

Alpine Space Forum – Coping with Demographic Change – Shaping policies

Summary of the speech by Marco Onida, Secretary General of the Alpine Convention, at the Round Table of 23 February 2011.

Question by facilitator: as representative of the Alpine Convention, what can you tell us about the relationships between the Alpine area and the surrounding areas, including the big cities?

1. These two days of interesting discussion have clearly shown the centrality of the Alpine bow when we discuss demographic trends and changes. In mountainous areas, we witness more difficult challenges than in other areas due to ageing, loss of supply of public services and decrease of public policies. This is also the case for other priority topics of the Alpine Space Programme, such as climate change, and shows how much the Alps (i.e. the mountainous territory of the Alpine regions) constitute the backbone of the area. It is not a coincidence that the Alpine Convention is regularly solicited by project partners to act as observer in several Alpine Space projects (the full list of those is available at http://www.alpconv.org/soia/soia04_a_en.htm).
2. However, despite the Alps (intended as the Alpine bow) represent, in terms of challenges and assets, the central part of the Alpine region, it is also clear that mountainous areas are scarcely – if at all – integrated, with the surrounding areas. The Alps are in between some of the most dynamic regions of Europe, but they are not integrated in them. Despite their cultural richness, the Alpine bow clearly deserves greater attention in terms of development of adequate public policies, the reason why the Alpine Convention has been signed in 1991. It is necessary to overcome the dichotomy between “urban areas” and “other areas”: the Alpine bow contains also several middle-small cities, which are dynamic centres of economic development but suffers from the competition of neighboring large cities. We should develop a more “polycentric” approach, as states yesterday by Mr Gloersen.
3. The Alpine Convention must concentrate by definition on the problems of its territory, which represents the “periphery” of Alpine Space in terms of political attention. In addition to concentrating on the Alpine-specific problems, it is necessary that the Alpine Convention develops the relationships between the Alpine bow and the neighboring large cities. The Alpine Space Programme is a good platform for this.
4. It is also important to address the issue of Governance. Several protocols of the Alpine Convention request the direct involvement of the Alpine population in the taking of decisions affecting their territory, but in reality this is seldom the case. Policies for the Alpine territories are being developed outside the Alps. This has a negative impact on the level of consideration of alpine-specific issues in public policies. A combined approach whereby alpine specific issues are seriously considered, by addressing at the same time the effects of the relationships between mountainous regions and cities, would be necessary and beneficial.