



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

Eighth meeting
September 23, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

Report of the eighth REReP Task Force meeting



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

Eighth REReP Task Force Meeting

Meeting report

Co- chairs

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

Ms. Narin Panariti, Director, Department for Environmental Policy Integration and Legislation, Ministry of Environment, Albania

The Task Force for Implementation of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe (REReP) held its 8th meeting on 23 September, 2005 in Brussels. 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 8th 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, and welcomed the participants. She underlined the fundamental role of REReP in SEE, objectives set in the beginning of the process are still valid, stressed its unique value in bringing together all the environmental stakeholders including countries, donors, NGOs, international organisations. Progress has been achieved within the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), with Croatia becoming a full candidate and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia moving even closer to the EU.

Ms. Narin Panariti, Director, Department for Environmental Policy Integration and Legislation, Ministry of Environment, Albania welcomed the participants stressing the importance of the regional cooperation and the success of REReP which made the countries to talk to each other. She thanked the EC and the REC for supporting the REReP process.

2. Adoption of the Meeting report from the 7th REReP Task Force

The participants adopted the report from the 7th meeting of the REReP Task Force, held on September 30 – October 1, 2004 in Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro. (See the report in the outcome documents)

3. Major developments since the 7th REReP Task Force meeting

Mr. Andrew Murphy, the European Commission presented the recent developments in the Stabilisation and Association Process. He outlined the main elements of the SAP: Stabilisation Association Agreements (SAAs) are the contractual basis for relations between each individual country and EU; the European Partnerships identify short and media term priorities; the countries drafted National Programmes to meet these priorities. Until 2006 financial assistance to meet the priorities will be provided through CARDS.

Two SAAs are in force: with Croatia since 1 February 2005 and with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia since April 2004. An SAA with Albania is under preparation and negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro for SAA will start soon. Negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina on SAA are awaiting progress in priorities identified in 2003 feasibility report.

As a candidate country Croatia benefits from ISPA and Phare, remains eligible for the CARDS regional programme but not the national programme. Negotiations for EU accession are not yet underway and are awaiting Croatia's full cooperation with the ICTY. A study on the benefits of accession that had been carried out for the previous candidate countries was extended to Croatia. It finds that benefits will not only be for Croatian citizens but also for those of the neighbouring countries. The European Commission's Opinion on the application for membership of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be released on 9 November 2005. In April a Commission Communication recommending opening SAA negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro, was supported by the Council. The Commission Communication on Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244, supported inclusion of Kosovo (territory under UN interim administration) in regional environmental initiatives, specifically mentioning REReP and associated initiatives.

The Financial proposal for the CARDS 2005 Regional was approved by the CARDS Committee in September 2005 and the intention is to continue support for REReP Secretariat beyond the current contract. According to the new reorganisation in the European Commission, SEE countries are now dealt with by DG ENLARG which reinforces their perspective of EU membership.

Within the Danube-Black Sea (DABLAS) initiative half of the 30 priority projects moved forward with 9 now fully funded. 17 new projects are identified through the Danube Investment Support Facility, the Priority Environmental Investment Programme (PEIP), the Black Sea Project Broker, the PPC officer for the Balkans, the ISPA Strategy for Croatia and by the countries themselves.

The Infrastructure Steering Group held an environment meeting in May with focus on the PEIP. General agreement was reached over the SEE Regional Electricity Market that will open up electricity markets and phase-in EU environmental norms and standards in South East Europe.

The financial perspectives for the EU (2007 – 2013) are still to be decided by the Member States before post 2007 budgets can be fixed. CARDS and pre-accession instruments such as Phare, SAPARD and ISPA will be replaced by a single pre-accession instrument. (See the presentation in the outcome documents)

Mr. Oswald Hutter reported on the Stability Pact (SP) Working Table II activities since the 7th REReP Task Force meeting. He outlined the links between Stability Pact and REReP and 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. The Energy Treaty is forthcoming, responding to the needs for sustainable energies in SEE. It will create a single stable regulatory and market framework capable of attracting investments and improve the environmental situation, it also involves the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* on energy, environment, competition and renewables, including compliance with regulations concerning large combustion plants, environmental impact assessment and sulphur content. The last meeting of the Infrastructure Steering Group was held on 21 September. The EC CARDS funded Project Preparation Facility for environmental projects is warmly welcomed.

A Public Private Partnership Task Force was established with objective to facilitate improvements in environment in SEE using pilot projects for demonstration, now in close cooperation with SEE BID-Fund called Private Enterprise Partnership for SEE (PEP), a new technical assistance and advisory programme. It's an initiative of the International Finance Corporation, World Bank (IFC/WB) with support of SP in the foundation phase, established in cooperation with the governments of Austria,

Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the USA. (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 achievements in drafting and implementing new environmental legislation, strengthening environmental institutions and addressing priority environmental problems.

Albania has a new government, the Ministry of Environment was renamed into Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Management. New laws have been adopted on the Basel Convention for the transboundary transfer of hazardous substances, on Albania's adhering to the Koyoto and Cartagena Protocols, on the ratification of the convention on persistent organic pollutants, on the ratification of the agreement between Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for the protection of the lake Ohrid and its watershed and a draft law is being discussed by the Parliamentary commissions on the Environmental Impact Assessment in transboundary context. The National Environmental Strategy is being prepared under CARDS 2002 aiming to improve inter-sectoral coordination, provide an up-to-date analysis of the environment of Albania and proposals for future policy and to guide integration of Albania's environmental policies to meet EU obligations. Feasibility studies for rehabilitation of environmental hot spots in Durresi and Vlora were completed and some progress was made in waste water and hazardous waste treatment.

(See the presentation in the outcome documents)

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a draft law on environmental protection and is setting up an Agency for Environmental Protection. Funds on environmental protection will be set up by the end of the year in the two entities. The biggest problem is how to coordinate the different entities responsible for environment and various administrative levels within each entity. A Department for Management of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection was established at the ministry of Foreign Affairs and Economic Relations. Achievements in reducing environmental pollution includes activities in solid and hazardous waste and water management. (See the presentation in the outcome documents)

Croatia has progressed in harmonisation of the environmental legislation, environmental laws on waste, air, nature protection were adopted and the water act was amended. A new Environmental protection Act will be adopted in 2006. The National Programme for the Integration of the Republic of Croatia into the European Union (NPEIU) 2006 is under development. A State network for permanent air quality monitoring is being established with 8 stations installed. Environmental priority problems are currently being addressed through the Environmental Fund, operational as of January 2004, and international support. (See the presentation in the outcome documents)

Following the address by the Deputy Minister of Environment of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, (See the speech in the outcome documents) the country proceeded to present its developments. A Law on Environment entered into force on 1 September 2005 and sectoral laws on ambient air quality, waste management, nature protection, physical and urban planning, waters and ratification of the Cartagena protocol were adopted. Activities for reducing environmental pollution include mine rehabilitations, cleaning up of illegal landfills, environmentally sound disposal of medical waste, conservation cross border projects, etc. (See the presentation in the outcome documents)

The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the National Strategy of Republic of Serbia for Accession of Serbia and Montenegro to EU; an Action plan of approximation to the EU regulations is adopted by Serbian Government, every year, setting up deadlines for adoption of laws in accordance

with EU environmental regulations. The Law on Environmental protection has been adopted and the Environmental Protection Agency established. Achievements in reducing environmental pollution includes activities in waste management, development of Local Environmental Action Plans, nutrient reduction in the Danube-Black Sea area, several projects related to implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, etc.

In 2005 the Republic of Montenegro adopted an Action Plan for Implementation of European Partnership and a Communication Strategy of Montenegro in its process to approximate to the EU. In the period 2004 – 2005 a law on the development of Montenegro's land use plan was adopted. In 2005 – 2006 the laws on EIA and SEA, IPPC and secondary legislation on Waste Management, Environmental Noise, Ambient Air Quality, Protection from ionizing radiation and nuclear safety, Chemicals, Access to Information are foreseen for adoption. During the same period, an Environmental Fund and Environmental Protection Agency will be established. Activities of reducing environmental pollution includes sewerage system reconstruction and building of a wastewater treatment plant in Virpazar and Rijeka, Crnojevica project of remediation, and the recultivation of Mojkovac lead and zinc tailings impoundment and construction of one of 7 planned Regional Sanitary Landfills.

The Law on Environmental Protection (2003) in Kosovo (territory under UN interim administration) is currently under revision and laws on nature protection and waste administration were adopted by the Parliament in 2005. The Environmental Strategy for Kosovo was approved and the first draft of the Kosovo Environmental Action Plan will be finished by the end of September 2005. Reducing environmental pollution is mainly focused on waste disposal and hazardous waste management. Rehabilitation of mine dumps in Obliq, Mitrovica and Graqanice is ongoing, as well as cleaning up of some sites from hazardous waste and materials. (See the three presentations in the outcome documents)

Bulgaria and Romania have signed an Accession Treaty with EU with a view to become full members since 2007. (See the two presentations in the outcome documents)

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

Green Action, Croatia presented the activities of the South Eastern Environmental NGO Network (SEEENN). The network faces several challenges; due to the lack of financing, the Secretariat ceased to exist. SEENN would like to reinitiate the EU – NGO Dialogue which was completed in 2004, to have a budget line for cross border cooperation among environmental NGOs and grants for international environmental NGOs networks with more flexible criteria. (See the presentation in the outcome documents)

6. Overall progress and achievements of REReP since the 7th Task Force meeting

The REC highlighted the major developments in REReP implementation since the 7th REReP Task Force, based on the new publication on REReP, entitled "Environmental reconstruction and EU approximation in South Eastern Europe: REReP Highlights 2003 - 2005".

In the priority area of institution building, BERCEN was transformed into ECENA (Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Network for Accession) as Turkey became a member of the network, and Bulgaria and Romania became full members, instead of just observers. Work continued under the Environmental Law Drafting project, and a new project "Strengthening West Balkan Environmental Institutions" started with the support of the World Bank. Work in the area of civil society development

focused on a sustainable development grants programme, a Danube regional project, a new project on improving public participation practices, and a workshop on environmental information. In the area of cross border cooperation, activities continued in the Neretva Delta, West Stara Planina and Skadar Lake, as well as the cross border municipal environmental cooperation on the Drina river basin; a new project on cross border cooperation through environmental planning and assistance also began. As regards information exchange, a new information service about REReP has been launched (see REReP website for details) and environmental profiles of the SEE countries are being developed. (See the presentations in the outcome documents)

UNDP and UNEP presented the progress and the Environment and Security Initiative for South East Europe. There are three targeted fields of action: managing and reducing trans-boundary risks of hazardous activities, management of transboundary natural resources and cross-cutting issues (awareness, information, education etc.) They announced the forthcoming Advisory meeting of EnvSec to be held on 29th September in Bratislava, Slovakia. (See the three presentations in the outcome documents)

BlueLink Information Network, Bulgaria, presented the outcomes of the Belgrade meeting held in June on the environmental information management, exchange and public access. The meeting aimed to bring together environmental information experts previously involved in three REReP projects: National Environmental Information Systems (REReP 1.8), Regional Environmental Press Centre (REReP 2.1), Balkan Bytes: Electronic NGO Networks (REReP 2.3). The meeting concluded with a joint statement with updated priorities of the networks. (See the presentation in the outcome documents)

7. Presentation and discussion of the EC paper on the future activities within REReP

DG Environment presented the European Commission paper on the future activities within REReP. The main recommendations of the REReP External review and the REReP task force comments were recalled. The «REReP Way Forward » paper envisages continuation of the regional cooperation with the cross-border element reinforced, regional activities in areas best served by regional cooperation, continued collaboration with EEA and environmental infrastructure and hotspots projects. A two-year work plan including objectives, concrete activities and results should be drawn up.

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

- The REReP Future paper was welcomed and supported and REReP could be very instrumental in the implementation of the SAP. REReP plays a strong role in bringing together all environmental, financial and institutional aspects. REReP contributes to implementing the SAA provisions on regional cooperation and dialogue. REReP priority areas are valid, and its principles remain valid. It's difficult to anticipate whether REReP will make sense after 2007, but it's useful to continue working for the next couple of years. DG Enlargement is in charge of programming EU assistance, and for CARDS 2006 it is important to be clear on what the REReP Task Force wants to achieve in the coming two years.
- The definition of "regional" issues can be considered to mean either cross-border between two or more countries, or just in one country, having cross-border effects.
- Important areas of work in the past and which will continue to be so for the future are: approximation of legislation, cooperation with the EEA, regional and cross border cooperation, facilitation and exchange of information, coordination of donor support,

institutional capacity building and links to work investment initiatives such as PEIP and DABLAS.

- Having a two year work plan was supported, and a draft should be drafted and circulated to Task Force members for comments
- The status of Bulgaria and Romania will inevitably change in REReP after they become EU Member States. Their involvement in REReP (as that of other Member States) is good for the exchange of experience on approximating to the requirements of EU environmental acquis

Conclusions and recommendations:

Country presentations should focus on the main issues the countries were confronted with in their efforts to approximate legislation, implementation and enforcement to EU norms and standards. Achievements since the previous REReP Task Force meeting should be distributed in advance as a written document. The template for country presentations would need to be amended accordingly.

In the Task Force meeting itself, the time for presentations should be limited, in order to have more time for discussions.

There was a also request for including an information point on the preparations for the Belgrade Environment for Europe conference in the next REReP plenary meeting.

A draft two year work plan should be prepared by the REReP Secretariat with guidance from the EC and input from Task Force members.

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

The co-chairs Albania and the EC wrapped up the 8th REReP Task Force meeting by welcoming continuing progress in environmental reconstruction of the region and commitment of the countries to regional cooperation.

As the co-chairing a country of the region is on a rotating basis, Albania should be replaced by another country as co-chair in the next REReP meeting. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, who chaired the first REReP Task Force meetings has indicated its interest. A decision on which country from SEE will be co-chairing will be taken later.

Note: The outcome documents from the meeting could be found on the REReP website <http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REREP/8th-DocumentsList.html>