

History of REReP

In the last decade, one of the biggest environmental challenges in Central and Eastern Europe was found in the Balkans, where military conflict and political instability wreaked havoc on mankind and nature alike. The Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe (REReP) was launched in 1999 following the Kosovo conflict as a participatory, flexible and transparent process to ensure that environmental protection was not overlooked in reconstruction efforts. It was launched as a regional initiative, not just in recognition that environmental problems needed regional solutions, but as an early attempt to establish contact and trust between the environmental actors from the various countries.

The ministers of environment from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Romania — observed by representatives of donor countries, international organisations, institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) — met in Skopje on March 15-16, 2000, to discuss and agree upon the REReP in the framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe¹ (Working Table II). Serbia and Montenegro (then the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) joined REReP in November 2000 after its political changes.

In a Joint Statement, the ministers endorsed REReP and agreed on a List of Immediate Project Priorities for the Implementation of REReP as part of the Stability Pact's "Quick Start" package of projects. The ministers also approved the Terms of Reference of the Task Force for Implementation of the REReP (REReP TF) and asked the REC to act as secretariat.

Since the first meeting of the REReP Task Force in July 2000, the Task Force has met seven times to review the progress of the programme, provide guidance and take decisions on REReP's implementation. The activities during the first years were characterised by pioneering work in collecting and processing information, clarifying needs, establishing networks, mobilising environmental stakeholders and developing strategies and action plans.

The REReP mechanism was revised to align with the rapidly developing Stabilisation and Association Process, which reflected the changing political landscape. REReP evolved into a mechanism to support countries in meeting their SAP obligation of regional cooperation. It was clearly stated that "REReP must develop into a vehicle to assist the countries of SEE in their long-term goal of integration into the structures of the European Union."

The objectives of the programme are:

- the creation of functioning environmental institutions and the development of a sound, effectively enforced environmental legal and policy framework that approximates with that of the EU;
- strengthened civil society, in which the public has access to environmental information and participates in environmental decision making, and environmental awareness is enhanced;
- achieving measurably reduced levels of environmental pollution, with the corresponding health benefits that follow;
- minimising environmental pressures arising from economic recovery; and
- achieving genuine environmental regional cooperation on cross-border issues that meets the obligations of the SAP.

Thus the REReP process in South Eastern Europe combined SAP objectives for fostering lasting peace, prosperity and stability in the region, with the SAP objectives of harmonising the environmental policies, institutions and standards in SEE countries with those of the EU. A valuable complementary link to the EU accession process in candidate countries has been established through the participation of Bulgaria and Romania.

A ministerial meeting on progress achieved within the Stabilisation and Association Process took place on October 15, 2003 in Skopje. Ministers of environment met to discuss the progress achieved, identify common problems in the implementation of the SAP, and to propose priorities of high interest for the region for future

assistance within the SAP, which remains the driving force for environmental improvement in the region. They adopted a Joint Statement that identified areas for regional, cross-border cooperation and assistance.

The Meeting of Senior Officials on Cross Border Cooperation from Stabilisation and Association Process Countries took place in Belgrade on May 20-21, 2004 to implement the Joint Statement and the decisions of the sixth REReP TF meeting of 2003 to enhance cross-border cooperation. It was also in line with recommendations made by the External Review report on REReP, issued in January 2004. Senior officials discussed the current status and needs in cross-border cooperation in South Eastern Europe. They also presented the existing and planned cross-border initiatives and projects, reported on their progress, identified obstacles and listed fields where assistance is needed.

The senior officials asked the REReP Secretariat to organise and facilitate a follow-up meeting to present and agree upon specific cross-border project ideas. The meeting was held in Belgrade on September 28-29, 2004, a day before the seventh meeting of the REReP Task Force. Senior officials from Bulgaria and Romania were also invited to take part. The conclusions and outcomes of both meetings, including the selection of project ideas, were presented at the seventh REReP Task Force meeting.

Interest in the REReP process by the international community has remained strong in recent years. At the latest meeting of the REReP Task Force some of the new member states were present for the first time after the historic enlargement of the European Union. Making the transition from recipients of aid to donors, they are keen to share their particularly relevant expertise with their neighbours.

Stabilisation and Association Agreements

Key building blocks of the SAP for the Western Balkans, the stabilisation and association agreements define the framework of regional cooperation, the corresponding principles applying to all the countries of the region, and makes explicit reference to Community assistance.

Article 1 of the SAA states that one of the aims of this association is “to foster regional co-operation in all the fields covered by this Agreement.”

Article 4 stipulates that the signatory country of the Western Balkans “commits itself to enter into co-operation and good neighbourly relations with the other countries of the region . . . This commitment constitutes a key factor in the development of the relations and co-operation between the Parties and thus contributes to regional stability.”

Article 11 specifies that “the Community will also support projects having a regional or cross border dimension through its technical assistance programmes.”

Article 103 stipulates that the parties “shall develop and strengthen their cooperation in the vital task of combating environmental degradation, with the view to supporting environmental sustainability.”

Key Dates in the Process

March 2000	Ministers of environment from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Romania endorse REReP in the frame of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.
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November 2000	The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia joins REReP (honoured by Serbia and Montenegro including Kosovo, which is under UN interim administration).
July 2000	The first TF meeting is held in Cavtat, Croatia. The Task Force decides to include Kosovo (territory under UN interim administration under UN Security Council Resolution 1244) and Montenegro in the programme in line with other Stability Pact activities.
November 2000	The second TF meeting is held in Brussels. The Task Force decides to include the European Investment Bank and similar financial institutions in future TF meetings. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is incorporated as a full member.
September 2001	The third TF meeting is held in Sarajevo. The REReP Mechanism is reviewed and adjusted to ensure a link between environmental reconstruction and the Stabilisation and Association Process in South Eastern Europe.
April 2002	The fourth TF meeting is held in Brussels. A decision is taken for REReP to be presented at the forthcoming Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Kiev.
January 2003	The fifth TF meeting is held in Tirana, Albania. A discussion paper on the future directions of REReP and its links to the SAP is presented.
May 2003	REReP is presented at the Kiev ministerial conference.
November 2003	The sixth TF meeting is held in Brussels. A decision is taken that REReP needs to increase focus on regional cooperation, as well as on broader political issues and development.
January 2004	An independent external review of REReP is issued.
September 2004	The seventh TF meeting is held in Belgrade. The independent external REReP review is discussed, with recommendations for future work.
January 2005	The European Commission issues its <i>Future Paper on REReP</i> based on review recommendations, comments and discussions. The paper is due for discussion at the next REReP TF meeting in September 2005 in Brussels.

Recent Developments

REReP independent external review

An independent external review of REReP was carried out for the European Commission four years after REReP's establishment in 2000.² The review evaluates the results of international support, including REReP's management, content and impact, and recommends new directions for the future in order to enable the programme to continue to play a useful role.

The review report states that REReP's most significant impact to date has been the process of reconciliation and cooperation, in some cases for the first time, that has been launched among the environmental officials from countries that had recently been in conflict. The programme has also helped to rebuild the environmental management structures of the region, re-establish former lines of communication, and initiate formal and informal regional coordination mechanisms among the environmental NGOs in the region.

In evaluating the REC's role as REReP Secretariat, the review concluded that it is "considered appropriate and necessary, and the strong coordination that [the REC] has provided is appreciated throughout the region." The report adds that "the strong local base provided by the REC Country Offices has been especially valuable."

The report pointed out that "today it is possible to consider the medium and long term tasks ahead, including drawing closer to the European Union. One of the principal conditions of the Stabilisation and Association Process is to promote regional co-operation and dialogue, which the REReP is primed to do. It is therefore recommended that the EU continue to play a leading role in this important regional initiative."

The review provides four major recommendations for REReP's future activities:

- A shift should be made to regionalised capacity building linked to SAAs.
- REReP should be a platform for coordinating support for issues where a long-term regional approach is needed.
- REReP activities concerning priority environmental investments should be redirected towards building more realistic self-help approaches for securing needed funds.
- Small grants funding should be continued for environmental civil society.

The review gives specific recommendations to the European Commission for programming future support to the programme in the four priority areas.

REReP future paper

The REReP external review was presented and discussed at the seventh REReP TF meeting in Belgrade on September 30 – October 1, 2004. Based on the review recommendations and discussions, the European Commission prepared a paper entitled, "Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme: The Way Forward," on the direction of future work within the REReP. It was circulated by the REReP Secretariat for comments by all participants to be discussed at the next meeting of the REReP Task Force.

Task Force and Secretariat

The REReP Task Force consists of representatives from the environmental ministries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, the State Union Serbia and Montenegro and Kosovo (*territory currently under interim UN administration*), and observed by representatives of donor countries, international organisations, institutions and NGOs.³ The task force, which was established upon endorsement of the programme, has made essential contributions to the success of REReP by providing regular country reports on the progress achieved, discussing existing problems and offering continuous guidance for the continuation of activities.

As decided at the ministerial meeting in Skopje in 2000, which established the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe, the REC was appointed to serve as the secretariat⁴ of the programme's task force. Responsibilities of the secretariat include facilitating donor communication between all REReP stakeholders — especially through the preparation and organisation of task force meetings — and

disseminating information on REReP's implementation. This dissemination takes place directly via electronic means by the secretariat and through the Balkan Information Service. Using these tools, the secretariat assists in coordinating donor support and in assessing REReP priorities.

A total amount of EUR 922,000 has been provided for the functioning of the REReP Secretariat since its inception (EUR 646,000 from the EU, EUR 136,000 from the Netherlands, EUR 90,000 from Italy and EUR 50,000 from Germany).

The task force is REReP's decision-making body. The secretariat implements these decisions and, between task force meetings, assists countries in the preparation of new projects and fundraising. It also acts as an implementing agency for specific projects. While monitoring the progress of REReP implementation, the secretariat is in continuous contact with task force members, donors and implementing agencies. The REReP Task Force operates in a spirit of partnership, involving coherent and complementary efforts from each stakeholder while making the best use of resources.

Since the beginning of REReP's implementation, the secretariat has organised seven regional task force meetings and has implemented the meetings' decisions. The secretariat also monitors project implementation and presents monitoring results at each task force meeting.

The shift in responsibility for reporting the progress achieved from implementing agencies to the countries represented at the task force meetings has resulted in a broader acknowledgement of REReP's results, and has added to the responsibilities of those countries towards the national and international environmental community. For this reason, and because of the identification of programme goals, SEE countries have effectively become the owners of REReP priority programmes.

The secretariat provides information about bilateral and multilateral assistance in the region in order to avoid duplicating its efforts, as well as to ensure synergy results from the projects by maintaining the electronic REReP project database and its Internet website.⁵

REReP Stakeholders and Partners

- The countries of the region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro, including Kosovo (territory under interim UN administration)
- European Union member states and the European Commission
- Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe
- European Environment Agency and European Agency for Reconstruction
- Other donor countries: Norway, Switzerland, United States, Japan

- International organisations: United Nations Environment Programme, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, World Conservation Union, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
- Nongovernmental organisations
- International financial institutions: World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Investment Bank, Council of Europe Development Bank

¹ Launched in 1999, the Stability Pact became the first comprehensive conflict-prevention strategy of the international community, aiming to strengthen the countries of South Eastern Europe in their efforts to foster peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity. The Stability Pact has been entrusted to work in the areas of Democratisation and Human Rights (Working table I), Economic Reconstruction, Cooperation and Development (Working Table II), and Security Issues (Working Table III).

² The Carl Bro Global Environmental Consortium performed REReP's external review.

³ For a list of the current members of the REReP Task Force, visit:
www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REREP/RerepTaskForce.html.

⁴ The secretariat homepage can be found at www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REREP/Default.html.

⁵ Visit the REReP project database at: www.rec.org/REC/Databases/REReP/Default.html.