

## **Evropska konferenca o smernicah za upravljske načrte za velike zveri na populacijski ravni**

Otvoritveni nagovor ministra za okolje in prostor  
gospoda Janeza PODOBNIKA  
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Dear Mrs. Grønfeldt Bergman from the Nordic Council, Mr. Patrick Murphy from the European Commission and Mr. Eladio Fernandez Galiano from the Council of Europe, dear participants of the Conference,  
Dober dan in dobrodošli v Sloveniji,  
Welcome to Slovenia!

It is my utmost pleasure to be here and I am delighted to address all eminent guests and participants of this conference in one of the nicest places in Slovenia, Postojna with its world famous cave.

At the beginning I would like to emphasize the importance of this conference, dealing with one of the major challenges to the implementation of European legislation in the field of nature conservation - the management of large carnivores. After the enlargement of the European Union there has been an increase in the number of Member States with large populations of carnivores. This requires new approaches regarding the conservation of such animals. As Slovenia has a long tradition of sustainable management in this field, I'm very honored that we were asked to host this event and will have the possibility to share our experience with other countries.

Large carnivores are on the top of the food chain and, as such, are an indicator of a well preserved environment. They need large and healthy habitats, thus habitat conservation is one of the pillars for maintaining their favourable conservation status. For this reason, Slovenia included over 2000 square kilometers of sites dedicated to the protection of large carnivores' habitats into the Natura 2000 network. This is equal to about 12% of the national territory, and is an essential part of the total Natura 2000 coverage in Slovenia.

The second extremely important issue is the interaction between humans and large carnivores. In areas where there is no presence of large carnivores, people's attitudes tend to be very positive, in some cases even romantically naive. However, it is quite the opposite in areas where people are used to living with populations of large carnivores, especially brown bear. They have to adjust their behaviour and respect the presence of those nice, but often unpredictable, animals.

It is a question of achieving a balance between ecological capacity and social acceptance of the presence of large carnivores. This is the key issue for a successful and sustainable management policy.

We are addressing this challenge through the brown bear strategy, backed by an experienced network consisting of the Slovenian Forest Service and the Hunters Association of Slovenia, and in co-operation with all stakeholders, from local communities to sheep breeders and NGO's.

The importance of acceptance issues was strongly reaffirmed recently by very successful co-operation with France. In 2006, five bears were translocated to the French Pyrenees in order to support the efforts of the French Government for repopulation of brown bear in the Pyrenees.

When the Habitats Directive was adopted in 1992, large carnivores were extremely rare within Community territory. Strict protection of each individual animal was one of the key elements of conservation management. However, through enlargement this picture changed dramatically. At present, the management of large carnivores demands various approaches in reaching the objectives of the Habitat Directive. I would like to emphasize that the response of the European Commission to the new situation was very wise. They decided to explore the scientific background of how to achieve the goals of the Directive under the new circumstances. This was the beginning of a large scientific and broad consultative process on how to best maintain the favorable conservation status of large carnivores within the existing provisions of the Directive. It was soon clear that most of the large carnivore populations are shared between countries with different management approaches. Thus guidance is needed in order to focus existing national measures on a common objective.

I'm thankful to all who were involved in this comprehensive process, especially to the European Commission, Large Carnivores Initiative, and sincerely believe that this document will contribute to the wisdom of cohabitation between large carnivores and people.

I'm confident that the outcome of this conference will contribute to the sustainable management of large carnivores in the EU. And I wish you a pleasant stay and much success during these two days!