

**General Information on the Regional Meeting and the  
Second Steering Committee Meeting on National Action Plans\*  
under the REReP 1.8 Project “Development of National Environmental Information  
Systems in the SEE Countries”**

The goal of the meeting was to draft action plans for national environmental information systems for Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Romania and Yugoslavia (including Kosovo Territory Under UN Interim Administration). The meeting was held concurrently with the REReP 1.15 start-up meeting.

In his opening statement Assistant Minister Hrvoje Glavac, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning, Croatia, underlined the importance of regional cooperation in developing effective national environmental information systems.

The opening statement was followed with welcome remarks by the Regional Environmental Center and a message from Claus Toepfler, executive director of UNEP, to the meeting participants of the REReP 1.15 project start-up. The message presaged a presentation by Gerald Cunningham, UNEP, on the REReP 1.15 project on a regional environmental information portal as a gateway for environmental data in the SEE region. The portal components would be in local languages and the main portal would include addresses, documents, data sets, maps and information about regional environmental projects.

Next on the agenda were the needs assessments for national environmental information systems which were presented by ministry representatives and looked over by international experts. Reviews of the assessments stressed the most persistent problems in the development of national environmental information systems; many of these problems are regionwide.

- In Albania better cooperation was needed between ministries, which may be solved through better information flow with new practices or approaches and/or the appointment of officers with liaison responsibilities. Albania lacks an environmental inspection system with strong enforcement powers and gaps exist in the country’s legal framework. The country needs a strategy on dissemination of data (especially water data, should make better use of Internet for publications dissemination and it should improve the Internet infrastructure of the Ministry of Environment.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina lacks a legal framework; a monitoring system; and a system for collecting, organising and disseminating data. The country lacks financial and human resources, does not give due consideration to data users’ needs, has insufficient interest in Aarhus Convention ratification and there are needs for ministry personnel training and equipment.
- Bulgarian representatives stressed the importance of the national strategy for the environment, which mentions access to information and public participation in the development of an information system. They said there was no compatibility of data and poor cooperation between the Ministry of Environment and Waters and the Health Ministry. There needs to be better networking (with the REReP 2.3 project assistance) and better linking between NGO community initiatives (Bluelink network) and Ministry of Environment initiatives (“Dialogue with NGOs” via the ministry web site). There was a lack of data integration methodology.

- The Croatian report put a priority on bringing data gathering procedures into compliance with EU norms. The needs assessment mentioned the creation of databases with meta information and constant consideration of the needs of potential users.
- The FYR Macedonia report mentioned the need for improvement of data flow and the priority to create a legal framework for access to information.
- Romanian representatives reiterated in their needs report that NGO networks should not be omitted from the information.
- Yugoslavia's report stressed equipment needs and highlighted the Environmental Resource Centre project of REC Country Office (with media information, events, a government directory, an expert directory, a discussion forum, laws in local language and an information portal tailored for different types of users (lay people and experts)).
- The representatives from Kosovo (Territory Under UN Interim Administration) raised again the needs for cooperation in filling needs for finances, equipment and human resources along with efforts to build up the environmental enforcement system in the territory.

The reviews of the national needs assessments were followed by a mentioning of summaries of the REReP 1.6 and 2.3 projects and an open discussion (including the reaction of NGOs to the needs assessments).

The second day of the meeting started with the presentation of the Balkan Environmental Regulatory Compliance and Enforcement Network by Mihail Dimovski, REC Environmental Policy Programme (REReP project 1.7) and a presentation on the information system for state monitoring of the environment in Poland — its conceptualisation and development — by Andrzej Kraszewski, Warsaw Technical University.

The meeting participants proceeded with the drafting of national action plans in nine working groups; these plans are available in the form of tables for each country.

Croatia, the leading country of this project, discussed briefly the scope of its implementation in Croatia in 2002. A regional environmental information system was developed in Istria related to all aspects of the environment.

The meeting closed with the setting of a timetable for further work on the project and a discussion on co-operation between the 1.8 and regional environmental information portal project.

The scope of the Szentendre workshop (which will cover access to sensitive data, legal components, e-tools, access to information, access to information indicators) was discussed along with a tentative date (the end of March 2002) as the last item on the agenda.

The REC closed the meeting by thanking participants for their active participation, their contribution and cooperative mood.