



Declaration of Illmitz

on the preservation and promotion of the “Green Belt of Europe”

Preamble

For four decades after the Second World War, a solid boundary divided Europe into two different political areas – the Iron Curtain. Restricted access and remoteness have enabled a unique variety of animal and plant species to survive along the route of this boundary zone. Animals and plants use this strip of land, which is known today as the “Green Belt”, as a habitat and as a corridor for migration.

The "European Green Belt" is a major European axis, forming the backbone of a European network of biotopes that are closely connected to each other and to the larger areas of substantive nature conservation value that surround them. The “European Green Belt” is thus of outstanding importance for Europe's natural heritage. Parts of this natural heritage are protected under the designation of national parks, nature reserves or Ramsar sites.

With its unparalleled history, the “Green Belt” stands as a living symbol of the former division of Europe and as a peace-building, nation-unifying project.

However, numerous interferences with the natural environment, as well inconsiderate use and a lack of biotope management pose considerable threats to the “Green Belt” today, and these threats have to be averted.

2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain. As signatories of this declaration, the Federal Government of Austria and the Austrian Federal States (*Länder*) are taking this opportunity to agree efforts to preserve the "Green Belt" as a “ribbon of life” and to make them known to the general public.

On the occasion of the commemorations marking the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, the undersigned, in the face of the continuing loss of biodiversity in Europe/Austria resulting from the destruction and fragmentation of habitats, agree to do everything in their power to protect the “Green Belt” in Austria and to develop it further.

The undersigned

are committed to the preservation of the “Green Belt” as a unique natural area and as a memorial to an inhuman division of Europe.

acknowledge that they are responsible for the preservation of the “Green Belt” for future generations as a special natural area and a living monument of the former division of Europe.

support the creation and further development of the “Green Belt” as part of the pan-European green infrastructure through funding programmes and cross-sector collaboration.

recommend that the “Green Belt” be included in their spatial development plans as a priority area for green infrastructure, while improving the ecological quality and connectivity of existing protected areas.

support the “European Green Belt” initiative as a suitable umbrella for all activities promoting the restoration of the “European Green Belt” and its sustainable development, with the participation of public and private institutions.

share a common understanding of the importance of “European Green Belt” cross-border cooperation, and reaffirm their intention to work more closely together.

take into account the special protection requirements of the “Green Belt” in the event of further expansions of technical infrastructure and transport routes, and mitigate unavoidable interferences by taking appropriate measures.

strive to make better use of synergies between the themes nature, culture and history along the “Green Belt” in the form of cultural landscapes that serve as a reminder of European history.

undertake extensive public relations work, focusing on the special historical and cultural significance of the “Green Belt” and its importance for nature conservation, and bringing it closer to the population at large.

call upon the European Commission and the European Parliament to create concrete measures for an ecological network within the framework of the EU’s Strategy on Green Infrastructure, with the help of appropriate funding options.

The Federal Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism, represented by Federal Minister Maria Patek, and the Regional Governments of the Austrian Federal States Upper Austria, Lower Austria, Burgenland, Styria and Carinthia, represented by the relevant Members of the Regional Governments responsible for nature conservation.

Signed on the occasion of the Green Belt celebration commemorating the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, on 19.8.2019 in Illmitz

