

**Summarised minutes of the steering committee meeting
of REReP 1.8: Development of National
Environmental Information Systems Project
July 9, 2001**

Session I

After the opening remarks delivered by Ana Babic, PINTA, in the name of Minister H. Glavac and finalising the agenda, participants were introduced. It was decided that a short presentation by Monika Trsic concerning an information-related project of the Croatian Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning would be put on the agenda as the first item. Besides REReP 1.8, projects national environmental data collection, Aarhus Convention implementation, establishment of the Croatian EPA and national emission inventory system were presented.

The next item on the agenda was a discussion about the need for cooperation between steering committee members concerning different REReP projects. One suggestion for better cooperation was to involve the same experts on several steering committees. The projects whose synergies and similarities were especially obvious were 1.8 and 2.2 and 1.6. REReP project 2.2 concerns developing strategies for Aarhus Convention implementation, while project 1.6 will assist the SEE countries in membership and cooperation with European Environmental Agency, development of joint monitoring systems and harmonisation with EU standards. Ministry of Environment representatives suggested producing only one report for these projects. No decision was made.

The advisory role of the steering committee throughout the project was discussed. The steering committee will have an important role in finalising the project's methodology for assessing the national needs information access and determining the scope of related national action plans. The committee will also play a role in awarding funds for project implementation in the target countries, which will be based on needs assessment results and national action plans (in preparation of bids for funding awards).

Macedonian representative S. Gjorgjeva suggested that, in reference to REReP 1.8, project goals and objectives should be preceded by a short overview of the existing situation regarding environmental information systems in each represented country, with special regard to legislative and institutional frameworks. Afterwards participants discussed the goals, objectives and activities of the project as outlined in the project proposal. The main goals of the project is to implement an environmental information system in a chosen thematic area in the leading country and assist other SEE countries with their environmental information systems development (providing equipment, helping with needs assessments, developing action plans, providing capacity-building materials).

A discussion followed on how to prepare country needs assessments. The UNEP-GRID and UNMIK participants noted the need for a clearer focus on which information should be included in the assessments. They also called for better harmonisation of information flow between SEE countries. The Kosovo representative pointed out that the structure of the needs assessment report to be prepared by the REC should correspond with its future utilisation. The UNEP headquarters representative, G. Cunningham, highlighted the importance of considering both the demand and supply side of environmental information as well as a legal context when designing the methodology and terms of reference for the country needs assessments performance. He also cited the work done by UNEP's GRID-Arendal office in this area. It was concluded that the needs assessments would be prepared by the REC country offices in close

cooperation with ministry of environment officials (identified by REC country offices), with IT and environmental information system experts, and with possible input from NGO community.

After the coffee break Gordon McInnes of the European Environmental Agency gave a presentation on his agency's projects, underlying the role of the European topic reference centres in eight countries in information collection and dissemination within the agreed policy framework. Collected official data is verified by authorities for international reporting and release to the general public. Macedonian representative S. Gjorgjeva suggested that a similar scheme for reporting could be used for REReP 1.8, provided that there is more public participation in the gathering, verification and dissemination of data. Mr. O. Simonett pointed out the threat of centralisation of data gathering within countries. There are technical problems, a shortage of time and the prerogative to release data of different types rests with different authorities. The latter point was supported by UNMIK.

Session II

Participants discussed around the table the proposed scope of the terms of reference and methodology for the national assessment surveys in the participating countries.

Three points were made, the first urging the use of existing methodologies and examples of surveys on existing legal and policy frameworks, the second stressing the need for developing a common methodology between REReP 1.6 and 1.8 for surveys of experts and the third being a proposal to use Word Resource Institute indicators on accessibility of information. Participants also called for balancing the needs of information users and providers in the national needs assessment and the need for creating project web page and meta-information databases about the environmental information systems existing in the target countries.

The problem of implementing environmental information systems in project target countries besides Croatia was raised along with the use of allocate resources. The procedures for awarding funds for the local implementation of the project were not discussed in detail. The steering committee agreed on the tender invitation for the participating countries' ministries of environment, with the involvement of the steering committee members in the bids preparation. The tender guidelines will include specifics on software and hardware for which they will request funding in line with country needs assessments. G. Cunningham outlined the current UNEP initiative to develop a global environmental information portal, UNEP.net. He described in brief a project concept to develop a sub-regional portal for the REReP beneficiary countries. The Austrian government provided seed funding for this project and it was planned to submit a "quick start" project proposal to leverage additional funding under REReP.

During the last part of the meeting the framework participants discussed a timeframe and responsibilities for the project activities before the next meeting. It was decided that the REC would prepare draft methodology and terms of reference for country needs assessments and send them to the steering committee members for comments on July 23, 2001. The deadline for sending comments was set as August 10, 2001. The REC will finalise the methodology and terms of reference and send them to the REC country offices by August 15, 2001. The REC country offices will send back to the REC Head Office the draft needs assessments by September 30, 2001 for editing, clarifications and additions. The needs assessments will be sent to the steering committee members for comments by October 31, 2001 and the regional meeting in Istria, Croatia on identification of national priorities and national action plans regarding environmental information systems development will take place on November 19, 2001.

The REC will consult Dutch donors on the change of the date of the planned regional meeting.