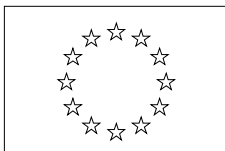




Task Force for Implementation of the  
Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme  
for South Eastern Europe  
(REReP Task Force)

Seventh meeting  
September 30 – October 1, 2004, Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro

**Report of the seventh REReP Task Force meeting**



These activities have been completed with the financial assistance of the European Commission CARDS Programme.

# Seventh REReP Task Force Meeting

## Meeting report

Co- chairs

Mrs. Soledad Blanco, Director of International Affairs, DG Environment, European Commission.

Ms. Etleva Canaj, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment, Albania

The Task Force for Implementation of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe (REReP) held its 7th meeting on 30 September – 1 October 2004 in Belgrade. Representatives of SEE and donor governments, international organisations, international financing institutions and NGOs were present. (See, the attached list of participants).

### **1. Opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> REReP Task Force meeting by the co-chairs. Adoption of the draft agenda**

Ms. Soledad Blanco, Director of International Affairs, DG Environment, European Commission, opened the meeting, thanked the host country and announced the agenda. She underlined the progress achieved within the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), the role of REReP and the new political situation in the region. Croatia is now a candidate country and the European Commission will issue an opinion on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's application for membership in 2005.

Ms. Etleva Canaj, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment, Albania welcomed the participants stressing the importance of the regional cooperation for the reconstruction, development and stabilisation and thanked the host country.

Mr. Miroslav Spasojevic, Assistant Director for International Cooperation and European Integration, Directorate for Environmental Protection, Ministry of Science and Environmental Protection, Republic of Serbia, Serbia and Montenegro, welcomed the participants and delivered a speech on behalf of Mr. Aleksandar Popovic, Minister of Science and Environmental Protection of Republic of Serbia. (See the speech in the outcome documents).

Mr. Boro Vučinić, Minister of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning, Republic of Montenegro, Serbia and Montenegro, welcomed the participants underlining the contribution of the REReP assistance to the fulfillment of the goal of integration of the countries to the European Union. (See the speech in the outcome documents).

### **2. Adoption of the Meeting report from the 6<sup>th</sup> REReP Task Force**

The participants adopted the report from the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the REReP Task Force, held on November 7, 2003 in Brussels, Belgium. (see the report in the outcome documents) without comments.

### **3. Major developments since the 6<sup>th</sup> REReP Task Force meeting**

Mr. Andrew Murphy, the European Commission presented the latest developments in the Stabilisation and Association Process and the Infrastructure Steering Group. He re-iterated the main outcomes of

the Thessaloniki Summit which gave the prospective of eventual EU membership for the countries of South East Europe and confirmed that the EU policy framework was the Stabilisation and Association Process. The summit called for the enrichment of the SAP with the elements from the recent EU enlargement.

In the last twelve months European Partnerships were issued for all of the countries identifying short term and medium term priorities. EU financial assistance will in future be targeted towards the priorities. Enhanced support for institution building will be provided through twinning and the Technical Assistance Information Exchange (TAIEX) Office is now operating in the region. Framework agreements are being prepared and ratified to enable participation of each SEE country in Community programmes and participation in the activities of the European Environment Agency is being underpinned through financial assistance.

In March, the Commission's Third Annual Report of SAP recognised the REReP as an important regional programme to continue with the Commission support. The Priority Environmental Investment Programme (PEIP) was emphasized as a valuable outcome and a base for further work to increase investment in environmental infrastructure. A feasibility report into the opening of negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) was prepared for Bosnia and Herzegovina. , Croatia became a candidate country after the June European Council and negotiations will begin in the first half of 2005. However the Commission opinion highlighted environment as potentially a problem sector for Croatia in which it could meet the environmental acquis only in the long term. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has applied for EU membership and the Commission will issue its opinion on the application for membership in the second half of 2005 on the basis of a questionnaire that has been given to the country.

The Danube-Black Sea (DABLAS) initiative which has a geographic scope wider than SEE recently reviewed progress with the investment projects that had been prioritised under the initiative. Half of the 30 priority projects moved forward with 6 now fully funded, a second phase will be opened for new projects. The Danube Investment Support facility is now underway and the Balkan Project Preparation Committee Officer will be funded by Italy.

The Infrastructure Steering Group will pay increasing attention to environmental issues and use the PEIP as input for planning future investments. Water projects will be offered to the DABLAS Task Force and DABLAS type mechanism could be considered by ISG for water projects outside of the current geographical scope. However it remains a country responsibility to progress these projects through the internal decision making mechanisms. Two other initiatives were highlighted: EU Water Initiative and SEE Regional Electricity market.

In the next financial period (the so-called financial perspective 2007-2013) CARDS and the existing pre-accession instruments will be replaced by a single pre-accession instrument. Follow-up to current LIFE programme (LIFE+) is under discussion and CARDS programming for 2005-2006 is being finalised. (See the presentation in the outcome documents)

Mr. Hutter Oswald reported on the Stability Pact (SP) Working Table II activities since the 6<sup>th</sup> REReP Task Force meeting. He commented that the REReP is an excellent example of how to use the office of the Stability Pact to identify an area that can foster and enhance regional cooperation in SEE. Stability Pact will ensure other WT II initiatives take account of environmental issues: Transport infrastructure projects, Regional energy initiative, Water and waste management. In February 2004 the mandate of Infrastructure Steering Group was extended to environmental issues in order to provide overall strategy to allow countries move towards integration to EU and reach EU standards in a progressive manner. ISG will use EU environmental legislation and standards as the strategic framework of their activities.

A Public Private Partnership Task Force was established with objective to facilitate improvements in environment in SEE using pilot projects for demonstration. These are commercial viable projects with subject of primary interest for the public sector, with clear defined structure and clear defined roles of all the partners involved. (See the presentation in the outcome documents)

#### **4. Reports of accomplishments and reforms in environmental policy and reconstruction, development and cooperation in the region**

The SEE countries presented their main accomplishments in drafting and implementing new environmental legislation, strengthening environmental institutions and addressing priority environmental problems.

Albania started preparations for drafting the National Plan on Legislation Approximation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a draft law on environmental protection and is drafting secondary legislation in both entities.

In Serbia and Montenegro the Serbian government adopted an Action plan of approximation to the EU regulations where deadlines for adoption of laws in accordance with EU environmental regulations are set up. The Republic of Montenegro has adopted new environmental laws and established Environmental Protection Agency. An environmental Strategy for Kosovo (territory under UN interim administration) was approved by the Provisional Institutions of Self Government (as set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1244) and the preparation of an Environmental Action Plan is ongoing.

The two candidate countries Bulgaria and Romania have made good progress towards EU membership. Negotiations with Bulgaria on Chapter 22 "Environment" were provisionally closed on 30 June 2003 and Romania is expecting to close the negotiations by the end of 2004.

The Stabilization Association Agreement has entered into force for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2004 and the country applied for the EU membership. Three new environmental laws were adopted in September 2004: on air quality, nature protection and water management.

Croatia introduced new economic instruments for environment and a waste management programme. As its status is changing to a candidate country in 2005 a National Programme for the Integration with EU is developed.

The involvement of the public and civil society in environmental policy and implementation was highlighted in the presentations as well as the environmental regional cooperation on cross border issues. Progress achieved in REReP priority areas and the new projects funded by the CARDS programme were also presented. (See the country presentations in the outcome documents).

#### **5. Report on IUCN and UNEP activities**

Mr. Tim Christophersen, Regional Programme Coordinator, IUCN, Regional Office for Europe presented the newly opened IUCN Programme Office for South East Europe in Belgrade and its activities. IUCN works on two topics in SEE: Biodiversity conservation and sustainable use and management of transboundary protected areas. Through the "Countdown 2010" IUCN will provide an essential platform to amplify and facilitate the work of its members and Commissions and other Secretariat offices and Programmes in a European context. The workshop "MAB and Biosphere Reserves and Transboundary Cooperation in SEE Region" in June, 2004, was convened jointly by

UNESCO, IUCN, and SDC, in Belgrade and Tara National Park, with the support of Serbian Institute for Nature Conservations.

A large part of the proposed “European Green Belt” will be in the countries of the Stability Pact, which requires regional and bilateral cross border cooperation, in order to connect this ecological network through the backbone of pan-Europe. IUCN which acts as the Secretariat for the initiative, has asked the Environmental Ministers of SEE countries to nominate a focal point from their country. (See the presentation and IUCN report in the outcome documents).

Mr. Herald Egerer, Programme Officer, UNEP Vienna, Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention addressed the audience on behalf of the UNEP-UNDP-OSCE Environment and Security Initiative (short EnvSec) launched in 2002 by the three organizations. It focuses on the link between environmental risks and pressures, or competitions over natural resources, and national security concerns. Besides the EnvSec activities in Central Asia and Caucasus, the South East European (SEE) region was chosen as a pilot region of the initiative, and as a natural choice is covering the countries of the REReP region. The EnvSec cooperation in SEE is firmly built on past and ongoing cooperation with the REC, and the association of the REC to the EnvSec Initiative is under discussion. (See the speech in the outcome documents).

## **6. Overall progress and achievements of REReP since the 6<sup>th</sup> Task Force meeting**

Ms. Marta Bonifert, Executive Director, REC, highlighted the major developments in REReP implementation since the 6<sup>th</sup> REReP Task Force meeting of November 7, 2004 in Brussels, Belgium, (See the Secretariat report and the presentation in the outcome documents).

Two important developments took place since the last meeting: an external review of REReP was carried out, the review report issued in March 2004, and a meeting of SEE Senior Officials on cross border cooperation was held in May to implement recommendations of the November’03 REReP TF to enhance the cross border cooperation in the region. A subsequent meeting on cross border project development took place on 28-29 September, 2004.

Most of the projects within the REReP priority area of institutional strengthening have been provided with a second phase of financing e.g. Priority Environmental Investment Programme, Strengthening the BERCEN Inspectorates, Assistance in Environmental Law Drafting.

In the area of environmental civil society building a sustainable development grant programme is being implemented, Arhus convention national strategies and action plans are developed, a pilot environmental advocacy and advisory centre in Bulgaria is functioning and a new information project will connect the existing REReP networks. In March 2003 a third phase of “Transboundary cooperation through the management of shared natural resources” started focused on the implementation of the five year strategic plan and two-year action plans for 2004-2005.

A REReP Statistics Pack was presented attached to this report as a preparation for a new REReP publication. It contains summarised information on donor contribution and status of REReP priority projects. It also contains a compiled List of projects information submitted to the REReP Secretariat by now. Donor assistance within REReP 2000-2004 based on the submitted project information amounts to 664,7 M EUR, out of which 44,3 M EUR for the project identified by the ministers in 2000. (See the REReP Statistics Pack in the outcome documents).

*The REReP stakeholders were asked to review all data and send corrections/new information to the REReP Secretariat by the end of October 2004 They will be also approached with a request for input for the new REReP publication*

Ms. Gretta Goldenman, Director, Milieu presented the recommendations of the REReP external review report. The review of the overall programme was carried out for the European Commission following demands from various quarters to determine the results from the assistance to date.. She described the process of the review, highlighted the REReP achievements, the links between the REReP and the role of the REC, identified the areas where REReP could have done things better or differently and the continuing challenges.

The second part of the presentation was focused on the recommendations for the future directions of REReP. Four general recommendations were given: more support for regional experience sharing linked to the Stabilisation and Association Agreements; REReP as a platform to coordinate support for issues where a long-term regional approach needed, redirect REReP activities concerning priority environmental investments towards building more realistic approaches for securing needed funds and continuing support for environmental civil society.

Concerning the four programme areas the review recommended that regional assistance (e.g. the CARDS regional programme) should shift support from national capacity building (which is now covered by national assistance programmes) to regional experience sharing in the area of “institutional building”. It recommends increased support to selected “environmental cooperation mechanisms and cross border projects”. More support for hot spot clean-ups and public sector infrastructure was recommended within the area of “reducing environmental health threats and loss of biodiversity”. (See the presentation in the outcome documents).

The presentation was followed by discussion focused on the REReP past and future. Key issues raised are summarised below:

- REReP has been successful in institutional strengthening, capacity building, networking, joint work of environmental stakeholders. It brought countries together to begin to solve common problems. The facilitation role of the REReP secretariat was much appreciated and there is no pressure to change this at the moment. Through the REC and its country offices, important networks have been established. Beneficiaries share the concern that a large percentage of the costs stayed with the REC Head Office. Capacity building on local level is also important but may be best addressed through national programmes. Concrete results of the capacity building have to be better demonstrated, examples of success stories given with the Drina cross-border project and cleaner production projects for Croatia.
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- Regional cooperation to address waste issues appears to be needed . Support to civil society also appears as a priority area for co-operation at regional level.
- There is scope for improvements in cross-border cooperation projects in the region particularly in regard to countries themselves developing the projects. Exchange of experience among the countries (e.g. BERCEN) and with other regions in Europe (e.g. the Baltic Sea region) should be supported further.
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- Capacities need to be further developed in the countries to process environmental investments through improved understanding of IFI requirements and better linkages between the various ministries, Importance of developed methodologies and multistakeholder dialogue. Country ownership has to be further promoted. Investments should follow national priorities and absorption capacity should be taken into account when identifying and designing projects. Preconditions for bankable projects are the good legal

system and strong institutions. The recent EU enlargement is the best example that the capacity building brings results.

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- National funding sources should be mobilised alongside grants and loans from the donor community. The countries have to work on the cost recovery issues, make the projects bankable and more attractive for the IFIs. Experience from DABLAS could be useful, and REREP could assist with capacity building. The proposal for a pool of funds for hotspots needs to be clarified further. IFIs are best placed to provide the funds, while the CARDS programme can provide funds for project preparation facilities which in turn trigger investments by IFIs.

*A decision was made that the European Commission will prepare a paper on the directions for future work within the REReP and will circulate it through REReP Secretariat for comments to all participants. The paper will reflect the discussion and recommendations made.*

Ms. Gordana Kozuharova, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia presented the conclusions of the Meeting of SEE Senior Officials on Cross-border cooperation-current status and needs, held in May 2004. The conclusions identify priorities for cross border cooperation, the steps to be taken and outline the lessons learnt. The results from the subsequent meeting on cross border project preparation which took place on 28 -29 September, 2004 were also reported. Specific project ideas were presented by the country representatives and criteria for their selection and categorisation were defined. Two tables with the project ideas were presented as part of the presentation. Further development of the proposed project ideas is needed. The SEE Senior officials proposed that future activities to be coordinated and facilitated by the REC. (See the presentation in the outcome documents).

The Senior Officials from Bosnia and Herzegovina who were not able to attend the cross border meeting expressed their willingness to send their project ideas in order to be included in the presented list.

## **7. Report on South Eastern European Environmental NGO Network (SEEENN) activities**

The presentation by Jelena Beronja, Young Researchers of Serbia (member of SEEENN) covered the activities of the network that have taken place since the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the REReP Task Force.. Ms. Berona outlined the problems of the network as finances, human capacity, lack of effective marketing, management and leadership. She also encouraged the governments of SEE and donors to involve NGOs in planning and implementing the regional activities.

## **8. Any other business. Date and place of the next meeting.**

The co-chairs Albania and the EC wrapped up the 7<sup>th</sup> REReP Task Force meeting by welcoming continuing progress in environmental reconstruction of the region and commitment of the countries to the regional cooperation.

The next REReP Task Force meeting will take place in Brussels on a date to be specified.

Note: The outcome documents from the meeting could be found on the REReP website <http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REREP/7th-DocumentsList.html>