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José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Banská Bystrica, Gland, February 2, 2005

Dear Mr. Barroso,

On November 19, 2004, the strongest storm in Slovakia in 70 years hit the Tatra National Park. It literally cleared a forest area of 12,000 hectares and severely damaged another several thousand hectares. The flattened spruce forests correspond to at least 90% of the annual felling of coniferous wood in the country.

A joint national effort and international support is required to deal with the storm and its impact. The Slovak authorities, municipalities as well as many non-governmental organisations are working to respond to the impact of the storm. We would welcome support by the EU for Slovakia through the Solidarity Fund and other mechanisms to deal with the storm's impact and to implement a nature conservation-oriented restoration initiative for the Tatra region, based on the principles we outline below.

Currently there are developments in Slovakia which give the undersigned NGOs cause to worry such as:

- salvage logging has been started in the B and C zone of the Tatra NP without leaving barely any of the ecologically valuable deadwood on the ground;
- there is a risk that the legal status of the Park is being weakened to allow non-ecological development of mass tourism;
- public participation in the development of the restoration strategy is currently not sufficient.

As a response leading Slovak environmental NGO's together with scientists and celebrities have established the Non-Governmental committee "Our Tatras". Our Tatras is developing strategies and project proposals for a nature conservation-oriented restoration of the Tatra region. The NGO committee is aiming at cooperating with the Slovak authorities towards implementing these strategies and projects.

Any restoration initiative must take into consideration the extraordinary natural values of this area, which are of European and even global importance. Some 70 % of the Tatra National Park has been proposed by the Slovak government for designation as a Natura 2000 site (64 % of the Park's area are proposed Sites of Community Importance according to the Habitats Directive, and 51.4 % are proposed as Specially Protected Areas according to the Birds Directive). Tatra National Park is home to many endangered and protected species, including wolf, lynx, brown bear, lesser spotted eagle (*Aquila pomarina*) and lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*), which are listed in the Habitats Directive and Birds Directive respectively.

In addition to their own intrinsic value, the extraordinary natural features of the Tatras mountains are an important basis for the long-term sustainable development of the region, including e.g. from tourism; and provide important ecosystems services, e.g. flood control and management of the hydrological regime as well as ecological stability, that is of importance for the great region as a whole.



Therefore, the undersigned NGO's believe that any restoration in the Tatra region must be based on the following principles:

- The integrity of Tatra National Park, which is a key part of the future Natura 2000 network in Slovakia and is recognised as an international biosphere reserve, must be maintained;
- For a protected area like Tatra National Park, the storm must not be seen as a disaster, but as a natural disturbance phenomenon which is part of the dynamics in a forest ecosystem;
- The new zonation for Tatra National Park, which has been developed with technical and financial support from the Danish Government and through broad stakeholder participation, should be supported;
- In the core zone (A zone) of Tatra National Park, all fallen and snapped off trees should be left as deadwood. Also in the B and C zones as well as in the Park's buffer zone, a significant share of deadwood should be maintained;
- The planted pure spruce forests, which have mainly been damaged by the storm, should be converted into more natural and stable forests by allowing natural regeneration to play a vital role;
- Bark beetle outbreaks, which will inevitably occur after the storm, have to be seen as a natural phenomenon which is part of the forest ecosystem. No interventions should be taken against bark beetles in the core zone of the National Park. In zone B and C and in the Park's buffer zone, low-impact intervention without any use of pesticides should be applied;
- Nature-friendly tourism with its socio-economic benefits is to be supported and inappropriate development of mass tourism are to be avoided;
- Any measures taken have to fully comply with the Slovakian Act on Nature Conservation and international commitments by the Slovakian Government;
- Before any restoration strategy is implemented, a strategic environmental assessment must be conducted. For development and restoration projects environmental impact assessments are to be implemented;
- Any restoration initiative must be consulted with all relevant stakeholders and submitted to public discussion and participation processes before implementation.

The undersigned NGO's call on the EU to provide support to Slovakia for managing the impact of the storm through the Solidarity Fund or other EU mechanisms only if the planned restoration and development measures respect the above principles.

For further consideration please see attached the WWF Position Paper "Storm in Tatras National Park" as well as the list of species/ biotopes found in Tatra NP which are listed in the Habitats Directive and Birds Directive respectively.

Sincerely,

Duncan Pollard
Head of WWF European Forest Programme

Juraj Vysoký
Forest Officer for Slovakia
WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme



This letter is further undersigned by the following Slovak NGO's:

1. Non-governmental Committee "Our Tatras", Lubica Trubiniova, Adrian Rajter, Tono Popovic - coordinators of the Committee, Starotursky chodník 1, 811 01 Bratislava, Slovakia
2. Environmental Partnership Foundation Slovakia, Peter Medved', Komenskeho 21, 974 01 Banska Bystrica, Slovakia
3. The Living Planet civic Association, Peter Sabo, Mierova 20, 921 01 Piestany, Slovakia
4. Greenpeace, Mgr. Martina Badidová, Mlynské Nivy 37, 821 09 Bratislava, Slovakia
5. BROZ - Regional Association for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development, Tomáš Kusik, Šancová 96, 831 04 Bratislava, Slovakia
6. WOLF Forest Protection Movement, Juraj Lukáč, 082 13 Tulčík 27, Slovakia
7. Nature Guard Club, Jan Dobšovič, Godrova 3/b, 811 06 Bratislava, Slovakia
8. Society for Sustainable Living in the Slovak Republic, Mikuláš Huba, Starotursky chodník 1, 811 01 Bratislava, Slovakia
9. TATRY Civil Association, Rudolf Pado, KEMI 627/5, 031 04 Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovakia
10. Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia, BirdLife Partner in Slovakia, Rastislav Rybanič, Mlynske nivy 41, 821 09 Bratislava, Slovakia
11. Raptor Protection of Slovakia, Jozef Chavko, Sekurisova 16, 841 02 Bratislava, Slovakia
12. City Committee of The Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protectors, Katarina Simoncicova, Godrova 3/b, 811 06 Bratislava, Slovakia

Copies to:

- Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy, European Commission
- Stavros Dimas, Commissioner for Environment, European Commission
- Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission
- Joaquín Almunia, Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, European Commission
- Pavol Hrušovský, President of the Slovakia Parliament
- Mikuláš Dzurinda, Prime Minister of Slovakia
- Pavol Rusko, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy of Slovakia
- László Miklós, Minister of Environment of Slovakia
- Zsolt Simon, Minister of Agriculture of Slovakia
- Ivan Mikloš, Minister of Finance of Slovakia
- Ivan Štefanec, Executive Secretary of Slovakian Government Committee for Tatra National Park

Enclosure:

- WWF Position Paper "Storm in Tatras National Park"
- list of species/ biotopes found in Tatra NP which are listed in the Habitats Directive and Birds Directive