

## **“Environmental NGO Electronic Networking in South Eastern Europe”**

### **Implementing agency in South Eastern Europe :**

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe

#### **Project Manager:**

Gabor Heves

### **Implementing agency in Italy:**

L'Umana Dimora

#### **Project Manager:**

Lucia Margaritelli

**Project Start Date: 1 May 2002**

**Project End Date: 31 December 2004**

### **I. ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD (1 May 2003 – 1 October 2003)**

In the reporting period the start-up phase of the project (May 1 2003 – December 2003) has successfully commenced, focusing on two main strategic areas: establishing a well-functioning cooperation between the REC and L'Umana Dimora and organising a series of study tours to South Eastern European NGOs. While certain delay was experienced with the project's start, this period has set the conditions for a high-quality and efficient project implementation, preparing the ground for a large number of project activities foreseen in the main project phase (January 1 – December 31, 2004).

The financial spending during year 2003 is primarily focused to organising the series of study tours. Costs related to the other project activities described in the project proposal are charged to the Dutch-funded electronic networking project: it will end in December 2003 and the REC needs to use up that budget first. Project spending will be largely increased from January 2004 once the Dutch co-financing is no longer available and the whole scale of project activities will fully rely on Italian support.

#### **Cooperation with L'Umana Dimora**

As L'Umana Dimora is a key player in the project, in the reporting period significant efforts were dedicated to establishing a well-functioning day-to-day cooperation. As the first step a Terms of Reference was prepared, which outlines in detail the tasks and responsibilities of L'Umana Dimora in the project. The two organisations agreed that L'Umana Dimora should focus to two key areas: organising a series of study tours to South Eastern European NGOs and contribute to the strategic development of the project.

In May 2003 a start-up meeting was held in Rome with the presence of managers from both organisations. Here the Terms of Reference was officially endorsed by the President of L'Umana Dimora. As this document specifies the conditions for the financial transfers, the contract was also signed.

In the reporting period the cooperation between the two organisations was firmly established. A common understanding of issues was developed. A good mutual understanding was also created – in no small part as a result of an intensive day-to-day communication through e-mail, telephone and altogether four personal meetings. This trust contributes to the efficient implementation of the project: for example that there is no need that the REC manager attends all study tours.

### **Study tours**

As it was described in the original project proposal, in 2003 altogether four study tours are organised to participants coming from South Eastern European electronic networks. In the reporting period three were successfully implemented, with the participation of more than 20 participants. The exact timing of the study tours was agreed at the May start-up meeting in Rome: 5-12 July, 13-20 September and 11-18 October. (The last one is planned for 19-22 November.)



The programme of the study tour was compiled based on the overall aims and objectives of the project and to meet the expectations of participants, collected at the 2003 regional electronic networking meeting in Kosovo in April 2003. The

study tours serve the following purposes: (1) to learn new knowledge in the field of on-line environmental communication; (2) to improve networking among the group participants themselves; and (3) to establish relationships with Italian environmentalists. Please find attached the study tour programme to this document.

It is hoped that upon arrival home tour participants will keep in touch with each other, making the continued cross-border environmental information exchange easier. With this in mind as well as the request of participants and the overall focus on the environment the last day of the tour is dedicated to visiting the Abruzzo National Park.

On the first afternoon of the study tour a so-called NGO fair is organised, with the participation of many (5-10) Italian organisations. This is hoped to serve triple purposes: (1) to learn first-hand information from a variety of experienced Italian environmentalists; (2) to establish first contacts for possible further cooperation; and (3) to invite the best presenters to deliver a more detailed training at upcoming tours.

The tour organisers place special emphasis to collect feedback from tour participants and continuously improve the programme. As a result, the following changes were implemented: the timing of the trip was changed (lasting for four days and ending on Saturday), only the best/most relevant trainers were invited again, unnecessary travelling was eliminated by staying at one location on each day, every day has its thematic focus, the morning being theoretical (presentations) while the afternoons more practical. The programme now also allows much more opportunity to meet Italian partners.

All in all, tour participants had a generally positive feedback about the tours. Almost all of them indicated that they would recommend the tour to others and would be glad to participate in some kind of an advanced training later. From the project's overall objectives' point of view the diverse programme and relatively informal atmosphere of the tours has proved to be a highly efficient tool to bring people from former warring countries together and improve on-line information exchange and cooperation.

## Strategic project development

Taking into consideration the current European integration processes and the growing ambitions of the project, L'Umana Dimora is seen as a highly important project partner, being key to transfer experience from Italy to South Eastern Europe, and in general, to open East-West communications channels. At the May start-up meeting the partners have agreed that L'Umana Dimora will proactively contribute to the strategic project development, primarily through (1) informing and bringing new partners to the project, (2) identifying other possible funding sources on a European level and (3) contributing with general advice and ideas. As one of the first concrete activities to get to know other organisations on a European level and collect possibly useful information, L'Umana Dimora attends a conference on non-profit organisations in Brussels on 17 October, 2003.

During the reporting period the REC also attended conferences that provided an opportunity to promote the project and possibly bring in new partners (IT and Environment Scenario Building Workshop, London; Information Society and Environment, Cottbus, Germany). The participation at these events was partially covered from the present project as in all cases co-financing was successfully brought in from other sources (REC core funds and European Commission).



In line with the project objectives, on May 2002 an informal visit was organised to establish first relationships with possible partners in Greece. This meeting (held in Thessaloniki) was attended by the REC manager, the Bulgarian electronic network representative and a local and a national environmental organisation from Greece.

Besides exchanging information the meeting participants have looked into project ideas and identified possible funding sources for cooperation between NGOs in Greece and its Northern neighbours.

During the project implementation special attention is paid to good media relations. Various media representatives are invited to all important project events. As a result, our activities have received significant media coverage in TV, radio, printed journals and on-line magazines.

In the reporting period the project website (available at [http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE\\_Networking/](http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE_Networking/)) was continuously updated, including detailed information about the NGO networks' current activities, a full list of all media responses and information about the study tours.

## II. PLANNED ACTIVITIES

While the project partners constantly monitor the impact of the project and make on-going improvements accordingly, at the start-up meeting the REC and L'Umana Dimora have agreed that after the implementation of the first four study tours they will make an in-depth review of the project. The aim of this overall review – planned for December 2003 – is to analyse the experiences and feedback from the first project period to see if any substantial change is needed or not. At this occasion the partners will also make a financial review of the project implementation.

Until December 2003 the main focus of the project will involve organising the series of study tours and bringing in as many Italian trainers/partners to the project as possible. We see this as an excellent opportunity for South Eastern European NGO networks to establish working relations and exchange information with the environmental movement in Italy and in Europe.

As mentioned in the introduction, in 2003 many project activities are financed from the REC's Dutch-funded electronic networking project. As that project will end in December 2003, from January 2004 all project activities will be fully rely on funds provided by the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory. While this division of cost coverage has caused delay in charging to the project budget, it has contributed to the efficient and smooth implementation of project tasks.

As described in the original project proposal, from January 2004 the foreseen project activities will include the following main tasks: the organisation of national training workshops and one regional strategic workshop, the development of on-line content (websites, mailing lists, interactive forums etc.), the improvement of the institutional stability of electronic networks and providing computer equipment.

In line with the advancing European integration, significant efforts will be devoted to encouraging on-line information exchange with other countries, primarily neighbouring countries to South Eastern Europe (Greece and Turkey), secondarily Western European countries. Efforts will be devoted to further improve the media coverage of project activities, primarily in Italy and in other Western European countries.