

## SWISS EUSALP PRESIDENCY 2023

*Switzerland held the presidency of EUSALP for the first time in 2023. This year provided an opportunity to exchange on three key themes for the future of the Alps: the circular economy, water and transport/mobility. The year was also marked by a strong presence in Brussels, the adoption of new action group work plans and the launch, with the Bad Ragaz declaration, of a process to revise the EUSALP action plan.*

### **A shared Presidency**

In keeping with its federalist tradition, Switzerland has shared the Presidency between the Confederation and its twenty-six cantons, all included in the EUSALP perimeter. In practice, the Presidency required the direct involvement and financial support of five cantons as hosts of the various thematic conferences and the Annual Forum and the Conference of Cantonal Governments as the overall coordinating body at the regional level, as well as three ministries – the Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE, the State Secretary for Economic Affairs SECO, and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA – at the national level. The various events of the Presidency have taken EUSALP players to Switzerland's all four linguistic regions.

The commitment of the Confederation and the cantons was underlined by the strong presence of their political representatives, senior civil servants, newcomers and EUSALP players throughout the year.

Switzerland is very interested in seeing political will strengthened again within the framework of the EUSALP. The organisation of the General Assembly in Bad Ragaz is a signal in this direction, as it was there that political representatives from the Alpine regions signalled

their desire to create EUSALP in 2012. Focusing on a few topics and clear structures and goals should help to tame the EUSALP's breadth. Less is more was the motto of the Presidency.

### **The Alps, at the heart of Europe**

The Swiss Presidency was keen to strengthen EUSALP's links with Europe and its regions.

Connections with the various bodies of the European Union are particularly crucial, which is why the closing event of the Swiss Presidency will be held in Brussels in November. A thematic conference on water was already held there in April involving the Friends of EUSALP, an informal group of the European Parliament.

The year 2023 also allowed exchanges with representatives of the three other macro-regional strategies, strengthening the mutual learning process.

### **Three key topics for the future of the Alps**

At a time of climate and energy crises, when the Alps are more than ever faced with the need for change, the Swiss Presidency felt it was important to focus its activities on three key themes where increased cooperation between the Alpine regions can make a difference. Switzer-

land organised three thematic conferences for this purpose.

The first conference in March, held in Fribourg, brought together players from all over the Alps to discuss the **circular economy**, a key issue for regional development. The participants signed a declaration expressing their willingness to deepen cooperation.

Three months later, politicians and experts gathered in Scuol, in the heart of the Alps, to exchange on the **water** issue. Long considered to be Europe's water tower, the Alps now have to cope with increasingly frequent periods of water shortage while natural disasters, particularly those linked to water, are increasing.

Finally, it was in Lugano, not far from the southern exit of the Gotthard tunnel, that almost 150 Alpine **transport and mobility** players met. Fruitful discussions focused on how to boost modal shift and thus help meet the energy and climate challenges facing the Alps.

### Strengthening the Strategy

EUSALP was set up less than ten years ago and has already seen a number of changes in how it operates, from creating a joint secretariat (TSS) to establishing a Youth Council, thanks to the perseverance of previous presidencies.

The year 2023 provided an opportunity to continue consolidating EUSALP. The Interreg Alpine Space "Support EUSALP" project, which helps finance the TSS, the work of the action groups and the presidencies, began on January 1.

While the TSS still needs to be better integrated within the EUSALP governance system, a particular emphasis was placed on the action groups.

The EUSALP states and regions have, in particular, reviewed their composition, and the Executive Board has discussed and accepted their new work plans. These included four cross-cutting priorities:

- » Promoting Digitalisation in the Alps.
- » Accelerating the Energy Transition for a Carbon-Neutral Alpine Region.
- » Promoting a Joint Water Management Transition.
- » Boosting Circular Economy.

These work plans and cross-cutting priorities will guide the activities of the action groups until the end of 2025.

Because of all the changes that have taken place since EUSALP was created, it is now time to review the document at the very basis of the strategy. This is why Switzerland has initiated, with the Bad Ragaz declaration, the revision of the EUSALP action plan. This process will continue under the Slovenian and Austro-Liechtenstein presidencies and should culminate in the adoption of a new action plan at the end of 2025.



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