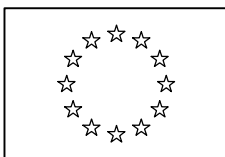




Task Force for Implementation of the
Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme
for South Eastern Europe
(REReP Task Force)

Sixth meeting
November 7, 2003, Brussels, Belgium

Report of the sixth REReP Task Force meeting



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

Sixth REReP Task Force Meeting

Meeting report

**November 7, 2003.
Brussels, Belgium**

Co- chairs Ms. Soledad Blanco (the European Commission)
 Mr. Roko Andricevic (Ministry of Environment, Croatia)

The Task Force for Implementation of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe (REReP) held its 6th meeting in November 7, 2003. Representatives of SEE and donor governments, international institutions, international financing institutions and NGOs were present. (See, the attached list of participants).

1. Opening of the 6th REReP Task Force meeting by the co-chairs. Adoption of the draft agenda

The Assistant Minister of Environment of Republic of Croatia, Mr. Roko Andricevic welcomed the participants stressing the importance of the regional cooperation for the reconstruction, development and stabilisation, and expressed his appreciation for the work done within the REReP process.

Ms. Soledad Blanco, Head of Unit, DG Environment, European Commission, underlined the importance of REReP in supporting the SAP through developing regional co-operation. The REReP Task Force offers an excellent opportunity for exchange of experience and review of the achieved progress. She reported that the European Commission (EC) through the CARDS programme has decided to support the operation of the Secretariat for three more years demonstrating the Commission's commitment to the REReP.

The Task Force adopted the Preliminary Agenda of its 6th meeting (see document REReP/TF/6/a) with two additions:

- under agenda item 3 will be presented the Joint Statement adopted by of the Ministers of Environment and Heads of Delegations of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro on the achieved progress within the SAP on October 15, 2003 in Skopje, FYR Macedonia.
- under agenda item 6 will be provided information on the REReP review initiated by the EC;

All documents and handouts relevant to the meeting could be found at the REReP web site: www.rec.org/Programs/REReP/default.html.

2. Adoption of Meeting report from the 5th REReP Task Force

The participants adopted the meeting's report from the 5th meeting of the REReP Task Force, held on January 30-31, 2003 in Tirana, Albania (see document REReP/TF/6/b). No comments were made.

3. Major developments since the 5th REReP Task Force meeting

Mr. Andrew Murphy, the European Commission presented the latest developments in the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). He highlighted the main outcomes of the EU Hellenic Presidency: the Informal meeting of Environmental Ministers in May 2003 and the EU Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki in June 2003.

In March, the Commission's Second Annual Report of SAP issued recognised substantial achievements in terms of stabilisation of the region but also reveals shortcomings and slow progress in the reform process in many sectors including environment. Negotiations with Albania for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement were opened in January 2003. A feasibility study for opening such negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina is under way. A feasibility study for Serbia and Montenegro will be considered in 2004. Earlier in the year Croatia had applied for EU membership and the Commission is preparing its opinion on the application that is expected in the first half of 2004.

The meeting of the ministers of environment in Athens in May 2003 gave its support to twinning programmes as a means to build administrative capacity (following the example from enlargement). The higher priority needs to be given to environmental investments which should be in line with the Acquis Communautaire.

The Thessaloniki Summit decided to launch European Partnerships (similar to the Accession Partnerships with the candidate countries). Priorities will be identified and the SEE countries will produce national action plans to meet them. Eventually these partnerships will be linked to future assistance. Other specific actions include inviting SEE countries to participate in Community programmes and agencies. In this respect the cooperation with the EEA will be further developed although membership not yet on the political agenda. CARDS will support this process.

Ms. Mary O'Mahony reported on the Stability Pact (SP) Working Table II activities since the 5th REReP Task Force meeting. She assured the participants that environment is on the SP agenda. The REReP is recognised as a successful model, catalyst, facilitator and mediator of the regional cooperation in SEE. REReP is viewed as being complementary to the SAP. The continuous support of the secretariat by the EC was welcomed and the regional ownership of the process was underlined. Key developments within the Sava River Initiative and SECI were presented. The importance of giving priority to environmental investments was underlined. It was observed that Working Table III issues cross with the issues of Working Tables I and II which was visible during cooperation and information exchange between Stability Pact and the Infrastructure Steering Group. There will be new environment related initiatives of the EU Presidency by Ireland, the focus on the SEE will remain.

Ms. Marta Bonifert, Executive Director, REC welcomed the participants and highlighted the text relevant to REReP in the Kiev Ministerial Declaration. The two publications requested at the January'03 REReP Task Force - "Highlights of the REReP" and "REReP – Model for a Successful Assistance Mechanism", were presented in Kiev together with the report on "Environmental Enforcement and Compliance in SEE", "Training Manual for Environmental Inspectorates in SEE" and "Following Through a Progress in the Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in SEE". The need for a regular review process highlighting the successes and problems as well as more emphasis on the cross border cooperation and local authorities support within REReP were underlined. A note on the cross border cooperation status in the SEE, document REReP/TF/6/(i), as distributed for comments.

The Joint Statement by the Ministers of Environment and Heads of Delegations of the SAP countries adopted on October 15, 2003 in Skopje, FYR Macedonia was presented to the participants by the Minister of the Environment of FYR Macedonia, Mr. Lubomir Janev.

The European Commission expressed the view that the ministerial statement is coherent with the EU plans within the SAP process. It demonstrates the regional ownership of the process and the good relations among the SEE countries.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) representative drew the attention of the participants to the EIB Medium-Term Strategy for the Western Balkans. The Bank plans to provide over the next three years EUR 1,2 billion of new financing in support of almost EUR 2,5 billion of new project investment. This represents an increase in lending activity of a 1/3rd over that for the previous three years (2000-2002). EIB provides financing for up to 50% of the project costs. Among the recent achievements was listed the Adriatic Sea Environmental Master Plan for the Croatia's coastal region to be implemented with Italian support.

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

The SEE countries presented major accomplishments in drafting and implementing new environmental legislation, strengthening of the environmental institutions and in addressing priority environmental problems. They also presented progress achieved in REReP projects for which they provide leadership. The implemented projects covered areas such as institutional strengthening and capacity building, environmental policy and legal reform, development of national strategies and action plans, civil society building and access to information and public participation. The need for environmental investments was emphasised. The Priority Environmental Investment Programme has prioritised the necessary environmental investments in a number of areas.

5. Report on South Eastern European Environmental NGO Network (SEEENN) activities

The presentation by Ms. Daniela Stojanova of SEEENN and Jelena Beronja, Young Researchers of Serbia (member of SEEENN) covered the activities of the network that have taken place since the 5th meeting of the REReP Task Force. The SEEENN encouraged the European Commission to continue support of the REReP and welcomed the international donors that involve NGOs in planning and implementing of support programs for the civil society in SEE countries. The NGOs can play an important role in planning and implementing activities in recognised priority areas for international, regional and cross border cooperation, as well in providing information to the public on SAP.

6. Overall progress and achievements of REReP since the 5th Task Force meeting

Ms. Marta Bonifert, Executive Director, REC, presented a summary of major developments and statistical financial overview of the programme since the 5th meeting of the REReP Task Force, see document REReP/TF/6/(h) for details.

The discussion which followed touched upon the following issues:

According to Croatia all REReP projects have trans-boundary character. Very good work has been accomplished for institutional strengthening and capacity building. There are big financial difficulties with the establishment and maintenance of environmental monitoring system.

The EEA underlined the need for reliable environmental data for assessing the state of environment. It is important to work to collect all national reports provided within different networks and conventions at one place. EEA is working on a set of indicators to harmonise the national reporting and data gathering. EEA provides guidelines to the countries within EIONET on the development of environmental information systems and environmental monitoring but it does not provide direct financial support.

The Netherlands indicated that limited additional support is available through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for cross border projects promoting peace and stability in SEE.

Albania also indicated financial difficulties in collecting environmental data, limited data is available only for the urban areas. The usefulness of many feasibility studies without follow up was questioned

Italy reminded that one of the 5th REReP Task Force conclusions was that support is needed for both institutional strengthening/capacity building and investment projects. In this respect the feasibility studies are important.

Italy was supported by Croatia that stated that environmental investments in the SEE are much needed. Better use of the national expertise in the feasibility studies was recommended.

The EC reminded that in view of the limited grant assistance available in the region the majority of investments would need to be financed through loans.

Environmental funds are beginning to be established and they could assist in addressing environmental challenges.

Kosovo (territory under UN interim administration) added that assistance with the feasibility studies, monitoring system development and business involvement (e.g. cleaner production, environmentally friendly technologies) are needed. Donor community was asked to encourage the environmental investments in the reconstruction of the region. Placing environment high on the political agenda is crucial for securing financial resources and political will to implement projects.

Under this agenda item the European Commission informed participant of a review of the REReP mechanism that had been commissioned with a view to establishing a more detailed measure of the impact of the programme.

7. Enhancing the REReP - follow up of the strategic discussion at the 5th Task Force meeting

Mr. Andrew Murphy of the European Commission presented the EC view on the approach outlined in the REReP document “Enhancing the REReP” prepared by the Secretariat for the 5th REReP Task Force. Following the meeting in Tirana when participants were requested to provide written comments a contribution was received from Germany (distributed at the meeting). The Commission supported the position of Germany, see document REReP/TF/6(j).

The Commission view is that REReP needs to focus on its strong point – regional co-operation and the broader political issues and developments. SEE countries should seize the opportunity to fulfil the regional cooperation obligations imposed by the SAP. A clear statement of results is needed to cement further support. The results of the independent REReP review will be made available to the REReP Task Force. There is a need to further develop regional projects under local ownership that could be financed from the limited grant assistance that is available. The new EU member states have a key role to play and should be brought into REReP. The Stabilisation and Association Process Annual Reports should be used to guide future actions when appropriate. The document prepared by the secretariat identifies areas that are generally coherent with the SAP but some indication of prioritisation should be given. It is the view of the EC that it is already difficult to keep track of and co-ordinate the proliferation of water related initiatives and that REReP would not provide added value in this respect. They should be dealt with through existing mechanisms ((DABLAS, ICPDR etc.).

Italy and FYR of Macedonia felt that DABLAS does not cover all river basins in SEE. Different initiatives (for example, Adriatic-Ionian Initiative) have different geographical focus than REReP, do not cover all countries. FYR Macedonia stressed that water project priorities are very different country by country. To enhance the number of investment projects one has to use the Priority Environmental Investment Programme for the agreed funding mechanisms.

Bosnia and Herzegovina stressed that the REReP mechanism is based on assistance projects. Without projects the REReP is losing its major strength.

SEEENN repeated that the support to the environmental civil society should continue to achieve lasting results in the field.

Romania indicated that within the projects about to finish the countries have agreed on priorities for follow up activities, for example under REReP projects 1.8 and 1.9 on environmental information systems development and capacity building for the EU accession. Therefore, there is clear need for continuation of the work.

The EC emphasised the importance of the SAP and its continuous support to the REReP. Support has been given to the Secretariat and other projects to show commitment to the REReP.

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

The co-chairs Croatia and the EC wrapped up the 6th REReP Task Force meeting by welcoming continuing progress in environmental reconstruction of the region and commitment of the countries to the regional cooperation.

The EC stressed that the legal drafting is very important but more human and financial resources are needed on national level for implementation of the newly adopted laws. There is still low political priority given to environment within national governments. The regional transboundary dimension is very important, there is a need of intensified regional cooperation on biodiversity issues. The existing assistance programmes should be better used.

Croatia commented that putting and keeping environment on the agenda and securing resources for the field work are needed. SEE countries and donors need also to take into consideration lessons learnt from other programmes, while supporting and working on future REReP projects.

The countries were encouraged to consult among themselves on possible candidates for co-chair of the REReP Task Force and to keep the Secretariat informed.

The next REReP Task Force meeting will take place in autumn 2004 in Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro on a date to be confirmed.