depopulation in mountain settlements and villages (common for the mountain areas worldwide) as well as the abandonment of some previously inhabited and cultivated areas in result of the recent armed ethnic conflicts in the region.

It does not mean that this threat would result in replacing the traditional extensive land use practices with the intensive modern agricultural patterns, as the natural conditions of the region would make such changes not economically sustainable. But the exodus of younger people from mountain villages into towns and cities results in ageing of the population inhabiting these mountain areas. Therefore, older people remaining in those remotely located mountain settlements can not continue the traditional management of nearby pastures, meadows and orchards, which gradually become overgrown by the bushes and trees, in the course of the natural forest succession to non-cultivated post-agricultural areas.

In result, the former picturesque mosaic of the ‘agri-cultural’ mountain landscape would slowly fade away, and turn into a simple forest landscape with the dominant forest vegetation, once the formerly cultivated or managed areas gradually turn into a dense forest. Thus, the landscape diversity in some of the mountain areas (in particular in Korab mountains) would decrease, with foreseeable adverse effect for the biological diversity of plant and animal species.

The disappearance of the current pastures and open spaces would not only mean the disappearance of several plant species of the meadows and grasslands, but would also limit the suitable hunting areas for several birds of prey, and decrease grazing areas for the hoofed animals (ungulates), thus limiting the current size of populations of e.g. the roe deer. In result, some of the important bird and large carnivore species would become even more rare in some parts of the region.

This is why due to the abandonment of traditional land use practices in abandoned mountain rural areas - the composition of flora and fauna species contributing to the currently high biological diversity of the region, which evolved throughout the centuries of permanent human presence and management of the mountain areas, may significantly change in the near future.

Therefore, the management plans of protected areas in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina - Korab - Dešat/Deshat” (both the existing and planned ones) should carefully address the challenge of either supporting the traditional land use practices of the inhabitants still remaining in the mountain settlements, or implementing relevant management measures substituting the traditional agricultural practice in the abandoned post-agricultural areas.
The region of the planned transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” is located at the borders of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, meeting at Mt. Sherupa (2 092 m). In Albania the areas currently planned for nature protection are located in two prefectures in the northeastern region of Albania - Dibra prefecture (bordering the FYR of Macedonia) and Kukës prefecture (bordering Kosovo, and on the small section of the state border – also the FYR of Macedonia). In Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 the areas either already protected or proposed for protection are located within the territories of five municipalities in the southernmost region (Dragash/Dragaš, Prizren, Suharekë/Suva Reka, Shtërpcë/Strpce and Kaçanik/Kacanik), four of them (except Suharekë/Suva Reka) are located at the border with the FYR of Macedonia, while the Dragash/Dragaš municipality additionally borders the Albanian territory. On the Macedonian side the areas either planned for protection or already protected are within the boundaries of seven local municipalities in the northwestern region of the country: Jegunovce, Tearce, Tetovo, Bogovinje, Vrapchishte (located at the border with Kosovo), Gostivar (bordering both Kosovo and Albania) and Mavrovo-Rostushe (located at the state border with Albania).

Kabash and Kepi Bard in the Korab mountain ridge

The region described in this study encompasses two distinctive neighbouring mountain regions – the Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range stretching along the border between the FYR of Macedonia and Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99), from the North-East towards the South-West, and the Korab – Dešat/Deshat mountain range stretching along the state border between Albania and the FYR of Macedonia, from the North towards the South; separated only by the Radika river canyon.
Map 4: Topography of the region of planned transboundary protected area and geographical borders of its sub-regions: Sharr/Sar Planina mountains (black line) and Korab – Dešat/Deshat mountains (red line).
Sharr/Šar Planina Mountains

Sharr/Šar Planina is one of the largest and highest mountain ranges of the Balkan Peninsula, stretching between the Prizren-Metohia valley and the Polog valley in the border areas of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 is approx. 70 kilometres long and up to 30 kilometres wide, with the territory almost equally divided between the FYR of Macedonia and Kosovo.

The name of this mountain range appears on the ancient map by Ptolomeus as “Scardus”, which was later reflected in the scientific terminology when giving names to local endemic plant species (e.g. Anthyllis scardica, Crocus scardicus, Narthecium scardicum, Onobrychis montana ssp. scardica, Sideritis scardica, Stachys scardica, Verbascum scardicolum, Viola schariensis). The valley of the river Pena marks the geographical division of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains, between their northeastern and southern parts.

The high mountain landscape of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range includes numerous summits reaching over 2000 metres above the sea level, including twenty two peaks over 2500 m a.s.l. The highest peak of the whole range is Titov Vrv / Golem Turčin (2747 m) on the Macedonian side of the central part of Šar Planina. Other distinctive peaks over 2500 metres above the sea level are Bakardan (2704), Mal Turčin (2702 m), Borislavec (2675 m), Rudoka (2658 m), Peskovi (2651 m), Djinibeg (2610 m), Trapeznica (2590 m), Ezerska Čuka (2586 m), Crn Vrv (2585 m), Golema Vraca (2582 m), Bistra (2571 m), Vrtop (2555 m), Čelepino (2554 m), Suva Dupka (2551 m), Sin Vrv (2550 m), Gabrovnica (2536 m), Mala Vraca (2536 m), Kobilica (2528 m), Kukinagledski Vrv (2524 m), Skakalo (2517 m) and Treta Karpa (2511 m).

The peak of Ljuboten (2499 m) marking the northernmost edge of the Šar Planina massif is famous for its impressive pyramidal shape. From the alpine landscape point of view the most attractive location in Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range is the Lešnica valley in the upper flow of Pena river, surrounded by fifteen peaks reaching over 2000 m and steep limestone rocks towering over the valley to the height of up to 600 metres. The Lešnica valley is also rich in flora and fauna, and famous for its endemic and relic species.

The Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range is located at the conjunction of the three large water catchment areas, and is rich in springs, rivers and waterfalls. The region is also rich in glacial relief forms, e.g. morens, glacial shoulders, glacial cirques as well as 39 post-glacial lakes (27 on the Macedonian side and 12 in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99), either permanent or temporary, located at altitudes between 1936 m and 2340 m above the sea level, e.g. Skakaličko Ezero (2340 m), Dobroški Ezera (2340 m and

Glacial geomorphology of Ezerski Rid (right)
2300 m). Belo Ezero (2280 m), Krivošijsko Ezero (2250 m), Livadičko Ezero (2173 m), Karanikoličko Ezero (2180 m), Vračanski Ezera (2180 m), Crno Ezero (2122 m) and Bogovisko Ezero (1960 m).

The history of scientific research in the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains dates back to 1836, the first research on the botany of this range was carried out in 1890. The biodiversity value of this area is outstanding due to the combination of both Balkan and Mediterranean characteristics determining the richness of its flora and fauna including a large number of rare, endemic and endangered species. Sharr/Šar Planina is the classic occurrence (locus classicus – locality where the species was originally discovered) of fifteen plant species.

The flora of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range includes approximately 150 endemic species, e.g. Cerinthe glabra, Silene graeffei, Cynanchum huteri, Onobrychis montana ssp. scardica, Cerastium decalvans ssp. dollineri, Asperula doerfleri, Pedicularis leucodon, Pedicularis brachyodonta ssp. grisebachii, Anthyllis aurea, Saxifraga marginata var. karadzicensis, Saxifraga grisebachii ssp. montenegrina, Saxifraga sempervivum, Potentilla speciosa, Potentilla montenegrina, Viola aetolica, Viola orphanidis, Viola latisepala, Thymus albus, Thymus zygiformis, Saxifraga teygetea, Silene sendtneri, Sedum flexuosum, Dordonicum orphanidis, Arabis alpina ssp. flavescens, Sesleria tenerrima, Veronica orsiniana, Gentianella bulgarica var. albanica, Achillea canescens, Androsace hedraentha, Soldanella dimoniei, Campanula spatulata, Campanula epigea, Campanula moesiaca, Cirsium appendic-
ulatum, Knautia dinarica, Knautia macedonica var. lyrophylla, Knautia sarajevensis, Hieracium gymnocephalum, Senecio wagneri, Erysimum pectinatum, Dianthus cruentus var. baldaccii, Silene wjaldsteinii, Scabiosa dubia, Trifolium vellenvoskyi, Iris reichenbachii, Stachys scardica, Linum spathulatum, Pancicia serbica, Cicerbita panicicii, Cirsis appendiculatum f. pantocseki, Thlaspi kovatsii, Euphorbia montenegrina var. bertasca, Alysum thessalum, Alyssum markgrafii, Alysum janchenii, Micromeria cristata, Dactylorhiza cordigera, Corallorhiza trifida, Sesleria coerulans, Dianthus petraeus ssp. integer, Hypericum umbellatum, Ranunculus sartorianus, Rhinanthus melampyroides, Melampyrum trichocalycinum or Scabiosa dubia.

Many of them have a Balkan distribution (e.g. Lilium albanicum, Pinus peuce, Ranunculus montenegranus, Thlaspi bellidifolium, Silene sendtneri, Geum cooconineum, Trifolium noricum, Anthyllis scardica, Acer heldreichii, Saxifraga co-ryophilla, Centranthus junceus, Soldanella dimo-niei, Sidentis scardica).

Some twenty of the endemic flora species of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains are local endemic species, which range is solely limited to this small region, e.g. Achillea alexandri-regis, Anthyllis scardica, Crocus scardicus, Onobrychis montana ssp. scardica, Sideritis scardica, Stachys scardica, Verbascum scardicum (Sara Mullein) or Viola schariensis.

Other important plant species of Sharr/Šar Planina are the tertiary relic plant species, e.g. Picea excelsa, Pinus mugo var. mughus, Taxus baccata, Ruscus hypolossum, Silene schmuck- en, Rhododendron ferrugineum, Arctostaphyllos uve ursi, Rhamnus pumila, Primula longiflora, Gentiana lutea, Sambucus racemosae, Artemisia petrosa and the glacial relic plant species, e.g. Elyna myosuroides, Carex curvula, Listera cordata, Trollius europaeus, Anemone narcissiflora, Arabis alpina, Salix herbacea, Dryas octopetalla, Myrccaria germanica, Primula minima, Loiseleuria procumbens, Empetrum nigrum, Linaria alpine, Campanula alpine, Aster alpina.

As many as 32 plant species present in the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains are listed by the IUCN on the Red List of Threatened Plants, while 26 species are included into the European Red List. According to the field researches carried out in the Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range and resulting species inventories developed by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia – plant species found in this mountain range which are listed as internationally important for conservation include Cerinthe glabra, Silene graeffei, Cynanchum huteri, Onobrychis montana ssp. scardica, Cerasium decalvans ssp. dollineri, Asperula doerfleri, Pedicularis leucodon, Pedicularis brachyodonta ssp. grisebachii, Anthyllis aurea, Saxifraga marginata var. karadzicensis, Saxifraga grisebachii ssp. montenegrina, Saxifraga sempervivum, Potentilla speciosa, Potentilla montenegrina, Viola aetolica, Viola orphanidis, Viola
latisepala, Thymus rohienae, Thymus albanus, Thymus zygiformis, Saxifraga teygetea, Silene sendtneri, Sedum flexuosum, Doronicum orphanidis, Arabis alpina ssp. flavescens, Sesleria tenerrima, Veronica orsiniana, Gentianella bulgarica var. albanica, Achillea canescens, Androsace hedraentha, Soldanella dimoniei, Campanula spatulata, Campanula epigaea, Campanula moesiaca, Cirsiun appendiculatum, Knautia dinarica, Knautia macedonica var. lyrophylla, Cirsium appendiculatum, Knautia sarajevensis, Hieracium gymnocephalum, Senecio wagneri, Erysimum pectinatum, Dianthus cruentus var. baldacci, Silene waldsteinii, Scabiosa dubia, Trifolium velenovskyi, Iris reichenbachii, Stachys scardica, Linum spathulatum, Pancicia serbica, Cicerbita pannici, Cirsiun appendiculatum, t. pantocsekii, Thlaspi kovatsii, Euphorbia montenegrova var. bertiscea, Alyssum thessalum, Alyssum markgrafii, Alyssum janchenii, Micromeria cristata, Dactylorhiza cordigera, Corallorhiza trifida, Sesleria coerulans, Dianthus petaeus ssp. integer, Hypericum umbellatum, Ranunculus sartorianus, Rhinanthus melampyroides, Melampyrum trichocalycinum, Scabiosa dubia.

Areas located above the upper forest limit harbour diverse habitats (e.g. alpine and sub-alpine limestone rocks and rocky habitats and screes, alpine and sub-alpine silicate rocks and rocky habitats, alpine and sub-alpine meadows and pastures on either limestone or silicate bedrock, grasslands, peat bogs and marshy habitats) and different plant communities relevant for particular vegetation belt, elevation, exposure to sunshine, soil conditions and rock substrate (e.g. limestone or silicate rock vegetation communities).

However, the true trademark of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains are the relatively small areas harbouring primeval treestands of the endemic and relic Macedonian pine (*Pinus peuce*) and the Bosnian pine (*Pinus heldreichii ssp.leucodermis*) which forms the oldest Tertiary plant communities *Seslerio-Pinetum heldreichii* and *Luzulo maxime-Pinetum heldreichii*.

Forests of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains are predominantly deciduous beech treestands, however mixed and coniferous forests are also present here. The main tree species in the composition of Sharr/Šar Planina forests include beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), black oak (*Quercus petraea*), oriental hornbeam (*Carpinus orientalis*), black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), silver fir (*Abies alba*) and Norway spruce (*Picea excelsa*).

Sharr/Šar Planina is the habitat for a large number of fauna species, which includes a high number of invertebrates, with many rare, relic and endemic species. Among 147 butterfly species most interesting are 12 Lepidoptera species. Endemics include 3 species of the hard-wing racers family (*Carabidae*), while many rare species belong to *Plecoptera, Odonata* and *Heteroptera*.
The fauna of Sharr/Šar Planina includes approximately 50 species of mammals, e.g. the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), European wild cat (*Felis silvestris*), the Balkan subspecies of lynx (*Lynx lynx martinoi*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), Eurasian badger (*Meles meles*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), otter (*Lutra lutra*), pine marten (*Martes martes*), roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), the Balkan sub-species of chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), ermine (*Mustela erminea*), common shrew (*Sorex araneus*), Eurasian water-shrew (*Neomys fodiens*), mole (*Talpa europaea*), Mediterranean mole (*Talpa caeca*), squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*), forest vole (*Cletrionomys glareolus*), Martino’s snow vole microtus (*Dinaromys bogdanovi*), snow vole (*Microtus nivalis*), subterranean vole (*Pitymys subterraneus*), yellow-necked mouse (*Apodemus flavicollis*), striped field mouse (*Apodemus agrarius*), brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*), weasel (*Mustela nivalis*), ferret (*Mustela putorius*); many of the above are rare and endangered species of the common European and global importance. Reptiles are represented here by 17 species, and amphibians by twelve species; the most interesting are the Juniper skink (*Ablepharus kitaibelli*), Bulgarian viper (*Vipera ammoditis*) and Balkan stream frog (*Rana graeca*).

All these wildlife species which have their habitats crossed by the border between the FYR of Macedonia and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, would largely benefit from transboundary cooperation on their protection.

Depending on the source of information the number of bird species nesting in the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains varies between 129 and 200, including the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), northern hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), rock partridge (*Alectoris graeca*), eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*), Alpine accentor (*Prunella collaris*), wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*), alpine chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*), red-billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) and white-winged snow finch (*Montifringilla nivalis*).
Korab - Dešat/Deshat Mountains

Korab is a high mountain massif stretching some 40 kilometres to the South from the confluence of borders of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, thus very much a continuation of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range, separated by the Radika river canyon. The mountain ridge stretching southwards from Mt. Korab along the state border between Albania and the FYR of Macedonia is named Dešat/Deshat. The mountain range encompasses the area of some 884 km² (562 km² or 63.5 per cent of the total on the Albanian side, 322 km² or 36.5 per cent in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

Its northern part is characterized by typical alpine landscape with steep rocky peaks while the landscape of its southern part is gentler. The highest peak of the Korab mountain range, Mt. Golem Korab (2764 m) located at the state border is simultaneously the highest peak of Albania and of the FYR of Macedonia. The highest peaks of the
Dešat/Deshat mountain ridge are Velivar (2,373 m) and Golem Krchin (2,341 m).

The Korab – Dešat/Deshat region preserves a great variety of mountain landscapes, including postglacial relief shapes, deep gorges, and rock formations. The subalpine and alpine meadows are dominated by Sesleria autumnalis and are rich in rare and endemic species like Primula halleri, Juniperus foetidissima, Aconitum lamarckii, Trifolium wetsteinii, Ranunculus degennii, Ranunculus wettssteinii, etc.

The slopes below the mountain meadows are mostly covered with deciduous forests, mainly beech (Fagus sylvatica), sometimes mixed with Austrian pine (Pinus nigra), and verrucose birch (Betula verrucosa); the Korab area is the location of the largest pure birch treestand in Albania. Other tree species contributing to the diversity of forest ecosystems in this region are silver fir (Abies alba), Bosnian pine (Pinus heldreichii ssp. leucodermis), Macedonian pine (Pinus peuce), and black alder (Alnus glutinosa). The oak forests (incl. Quercus cerris and Quercus petraea) cover areas on lower altitudes.
This border area constitutes an important habitat of several threatened fauna species of the common European importance which require large undisturbed forest ecosystems, including big mammals like the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), lynx (*Lynx lynx*), the Balkan sub-species of chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica*) and birds like the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), western capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), goshawk (*Accipiter gentiles*), buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) and the grey-headed woodpecker (*Picus canus*).

All these wildlife species which have their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state border between Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia would largely benefit from transboundary cooperation on their protection between the two countries involved, and potentially also with Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.
PART 2. NATURE AND ITS PROTECTION IN THE AREA

Small connected lakes Gashevski Ezera (Deshat/Dešat).

Bosnian pine forest in the upper Radika valley (Korab).

Brushtla - peat bogs below the Kepi Bard peak.
In the times of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) numerous symposiums and congresses focused on biodiversity conservation issues, and resulted in so-called “long-term projections” for nature protection in the whole region, and recommendations for designation of new protected areas. Many of these recommendations were consequently translated into different planning documents (e.g. physical plans, sector strategies and policies) but very few of them were later implemented.

Since 1990’s, the times of the civil war and armed ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, the progress in establishing new protected areas considerably slowed down. Biodiversity conservation has not been the priority for the new independent countries which emerged after the break down of the SFRJ, confronted with many other urgent needs and severe problems, in particular those resulting from the economic crises caused by war damages, several years of isolation of several countries of this region from the global economy, and ongoing transition from socialist economic policies to free market economies. Moreover, in some regions of the South Eastern Europe the recent ethnic tensions are still a possible obstacle for developing sub-regional and transboundary cooperation on biodiversity conservation issues.

Once the political and economic situation became more stable - the climate for nature conservation became more favourable. This positive trend is reflected in e.g. the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia of 1991, declaring that “Protection and promotion of the environment and nature are fundamental values of the constitution of the Republic. All the natural resources of the Republic of Macedonia, and the flora and fauna, are amenities of common interest for the Republic and enjoy particular protection”.

Secondly, several South Eastern European countries demonstrated their commitment to protect the biodiversity of their shared bioregion by the successful ratification of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), including the Convention on biological diversity, the Convention on World Heritage Sites, the Convention on the international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora, the Convention on wetlands of international importance especially as waterfowl habitat (Ramsar Convention), the United Nations Convention to combat desertification and land degradation, and the United Nations Framework Convention on climate change.

Current legislation related to nature conservation issues in South Eastern European countries is already to a large extent quite similar and compatible, and will become even more compatible with the full incorporation of acquis communautaire, as the Council Directives concerning nature protection are currently transposed into the national legislation of several SEE countries, in the light of their expected accession to the European Community.

On the other hand – the legislative and institutional framework for nature conservation in SEE countries often remains relatively complicated, as the competencies of different Ministries and institutions are sometimes overlapping.

In order to provide the most comprehensive overview on the legal and administrative framework for protected area designation and management – the following part of this chapter compiles information received from, or made
available in different sources, in particular the responses of UNEP local experts to questionnaires and the publication resulting from the common “Civil-military Cooperation for the Promotion of Transboundary Nature Conservation along the European Green Belt” project of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) and the IUCN, supported by ENVSEC - the Environment and Security Initiative.

Albania

The legal framework in Albania directly related to, or relevant for protected area designation and management includes a number of legal acts. The law “On protected areas” (No.8906, 2002), the law “On biodiversity protection” (2006) and the recently approved law “On wild fauna protection” are the main legal acts related to nature protection, supplemented by several Decrees adopted by the Council of Ministers, in particular “On the procedures of designation of Protected Areas and buffer zones” (No.267, dated 24 April 2003, published in the Official Journal No.35, dated 21 May 2003, page 1228), “On the Administration of Protected Areas (No.266, dated 24 April 2003), “On the Protected Areas Committee” (No.81, October 2005) as well as “On the Designation of Nature Monuments”, “On the Regulations of Cave Usage” and “On the Approval of the List of Protected Albanian Flora and Fauna Species”. Other relevant legal acts are those related to e.g. environmental protection, transboundary lakes, and protection of the marine environment from pollution and damage.

The thematic scope of the law “On protected areas” (2002) includes proclamation, protection, administration, management and sustainable usage of protected areas and their natural and biological resources; facilitation of conditions for the development of environmental tourism; informing and educating the community, as well as direct and indirect economic incomes for the local community and business entities. The goal of this legal act is to ensure special protection for specific important natural assets of biodiversity and nature, by proclamation of protected areas for the protection and regeneration of natural habitats, species, reserves and natural landscapes. This legal act also distinguishes different protective management levels for protected areas, in accordance to six IUCN categories of protected areas.

The procedures for the designation of a protected area are set up by the Decree “On the procedures of designation of Protected Areas and buffer zones” (2003). According to this decree the Nature Protection Policies Directorate (NPPD) of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) shall prepare the study for the proposed area, based on the recommendations of the Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (2000), and following the governmental programme providing for extension of the protected area network in Albania. The study shall include the GIS map and the detailed zoning of the proposed area. An important phase of this designation procedure is the presentation of the proposal to the local communities and local authorities, for their comments and approval.

Once the new protected area is officially designated by a Government Decree (Decision of the Council of Ministers) its administration is established. Protected area administrations operate under the supervision of the MEFWA Directorate of Forestry Service, and of the management committee established according to the requirements of the decree “On the Protected Areas Committee”. Another authority supervising the implementation of activities carried out in the protected area is the Forestry Police of the regional Forestry Service Directorate.
The legal powers and duties delegated to the protected area administration are defined by the decree “On the Administration of Protected Areas” (2003). Pursuant to its Article 4 the administration of the protected zone is charged with the following tasks and duties:

a) Administration of the protected zones;
b) Guarding of the protected zones;
c) Oversight of the implementation of the zone’s management plan;
d) Oversight of the implementation of annual monitoring and bio monitoring plans in conjunction with institutes and structures specialized to monitor and publish environmental data;
e) Designing regulation for the administration and protection of the area, and the regulation for local fishing and hunting; for the protection of forests, pastures, and medicinal plants where such plants occur;
f) In cases of infringements - administering and collecting fines;
g) Collecting fees for the use and exploitation of protected zones;
h) Liaising with users of facilities and objects;
i) Controlling visitors and users;
j) Requesting the use of appropriate instruments from subject who use and/or utilize protected zones;
k) Building the regional environmental index, as part of the national index;
l) Ensuring the efficient use of funds allocated for the protected zone;
m) Publishing annually the information on the condition of the zone;
n) Instituting effective book keeping on activities, investment and scientific research carried out in the protected zone;
o) Preparing the annual report on the condition of the zone and submitting it to the Ministry of the Environment, Forests and Water Administration, the General Directorate of Forests and Pastures and the local government structures;
p) Interacting with scientific research institutions, environmental NGO-s and the community for the protection of the zone and the conservation of its biodiversity;
q) Holding awareness and publicity campaigns and events in conjunction with the local government, research institutions, educational and cultural structures, environmental NGO-s and local communities: preparation of publications aiming at promoting the values of the protected zone;
r) Coordinating the celebration of environmental days and events that relate to the specific protected zone.

Furthermore, according to the decree “On the Protected Areas Committee” protected area administrations are expected to supervise the implementation of the management plan, which corresponds to Article 4/c of the decree “On the Administration of Protected Areas”. Taking into account that the land management in different protective zones is one of the components of the protected area management plan, it has to be noted here that the land-ownership issues in Albania still needs to be resolved, which could make this task of the protected area administration even harder to execute.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) of Albania is the main institution in charge for nature protection, including protected areas. The MEFWA Nature Protection Policies Directorate is responsible for the development (in cooperation with the Directorate of Services - Legislation Sector) and implementation of nature protection policies and strategies, as well as for the implementation of the legal provisions related to nature protection, one of which is the designation...
and extension of the protected area network. The executing agencies of the MEFWA include the regional Environment Agencies and Directorates of Forestry Service (DFS) in each prefecture, which competencies include protected area administration.

In the field of nature conservation the MEFWA cooperates with other Ministries, e.g. the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection on Agricultural Biodiversity; the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunication (e.g. concerning land management planning), the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports (e.g. on tourism development issues), and the Ministry of Interior (concerning the management of local natural resources).

Therefore, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) of Albania and the local municipal (prefecture) authorities are the decisive bodies for the designation of new protected areas in Albania, while the bodies responsible for their management are the local prefecture administration and Directorate of Forestry Services.

Thus, in the case of the planned Korabi Protected Landscape the responsible authorities and the main partners for transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” on the side of Albania would be the authorities of the Dibra Prefecture, in cooperation with those of the Kukës Prefecture, and both concerned Directorate of Forestry Services.

Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99

In Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) the legal framework related to protected area designation and management includes the Law on Nature Protection (a new legal act is currently being drafted) and the Law on Mali Sharr (Sharr Mountain) National Park, in correspondence with the Law on Environment Protection (currently in the parliamentary procedure), the Law on Physical Planning, the Law on Waste, the Law on Forest, the Law on Water, the Law on Hunting and the Law on Fisheries and Aquaculture.

The Law on Nature Protection lays down the basic requirements for the conservation and sustainable use of nature, in particular:

a) Conservation, renewal and sustainable utilization of nature and renewable natural resources;

b) Restoration of damaged nature conservation zones and of their natural habitats and species;

c) Maintenance and restoration of the ecological balance of nature;

d) Establishment of planning, management, information and funding systems for nature conservation;

e) Accomplishment of the goals determined within the policies on nature conservation;

f) Reduction of the over-use of and damage to flora and fauna, especially important species and their habitats;

g) Public access to information and the right to participation in nature conservation;

h) Ensuring the right of citizens to a healthy environment, and to natural amenities for relaxation and recreation;

i) Protecting biodiversity through the conservation of important natural habitats and important species of wild flora and fauna, with a favourable conservation status;

j) Bringing environmental standards in Kosovo
Feasibility Study: SHARR/ŠAR PLANINA - KORAB - DESHAT/DEŠAT

(Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) in line with those of the European Union, pursuant to Section 5.7 of the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government.

The Law on Nature Protection introduces “Nature Conservation Zones” as spatial conservation areas, designated with the purpose of protecting and maintaining the biodiversity, landscapes, natural characteristics and cultural heritage within, and of providing effective management through judicial and other means. Furthermore, this Law classifies protected areas accordingly to the IUCN categories.

Pursuant to the Law on Nature Protection, the categories of protected areas in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 are as follows:

I. Strict nature reserve - protected zone primarily designated for scientific purposes;
II. National park - protected zone mainly for the purpose of protecting ecosystems or as a recreational area;
III. Natural monument - protected zone mainly for the purpose of preserving specific natural characteristics;
IV. Managed zone of habitats or protected species - protected zone for preserving habitats or protected species;
V. Protected landscape - protected zone for the purpose of preserving the landscape;
VI. Protected zone of natural resources - protected area aiming to prohibit the unsustainable use of natural resources in natural ecosystems.

The authorities decisive for the designation of a new protected area are the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning and local authorities, while the final ratification of the relevant legal act is reserved for the Kosovo Assembly. The designation procedure includes developing the official proposal with scientific justification for proclaiming the protected area, consultations with the local authorities and groups of interest, adoption of the special legal act, its announcement, and ratification by the Kosovo Assembly.

Once an area has been included on the list of proposed nature conservation zones, any deterioration of the conservation status of any part of that area is prohibited. The protected area authority responsible for managing the national park, natural monuments or protected landscapes is then established by the Government, pursuant to Article 37 of the Law on Nature Conservation.

The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) of Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) is the main institution responsible for biodiversity conservation and most aspects of environmental protection, including nature protection and protected areas. The MESP Environment Department has divisions responsible for policy, environmental protection, and nature protection. The Nature Protection Division of the MESP Environment Department has units responsible for biodiversity conservation, protection of natural values, soil protection, and consistent use of natural resources. The unit responsible for protection of natural values within the MESP Nature Protection Division is directly responsible for management of national parks, thus part of its staff is based in Mali Sharr National Park (at present the only national park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) forming the National Park Administration.

Another central authority relevant for protected area management is the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development.
(MAFRD) and its Kosovo Forest Agency (KFA) managing all public forests (including forests in Mali Sharri National Park) and responsible for overseeing forest management on privately owned lands. Local authorities are in charge for the municipal administration offices for nature conservation, cooperating with the MESP coordinators (in five regional offices).

Additionally, the Kosovo Environment Protection Agency (KEPA), currently under development, will provide scientific and administrative support to the MESP concerning environment, biodiversity protection and hydrometeorology. Its responsibilities shall include supervising the implementation of the Kosovo Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development Strategy, preparation of reports on the state of the environment, evaluation of spatial plans, issuing opinions on environmental impact assessment (EIA) studies, and issuing opinions on areas proposed for nature protection.

Therefore, the Kosovo Assembly, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP), in particular its Nature Protection Division of the Environment Department, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD) are the decisive bodies for the planned territorial extension of Mali Sharri National Park, while the main partners for transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” on the side of Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) would be the Mali Sharri National Park Administration within the MESP organisational structure, the Kosovo Forest Agency within the MAFRD structure, the municipal administration offices for nature conservation (Dragash/Dragaš, Prizren, Suharekë/Suva Reka, Štrpce/Kaćanik/Kacanik), the Kosovo Environment Protection Agency, and the University of Pristina.

### The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the legal framework related to protected area designation and management includes the Law on Nature Protection (Off. Gazette of RM 67/2004), the Law on the Protection of Ohrid Lake, Prespa Lake and Dojran Lake, in correspondence with the Law on Environment, as well as other relevant sectoral policy legislation: the Law on Forests, the Law on Fishing, the Law on Hunting, the Law on Plant Protection, the Law on Pastures Act, the Law on Cattle Breeding, the Law on Veterinary Health, the Law on Land Use and Development, the Law on Fire Protection, and the Law on Mineral Resource Exploitation.

The Law on Environment regulates the rights and responsibilities of the Republic of Macedonia, municipalities, the City of Skopje and the municipalities of the City of Skopje, and the rights and responsibilities of legal entities and natural persons in creating the required conditions to ensure protection and improvement of the environment, and ensuring the right of citizens to a healthy environment. The objectives of this Law are:

I. Preservation, protection, restoration and improvement of the quality of the environment;
II. Protection of human life and health;
III. Protection of biological diversity;
IV. Rational and sustainable use of natural resources;
V. Implementation and improvement of measures aimed at addressing regional and global environmental problems.

The Law on Nature Protection regulates the conservation of nature through biological and
landscape protection, and conservation inside and outside of protected areas. The objectives of this Law are:

• Assessment and monitoring of the state of nature;
• Conservation and restoration of the existing biological and landscape diversity in a state of natural balance;
• Establishment of a network of protected areas for the purpose of preservation of the subjects of protection;
• Providing for the sustainable use of natural resources in the interests of present and future development,
• Without significant damage to nature and with the least possible disturbance of the natural balance;
• Prevention of detrimental activities by individuals and legal entities and disturbances of nature resulting from technological development and the performance of activities, i.e. providing for the best possible conditions for protection and development of nature;
• Ensuring the citizens their right to a healthy environment.

The Law on Nature Protection regulates the procedures for the designation of new protected areas, and their management. Articles 66-90 classify protected areas accordingly to the six IUCN categories, and regulates their management regimes in the way corresponding to the respective IUCN category. However, the names of protected area categories in some cases are not exactly translated, but adapted to Macedonian conditions and terminology. Article 72 (paragraphs 1 and 2) defines the National Park as a large, mainly unchanged area of land or water with particular multiple natural values, which encompasses one or more, preserved or insignificantly changed ecosystems, primarily designed for the conservation of the original natural, cultural and spiritual wealth. The National Park shall be intended for scientific-research, cultural, pedagogic, educational and tourist-recreational purposes.

It should be mentioned here that Article 67 of the Law on Nature Protection provides for the possibility to connect protected areas in border regions with the corresponding protected area/s located across the state border in a neighbouring country.

As for the designation of new protected areas – Article 66 para.3 states that the proclamation of new protected areas shall first of all provide for a representative coverage of the habitat types and ecosystems that exist on the territory of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The first, second and third category of protected areas is proclaimed by the Law in a Parliamentary procedure, while other protective categories (fourth, fifth and sixth) are proclaimed by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (Article 92, para. 1 and 2). The act for proclamation of a new protected area shall contain the basis for submitting the proposal, name of protected area, category of protection, geographical characteristics and other basic features, cartographic overview, boundaries of the protected area and its zoning, regime of protection, management entity and other issues stipulated by the proclamation act (Article 92, para. 4), with attached technical study justifying the proposal.

The proposal for proclamation of all categories of protected areas may be submitted by e.g. the public administration bodies, organisations, scientific institutions or the relevant units of the local self-government, while for the categories 4-6 the proposal could be sub-
mitted also by the individuals and legal entities (Article 94, para. 1 and 2). The proposal is submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) and should contain at least the main objectives for submission of the proposal, map of the area and scientific study for justification of the proposal (Article 94, para 3).

The assessment and decision on proceeding with the submitted proposal is in the scope of responsibilities of the MEPP, based on the recommendations given by the National Council for Nature Protection. Then, the decision on adoption on the acceptability of the proposal and on the further procedure for proclamation shall be taken by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, based on the final proposal prepared by the MEPP (Article 95, para.1), or by the Parliament for the first three categories of protected areas.

Following the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, the MEPP is obliged to carry out public hearing for the given proposal for protection of certain area (Article 95, para.2). After the completion of the public hearing for the proposal, the MEPP shall prepare the final proposal for proclamation of the protected area and shall submit it to the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (Article 96, para.1). The final proposal for proclaiming protected area must include opinions resulting from the completed public hearing and a Proclamation Act of protected area (Article 96, para.2). The Government of the Republic of Macedonia shall consider and adopt the proposal for proclamation of protected area, and shall decide on further actions (e.g. submitting the adopted proposal to the Parliament) with regard to the proposal (Article 96, para.3).

By the act for proclamation referred to in Article 92, the following zones may be established in the protected area: (1) the zone of strict protection, (2) the zone of active management, (3) the zone of sustainable use, and (4) the buffer zone. The activities and actions that may be carried out within the zones established in accordance with Article 92, para. 1 of this article shall be stipulated by the Proclamation Act of the protected area referred to in Article 92 and the Management Plan for Protected Area.

After enforcement of the act for proclamation of the national park, the management plan for natural heritage shall be elaborated, in accordance with the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Macedonia and with the provisions of the Law on Nature Protection. The Natural Heritage Management Plan shall contain all prescribed measures and activities for nature protection, and be harmonised with the objectives, measures and activities for protection and management of the protected area determined by the Law on Nature Protection, the act for protected area proclamation, and international standards and international agreements ratified by the Republic of Macedonia, as well as the spatial planning documentation.
The spatial planning documentation is obligatory for national parks (Article 103, para.1). In accordance with the provisions of the Law on Nature Protection (Article 103, para.2), the spatial plan shall include:

1. **Textual part describing:**
   - Size, boundaries and geographical situation of the park;
   - Status of the natural environment;
   - Status of the existing spatial development, organization and protection;
   - Objectives and tasks concerning the spatial development;
   - Spatial distribution of the population, settlements and tourist sites;
   - Spatial distribution of infrastructural systems;
   - Guidelines and measures for implementation of the plan;
   
   and

2. **Graphical part, depicting:**
   - Relief and geomorphological forms;
   - Map of soils;
   - Vegetation map;
   - Hydrography;
   - Existing spatial organization; and
   - Extent to which the space is developed.

The Parliament and the Government of the Republic of Macedonia are the main bodies responsible for nature and biodiversity conservation. Within the Government, the Ministry of the Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) is responsible for nature protection issues, and developing nature conservation policies. The MEPP Administration for Environment is responsible for nature conservation issues. The National Council for Nature Protection was established for monitoring and development of nature protection and as a advisory body of the MEPP. The Administration for Environment conducts administrative work for the National Council for Nature Protection.

As for the management of protected areas – the MEPP is directly responsible for administration of strict nature reserves (however it can also delegate this responsibility to other legal body, e.g. SNR Ezerani to the NVO Society for the Protection of Birds in Macedonia, and SNR Tikves to the Public Enterprise “Vodostopanstvo na Makedonija”); while national parks are administrated and managed by the so called "public institution", which is supervised by the steering committee composed of five members, including one member delegated by the local municipality (Law on Nature Protection, Article 137, para.1).

Administration of other categories is carried out by the "subject", which is proposed with the application for proclaiming the protected area (Article 92, para.4; Article 134, para.1). The MEPP Nature Sector from the Administration for Environment is performing only the inspection on the implementation of the provisions of the management plan and implementation of overall protection (Article 163). According to the Law on Nature Protection, local municipal self governments have almost no competencies concerning administration of protected areas of category I and II (Article 134). The general public can be involved only in the proclamation process (Article 96).

The legal mandate for the Public Institution administering and carrying out the 'integral management' of national parks (currently: Mavrovo, Pelister and Galicica) includes monitoring and direct protection (by ranger service) of the national park area, implementation of management practices stipulated in the management plan, enabling and facilitating scientific
Moreover, the national park administrations may carry out economic activities and get revenues deriving from such activities. This legal mandate for the Public Institution does not include the land ownership rights (on behalf of the State).

The state-owned lands (e.g. pastures of forests) remaining outside protected areas are managed by Public Enterprises (e.g. the Public Enterprise for Forest Management “Makedonski Sumi”) established within the organisational framework of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (MAFWE).

Thus, in the case of areas planned for protection (e.g. in the case of the planned Šar Planina National Park) - the decision on their legal designation would to some extent depend on the opinion of the MAFWE, which could possibly be opposing to the proposals excluding some acreage of mountain pastures and mountain forests from the management of the territorially relevant Public Enterprises.

However, the opinion of the MAFWE shall not be decisive, taking into account that the current Spatial Plan of Macedonia (2004-2020) anticipates the increase in the share of protected areas from the current 7.32 per cent up to some 12.5 per cent of the country area by 2015. According to the valid Spatial Plan of Macedonia - one of the proposed new protected areas in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is the planned national park encompassing Šar Planina mountain range at the border with Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

Therefore, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP), including the Nature Sector of the MEPP Administration for Environment, and administrations of the local municipalities concerned (Jegunovce, Tearce, Tetovo, Bogovinje, Vrapchishte, Gostivar, and Mavrovo-Rostushe) are the main decisive bodies for the planned designation of Šar Planina National Park.

The main partners for transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” on the side of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia would be the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, the Public Institution “National Park Mavrovo”, the possible future Public Institution “National Park Šar Planina”, the administrations of the above local municipalities, and preferably also the Public Enterprise for Forest Management “Makedonski Sumi”.

PART 2. NATURE AND ITS PROTECTION IN THE AREA
2.3. Comparison of protected area networks

The protected area network in Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia can be best described as having a large potential to grow, due to the natural values remaining outside the presently protected areas, and also in the light of the expected accession to the European Community, requiring harmonization of their nature protection legislation and standards with those of the EU.

As for June 2009 the protected area system of Albania covers 361'569 ha (which accounts for some 12.58 per cent of the country’s territory). Large-scale protected areas in Albania include 14 national parks (of the total area of 176'584 ha), managed nature reserves (82'530 ha) and protected landscapes (95'884 ha), while some 200 nature monuments supplement the ecological network of Albania.
Throughout the last three years Albania has made a significant progress in developing its protected area network, compared to 2006 when the acreage of protected areas in Albania was more than twice smaller (166,691 ha, thus only 5.8 per cent of the country’s territory). The above increase resulted from the different initiatives recently undertaken by the Albanian Government towards biodiversity conservation, including extension of protected areas, database development, digital mapping, as well as GIS mapping of boundaries, habitats, threatened and endangered flora and fauna species, land use; activities towards the development of the EMERALD network of ASCI-s (so far 20 proposed sites covering 410,197 ha); identification of core areas, buffer zones and ecological corridors; and preparatory work for the implementation of Natura 2000.

In Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) the protected area system encompasses some 46,504.6 hectares (which accounts for 4.27 per cent of the territory). As for 2009 the only national park is Mali Sharr (Sharr Mountains) National Park, located in the southernmost region of Kosovo at the border with the FYR of Macedonia. The national park encompasses 39,000 ha, which accounts for some 84 per cent of the total acreage protected in Kosovo. Other protected areas are eleven small-scale nature reserves (covering together only 954.8 ha), 35 nature monuments (covering together some 4,868 ha), two protected landscapes - the Mirusha River Gorge and the Germia Mountains (together covering only 1,681.8 ha), and two forest parks. Natural Monuments and Protected Landscapes are declared and managed by the local municipalities.
The protected area system of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2006 included 77 areas covering an area of 188'154 ha (which accounts for 7.32 per cent of its land surface), in the following categories: national park, strict natural reserve, natural monument, landscape with special natural characteristics, and area outside nature reserves containing certain plant and animal species.

The system includes three national parks (NP Galičica covering 22,750 ha, NP Mavrovo 73'088 ha and NP Pelister 12'500 ha) together encompassing 108'338 ha (thus 4.21 per cent of the country area), four strict nature reserves together encompassing 12'855 ha, 53 natural monuments covering together the area of 61'978 ha, three areas classified as ‘landscape with special natural characteristics’ covering together 2'338 ha, and 14 areas located outside nature reserves and designated for protection of certain plant and animal species covering together 2'645 ha.

The new Law on Nature Protection adopted in 2004 in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia defined new legal categories of protected areas (in accordance with IUCN categorization), which are strict nature reserve, national park, natural monument, park of nature, protected landscape and multipurpose area. Re-valorisation and re-categorization of the existing protected areas is currently ongoing.

As visible in the Table 1. below, protected areas in Albania constitute 60.64 per cent, protected areas of the FYR of Macedonia account for 31.56 per cent, and those protected in Kos-
ovo only for 7.8 per cent of the total acreage of protected areas in this region.

Moreover, taking into account differences in size of land surfaces - the ‘spatial density ratio’ of the protected area network in Albania is the highest. The territory of Albania is only by some 11.8 per cent bigger than of the FYR of Macedonia, but the acreage under legal protection in Albania is almost twice bigger. Similarly, the territory of Albania is only 2.64 times bigger in size than of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, but the acreage of areas protected in Albania is almost eight (7.77) times bigger. Furthermore, these disparities may soon become even stronger in the light of planned designation of numerous new protected areas in Albania, if not paired by similar efforts on the side of Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

By the end of the year 2020 protected areas in Albania are expected to cover 588,817 ha, thus the share of protected areas in country’s territory is expected to increase to some 20.48 per cent. The designation of the new “Alps National Park” (77,458 ha), part of the planned transboundary area “Prokletije/Bjeshkët e Nemuna Mountains”, expected to incorporate three already existing protected areas on the Albanian side (National Park “Thethi”, National Park “Lugina e Valbones” and a Strict Nature Reserve “Lumi i Gashit” of the total area of 136,300 ha) is planned for 2010-2011. The designation of Korabi Protected Landscape (31,360 ha) as part of the planned transboundary area “Sharr/Shar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” is planned for 2012.

In Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, in the region of the planned transboundary area “Sharr/Shar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” there were proposals to extend the territory of Mali Sharr / Sharr Mountains national park to the South, along the border with the FYR of Macedonia and towards the border with Albania, which would then establish a spatial linkage between Sharr National Park, the area of Korabi Protected Landscape in Albania, and Mavrovo National Park in the FYR of Macedonia. There was also a proposal to designate a new national park in Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije Mountains, with an area of some 50,000 hectares, which would then more than double the size of areas protected in Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) and the FYR of Macedonia.

Table 1. Share of protected areas in territories of Albania, Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) and the FYR of Macedonia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Land surface (km²)</th>
<th>Protected area (km²)</th>
<th>Protected area share in land surface (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>28,750</td>
<td>3,615.69</td>
<td>12.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99</td>
<td>10,887</td>
<td>465.05</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYR of Macedonia</td>
<td>25,713</td>
<td>1,881.54</td>
<td>7.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>65,350</td>
<td>5,962.28</td>
<td>average share 9.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unfortunately, the proposal concerning Bjeshkët e Nemuna / Prokletije was rejected in 2007 by the Parliament of Kosovo.

The current Spatial Plan of Macedonia (2004-2020) anticipates the increase in the share of protected areas from the current 7.32 per cent up to some 12.5 per cent of the country area by 2015. One of the proposed new protected areas in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is the planned national park encompassing Šar Planina mountain range at the border with Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99).

### 2.4. Protected areas in the region of the planned transboundary protected area

As for June 2009 there are only two legally designated large-scale protected areas in the region of the planned transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat”, namely Sharr Mountains / Mali Sharr National Park located in the southern part of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 at the border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Mavrovo National Park bordering Albania and Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) in the westernmost region of the country.

**Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) - Sharr Mountains / Mali Sharr National Park**

The northwestern slopes of Sharr/Šar Planina mountain range are protected since 1986, when the Provincial Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo within the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) proclaimed the establishment of Sharr/Sara Mountain National Park, with the area of approx. 39’000 ha. Until today Sharr Mountains / Mali Sharr National Park remains the only national park and the largest protected area in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99. The national park area encompasses lands of the five municipalities, four of them (Dragash/ Dragaš, Suharekë/Suva Reka, Prizren and Kaçanik/Kacanik) are inhabited by predominantly Albanian population while the fifth one (Shtërpcë/Strpce) in the past had the population of prevailing Serbian ethnicity.

The borders of the national park have been recently marked under the project supported by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of Kosovo (MESP) and implemented in cooperation with the Kosovo Institute for Nature Protection.

According to the IUCN categorization Mali Sharr National Park is classified as protected area of IUCN Category II, including four strict nature reserves of IUCN Category II. The national park area was listed as an internationally Important Bird Area (IBA, BirdLife International, 1999) and Important Plant Area (IPA, Planta Europa, Plantlife, 2005) as well as on the list of the Prime Butterfly Areas.
The Protocol on cooperation between the Ministry for Protection of Environment of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry for Space Planning, Construction and Protection of the Environment of the Republic of Macedonia signed in 1998 planned the preparation of parallel applications to UNESCO-MaB Programme concerning the nomination of this area as the common transboundary Biosphere Reserve, but this initiative was suspended due to political reasons. According to the UNECE Performance Review the national park was nominated by the SFRJ government as the potential UNESCO World Heritage Site, but this nomination was deferred due to the uncertainty of the political status of Kosovo. Similarly, official consultations with the FYR of Macedonia on the possible coordination of protective measures were suspended for the same reasons. Last, but not least, the SFRJ authorities planned the significant extension of the Sharr/Sara Mountain National Park territory by additional 80'000 ha into the mountains to the south.

Nature inventories of Mali Sharr National Park are mostly based on researches carried out in the times of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, in particular by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia (INCS), which had its local department in Pristina. However, these researches were more oriented towards scientific studies on particular species and plant communities than on nature conservation management. At the times of the SFRJ the protective measures undertaken in the park area were based on five-year management plans, developed by INCS.
In 2001 a preliminary assessment of the natural values of Mali Sharr National Park following the internationally applied standards was conducted with the financial support of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), which confirmed the high conservation value of the park area in the European context. Most recently the experts from Pristina University carried out the assessment of natural values of Sharr Mountains, which may significantly contribute to updating existing databases and inventories, possible revision of its functional zonation and developing the new management plan for the national park.

Mali Sharr National Park protects an outstanding biological diversity and landscape values of the Sharr mountain range. The floral biodiversity in the park is considered to be composed of more than 2,000 vascular plant species, representative for both Balkan and Mediterranean bioregions, including numerous endemic, rare and threatened species as well as fauna species of the common European importance. The mountain landscapes in the park include several mountain peaks reaching over 2,000 metres above the sea level (the highest peak in the national park is Mt. Bistra, 2,641 m) with different postglacial relief forms and mountain ponds, intersected by river valleys, and mountain forests.

The most important natural values of Mali Sharr National Park are protected in strict nature reserves, including three nature reserves Popovo Prase (covering the area of 30 ha), Osijak (20 ha) and Golem Bor (35 ha) established on 9 December 1960 with the objective to protect the primeval treestands of the relic Bosnian pine (Pinus heldreichii ssp. leucodermis) and Mac-
edonian pine (*Pinus peuce*). The Rusenica Nature (300 ha) protects habitats of the lynx. The gorge of the Prizrenska Bistrica River (200 ha) was designated a Natural Monument on 25 November 1976. In other zones of the national park traditional uses such as summer grazing and collection of wild plants, mushrooms, and berries are permitted.

The territory of Mali Sharr National Park is intersected by the scenic main road running parallel to Sharr mountain range and connecting Prizren with the international transport corridor – road E65 (road No 2 in Kosovo and road No M3 in the FYR of Macedonia) between Pristina and Skopje. This road across Mali Sharr National Park is also the shortest route connecting Skopje in the FYR of Macedonia across the territory of Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) with the road No 25 connecting Prizren with the northern part of Albania, e.g. Kukës and Shkoder.

Due to the above the park area and villages located either inside the national park or near its borders are easily accessible, attracting mountaineers and families coming for picnics from the nearby Prizren. In winter months Mali Sharr National Park is also a popular destination for ski tourism and downhill skiing (e.g. in the village of Brezovica).

The Mali Sharr National Park administration based in Prizren currently employs over 20 staff, including a park director, a biologist, a forester, technicians, and park guards. The park administration has good relations with surrounding municipal governments, and their support in dealing with threats to the park. The park area is also patrolled by the forest guards from the (mainly private) forestry enterprises in close cooperation with the park authority. The national park administration has four specialised sectors (departments) responsible for planning and development, for cooperation with the public, for park management operations and for human resources. It has to be noted that some part of the park staff has limited experience with e.g. conservation measures targeted at species and habitats, of the use of the GIS techniques for management planning, and would therefore need training and technical capacity building.

It should also be recalled here that the recent political conflict and ethnic tensions in Kosovo resulted in a situation when the national park area for several years was managed by two separate management bodies, one officially designated by the authorities of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 (national park directorate in Prizren) and the second one based in Strpce municipality (ethnically a Serbian enclave within the park area) contesting the legal mandate of Kosovo institutions to manage the park area, and therefore considered no longer legal.

As described few years ago in UNECE report: “Management of the park is currently split. Approximately two-thirds of its area is managed by a Park Director who reports to the Environment Department of MESP and one-third of the area is managed by an ethnic Serb management team that reports to the Serbian government in Belgrade. The Serbian management group has a staff of more than thirty people, originally assigned to manage the entire park”. For obvious reasons working contacts, communication, consultations or coordination of measures undertaken in the Mali Sharr National Park area by both management bodies were rather difficult, to say the least.
Map 11: Mavrovo National Park.
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - Mavrovo National Park

The largest protected area in the FYR of Macedonia – Mavrovo National Park was designated in 1949, in the region of the planned transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” at the state border with Albania (the current park area borders also Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) on a small section of the current state border). The national park was initially established on the area of 11’750 ha, extended in 1952 to the current size of 73,088 ha. Simultaneously, the legal act on park proclamation adopted by the National Assembly of Macedonia was significantly revised in 1952 enforcing a much stricter conservation regime, and the park territory was divided into three functional zones with different levels of protection.

The territory of Mavrovo National Park is intersected by the scenic main road connecting the international transport corridor – road E65 with the city of Debar and the nearby border crossing with Albania.

Following the comprehensive description of the park area by the IUCN Programme Office for South Eastern Europe - Mavrovo National Park covers the southernmost part of the Sharr/Šar Planina mountains, and the Macedonian part of the Korab and Deshat mountain ranges, including a number of mountain peaks reaching over 2,000 meters, divided by deep gorges and canyons. The highest peak of both the FYR of Macedonia and Albania located at
the state border, at the boundary of Mavrovo National Park is Golem Korab (2,764 m). The lowest elevation point in the park area is located at Boshkov Most (611 m) at the mouth of the Mala Reka River in Radika.

The tourist hotspot in Mavrovo National Park is the Mavrovsko Ezero lake, surrounded by several villages. Other areas in the national park territory with distinctive landscape values include the river canyons of Diaboka Reka, Adzhina Reka and Radika; Proyfel waterfall (134 m), and the karst fields on Bistra Mountain. Other famous tourist destinations in the national park are the viewpoints at the localities Careva Češma and Tonivoda overlooking the scenery of the Korab Massif, the caves at Alilica and Kalina Dupka, waterfalls and natural cascades on the Rostuška and Tresonečka Rivers, the landscape of the villages of Galičnik, Lazaropole, Gari, and Tresonče, and the sheep grazing pastures on the Bistra and Dešat Mountains.

The hydrography in the national park is dominated by glacial lakes and by the Radika River and its tributaries. The lowest glacial lake is Lokuv Lake on Dešat Mountains at an elevation of 1565 m, while the highest lake is beneath Golem Korab peak, at 2,470 m. The Radika River with its gorges, high slopes, rocks and caves separates the Bistra, Korab and Sharr/ Sara Mountains. The central part of the national park is located in the river valley.

The vegetation of the national park consists of over 1,000 species of higher plants, including endemic and rare species. The fauna of the national park is also diverse. To date, 140 bird species have been recorded, including grey hawk, imperial eagle, golden eagle, forest owl and big owl. Several amphibians and reptiles and 38 species of mammals have also been reported, e.g. lynx, brown bear and wild cat.
One of the major threats to habitats and species populations and main causes of the decline in biological diversity in Europe is the fragmentation and isolation of habitats and the effect this can have on the viability of species populations. Fragmentation is the breaking-up of continuous tracts of ecosystems creating barriers to migration or dispersal of organisms and reducing the size of homogenous areas. Fragmentation may be induced by human activities (e.g. road infrastructure) or by natural processes.

The negative effects of habitats fragmentation can be mitigated by establishing ecological networks: the fragmentation of habitats can be counteracted by creating buffer zones to protect the surviving natural areas, and connecting these core areas by stepping stones and corridors, which allow species to migrate or disperse.

Numerous conventions and initiatives emphasise the importance of ecological networks for biodiversity conservation, e.g. the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the European Community Biodiversity Strategy (1998) and the EC Habitats Directive, or the IUCN “Countdown 2010” initiative.

2.5.1. European context

The Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN) is an important implementation tool of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy. As declared during the 3rd Conference of Ministers “An Environment for Europe” in Sofia, on 25 October 1995: “The Pan-European Ecological Network will contribute to achieving the main goals of the Strategy by ensuring that a full range of ecosystems, habitats, species and their genetic diversity, and landscapes of European importance are conserved; habitats are large enough to place species in a favourable conservation status; there are sufficient opportunities for the dispersal and migration”.

The favourable conservation status of different species and natural habitats depends on the size of protected areas. Migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species depends on the existence of ecological corridors linking particular protected areas of different protective categories designated at national level. The continuity and connectivity of habitats in the border areas requires transboundary linkages, corridors which link protected area networks of neighbouring countries.

The Habitats Directive in Article 3.3 aims at maintaining and establishing spatial linkages between the Natura 2000 sites: “Where they consider it necessary, Member States shall endeavour to improve the ecological coherence of Natura 2000 by maintaining, and where appropriate developing, features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora, as referred to in Article 10.”

Article 10. of the Habitats Directive states that: “Member States shall endeavour, where they consider it necessary, in their land-use planning and development policies and, in particular, with a view to improving the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network, to encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora. Such features are those which, by virtue of their linear and continuous structure (such as rivers with their banks or the traditional systems for marking field boundaries) or their function as stepping stones (such as ponds or small woods), are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.”
2.5.2. Planned new protected areas in Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region

As for June 2009 – in the region of the planned transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” legally designated protected areas are present only in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 (Sharr Mountains / Mali Sharr National Park at the border with the FYR of Macedonia) and in the FYR of Macedonia (Mavrovo National Park bordering Albania and Kosovo). Thus, the natural values of the Sharr / Šar Planina mountains are legally protected mainly on one side in Mali Sharr National Park, while the vast mountain areas across the border with the FYR of Macedonia, including the highest mountain peaks and ridges in the central part of Šar Planina mountains currently remain unprotected. Moreover, the southwestern part of the Sharr / Šar Planina mountains remains well beyond the borders of existing protected areas, as the territory of Mali Sharr National Park encompasses only the northern part of Sharr mountains, while Mavrovo National Park in the FYR of Macedonia encompasses only a small part of the southernmost slopes of Šar Planina mountain range. Similarly, the natural values of the Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountain range are currently protected only on the Macedonian side, in Mavrovo National Park (the largest protected area in the FYR of Macedonia).

Therefore, adjacent border areas of high conservation values in Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the FYR of Macedonia in the region of the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr / Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” have, as for 2009, quite different legal protective status, being either included into the territory of a national park on one side of the state border, or remaining without legal protection on the other side. Furthermore, both existing national parks, isolated and distant from each other, operate very much as “separate islands”, being neither adjacent nor linked to any other protected areas, located either in-country or across the state border. Therefore, the connectivity and continuity of protected area network in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region currently remains an open question.

The mountain ranges of Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat form the natural ecological corridors connecting the whole region, but at present the integrity and continuity of these corridors is not yet ensured by putting these connecting areas under any kind of nature and landscape protection, accordingly to national legislations. However, there are plans to establish new protected areas in Albania and the FYR of Macedonia, as well as extend the territory of the national park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

In the best possible case, should all initiatives on all three sides described below be successful - the transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” could potentially cover the total area of up to some 255’306 ha, and become the largest protected area in South-Eastern Europe, and one of the largest in Europe.

Albania - Korabi Protected Landscape

The Macedonian part of the Korab massif and Dešat/Deshat mountain ridge is entirely within the boundaries of Mavrovo National Park, while the Albanian side is not yet protected, except for a number of small scale natural monuments (‘bio-monuments’ and ‘geo-monuments’).
The Government of Albania recently prepared the proposal for the "Korabi Protected Landscape" (IUCN category V) of the total area of 31'360.54 ha, which legal designation is planned for 2012. It should be noted here that few years ago (in 2005/2006) the proposed size of this new protected area was three times smaller, only some 10'000 ha. The planned new protected area on the Albanian side of the Korab - Dešat/Deshat region, “Korabi Protected Landscape”, will be adjacent to the borders with the FYR of Macedonia and Kosovo - (Kosovo UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99). The area lies within the jurisdiction of the two prefectures, Dibra prefecture (bordering the FYR of Macedonia) and Kukës prefecture (bordering Kosovo, and on the small section of the state border – also the FYR of Macedonia).

The major part of the proposed new protected area is planned in the territory of Dibra prefecture and its districts Peshkopi, Mat and Bulqize, while the northern part of the proposed protected area stretches in the southernmost part of Kukës prefecture. Other local authorities concerned are the communal authorities of Klobcishta, Kercishti i Eperm, Pocesti, Illica, Rabdishti, Bellova, Zagrad, Cerjani, Rasdomira, Oshtani, Ploshtani, Shkianaku, Fshati dhe Gjegjet.

The area of the planned “Korabi Protected Landscape” below the alpine vegetation zone is highly afforested, closer to villages the predominant landscape feature are pastures and hay meadows, due to the fact that the cold mountain microclimate with harsh winters and short vegetation period is not favourable for other more intensive agricultural uses of the area.

Private land ownership is prevailing (some 64 per cent of the total), while the current state land ownership extends over some 36
Map 12: Planned Korabi Protected Landscape area.
per cent of the area. However, the above proportions may change in the near future, in case the land use and management rights concerning currently state-owned forests are passed to local communities.

Most probably the management of this planned protected area would be the responsibility of Dibra Prefecture and Regional Forestry Service Directorate. The authorities of the Kukës prefecture and Kukës Directorate of Forestry Service are also supportive to the plans of designating the Korabi Protected Landscape area, and would most probably be responsible for the management of its northernmost part, located in Kukës prefecture.

As the planned “Korabi Protected Landscape” area (31’360.54 ha) will be adjacent to the existing Mavrovo National Park (73’088 ha) in the FYR of Macedonia, its legal designation by Albania would provide for establishment of a bilaterally protected transboundary area covering together over 104’448 ha.

Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 - planned extension of Mali Sharr / Sharr Mountains National Park

The proposals for the spatial extension of the territory of Sharr Mountains (Šar Planina) National Park date back to the times of the former the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ). The former SFRJ administration proposed expanding the national park by 80’000 ha into the mountains to the south.

Later, based on the protocol on cooperation signed in 1995 - a joint proposal by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia and the Macedonian scientists planned the extension of Šar Planina / Sharr National Park by additional 60’000 hectares, with the objective to reach the desired size of 99’000 ha in total, thus almost three times the actual size (39’000 ha).

According to the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia - the park area was planned to be significantly extended to the north and southwest, and stretch in the Dragash/Dragaš municipality along the border.

Maps 13 and 14: Comparison – relevant section of the map by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia showing the previously planned extension of Šar Planina / Sharr National Park, and the enlarged situation map of Mali Sharr / Sharr Mountains National Park.
Feasibility Study: SHARR/ŠAR PLANINA - KORAB - DESHAT/DEŠAT

with Macedonia to the southernmost point of the Kosovo territory as well as westwards up to the Koritnik mountain ridge at the Yugoslav state border with Albania. Such significant extension of the national park territory would then establish a direct spatial linkage between Šar Planina / Sharr National Park and Mavrovo National Park in the FYR of Macedonia (as well as the area currently planned for “Korabi Protected Landscape” in Albania).

These proposals have not yet been fully accommodated by the Kosovo - (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) administration, however some maps recall or reflect the above ambitious past concept, like visible on the enlarged small situation map supplementing the zonation map of Mali Sharr National Park, where the area “1.2a” marked with light green colour is located in the Dragash/Dragaš municipality, previously proposed for incorporation into the extended area of the Šar Planina / Sharr National Park, and “1.2b” area marked with light blue colour is the Kosovo - (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) part of Koritniku mountain ridge, stretching across the border with Albania.

Most recently the experts from Prishtina University carried out assessment of natural values of Sharr Mountains. According to the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning – currently the possible extension of Mali Sharr National Park area by 8'000 ha is being considered. More detailed information on the future spatial design of the park was not made available for the purposes of this study.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - Šar Planina National Park

The proposal for the legal designation of the Šar Planina National Park in Macedonia dates back to 1986 (same year as of the designation of the national park on the Kosovo side of the Sharr/Šar mountains), when some forests of Šar Planina were declared as a forest reserve and a hunting ground. The reserve was established on the territory of the upper flow of the river Pena, Ceripasino, Popova Sapka, and Leshnica, up to the Bogovinje Lake. Later, a protocol on cooperation between the Republic Institute responsible for protection of the natural rarities of the FYR of Macedonia (based in Skopje), and the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia (based in Belgrade) was signed on 16 December 1994 in Novi Sad, with the objective...
to enhance implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and transboundary cooperation for the protection of natural values of the Šar/Sharr mountains.

In 1998 this issue was also included into the Protocol on cooperation between the Ministry for Protection of Environment of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry for Space Planning, Construction and Protection of the Environment of the Republic of Macedonia, providing for a potential transboundary character of the initiative. Both countries committed to launch joint activities towards the valuation, delinea-
tion and promotion of the common transboundary protected area in Šar Planina mountains, and preparation of parallel applications to UNESCO-MaB Programme for the common transboundary Biosphere Reserve nomination.

Beginning from 1997, the proposal for a na-
tional park designation became a subject for consultations within the Government of the FYR of Macedonia. The Ministry for Urbanisa-
tion, Construction and Protection of the Envi-
ronment prepared a proposal of a legal act de-
claring part of Šar Planina as a national park. The proposed resolution in this respect was welcomed by different Macedonian Ministries relevant for foreign affairs, internal affairs, jus-
tice, culture, science, economy and defense, and supported by the non-governmental or-
organisations. However, the Ministry of Agricultu-
re, Forestry and Water Supply opposed to the planned resolution proclaiming the Šar Planina National Park.

Later, the Ministry of Environment and Physi-
cal Planning (established in 1999) formulated the proposal for proclaiming the National Park in Šar Planina (with the approx. area of 51'858 ha), which was forwarded for evaluation by the Government, together with the revised text of the planned resolution. The proposal was approved by the governmental commission relevant for sustainable development and eco-

nomic policy, adopted by the Government and further forwarded to the Parliament. In Decem-
ber 1999 the two parliamentary Commissions (the Commission for Youth, Sport and Environ-
ment, and the Juridical - Legislative Commis-
sion) adopted this proposal. It should be noted here that the initiatives for developing the proposal for the Šar Planina National Park, due to its potential for developing transboundary cooperation with Mali Sharr / Sharr Mountains National Park in Kosovo - (Kosovo - UN ad-
ministered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99), were consulted also with the Institute for Environment and Nature Prote-
tion in Prishtina.

Nevertheless, the proposed resolution pro-
claiming the Šar Planina National Park was re-
jected in the course of the public hearings car-
ried out in 2000, most probably due to the lack of involvement of the local municipal authori-
ties in the early planning phase, and missing public awareness campaign, which together resulted in the lack of support by local commu-
nities concerned, in particular those inhabited by the strong Albanian minority. The legisla-
tive process concerning the designation of the national park was accused to be not enough democratic and too fast.

Furthermore, according to scientists and non-governmental organisations promoting the ecosystem approach towards protecting the natural and landscape values of the Šar Plani-
na mountains - this first proposal for the legal designation of the Šar Planina National Park rejected in 2000 did not adequately correspond to the biodiversity conservation requirements, as the proposed park borders were delineated above the upper forest vegetation zone limits, thus excluding other important habitats and mainstays of target animal species.
Throughout the last years the political climate and public attitude towards establishing the national park in the Šar Planina mountains improved, compared to 2000. Several activities aimed at raising public awareness on the potential benefits of the national park designation were carried out by the Balkan Foundation for Sustainable Development (BFSD). During the field mission undertaken by UNEP in September 2006 the mayors of local municipalities and communities were interviewed and consulted on this proposal, as well as local non-governmental organisations in the Tetovo region.

Furthermore, in September 2007 UNEP organised the Stakeholders Consultation Meeting on “Activities towards proclamation of Shara National Park” held at the State University of Tetovo, the FYR of Macedonia, which is the higher education institution of particular importance for the local Albanian minority, and a prestigious venue potentially providing for a higher credibility of the whole initiative.

There were also some initiatives undertaken by the informal “Šar Planina lobby group” within the Macedonian Parliament (which gathers representatives of different political parties, sometimes of the opposite orientations concerning other issues), but so far this support by the Members of the Macedonian Parliament has not significantly reversed the fate of the previous proposal.

Taking into account the above, most probably a new proposal for the designation of the planned Šar Planina National Park should be prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the FYR of Macedonia, or developed by this Ministry.
Simultaneously, a public awareness campaign involving local non-governmental organisations and enhanced consultations with the local communities should be undertaken, with the objective to raise the public support for establishing the proposed national park and to find the compromise between the conservation requirements and the development needs of the local communities and stakeholders concerned.

For obvious reasons, such new proposal for national park designation should duly take into account both the biodiversity conservation requirements and the local conditions, e.g. the land ownership and current land use, which should result in a balanced and scientifically sound and justified functional zonation of the proposed protected area.

Therefore, the possible new proposal for the Šar Planina National Park should be based on the most recent nature research and inventories, and resource valorisation on one hand, but simultaneously take into account the economic development functions of this protected area.

The division of the proposed area into different functional zones should also take into account the state budget funding potentially available for e.g. possible costs of land acquisition and compensations to land owners or users, resources necessary for the development of management plans as well as the future financial sustainability of the national park administration.

Thus, the division of the proposed park area into functional zones (strict/passive protection,
partial/active protection, buffer and “transition/cooperation” zones) and the proportions between the size of particular zones (e.g. those strictly protected and those where forestry management operations would be continued) would be key for finding the proper balance between the needs for biodiversity conservation and the needs for sustainable use of natural resources of the region, and for local economic development.

The decision on the division of the proposed park area into functional zones should also take into account the size of the protected area. Excluding the area of some 50 thousand hectares from the economic use and enforcing more or less strict nature protection over such large area would simply be unrealistic under the South Eastern European conditions, and would also be quite challenging in case of many other bigger European countries.

In a relatively small national park its strictly protected areas (e.g. nature reserves) would most probably constitute a prevailing part of the whole park territory, which could automatically limit the financial sustainability of the park administration (operating as the Public Enterprise) thus limiting its operational capacities and strengthening the negative public perception of the protected area as an “area excluded from human use, imposing constraints and banning the local economic development”.

Contrary to the above situation, the designation of a larger national park where strict legal protection is granted to the most valuable areas (nature reserves) while the active protection and transition zones may constitute a significant portion of the national park territory would possibly allow for a different public perception of this initiative.

Leaving much bigger areas of other functional zones under management (e.g. traditional agriculture or re-naturalisation of forest treestands) would allow the continuation of the traditional management practices (e.g. grazing) and provide employment in the national park (e.g. in the sustainable forest management and re-naturalisation of forests inside the national park) for some part of the local population. Simultaneously, the park financial standing would be much different, and possible Governmental subsidies for park operations could be lower. Last but not least – the local population would gain enough time to gradually re-orientate their economic activities towards sustainable land uses, including the development of nature-based tourist services and facilities.

Furthermore, the previous size of the area (51'858 ha) proposed for incorporation into the territory of the planned national park should not be perceived as ultimate, and should further be consulted, with the involvement of the local stakeholders, e.g. local municipalities, private land owners, the Public Enterprise "Macedonian Forests" and the public enterprises for pastures operating in the framework of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (MAFWE). Resulting from these consultations the area of the national park could either be decreased (in case when the proposed park management regimes are strongly conflicting with the economic interests of the above key stakeholders) or even increased, responding to the suggestions of several non-governmental organisations to incorporate additional areas worth protection, not yet proposed for inclusion into the national park.

Designation of new protected areas is always a “several small versus one big” dilemma. For obvious reasons designation of the large-scale Šar Planina National Park with the area of e.g. 51’858 ha (or more) would be much more effective from the biodiversity conservation point of view.
Furthermore, in case when the territory of the proposed national park would border Mavrovo National Park in the FYR of Macedonia – the potential for developing transboundary cooperation on biodiversity conservation issues in a large transboundary protected area involving the FYR of Macedonia, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and Albania would be high.

On the other hand – a large-scale protected area can also mean stronger social conflicts, in case when the spatial design of the protected area does not respect the economic development needs of its inhabitants.

### 2.5.3. Possible scenarios

As for June 2009 – no transboundary (either bi- or trilateral) protected area is present in the Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region. Therefore, the connectivity and continuity of protected area network in the whole region remains an open question. This situation could change with the designation of Korabi Protected Landscape in Albania (planned for 2012) and/or the possible designation of Šar Planina National Park in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the near future, and/or with the still possible significant extension of the territory of Mali Sharr / Sharr Mountains National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

The designation of Korabi Protected Landscape in Albania would provide for supplementing the protected area network in this region and by establishing a potential partner for cooperation with Mavrovo National Park in the FYR of Macedonia. This would mean covering both sides of the Korab – Dešat/Deshat region with legal protection, thus improving the ecological connectivity and continuity of protected area network. However, it should be noted here that this legal designation would not provide for the similar protective status granted to areas on both sides of the state border, as Korabi Protected Landscape would be managed accordingly to the IUCN Category V objectives, in result the legal mandate, management priorities and operational capacities of both protected areas could be different.

Moreover, the effective biodiversity conservation in this bilaterally protected area of over 104'448 ha would mainly depend on the operational capacities of both Mavrovo National Park in the FYR of Macedonia and the future administration of Korabi Protected Landscape, most probably hosted by either the authorities of Dibra Prefecture or Dibra Regional Forestry Service Directorate.

Last but not least, the effective cooperation between Albania and the FYR of Macedonia on biodiversity and landscape conservation issues in this bilaterally protected area “Korabi-Mavrovo” would largely depend on the legal basis for transboundary cooperation in this region, and the capacities of both protected area administrations to cooperate with their counterpart across the state border, develop joint strategies and action plans and implement common research and nature conservation projects, or launch joint actions towards the sustainable development of this region. However, as for 2009 – there is no available evidence of working contacts e.g. between either the management of Mavrovo National Park in the FYR of Macedonia and Dibra Regional Forestry Service Directorate in Albania, or the local municipalities in both countries.

The possible designation (irrespective of the designated area size) of Šar Planina National Park in the FYR of Macedonia at the border with Kosovo, adjacent to the existing Mali Sharr
Map 15: Potential transboundary protected area (bilateral)
PART 2. NATURE AND ITS PROTECTION IN THE AREA

/ Sharr Mountains National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 would provide for establishing another bilaterally protected area “Šar – Sharr”. In case the Šar Planina National Park territory would stretch far towards southwest, up to the northeastern border of existing Mavrovo National Park in the FYR of Macedonia – the ecological connectivity and continuity of protected area network in the region would significantly improve, in particular on the Macedonian side of Šar Planina mountains.

Furthermore, by designating Šar Planina National Park adjacent to Mavrovo National Park - the potential for developing trilateral cooperation on biodiversity and landscape conservation issues would be much higher, by involving both neighbouring national parks in the FYR of Macedonia, the adjacent Korabi Protected Landscape in the western part of the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region (in Albania) and the adjacent Mali Sharr National Park on the northern slopes of Sharr/Šar Mountains in Kosovo.

The potential effects of the still possible extension of the Mali Sharr / Sharr Mountains National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 would depend on the spatial design and size of such territorial extension of the national park area. Extension of Sharr National Park area by additional 8'000 ha (as currently considered by the Government of Kosovo) would neither provide a spatial linkage with the existing Mavrovo National Park in the FYR of Macedonia, nor for the ecological corridor stretching along the Sharr Mountains and providing for a spatial connectivity of Mali Sharr National Park with Korabi Protected Landscape in Albania.

Taking into account the above – several different scenarios are possible:

“**No progress**” scenario – when no progress is achieved in terms of improved ecological connectivity of protected area network and transboundary cooperation, particularly possible in a hypothetical case when no new protected areas are designated in the region.

“**Bilateral connectivity and cooperation**” scenario – bilateral cooperation on biodiversity and landscape conservation issues resulting from “bilateral spatial connectivity”, when transboundary cooperation in the region would develop irrespective of the still missing ecological connectivity of protected area network in the whole region, and be mostly based on bilateral cooperative arrangements (e.g. between Korabi PL and Mavrovo NP, or Mali Sharr NP and Šar Planina NP).

“Intermediate trilateral connectivity and cooperation” scenario – limited trilateral cooperation resulting from the improved ecological connectivity of protected area network in some parts of the region (e.g. Šar Planina NP functioning as a spatial link between Mali Sharr NP, Mavrovo NP and Korabi PL) would foster direct working contacts between protected areas in Albania, the FYR of Macedonia and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99.

“**Direct trilateral connectivity and cooperation**” scenario – in the best possible case, when the initiatives on all three sides of the borders provide for the full ecological connectivity and continuity of the protected area network of the region (thus when the significantly extended territory of Mali Sharr National Park becomes spatially adjacent to the other three large scale protected areas in the region: existing Mavrovo National Park and planned Šar Planina National Park in the FYR of Macedonia, and the planned Korabi Protected Landscape in Albania), and working contacts in
transboundary cooperation between all above four protected areas are established and continuously maintained.

According to this last scenario the transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” could potentially cover the total area of up to some 255’306 ha, and become the largest protected area in South-Eastern Europe, and one of the largest in Europe.

It should be emphasised here that protected areas are centres of high biological and landscape diversity concentration, thus important reservoirs of the genetic material. Protected areas are in fact ‘banks’ where the highest natural and biodiversity values are ‘saved’ and kept for the future generations.

Each nation retains the full right to decide on the current and future land use of the country’s territory, also on the designation of protected area or, if need be, on the later withdrawal of its protective status, either in a situation when its natural values significantly deteriorate or in the case when the use of its natural resources is perceived as an absolute necessity for the benefit of the whole nation.

However, such strategic decision on safekeeping national treasures, to be independently undertaken by each Government, has to be taken in the proper time, as ongoing degradation of biological diversity values is most often irreversible. For example, a protected forest currently excluded from commercial use can later be harvested or turned into a residential area, but the recovery of its former biodiversity values would then become impossible.
Map 16: Šar Planina NP (approx. 48,500 ha) borders proposal, 2010
Brushtla – peat bogs below the Kepi Bard peak
PART 3. TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION – PRIORITIES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

3.1. Priorities for conservation in the planned transboundary protected area

One of the main purposes for establishing a transboundary protected area is to facilitate protection and sustainable use of its natural and landscape values in the eco-regional scale, perceived as one coherent natural unit. Harmonisation or coordination of nature and landscape management practices on each side of the border instead of managing natural and landscape values of several smaller protected areas in a conflicting or non-compatible mode is one of the major “added values” of establishing a transboundary protected area.

A similar approach has been applied for the mountain range of the Carpathians, under the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Kyiv, 2003). The 2. meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP2) to the Carpathian Convention adopted the first thematic Protocol to the Framework Convention - the Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity (Bucharest, 2009) already signed by all Carpathian countries, currently awaiting ratification. Pursuant to Article 16 of this Protocol each Party to the Carpathian Convention shall harmonise and coordinate measures, undertaken in its border area with the neighbouring Party, in particular in transboundary protected areas. Furthermore, the Parties shall cooperate within existing transboundary protected areas and harmonise the management objectives and measures applied and, if need be, encourage the expansion of existing transboundary protected areas or creation of new transboundary protected areas. In a case where the natural habitat of the endangered species is located on both sides of the state border between the Parties, they shall cooperate on ensuring the conservation and, as may be necessary, recovery of those species and their natural habitats.

Ideally, resulting from harmonised or coordinated management practices in a transboundary protected area, protection of natural habitats located across or close to the state border should be enhanced, the migration of species across the state border should become uninhibited, continuation of natural evolutionary processes across the state border should be ensured, and common threats to nature and transboundary environmental hazards jointly identified and controlled.

Therefore, partners of transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area should jointly identify habitats, plant associations, species, landscapes and other values, protection of which would greatly benefit from enhanced transboundary cooperation in this particular region. Once such targets are agreed upon, the joint identification and assessment of present threats, and of possible common activities with the objective to mitigate and/or control such threats would then allow for the joint identification of common priorities for transboundary cooperation on biodiversity protection in this region.
It should be noted here that none of the involved countries is not yet a Member State of the European Community. But in the light of expected accession to the European Community in the future - the process of harmonization of national legislation and nature protection standards with those of the EU is ongoing in South Eastern Europe. Therefore, the identification of priorities for transboundary cooperation on biodiversity protection in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region should already take into account the Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the "Habitats Directive") and the Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds, which would therefore prepare protected areas of this region for the future implementation of the Natura 2000 concept.

Last, but not least, it should be emphasised that relevant Annexes to the "Habitats Directive" as well as the appendices to the Bern Convention were elaborated without the inputs from e.g. Albania and the FYR of Macedonia. Thus, as for 2009, the lists of habitats or species of the common European importance do not necessarily include all important, rare, endemic or threatened species of the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region. Therefore, the expert judgment is currently the sole available basis for defining conservation priorities, while the widely accepted European approach towards the evaluation of the biodiversity of this region can fully be implemented here only after the incorporation of e.g. additional important plant species of the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountain ranges into these lists.

It should also be emphasized here that neither updated nor common databases and maps of habitats and species distribution for the whole transboundary region of Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountain ranges are available so far. Thus, developing such databases in trilateral cooperation remains the task for the near future.

Taking all above into account – the identification of priorities for biodiversity conservation in the proposed transboundary protected area "Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat", in cooperation between scientists from Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, should most probably combine three methodological approaches:

- Identifying habitats and species already listed in relevant Annexes to the Council Directives, Appendix II to the Bern Convention or national and IUCN Red Lists;
- Identifying “target species” (and possibly also habitats) of particular importance for biodiversity conservation in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region (e.g. local endemic, endemic and relic species) which are not yet included into internationally recognised lists;
- Focusing on habitats and species occurring in the border areas on Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountain ranges, protection of which would greatly benefit from enhanced transboundary cooperation in this particular region.

**Target habitats**

Following the Habitats Directive approach the rare or unique natural habitats are those “which either are in danger of disappearance in their natural range, or have a small natural range following their regression or by reason of their intrinsically restricted area, or present outstanding examples of typical characteristics of this particular region”, taking into account the uneven distribution of such habitats throughout this particular bio-geographic region.
The majority of habitats in the border areas in the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat region, thus shared by two or more countries are those of the alpine or sub-alpine pastures on either limestone or silicate bedrock, alpine and sub-alpine limestone rocks and rocky habitats and screes, and alpine and sub-alpine silicate rocks and rocky habitats. Less frequent habitats in border areas are peat bogs and marshy habitats, beech or fir forests, different types of oak forest habitats, or ruderal habitats around the sheep folds, or other habitats with insignificant area. Many of them are listed under Annex I to the Habitats Directive, e.g. Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands (5130), Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands (6150), Alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands (6170), Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels (6430), Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (8110), Calcareous and calcshist screes of the montane to alpine levels (*8120), Eastern Mediterranean screes (8140), Mesophytic calcareous scree of hill and montane levels (*8160), or Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation (8210).

As for the forest habitats (which do not necessarily occur across the state borders) – special attention and conservation would require the last remains of primeval forests of the endemic and relic Macedonian pine (*Pinus peuce*) and the Bosnian pine (*Pinus heldreichii ssp. leucodermis*), present in all countries sharing the Sharr/Šar Planina and Korab and Dešat/Deshat region. Other potential priority habitats of common interest could be those harbouiring chestnut treestands or termophyllous oak forests. Other target habitats for cooperation on biodiversity conservation in the region of Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains could e.g. be Alpine rivers and the herbaceous vegetation along their banks (3220), and Acidophilous *Picea* forests of the montane to alpine levels (*Vaccinio-Piceetea*) (9410).

Thus, the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” encompasses a large diversity of natural habitats, including those of the European Community interest, whose conservation pursuant to the Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the “Habitats Directive”) requires the designation of special areas of conservation in the Member States of the European Community. These habitats would greatly benefit from transboundary cooperation on biodiversity conservation issues in the proposed transboundary protected area.

**Target plant associations and species**

According to the expert judgment - the proposed target plant associations which conservation could become subject of transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” are as follows:

- Asplenio cuneifolii-Ramondaetum nathaliae,
- Bornmuellera dieckii-Seslerietum latifoliae,
- Caricio-Narthecetum scardici,
- Cetero-Achilleo aizoonis-Ramondaetum serbicae,
- Cynancho-Saponarietum intermediae,
- Empetro hermaphroditi-Vaccinietum uliginosum
- Junipero nanae-Bruckenthalietum spicilifoliae,
- Luzulo maxime-Pinetum heldreichii,
- Pinetum heldreichii-peucis scardicum,
- Potentillo doerfleri-Juncetum trifidi,
- Ptilotricho-Bruckenthalio-Pinetum heldreichii,
• *Rhododendro-Pinetum peucis*,
• *Seslerio korabensis-Juncetum trifidi*,
• *Seslerio-Pinetum heldreichii*,
• *Violo grisebachianae-Saxifragetum*.

The above list of plant associations does not yet include all important associations present in the region, and the identification of priority target ones shall be subject to further consultations between partners from all countries concerned, in the course of their transboundary cooperation.

As for the potential ‘target’ threatened or endemic plant species present in Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains – it should be recalled that at least 75 plant species are quite rare in SEE countries. Secondly, no less than 30 plant species bear the name of either Sharr/Šar Planina (*Scardus* in Latin, e.g. *Anthyllis scardica*, *Crocus scardicus*, *Narthecium scardicum*, *Oxytropis korabensis*), which means that they were discovered here and described for the first time, thus such species could be perceived as “flagship species” of the region. Many other species are already listed in Annexes to the “Habitats Directive”, which is a sound argument for including them into the target species for cooperation.

Furthermore, some experts suggest that such tentative list of target plant species which conservation could become subject of transboundary cooperation should include endemic, sub-endemic, and relic species, regardless whether particular species have already been listed in Annexes to the “Habitats Directive” or not.

Thus, the potential target plant species for conservation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” could be as follows:

**Steno-endemic orophytes with Tertiary origin or glacial relic species:**
• *Achillea alexandri-regis*,
• *Bornmullera dieckii*,
• *Crocus scardicus*,
• *Dianthus scardicus*,
• *Draba corabensis*,
• *Potentilla doerfleri*,
• *Oxytropis korabensis*.
• *Sedum flexuosum*,
• *Silene schumuckeri*.

**Endemic Tertiary relic species:**
• *Acer heldreichii*,
• *Anthyllis aurea*,
• *Heracleum orphanidis*,
• *Hesperis dinarica*,
• *Iberis sempervirens*,
• *Lilium albanicum*,
• *Narthecium scardicum*,
• *Oreoherzogia pumila*,
• *Pinus peuce*,
• *Potentilla montenegrina*,
• *Ramonda serbica*,
• *Ranunculus ingracillis*,
• *Silene asterias*,
• *Silene waldsteinii*,
• *Soldanella dimoniei*,
• *Tozzia alpina*,
• *Veronica satureioides*,
• *Viola grisebachiana*.

**Sub-endemic Tertiary relic species:**
• *Gymnadenia friwaldskyana*.
Alpine Tertiary relic species:
- Pinus heldreichii,
- Ptilotrichum rupestre,
- Saxifraga glabella,
- Shievereckia doerferi,
- Silene larchefeldiana.

Glacial relic species with narrow-range arcto-alpine distribution:
- Linaria alpina,
- Rhododendron ferrugineum.

Target fungi species
A number of globally important fungi species, e.g. those included into the Macedonian Preliminary Red List (Karadelev 2000), could benefit from transboundary cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat”.

Target fauna species
The proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat”, with limited human pressures on the remote and inaccessible vast mountain areas as well as traditional extensive land-use practices is still a
stronghold for several threatened fauna species of the common European importance, especially those which require large undisturbed forest ecosystems, including big mammals such as the brown bear, wolf, lynx, and chamois, listed under Annex II to Council Directive 92/43 EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

All these important species which survived in this region have their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state borders, thus would greatly benefit from transboundary cooperation on their protection in the proposed large-scale transboundary protected area.

However, the identification of the target species for protection, which could become subject of the common conservation projects would not always be easy, due to the abundance of fauna and multitude of important wildlife species in Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains.

For instance, among some 129 bird species nesting in the region there are 22 bird species of the common European importance, listed under Annex I to Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds; and as many as 96 bird species listed in Appendix II to the Bern Convention.

As for twelve reptile species of the region – only Vipera ursine is an “Annex II species” in the understanding of the Habitats Directive (simultaneously classified on the IUCN Red list as “endangered species”), but the remaining 11 species are listed in Appendix II to the Bern Convention.

Furthermore, invertebrates of Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains include many internationally important species (e.g. butterflies Pyrgus andromedae, Euphydryas maturna, Erebia gorge, Erebia alberganus, Erebia rhodopensis, Plebeius (Vacciniina) optilete, Plebeius (Agriades) pyrenaica, Erebia pandrotus, Maculinea arion, Zerynthia polyxena, Parnassius Apollo) while 41 ground beetle species (Carabidae) of the region are endemic.

Thus, any possible tentative list of fauna species which have their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state border in the planned transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” proposed as targets for common conservation activities would never be complete.

For obvious reasons, including on such tentative list species already listed in e.g. Annexes to both Council Directives would result in increased potential for raising both public and political support in particular countries, but also much broader European support, international partners and funding for the possible future common projects to be jointly undertaken in the proposed transboundary protected area. Thus, the presence of at least several “Annex species” on any possible provisional ‘target species list’ is obvious.

Secondly, the “absolute priority among many different priorities” should probably be given to species having their habitats in the border areas on Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountain ranges, thus of common interest to all partners of transboundary cooperation in this particular region.

However, like in the case of plant species diversity, there are many other fauna species important for the biodiversity of Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains which are not yet listed in above Annexes, e.g. endemic invertebrate species.

Some animal species which may not necessarily be considered to be important for conservation
on the European or global scale (not listed in relevant Annexes, Appendices or Red Lists) could either be rare in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat, or be crucial for the successful protection of the priority ‘target Annex species’.

This is why the golden jackal *Canis aureus* occasionally spotted on the foothills of the Deshat mountains appears on the tentative list in the table below. The golden jackal may not be listed as a species of European importance, but is not particularly common in the whole proposed transboundary protected area, and could therefore be considered as a rare species for this region.

There are also other mammals and carnivores, e.g. the European wild cat *Felis silvestris*, badger *Meles meles* or pine marten *Martes martes* – not listed in Annexes to the European Council Directives, but already quite rare in numerous European countries, moreover indispensable for maintaining the fragile natural equilibrium (balance) of wildlife in the habitats of the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains.

Similarly, the permanent presence of the griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus* in e.g. Dešat/Deshat mountains is sometimes questioned (as probably extinct throughout the last ten years) by some of the scientists, while other scientists consider it as the native species still nesting there. This is why putting the griffon vulture on the tentative list of proposed ‘target fauna species’ could allow, in the course of the possible future common research projects, to intensify field research and monitoring, and clarification of the status of this particular species in the region. In case its permanent presence or nesting in the region is confirmed – it would then require protective measures, as listed in Birds Directive Annex I. In case no individuals and/or nests are spotted or found in a longer term – this species could then be deleted from the priority list, until new observations could confirm the return of this species to the region.

Last, but not least, one could question the presence of the roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* on the tentative list of proposed ‘target fauna species’. Roe deer is indeed quite common all over Europe, thus it is not particularly rare, threatened by extinction, or endangered. Roe deer is a popular game species for human beings, and thousands of roe deer individuals are hunted all around Europe each year. Thus, what is the reason of inscribing the common roe deer on the tentative list of proposed ‘target fauna species’?

The reason is very simple – roe deer is a prey not only for human hunters, but also a prey for e.g. the wolf, lynx or brown bear (in particular in autumn). Thus, the effective protection of the above rare, threatened and endangered “Annex II species” of the common European importance, and maintaining viable populations of the wolf, lynx, brown bear and many other smaller carnivores present in the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains would never be possible without protecting their main animal prey and important food basis. This is why, in case when the ‘quite common roe deer’ is not protected at least in some areas of the region – wolves or brown bears may sooner or later become extinct in the whole region.

The decision on selecting target fauna species for common conservation projects shall be subject to further consultations between partners from both countries concerned, in the course of their transboundary cooperation. Therefore, the Table 2. below neither includes all important fauna species in need for protective measures in the proposed transboundary protected area, nor shall be perceived as the ultimate list of target fauna species.

As mentioned above - neither updated nor common databases and maps of habitats and species distribution for the whole transboundary region are available so far. Therefore, up-
Table 2. Tentative list of proposed target fauna species for conservation in the proposed transboundary protected area Sharr/Sar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>English name</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mammals</td>
<td>Canis aureus</td>
<td>Golden jackal</td>
<td>range: Deshat foothills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canis lupus</td>
<td>wolf</td>
<td>* HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capreolus capreolus</td>
<td>roe deer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dinaromys bogdanovi</td>
<td>Martino’s snow vole microtus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Felis silvestris</td>
<td>European wild cat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lutra lutra</td>
<td>river otter</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lynx lynx / Lynx lynx martini</td>
<td>Lynx / Balkan lynx</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martes martes</td>
<td>pine marten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meles meles</td>
<td>Eurasian badger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica</td>
<td>chamois (Balkan ssp.)</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ursus arctos</td>
<td>brown bear</td>
<td>* HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reptiles</td>
<td>Ablepharus kitaibelli</td>
<td>Juniper skink</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Vipera ammodites</td>
<td>Bulgarian viper</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vipera ursini</td>
<td>Orsini’s viper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphibians</td>
<td>Bombina variegata</td>
<td>yellow-bellied toad</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rana graeca</td>
<td>Balkan stream frog</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Triturus cristatus camifex</td>
<td>crested newt</td>
<td>HD Annex II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>Alectoris graeca</td>
<td>rock partridge</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accipiter gentilis</td>
<td>goshawk</td>
<td>BD Annex I (ssp. arrigonii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aquila chrysaetos</td>
<td>golden eagle</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bubo bubo</td>
<td>eagle owl</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Falco peregrinus</td>
<td>peregrine falcon</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gyps fulvus</td>
<td>griffon vulture</td>
<td>BD Annex I, extinct (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Picus canus</td>
<td>grey-headed woodpecker</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prunella collaris</td>
<td>Alpine accentor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pyrrhocorax graculus</td>
<td>alpine chough</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</td>
<td>red-billed chough</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tetrao urogallus</td>
<td>western capercaillie</td>
<td>BD Annex I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

dating, development, harmonization and maintenance of biodiversity-related databases, and development of the common database/s for the proposed transboundary protected area Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat, in consultation and cooperation between both involved countries seems to be the most urgent task. This would require gathering and compilation of scientific data, national inventories and maps concerning rare or endangered natural and semi-natural habitat types, as well as plant communities and species, including endemic flora and fauna species native to the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains.

In result of the above cooperation - areas significant for biological and landscape diversity of the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat region, in particular those encompassing endangered natural and semi-natural habitat types as well as mainstays, priority connecting corridors and migratory routes of endangered migratory species should be delineated, and threats to their ecological functions assessed. Only based on the analysis of such information the cooperation priorities for their future cooperation on biodiversity conservation issues can jointly be decided. This would later allow to develop common projects on e.g. coordinated protection of rare habitats and restoration of natural linkages across the state borders (ecological corridors) for migratory species, exchange of specimens of animal or plant species, establishing common ex situ seed/gene banks and/or nurseries of rare and threatened species.

**European context**


According to the Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds Member States shall take the requisite measures to preserve, maintain or reestablish a sufficient diversity and area of habitats for bird species, while according to Article 4 the species mentioned in Annex I shall be the subject of special conservation measures concerning their habitat in order to ensure their survival and reproduction in their area of distribution. Pursuant to Article 3 concerning the preservation, maintenance and re-establishment of biotopes and habitats for birds - “creation of protected areas” is the first among all measures recommended by this Directive.

Thus, when deciding on the spatial plans for the border territories, the relevant authorities of all involved countries should take into account that:

- The region of the proposed transboundary protected area harbours a considerable number of natural habitats “shared” by countries concerned as well as numerous threatened or endemic flora and fauna species having their mainstays in habitats crossed by the state border;
- These habitats and species would greatly benefit from transboundary cooperation between both concerned countries on their conservation;
- These habitats and species include those listed under relevant Annexes to the “Habitats” and “Birds” Directives, also priority species and habitat types;
- Such habitat types, animal and plant species of Community interest require the designation of special areas of conservation in the Member States of the European Community.
Therefore, the presence of habitats and species listed under relevant Annexes to the Council Directive 92/43/EEC ("Habitats Directive") whose protection in the Member States of the European Community requires the designation of special areas of conservation, and bird species listed under Annex I to Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds which require special conservation measures concerning their habitats could become a sound argument for the extension of existing or designation of new protected areas in the border areas of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in the proposed transboundary protected area Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat”.

3.2. Priorities for transboundary cooperation in the planned transboundary protected area identified by participants of the ENVSEC workshop in June 2009.

There is a wide range of potential joint activities, which can become the subject of transboundary cooperation between protected areas, local authorities and non-governmental organisations on each side of the state border. The potential for implementation of such joint activities depends to great extent on local conditions and identified common needs in a particular region.

As soon as both the legal and administrative frameworks for transboundary cooperation are in place, relevant partners, stakeholders and professional are involved, and potential funding sources are either made available or at least identified - the next important step is to decide on the priorities for cooperation which will later allow implementation of the first joint transboundary projects.

Priority actions which shall be undertaken in proposed transboundary areas in South Eastern Europe were one of the topics of the 2. sub-regional meeting on "Transboundary Cooperation of Mountain Protected Areas in South Eastern Europe: Towards the Dinaric Arc and BalkanNetwork of Mountain Protected Areas" organized in June 2009 within the framework of the ENVSEC Initiative by UNEP, and financed by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

The meeting was held at Hotel Crna Gora in Podgorica, Montenegro, organised by UNEP through the Vienna Office, in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Protection of Montenegro, the Institute for Nature Protection in Podgorica and the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (BRESCE). The meeting brought together 59 participants, mainly from the SEE region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, but also from Austria, France, Italy, Slovenia and UK.

The issue of priorities for common actions transboundary cooperation was addressed during the above meeting by organising a special workshop (Workshop 1: Priorities for common actions in transboundary "areas in focus"),
where participants from Albania, Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) and the FYR of Macedonia were present.

It has to be emphasized here, that this workshop had no legal mandate to e.g. decide on priorities, and was rather the first occasion to discuss such potential priorities in a group of participants from different countries, of different professional backgrounds and interests, in an informal manner. Much more intensive, and much more formal consultations on potential priorities should be conducted in the future, among the future key partners of transboundary cooperation, in particular the relevant Ministries, protected area administrations, and local municipalities.

However, the tentative list of possible priorities resulting from this workshop could potentially serve as a material for consideration, and a ‘warm-up’ for the future discussions.

Furthermore, the potential priorities identified in the course of this workshop prove that the representatives of nature conservation authorities, scientific institutions and non-governmental organizations understand the possible benefits of transboundary cooperation on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Deshat/Dešat mountains, are willing to develop this cooperation, and have a clear vision for the potential common activities.

The outcomes of this informal workshop include the following tentative list of priorities for cooperation in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Deshat/Dešat region, as follows:

- Legal designation of protected areas on all three sides as a precondition for developing transboundary cooperation.
- Common identification of threats to nature and environment of the TBPA region.
- Common management planning, incl. common maps and GIS database of habitats and endemic plant species distribution.
- Development of the common nature monitoring system.
- Enhancing direct personal working contacts between protected area managers and local stakeholders, by organizing stakeholder meetings (either bi- or trilateral) and thematic workshops.
- Capacity building for protected areas.
- Common research utilizing harmonized methodologies, allowing preparation of joint action plans and common implementation of conservation activities, in particular those targeted at ‘flagship’ large carnivore species (lynx, brown bear, wolf).
- Development and implementation of the system of compensations for damages in livestock caused by large carnivores.
- Development of common tourist hiking trails in border areas of Shara mountains, with the objective to facilitate provision of guided tours in the TBPA region.
- Common publication of promotional and information materials on the region of the proposed TBPA.

During the workshop, the proposed priority concerning the need for undertaking common research activities was illustrated by its participant, Mr. Dime Melovski (Macedonian Ecological Society - MES), who presented the project “Strategic Planning for the Conservation of the Balkan Lynx” - a joint bilateral project of the Macedonian (MES) and Albanian (Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment of Albania - PPNEA) partner non-governmental organizations. This project is implemented in cooperation with KORA, the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA), EuroNatur.
– Stiftung Europäisches Naturerbe and IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group; financially supported by the MAVA Foundation and the Research Council of Norway. The ultimate goal of this project aimed at the protection of the Balkan lynx species is the launch of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme. Mr. Melovski demonstrated the project outcomes achieved so far, e.g. the results of surveys and monitoring of the Balkan lynx habitats, camera trapping and methods of gathered data analysis. The pilot areas for the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme are the Sharr/Šar Planina transboundary mountain region, the currently developing transboundary protected area in Jablanica mountains (AL/MK), and the Ilinska-Plakenska region in the FYR of Macedonia.

It should be noted here, that the successful achievement of several priorities from the above tentative priority list is not feasible in short term, and would require both intensive preparatory works and consultations within all concerned countries, and bi- or trilateral consultations on e.g. inter-ministerial level. The majority of the above tentative priorities is addressed in detail as the challenges for transboundary cooperation in the planned transboundary protected area in the next part of this study.

Furthermore, the priority concerning “Development and implementation of the system of compensations for damages in livestock caused by large carnivores” perceived as a possible tool to mitigate conflicts between the local farmers and those who either manage protected areas or advocate for the protection of large carnivores could be considered as a priority for transboundary cooperation only in a case when ‘transfrontier damages’ (e.g. livestock on one side of the state border is attacked by carnivore populations from the neighbouring country) are officially confirmed, and the neighbouring countries develop and conclude a relevant agreement in this respect, concerning their mutual responsibility and compensations for such damages in their border areas.

By the way: the system of financial compensations for damages in livestock caused by large carnivores has already been implemented in may countries, but with limited success, due to the inherent weakness of this system. The problem is that in a case when the value of the financial compensation for livestock animals killed or injured by e.g. a brown bear or wolf is lower than the full market value of the animal – the farmers would always complain that their damage was not fully compensated, and accuse the Governments for carelessly addressing this conflict. Contrary to the above situation, in a case when the financial compensation is equal (or higher) than the average market price – the farmers would not be particularly motivated to protect their livestock from attacks by large carnivores by implementing different (and sometimes costly) protective measures. In the above case the farmers would rather push their herds straight into the forest or into the protected area, with the clear objective to be able to claim for such damages, and get the full market value of the animal/s without undertaking other efforts on ‘marketing their products’. However, this second option, no matter how costly for the Governments, would significantly help to feed the local carnivore populations.
According to the best possible scenario for the further development of trilateral cooperation between the Governments and local stakeholders in Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – the transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” could potentially cover the total area of up to some 255,306 ha, and become the largest protected area in South-Eastern Europe, and one of the largest in Europe.

The abandonment of traditional land-use practices ongoing on all three sides is a common challenge for the further sustainability of the local economy in the mountains. Sustainable tourism development in the region could bring new employment opportunities and new sources of income, thus mitigating the economic reasons for the current exodus of mountain populations.

The label of a ‘trilateral transboundary protected area of exceptional natural values and sustainable tourism development’ as well as of ‘the largest protected area in South-Eastern Europe’, and of ‘one of the largest protected areas in Europe’ could provide for the ‘unique selling point’ for the local or regional tourist packages, increase the tourist attractiveness of the region and marketing of the regional tourist product abroad, and help to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative stereotypes still common among some Europeans, resulting from the past armed ethnic conflicts.

But this will only be possible in the “direct trilateral connectivity and cooperation scenario” – in case when the initiatives on all three sides of the borders provide for the full ecological connectivity and continuity of the protected area network of the region.

In other words – this ambitious vision would become true when the significantly extended territory of Mali Sharr National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 becomes spatially adjacent to the other three large scale protected areas in the region: existing Mavrovo National Park and planned Šar Planina National Park in the FYR of Macedonia, and the planned Korabi Protected Landscape in Albania, and working contacts in transboundary cooperation between all above four protected areas are established and continuously maintained.

Last, but not least, due to the fact that the main tourist attractions of this transboundary region are the exceptional landscape and natural values of the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains – the development of sustainable tourism in the region would require close cooperation of the tourist services providers with the authorities of the protected areas in the region.

Opportunities

The achievement of the above vision for the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region could largely be facilitated by numerous ‘cross-border’ similarities.

The settlement pattern, land-use and economic development pattern, and welfare of inhabitants on each side of the state borders in the proposed transboundary protected area is very similar. All three sides face almost the same infrastructural problems and common environmental threats. The territories in the region of the proposed transboundary pro-
ected area belong to the less developed and poorest regions of their countries.

Furthermore, the negative demographic trends, population ageing, and migration to towns paired by rural depopulation are common challenges for all three sides of the state borders in Sharr/Šar Planina and Korab – Dešat/Deshat regions. The abandonment of traditional land-use practices ongoing on all three sides is a common challenge for the further sustainability of the local economy in the mountains, as these traditional practices have so far been either the main or the sole source of incomes, and largely facilitated the subsistence of the local inhabitants. Last, but not least - the unemployment rate is currently very high on all three sides of this mountain region.

Hence, in general the local inhabitants do not have much to loose. They either have to find the way to generate new employment opportunities for themselves and for the younger generations, or the rural exodus from the mountain territories of the common transboundary region would continue, and lead to further depopulation of the mountain areas, with negative consequences for the currently high biological and landscape diversity of the region.

The possible and most welcomed solution could be the sustainable tourism development in the region, which could bring new employment opportunities and new sources of income, thus mitigating the economic reasons for the current exodus of mountain populations. But the development of sustainable tourism in this region is still much more a future challenge (therefore described in the next part of this study), than the current opportunity.

As for 2009, there are in general no more potential conflict issues between the local populations in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat”. On the contrary, the idea of establishing a common protected area is perceived as an important factor which could mitigate the adverse effects of the past ethnic tension and create a much stronger sense of the common regional identity.

Furthermore, once the long lasting administrative barriers and political obstacles for cooperation in the region disappeared – the local population of all ethnic groups are willing to communicate and cooperate, which is another factor which could largely facilitate the development of trilateral transboundary cooperation on ‘politically neutral’ conservation of the shared natural values of the shared transboundary region.

The existence of state borders in the proposed transboundary protected area “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” does not provide an obstacle to wildlife migrations and has no negative influence on the connectivity and continuity of habitats present on both sides of the border.

Moreover, in general the presence of the state border does not result in explicit legal obstacles limiting civilian access to the border areas on either side of the state border, which could e.g. prevent the implementation of the common research or conservation projects in habitats crossed by the state border. It is also not a factor which could hamper the development of transboundary cooperation, for instance by limiting possibilities for direct and regular contacts between cooperation partners, e.g. protected area managers or the representatives of municipality authorities from all involved neighbouring countries.

The presence of the state border in this proposed transboundary protected area seems to
have no strong adverse effect on the availability of information on the area, like detailed maps indispensable for e.g. mapping of the habitats in border areas or planning common activities; the access to such information sources is in general not particularly restricted by security measures.

Languages spoken in the Albanian and Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) parts of the proposed transboundary protected area are either the same or very similar. The possible language barrier in communication with the Macedonian partners would to a large extent be facilitated by the presence of the significant Macedonian ethnic minority on the Albanian side, in the border areas of the Korab and Deshat mountain ranges, while the inhabitants of Mavrovo National Park area include Albanian Muslims and Albanian Christians. Similarly, the presence of the Macedonian Muslims on the Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) side of Sharr mountains and a strong ethnic Albanian minority on the Macedonian side of the Šar Planina mountain range should be perceived as an asset and opportunity, a factor facilitating communication and fostering transboundary cooperation in the shared region.

The objectives of protected area management, research methods and existing inventories and databases on the environment and natural resources, and legislation on nature protection are to a large extent compatible in all involved countries and territories.

At present, the ongoing approximation of national legislation on nature protection to the EU legislation and standards largely facilitates the use of the same methodological approaches. Moreover, the relevant Ministries of Albania and the FYR of Macedonia gathered some experience in transboundary cooperation.

**Challenges**

The legal designation of protected areas on all three sides as a precondition for developing transboundary cooperation was placed by the Podgorica workshop participants on top of this tentative priority list. It should be recalled here that, as for June 2009, only a small part of the Sharr / Šar Planina mountains is protected in Mali Sharr National Park on the side of Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99, and only the eastern side of the Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountain ranges is protected in Mavrovo National Park on the Macedonian side, while the remaining areas of the above mountain ranges located across the state borders remain outside the protected areas.

Taking into account the above – this first priority is also a precondition for improving the currently missing connectivity and continuity of protected area network in the whole region, which would then enhance direct personal working contacts between protected area managers and local stakeholders. As for today – both existing national parks are quite distant from each other, both in physical and mental sense, and there is no evidence of direct contacts between the management teams of both protected areas available.

By establishing new protected areas (Korabi Protected Landscape in Albania and Šar Planina National Park in the FYR of Macedonia), and possibly also by extending Mali Sharr National Park in Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) this connectivity and continuity of protected area network would be ensured, thus providing for a much stronger common regional identity, and providing incentives for the key stakeholders for developing and implementing a common vision for conservation.
and sustainable development of their shared transboundary region. Thus, this first priority on the list is also a precondition for establishing a transboundary protected area in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region.

However, it should be recalled here that the designation of Korabi Protected Landscape is planned by the Albanian Government for 2012, while the establishment of Šar Planina National Park in the FYR of Macedonia and territorial extension of Mali Sharr National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 would still require political decisions on the central level (undertaken in parallel to a possible trilateral agreement between involved Governments, concerning their cooperation in the region) which have to be based on updated and sound scientific basis as well as consensus with the authorities of local municipalities, and other key stakeholders.

Thus, the above ‘top priority’ can not be achieved in the near future, as the decision-making and legislation process for proclaiming new protected areas in the region would require several years for official consultations and procedures, proceeded by developing required scientific justification, and consultations with the authorities of local municipalities and among local communities concerned.

Undertaking the political decision concerning the designation of new protected areas (or extension of the existing ones) would require intensive preparatory works to be carried out in each country, utilising results of recent researches, e.g. update assessments of the natural values of the areas proposed for protection, evaluation of the socio-economic factors and possible benefits of establishing a protected area, spatial delineation of the boundaries of territories planned for protection as well as their internal functional zonation, digital mapping and developing the GIS database/s, as well as designing relevant organisational structures for the administrations of the new protected areas, and assessing their financial sustainability.

It is highly recommended that the above preparatory works are carried in consultation with the partners from across the state borders, e.g. with relevant Ministries of the neighbouring countries.

All the above activities would additionally require consultations with relevant stakeholders (e.g. local municipalities, forest services administrations and landowners) and launching public awareness campaigns (both in-country and possibly also on the regional level) which would require developing information and promotional materials targeted at different audiences and professional groups.

Furthermore, in a case when such political decisions on either extending the already existing protected area in Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) or proclaiming the planned new protected areas in Albania and Macedonia are positive, the proposals for park management plans would have to be developed.

Last, but not least, the newly established protected area administrations would require operational and professional/technical capacity building, which could include some common trainings, study visits or organising joint thematic seminars gathering experts and managers from all involved countries.

Consultations in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 with relevant stakeholders for the planned territorial extension of Mali Sharr National Park area should officially be launched by the Nature Protec-
tion Division of the Environment Department of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP), and carried out by either the MESP itself, or by the Kosovo Environment Protection Agency; in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD) and its Kosovo Forest Agency, with the authorities of the local municipalities, in particular with the Municipality of Dragash/Dragaš, but also of Prizren, Suharekë/Suva Reka, Shtërpicë/Strpce and Kaçanik/Kacanik). Of course, the representatives of Mali Sharr National Park Administration and experts from the University of Prishtina could largely facilitate such consultations. Last, but not least, according to some commonly expressed views, such consultations could also be facilitated by the involvement of the local environmental non-governmental organisations, and the presence of observers from the major international organisations, United Nations, and potential supporters to this process, e.g. international or foreign national assistance organisations, and the presence of observers from e.g. United Nations, and potential supporters.

In case of the designation of Korabi Protected Landscape (planned by the Albanian Government for 2012) the consultations with stakeholders should further be continued by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) of Albania with the bodies responsible for the future management of this protected area, namely the authorities of the Dibra Prefecture and Kukës Prefecture, and both concerned Directorate of Forestry Services.

As for the designation of National Park Šar Planina – the consultations with relevant Ministries and local stakeholders should officially be launched by the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) of the Republic of Macedonia with the authorities of the local municipalities concerned, in particular of the Municipalities of Tetovo, Mavrovo-Rostuše and Gostivar (which are expected to bring inhabited areas into the proposed national park area) as well as the Municipalities of Bogovinje, Jegunovce, Tearce, and Vrapčište (which were previously expected to contribute to the proposed national park solely with their uninhabited mountain areas), and the Public Enterprise for Forest Management “Makedonski Sumi”. According to some commonly expressed views, such consultations could to some extent be also facilitated by the involvement of the local and international environmental non-governmental organisations, and the presence of observers from e.g. United Nations, and potential supporters.

It should again be emphasized here, that such broad consultations in all three countries must be based e.g. on sound scientific research and justification for putting particular areas under the legal protection, analysis of the spatial planning documents, evaluation of the socio-economic factors and careful assessment of the available resources and financial possibilities on each side.

The priorities from the tentative priority list resulting from the ENVSEC workshop in Podgorica related to the above challenges were:

- Common research utilizing harmonized methodologies, allowing preparation of joint action plans, and common implementation of conservation activities, in particular those targetted at ‘flagship’ large carnivore species (lynx, brown bear, wolf);
- Common identification of threats to nature and environment of the shared transboundary region (which could potentially result in the elimination of e.g. illegal logging and hunting);
• Common management planning, including development of common maps and GIS database of habitats and endemic plant species distribution;
• Development of the common nature monitoring system.

Taking into account the possible different timing of planning activities on different sides of the state borders, the potential for developing an integrated management plan for the whole transboundary protected area is limited. For instance, the new updated management plans for Mavrovo National Park and Mali Sharr National Park are currently being prepared, while the Korabi Protected Landscape and National Park Šar Planina do not exist, as for June 2009. However, the development of harmonized management plans is possible, but subject to necessary consultations between relevant authorities and scientific institutions of all countries concerned.

The above relates to the need for developing a harmonised spatial design and internal functional zonation of the proposed transboundary protected area on each side of the state borders.

Most protected areas as well as UNESCO biosphere reserves implement zonation pattern fulfilling nature and landscape conservation, and sustainable development objectives. The most important natural and landscape values are maintained in the strictly protected “core zone” where human interventions or influence on natural processes are limited. Such core zones are usually surrounded and linked by areas (“buffer zones/areas”) remaining under partial protection regime allowing management aimed at e.g. improving the current state of ecosystems and/or habitats, and preventing negative outside pressures on the “core zone”.

Furthermore, in case of biosphere reserves a “transition zone /area of cooperation” is established outside the legally protected area, with the aim to harmonise sustainable development of the adjacent areas with protection of nature in the inner two zones.

In a case of a transboundary protected area – particular protected areas directly adjoining each other across the state border should be designed in a way allowing harmonized, compatible and complementary functional zonation. Preferably, both countries should implement the same or compatible functional zonation pattern, which means that each functional zone on one side of the state border should have its equivalent zone across the state border.

Furthermore, the core zones on each side of the state border should include all areas and habitats significant for maintaining biological and landscape diversity of the region (e.g. target natural habitats, priority connecting corridors in border areas, key mainstays and migratory routes of target animal species). Functional zones should later be precisely delineated with the use of the GIS (Geographic Information System) tools, and at least the core zones should be clearly signposted in the terrain.

The necessary ‘transboundary complementarity’ of the zonation pattern in a transboundary protected area means that the zonation on each side of the state border should provide for the ecological coherence of border areas, and grant similar protective status to areas located on both sides of the state border, with the objective to prevent the situation when e.g. a strict nature reserve designated on one side of the state border is directly adjacent to areas intensively exploited or developed across the border.
Such harmonised spatial design and internal functional zonation of the proposed transboundary protected area should duly take into account e.g. the landownership issues, the existing settlement network and development priorities of the municipalities on both sides of the state border, but also the conservation requirements for adjacent areas across the state border, the routes of the priority ecological transboundary connecting corridors (e.g. wildlife migration corridors) in the border areas.

It should be recalled here that the priority ecological transboundary connecting corridors, e.g. wildlife migration corridors in the border areas of the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat region are not yet adequately researched, clearly identified and delineated.

As for June 2009 only the current zonation of both national parks (Mavrovo National Park and Mali Sharr National Park) is known, but it would probably change in result of the current management planning procedures, and therefore should rather be perceived as provisional, requiring revision and improvements in the course of the future planning activities, on the basis of the most update scientific studies and recent field researches. The future spatial design and internal functional zonation of the planned Korabi Protected Landscape in Albania and National Park Šar Planina in the FYR of Macedonia has not yet been elaborated and decided, thus their internal zonation could potentially be easily harmonized with the zonation of the already existing protected areas across the state border.

It has to be recalled here, that Korabi Protected Landscape is expected to be classified as a protected area of the IUCN Category V, thus the possible strictly protected zones of this area would most probably be relatively small, compared to those in the neighbouring Mavrovo National Park on the Macedonian side of the mountain ridge. Nevertheless, it is highly expected that the future zonation pattern of Korabi Protected Landscape would correspond to the common conservation requirements and match the protective status of areas located in the border area of the partner Mavrovo National Park, and possibly also to the updated zonation of Mali Sharr National Park, in case this national park is spatially extended far to the South, up to the border with Albania.

Similarly, in case of the expected territorial extension of Mali Sharr National Park in Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 to the territory of the southernmost municipality of Dragash/Dragaš, along the state border of the FYR of Macedonia and towards the state border of Albania – it is highly expected that the future internal zonation pattern of this potential new part of the national park territory would be harmonized with the zonation of the existing Mavrovo National Park and planned Šar Planina National Park in the FYR of Macedonia, as well as with the common conservation requirements and zonation of Korabi Protected Landscape planned on the Albanian side.

Last, but not least, the future spatial design and internal functional zonation pattern of the planned Šar Planina National Park in the FYR of Macedonia should be harmonized with the updated zonation of Mavrovo National Park as well as the future spatial design of Mali Sharr National Park.

Therefore, intensive exchange of information, scientific data, methodological experience and consultations between relevant authorities and scientific institutions of all countries concerned are indispensable, in particular in the early phase of drafting relevant spatial planning documents and proposals.
Developing the harmonised and compatible zonation pattern for the whole transboundary protected area in consultations between all involved countries remains one of the most challenging tasks for the near future.

This task can be even more challenging due to the absence of common nature inventories or databases available for the whole region, including the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area. Moreover, the sources of scientific information on natural values of several areas in Kosovo (Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99) and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is limited mainly to literature from the times of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, thus containing not always updated information. Furthermore, scientific researches in the times of the SFRJ were usually focusing on specific areas, species or habitats, and even at the times of the SFRJ a common database compiling available data and research results concerning this transboundary region was not elaborated. However, there is still much information available, which could be used for developing common nature inventories.

Therefore, updating, development, harmonization and maintenance of biodiversity-related databases, and development of the common database/s for the proposed transboundary protected area Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat, in consultation and cooperation between all involved countries seems to be the most urgent task. This would require gathering and compilation of scientific data, national inventories and maps concerning rare or endangered natural and semi-natural habitat types, as well as plant communities and species, including endemic flora and fauna species native to the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains.

In result of the above cooperation - areas significant for biological and landscape diversity of the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat region, in particular those encompassing endangered natural and semi-natural habitat types as well as mainstays, priority connecting corridors and migratory routes of endangered migratory species should be delineated, and threats to their ecological functions assessed.

Only based on the analysis of such information the selection of cooperation priorities for the future cooperation on biodiversity conservation issues can jointly be decided. This would later allow to develop common projects on e.g. coordinated protection of rare habitats and restoration of natural linkages across the state borders (ecological corridors) for migratory species, exchange of specimens of animal or plant species, establishing common ex-situ seed/gene banks and/or nurseries of rare and threatened species.

According to country experts – this would require launching joint scientific research projects, particularly those important for the biodiversity of existing and planned protected areas (e.g. baseline research for establishing inventories of important taxonomic groups in the area, biodiversity mapping of important species and habitats, preparation of regional Red List/s of rare, endemic, threatened or endangered species).

Such common projects could largely benefit from, or build upon several research projects recently undertaken in the region. For instance, the experts of the Museum of Natural Sciences of Albania (Tirana University) are carrying some research projects in the area. Moreover, several non governmental organisations are also active in research in the region. For instance, the Macedonian Ecological Society
(MES) implements the field research project (2006-2009) aimed at development of nature inventories and a species database for the Šar Planina mountain range, and a similar project in the Korab region in cooperation with the Association for the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment of Albania (PPNEA) and the Albanian Society for Protection of Birds and Mammals (ASPM).

There are also common research projects targeted at particular species, e.g. the MAVA funded project aiming at the "Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme" conducted by MES in cooperation with their Albanian partner organisation (PPNEA) and Euronatur from Germany, or the recently launched project for the protection of the brown bear on the Macedonian side.

Last, but not least, there are several other 'success stories' in the region of the South Eastern Europe in implementing common transboundary projects, which could provide good practice examples and inspire the partners of transboundary cooperation in the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat region.

First of all, the most relevant example of transboundary cooperation is the successful cooperation between the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES) and the Association for the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment of Albania (PPNEA) focused on the establishment of "Jablanica – Shebenik" bilateral national park (located to the South from the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat region) by implementing a common project within the framework of the Green Belt initiative, supported by the BfN (German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation) and coordinated by the German foundation Euronatur. The original incentive for establishing this new transboundary protected area was the need for conservation of the Balkan lynx population on both sides of the border, where establishment of protected areas on both sides of the state border was perceived as a precondition and tool for successful conservation of the lynx.

The project involved also the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) of Albania, which representatives contributed to the success of this common initiative. As for June 2009 – the Jablanica-Shebenik area has already received a legal protective designation on the Albanian side, while the procedure for the official proclamation of a protected area on the Macedonian side is expected to be completed by MEPP still in 2009, subject to some additional adjustments of the proposed boundaries and a field inspection to be carried out together with the MEPP representatives and experts. Later the proposal would be forwarded to the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.

This common project was immediately followed by a new one, implemented by the same partners from both involved countries, aiming on public relations aspects. In result several common communication materials (poster, leaflets) were developed and printed, several meetings of the local key stakeholders were organised, as well as a study tour to Croatia (for the local mayors, administration representatives and activists) and a study tour to Germany (for e.g. the representatives of MEPP and forestry companies).

The above success stories immediately resulted in increased support for the activities of the partner organizations, thus 14 more small projects are currently implemented in the Jablanica-Shebenik region, mostly targeted at raising ecological awareness among the local communities as well as some small-scale development projects.
It should be noted with concern that the original project for the “Jablanica – Shebenik” bilateral national park also tried to facilitate the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) of Albania and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) of the Republic of Macedonia, both involved in the common project. However, this bilateral agreement has not been formalised until today.

Other examples of similar transboundary ‘success stories’ in the South Eastern European region could be the joint Prespa Park project aimed at sustainable management of the Prespa basin, involving Albania, Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Shkodra Lake project involving Albania and Montenegro, or the joint initiative of Albania and Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 aimed at protection of the endangered Gentiana lutea species in Koritniku and Sharr mountains.

Another serious obstacle to intensifying transboundary cooperation in the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains is the absence of official agreements on transboundary cooperation between all involved countries concerning the proposed transboundary protected area. There are also no official initiatives or cooperative agreements between local authorities and self-governments from either side of the borders concerning the proposed transboundary protected area.

In fact, there are some international agreements concluded between the Governments of Albania, Kosovo - UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244/99 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. There are also bilateral agreements between Albania and its neighbours, signed at the level of Ministries relevant for environmental issues, and related to their intended cooperation on e.g. nature protection and protected areas, spatial planning, sustainable use of natural and energy resources, and monitoring and control of the quality of air, water and soil. However, the implementation of these agreements is still very much a challenge for the future. Moreover, such bilateral agreements targeted at the broad scope of thematic fields of potential cooperation are very general, and are not directly addressing the expected cooperation of the three involved countries in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region.

As for today, the transboundary cooperation in this region is very limited, to say the least, while the exchange of data and information between partners is mainly based on good personal working contacts and strong voluntary informal collaborative relationships. Of course, such informal relationships are based on the initiative and consensus of all involved local partners, require less bureaucracy and no reporting, and may easily involve a wide range of partners including local non-governmental organisations. It is also true that friendly relations between partners across the borders may result in successful cooperation, even with little or no political and financial support of the Governments.

However, such informal relationships are not legally enforceable, are often affected by personnel changes (e.g. election of the new municipality mayor or nomination of a new park director, less committed to transboundary cooperation), do not provide for adequate track record (e.g. no minutes of meetings), and not always result in the support from the side of the central Governments.

This is why the success in transboundary cooperation requires both formal and informal
cooperative agreements. Formal agreements provide complex interdisciplinary approach to conservation and sustainable development, are legally enforceable, can prescribe the period of agreement requiring re-commitment or renegotiation, can involve governmental administrations and agencies, increase empowerment of protected area administrations and staff, are less affected by personnel changes, provide for regular reporting and evaluation of the cooperation progress, provide for continuity of cooperation, can provide adequate funding from central budget for e.g. meetings, travel and communication, staff, joint activities and research, as well as encourage agreements on the local level. Last, but not least, formal agreements are indispensable as the legal basis for receiving official institutional and financial support as well as for official recognition of a particular TBPA by international organisations, e.g. UNESCO-MaB Programme or the Europarc Federation.

On the other hand - even an ‘official high-level agreement’ will not initiate successful transboundary cooperation alone, unless clear and feasible priorities and tasks for cooperation are identified by the partners and agreed, relevant consultative or governing structures established, and adequately budgeted.

As for 2009 the transboundary cooperation in Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains cannot legally be based on any regional convention or a bi- or trilateral agreement / protocol on cooperation signed between the countries concerned, signed either at the governmental or at the ministerial level. There are also no legal agreements between nature conservation authorities, administrations of protected areas, scientific institutions or local municipal administrations of the region.

Preferably such agreement should clearly state the common vision, priorities and fields of work for cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area, allocate duties and responsibilities among different cooperation partners, delegate powers and designate authorities mandated to coordinate transboundary cooperation, authorise allocation of the part of the state budget funding for common transboundary activities.

A possible agreement should also refer to the socio-economic context and well-being of local communities, linking such with the protection of common natural and cultural values. Last, but not least, such agreement should later officially be communicated to local stakeholders on each side of the state border.

As suggested by the authors of the reports used for this study - such agreement could also provide a legal basis for the possible establishment of a joint body coordinating transboundary cooperation (commission, committee), which at the early stages of transboundary cooperation could be a precondition for its successful planning and implementation.

Maintaining direct personal working contacts between different partners would be substantial for developing the future transboundary cooperation. As for today, these contacts are not particularly frequent or regular, however such are not restricted by e.g. the presence of the state border. However, probably due to the fact that cooperation has so far been developed mostly on informal basis – these meetings have not been properly recorded and documented, thus no written record of such meetings (e.g. minutes, decisions, joint statements or declarations) are available.

The lack of such records impairs the possibility of recalling the outcomes of particular common meetings, or making such outcomes available to other partners. Thus, documenting the
ongoing cooperation to e.g. the Governments and/or potential donors is currently not possible. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the future meetings in transboundary cooperation in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region are properly documented in a written form.

Furthermore, due to the fact that the cooperation and meetings have so far been informal – the cooperation partners had to cover related expenses (e.g. costs of travel, accommodation and communication) from their regular operational budgets. An official agreement on cooperation could help to properly justify such expenses, or even generate some support from the central budget for the meeting costs, which would then enhance the frequency (and possibly also the regularity) of meetings gathering different partners from all sides of the state borders, influencing the intensity and efficiency of direct personal working contacts.

Last, but not least, it should be recalled that the scarce network of roads and border crossing points in the mountains of Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat, and in particular the absence of border crossing points in the territory of the proposed transboundary protected area could be a factor seriously impairing the frequency of the direct personal contacts between the authorities expected to become partners of transboundary cooperation in the region.

As already mentioned, the transboundary cooperation would largely be facilitated by establishment and designation of a special common ‘coordinating body’ for transboundary cooperation in the Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat region, as an official forum for consultations between all involved countries.

Such common coordinating body should have clearly defined range of competencies, tasks, rules of procedure allowing fair and balanced decision making between all partners, operational modalities and adequate operational budget to finance its meetings and work. A similar common coordinating body was established in the framework of the transboundary project of Montenegro and Albania concerning the protection of the Skadar Lake, based on the Memorandum of Understanding between responsible Ministries from both countries, later approved by respective Governments.

Different institutional, operational and technical capacities (e.g. imbalance in the number of staff, in degree of professionalism and expertise) between the partners may cause serious obstacles for developing transboundary cooperation, and result in need for mutual assistance and support in implementing agreed management objectives. Therefore, the capacities of different local partners for transboundary cooperation should be assessed and enhanced, in order to cumulate currently available resources and upgrade the professional skills and expertise possessed by the staff members of different institutions and authorities. Resources necessary for developing transboundary cooperation would include e.g. premises (offices, libraries, conference and meeting rooms), personnel (professional and administrative staff), equipment (e.g. computers, cameras, vehicles, or scientific and professional equipment).

It has to be emphasised here that local partners on both sides of the state border have little or even no experience in common fund raising, while most probably the future capacity building projects, trainings and exchanges for personnel of protected areas and local municipalities would be dependent on available external financial assistance.
Similarly, not all local partners on both sides of the state border have the previous experience in implementing and managing e.g. foreign assistance projects (such as the Prefecture of Dibra in Albania, which implemented part of the “Forestry Project”, funded by the World Bank and the Swiss Government between 1995 and 2002). Last, but not least, foreign language skills (e.g. the knowledge of English or German) necessary for developing an application to foreign sources are scarce in the region.

But it has to be emphasised that transboundary co-operation can not be developed in long-term only on the ‘project basis’, as the ‘project deadline’ may simultaneously become the ‘co-operation deadline’ and the continuity of co-operation could then be seriously threatened. Therefore providing a stable source/s of funding for at least the core activities in transboundary cooperation is indispensable. The example of fund-raising activities for the transboundary project on the protection of the Skadar Lake showed that transboundary cooperation cannot solely rely on international donors and initiatives, therefore national sources are perceived as a more sustainable long-term solution. Potentially, a regional environmental trust funds supporting transboundary cooperation in the region of Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat could be perceived as a future solution, with the involvement and support of e.g. companies benefiting from the natural resources of the region, such as hydro power plants, water supply companies or tourist operators.

Furthermore, joint actions will hardly be possible without allocating staff members as co-operation contacts and focal points, with the responsibility to facilitate transboundary cooperation from each cooperating side, of relevant capacities and skills to work together, or if appropriate - without designating transboundary cooperation programme coordinator/s for the whole transboundary protected area, or for each of its constituent national parts.

Some of the potential benefits of transboundary cooperation are crucial for nature and landscape conservation of the transboundary protected area, therefore much more motivating nature conservationists and scientists, who better understand the need for a coordinated approach in an eco-regional scale than the local inhabitants.

Other potential benefits of transboundary cooperation, in particular those for sustainable local economic development, could be more appealing and attractive for the local communities, thus potentially raising local support for establishing a transboundary protected area, perceived as a tool for improving the life standards and well-being of the area inhabitants.

**Sustainable tourism development** could probably be the most promising development opportunity for the local economy, the source of income of growing importance providing employment chances for the local inhabitants, and a factor which can mitigate or prevent the current alarming rural depopulation trends, and limit the ongoing migration of younger people to towns and cities.

However, it is important to emphasise that the exceptional landscape and nature values of this region are not ‘eternal and granted forever’, and their maintenance depends on the careful spatial planning providing for the wise and sustainable use of natural resources, and their protection. In case tourism develops in an uncontrolled and unsustainable way – it can also lead to e.g. the non-reversible changes of the pristine landscapes, degradation of fragile mountain habitats, loss of biodiversity, increased problems of water supplies, waste
and sewage management, increased traffic on mountain roads and trails etc.

Should the above mentioned unique landscape, natural and recreational values of the region significantly deteriorate in result of e.g. uncontrolled development or illegal practices – the present high tourist attractiveness would immediately decrease. In result no new visitors (in particular not the international ones) would be attracted to come to the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains, while some part of the current visitors to the area may decide to chose other holiday destinations, where adverse effects of human economy on environment, landscape and nature are either none or better prevented, providing for better quality of recreation.

The mountains of this region are indeed highly attractive for mountain trekking and skiing – but there are many other mountain ranges in Europe providing similar recreation opportunities, often paired by other attractions, e.g. historical towns, museums, spas, conference and wellness centers, and much better developed tourist, ski-lift and road infrastructure, like for instance in the Alps.

Thus, foreign tourists do need a strong incentive to choose Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains as their holiday destination, instead of traveling either to other mountain locations in Europe.

In other words – should these natural values be gone, a considerable number of current customers, in particular the foreign ones, could simply disappear forever. With the decreasing number of visitors the local entrepreneurs in tourist services sector could simultaneously lose a corresponding part of their current incomes, and chances for further development and employment in the future.

Last, but not least, due to the fact that the main tourist attractions of this transboundary region are the exceptional landscape and natural values of the Sharr/Šar Planina, Korab and Dešat/Deshat mountains – the development of sustainable tourism in the region would require close cooperation of the tourist services providers with the authorities of the protected areas in the region.

Therefore, the future and sustainability of the tourist business in the whole region of the proposed transboundary protected area Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat is to a large extent dependant on the cooperation of nature conservation authorities and protected are administrations with local municipality authorities and the tourism sector, on the maintenance, conservation and if need be, also the restoration of its natural assets as the main source of tourist attractiveness of the region.

Developing common tourist products and packages including visits and various tourist activities in different regions on each side of the state borders should be based on the commonly developed and implemented sustainable tourism development strategy for the region, which should involve tourist services providers from different municipalities of the neighbouring countries, thus providing for a more equal sharing of benefits and revenues from tourism by inhabitants of different ‘national parts’ of the proposed transboundary protected area, potentially resulting in a more harmonized and compatible development of services and facilities in the whole transboundary region.

Last, but not least, developing and publishing common promotional materials and a common map for visitors is indispensable, taking into account that (as for 2009)
tourist or mountaineering maps are available only for some smaller areas of the whole transboundary region, while the common detailed tourist map including areas in all three neighbouring countries does not exist.
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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADA Austrian Development Agency
AL Albania
ASPBM Albanian Society for Protection of Birds and Mammals
Bfn German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation
BFSD Balkan Foundation for Sustainable Development
CBD Convention on Biological Diversity
CIDA Canadian Development Agency
COP Conference of the Parties
DAI Dinaric Arc Initiative
DEWA Division of Early Warning and Assessment
DFS Directorate of Forestry Service (Albania)
EIA Environmental Impact Assessment
ENVSEC Environment and Security Initiative
EU European Union
EuroNatur Stiftung Europäisches Naturerbe
FYR Former Yugoslav Republic
GIS Geographic Information System
GRID Global Resource Information Database
IBA Important Bird Area
INCS Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia
IUCN International Union for Conservation of Nature
KEPA Kosovo Environment Protection Agency
KFA Kosovo Forest Agency
KFOR NATO Kosovo Force
MAVA Fondation pour la Protection de la Nature
MES Macedonian Ecological Society
MK FYR of Macedonia
MoAFRD Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (Kosovo)
MoAFWE Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (FYR Macedonia)
MoEFWA Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (Albania)
MoEPP Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (FYR Macedonia)
MoESP Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (Kosovo)
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO Non-governmental Organisation
NINA Norwegian Institute for Nature Research
OSCE Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe
PEEN Pan-European Ecological Network
PPNEA Association for the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment of Albania
REC Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe
RM Republic of Macedonia
SEE South-Eastern Europe
SFRJ Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia
IDA Swedish International Development Agency
SNR  Strict Nature Reserve
SNV  Netherlands Development Organisation
TBPA  Transboundary Protected Area
UK  United Kingdom
UN  United Nations
UNDP  United Nations Development Programme
UNDPI  United Nations Department of Public Information
UNECE  United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP  United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP - ISCC  UNEP Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Framework Convention
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNESCO-BRESCE  UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe
UNESCO-MaB  UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme
USAID  United States Agency for International Development
WWF  World Wide Fund for Nature
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COVER PHOTO:

Treskavec (2 444 m) and Vrtop (2 555 m) mountain peaks in the northern part of Šar Planina, view from Mt. Kobilica (2 528 m). Photo by Ljupčo Melovski.
FEASIBILITY STUDY
ON ESTABLISHING A TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREA
SHARR/ŠAR PLANINA – KORAB – DEŠAT/DESHAT

The programme of work on mountain biological diversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recommends establishing new transboundary protected areas with the objective to enhance conservation of biological diversity, implement the ecosystem approach, and improve international cooperation.

The feasibility study by UNEP-Vienna on the potential for establishing a transboundary protected area in the “Sharr/Šar Planina – Korab – Dešat/Deshat” region:
• Provides a brief overview on the local context for transboundary cooperation, natural values and protected areas of the region;
• Describes the state of the environment and potential threats, legal and administrative frameworks for the development and improving the connectivity and continuity of protected area networks in the region;
• Identifies priorities for biodiversity conservation and international cooperation in the proposed transboundary protected area.

The objective of this study is to:
• Provide for better understanding of the situation across the border in the region, and identify possible added values of transboundary cooperation;
• Analyse and evaluate the current status of transboundary initiatives, identify current short-comings and impediments for cooperation, and recommend actions aimed at facilitating transboundary cooperation;
• Assess the potential for success under the local conditions;
• Indicate what kind of external support is indispensable for the success of this initiative.

The label of a transboundary protected area of exceptional natural values and sustainable tourism development as well as of one of the largest protected areas in Europe could provide for the ‘unique selling point’ for the local and regional tourist packages, increase the tourist attractiveness of the region, facilitate the broad recognition of the region and marketing of the regional tourist product abroad, and help to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative stereotypes resulting from the past armed ethnic conflicts.