

# **Networks at Work – Three Years Later**

Review of the impact of the REReP 2.3 project on South  
Eastern European environmental NGO electronic  
networking and the steps forward



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## Background

This survey was conducted as part of the **project** round-up activities of the REReP 2.3 project Promoting Networking and Cooperation of Environmental NGOs: Establishment of Electronic Computer Networks on a National and Regional Level. It was financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and was implemented in the period of 2001-2003.

The **purpose** of this survey was to collect feedback on the overall impact of the project and to help future planning and fundraising. This document was compiled based on submissions received from the project's beneficiary networks. It includes the original, unedited submissions, preceded by an international summary compiled by the international project team.



At the beginning of the project in 2001 a detailed needs assessment was conducted to find out the current status of networking as well as to collect NGO recommendations. The results of this survey were published in the book *Networks at Work*. (This 75-page publication can be ordered in hard copy or downloaded from the Internet at [www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE\\_Networking/NetworksAtWork.html](http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE_Networking/NetworksAtWork.html).) The current short review is a follow-up (update) on the book's findings.

Each network's coordinator was asked to (1) review the respective country chapter of the book and then (2) using the personal experiences accumulated over the implementation of the project, to answer the following **four questions**:

1. What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?
2. What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?
3. What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?
4. What are your recommendations for continuing the project?

This survey was conducted to be an **informal snap-shot** of the current situation. In contrast to *Networks at Work*, no questionnaire/interview survey was completed, nor was there any in-depth analysis of the collected data. In spite of a lack of scientific accuracy, this report should provide extremely valuable insight into the current situation and future network development path.

For more information on the electronic networking activities please visit the international project **website** at [www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE\\_Networking/](http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE_Networking/)

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## International summary

### What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?

In all South Eastern European countries the environmental NGO movement has gained in general strength and increased its role in society over the past three years. This was reported by all electronic networks — though immediately followed by the comment that there is still a long way to go until the environmental movement stabilises and reaches adequate public visibility and political acceptance.

Similar to the findings in *Networks at Work*, significant differences continue to exist in the level of development of South Eastern European countries and their NGO sectors. The general level of the NGO sector's establishment seems to be strongly related to the historical background of the NGO sector, as well as to the general political-economic-social situation of each country. Two of the networks have reported that they feel a gradual improvement in the environmental awareness of the population of their countries, which — among other reasons — can be considered as a positive result of the NGOs activities.



The main problems that adversely affect the evolution of the NGO sectors can be grouped into three main categories: problems with funding, lack of coordination and human skills (within the organisation, on a national level and internationally) and problems with relationships with other stakeholders (primarily governments).

Currently all networks run on financial support received from international organisations. Some of them have expressed concern that this may lead to a dependence on foreign donors, as they continue to face big difficulties in attracting local support. In fact, three of the networks have already been confronted with the reality of this concern: international donors are either gradually pulling out of their countries or allocate significantly less funding for environmental NGOs in favour of other non-profit activities. In terms of electronic networking, two of the networks have indicated a full reliance on the REC's support and have expressed concern about their future financing once the present project finishes.

Most networks have drawn attention to the fact that a significant portion of the current vulnerability of the networks stems from issues related to human capital. On one hand the number of active NGO members and the number of supporters is less than optimal, on the other hand the skills and knowledge of the activists also need improvement. One good example of the risk associated with the low number of active NGO members is an on-line environmental education project, which became (hopefully temporarily) abandoned after its coordinator left. Another frequent difficulty was highlighted by the lack of knowledge and managerial skills to efficiently run projects and coordinate joint activities. In at least three countries this has appeared through the limited level of coordination among NGOs working in a similar field and the lack of organisational skills.

Over the past two years the general level of (on-line) information exchange within the NGO sector has increased all over South Eastern Europe, which has brought even more attention to communication with other sectors. While, for example, the general mailing lists of the networks are typically open to any interested individuals (primarily journalists and government officials), there is still work to be done to improve the relationships with other stakeholders, primarily governments. Two of the networks have reported that there are institutional means for NGO representation in government structures, whereas in most other countries such NGO-government cooperation is very limited.

## **What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?**

In terms of electronic networking activities, the past two years have witnessed a dynamic improvement in almost all countries. At the beginning of the project only two NGO electronic networks existed (in Romania and in Bulgaria), which were since then joined by new initiatives in almost all other countries. Every network has implemented a vast amount of activities in this period, such as on-line content development (portal sites, news services or databases), training programmes (technical trainings as well as strategic ones), coordination and planning meetings (on a national and international level), engagement in new cooperative projects (be that news sharing or topic-oriented joint-projects), distribution of computer equipment and a lot more, ranging from the dissemination of promotional materials through organising Internet Cafes to providing user support. (For a detailed review of activities please visit the project website at <[www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE\\_Networking/](http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE_Networking/)>.)



In terms of the basic technical infrastructure, the number of NGOs that possess computers and have access to the Internet has grown dynamically. By now Internet use has become part of everyday life for most NGOs (for example to implement lobbying, campaigning and joint actions), and even in countries with the least favourable computer infrastructure at least half of the NGOs reported to have computer equipment — and this figure is even better if we consider that many members use the Internet through other (such as university, business or private) access points. By distributing as many as sixty (!) computers, the projet has significantly contributed to the closure of the remaining “digital divide.” In fact, in the majority of South Eastern European countries the project has succeeded to provide the technical infrastructure to access the Internet (telecommunication and hardware) to practically all of those NGOs that were committed to sharing information on-line.

Electronic networking activities were found to play a catalytic role in the overall improvement of environmental civil society. The review has demonstrated a positive general attitude to computer-based communication, leading to a general growth of interest in exchanging information.

Over the past three years on-line data traffic has increased rapidly. Most networks have registered a dynamic traffic growth on their portal websites, in one case reaching as many as 7,500 visits monthly. The number of news postings or exchanged e-mail messages has increased in a similarly dynamic way. These figures also yielded tangible results: some

networks reported that e-mail discussion lists have helped them to launch new joint projects, and most importantly, led to the successful implementation of various nation-wide protests and campaigns. (Mailing lists were primarily used for action planning and implementation, and had as many as 250 subscribers.)

A second indicator that demonstrates the positive effect of electronic networking in empowering the environmental civil society is the general increase in interest to exchange information offline. Especially in those countries where electronic networking is relatively new, the motivation for direct personal communication has also increased, especially on the local level. On the sub-national, country-wide and international levels this personal information flow was enhanced through personal interaction at various events, primarily training and strategic network-planning seminars.



While these meetings focused on computer-mediated communication, very often more general issues have surfaced, leading to a general debate on the overall functioning and work of the NGO community. This is also a good example of the catalytic effect of electronic networking on the general improvement of the environmental movement. If the green movement is plagued by unsolved institutional problems or conflicting interests it also makes it much harder to establish and effectively run an electronic network. This observation was reported by one of the networks, suggesting that more focus on training and the disbursement of computer equipment would be the best approach to improve such a situation.

In spite of significant progress over the past three years, the newly created networks in particular have reported that their networks are not yet known or used enough, neither within the green movement nor on a wider scale (primarily media and governments). Based on the experience of more established networks, with the increase of the number and quality of the services available to users tend to demonstrate an increased readiness to use these services and to actively share information. One example is a case where journalists signed up to a general network mailing list. This helped NGOs improve their media relations and eventually led to improved visibility and impact of their work in society.

In spite of significant progress over the past few years, practically all networks have reported a strong need to devote continued and increased attention to outreach and network promotion. This is essential to securing the long-term position of electronic networks and ultimately bringing in the necessary user and financial support. Unfortunately, when financial resources and time are limited, promotion and outreach will inevitably receive lower priority than core activities.

All in all, the network reports indicate that their services respond to significant and as yet unsatisfied needs. Through this well-targeted and needs-driven communications assistance networks often trigger positive changes in the green movement that extend well beyond the field of electronic networking. If external circumstances remain favourable these networks stand a good chance of long-term existence. Being in a crucial phase of development, current planning decisions and working conditions will have a fundamental impact on the networks' long-term development.

## What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?

The first two questions of the review aimed to uncover the core issues about the present status of electronic networking. The answers given highlighted a very promising development path, while at the same time drew attention to the significant difficulties networks face in securing their long-term functioning, mainly in terms of financial coverage, but also in institutional development. The third question of the review therefore attempted to collect the plans and ideas that these networks try to face these challenges with.

As a basic precondition of financial stability South Eastern European electronic networks first aim to lay down solid institutional foundations, primarily using the funds available under the present project. Under this pillar of network sustainability they are exploring the following main ideas.

Addressing an issue already mentioned in the previous section, at least four of the networks plan to improve their networks' visibility in society. Some of the public outreach tools considered include press releases and press conferences, various newsletters and general public relations work. As media relations and public outreach is often a weakness of the green movement, some of these networks plan a training in this field.

To achieve long-term institutional stability every network needs to reach a "critical mass" of user base. While environmental NGOs represent a very well definable and coherent user community, it is often not large enough to assure long-term security. Having recognised this, four networks are currently considering or are in the process of opening up their services to non-environmental NGOs. Most of the services they currently offer can be offered to other segments of civil society with little or no modification. Therefore with relatively little additional investment they could serve a much larger audience and harvest much more benefit — though environmental NGOs would remain the primary audience.

Before going in this direction, half of the networks claim that there is an untapped potential to increase the number of active users even within the current target audience. This can be done by attracting those NGOs that are typically small in size and did not engage in wider communication so far. Building partnerships and improving international cooperation on specific issues is also a way to increase network use. A more committed user base could also contribute greatly to more secure long-term functioning.

Some networks are also considering the development of new and innovative services that are specific to the NGO sector and are not available from commercial service providers. One idea is, for example, to become a professional electronic media of the environmental community.

Before taking on more demanding tasks, however, a network also needs to improve its internal communication, project monitoring and administrative capacity. These skills are increasingly important and demanding as the size of implemented projects grow.

Once there is a strong user base and service portfolio, a network stands a much higher chance of attracting funding. The network reports highlight the overall intentions to diversify funding sources and rely more and more on a continuous flow of income.



At present, networks reported a number of obstacles that prevent them from securing a continuous flow of income. One is related to the legal environment. For example, some of the networks are not yet legally registered which prevents them from accessing donor funding. Another, harder-to-bridge legal difficulty is that in many South Eastern European countries there is no state funding available for NGOs, it is not possible for tax payers to allocate a certain percentage of their taxes to NGOs, and, if there is state support, it does not cover more than 10 percent of the NGOs costs. A major obstacle against securing a steady flow of income is that in some countries the law simply forbids NGOs from turning a profit.

These difficulties suggest there is still a lot of lobbying to be done towards national law-makers and progress can only be expected in the mid-term. Considering the overall poor financial conditions of network user NGOs, the introduction of (even symbolic) membership fees may do more harm than benefit. Environmental commercial marketing is also considered to belong to the distant future.

In the short- and mid-term the only realistic and significant source of income is donor funding. Practically all networks therefore consider fundraising of key importance, drawing attention to the importance of trainings on proposal writing and fundraising. Even if a certain project is focused on a specific environmental theme, some of the networks encourage their users to build in an on-line communication budget line into their proposals. This approach has already yielded benefits, and with an improved level of user satisfaction and number of users it is hoped to increase even further. One network also considers an institutional way of doing this, through a planned contractual obligation of local coordinators to include network costs into project proposals.



One network has already succeeded to bring in some funding by charging fees for hosting larger NGO websites on its server. In general, it is an important long-term goal to increase financial support from the networks' own users.

Similar to the evolution of electronic networks in the West, the ultimate solution in South Eastern Europe for generating steady income lies in developing a business model to operate the network. Currently these networks do not consider launching larger commercial services, primarily in fear of losing their focus and because of an unknown or underdeveloped market. Two of the networks, however, explore micro-credit based commercial services, such as answering information requests, doing web design, performing on-line campaign support and management, advertising and providing consultancy services.

To sum up, at present networks face a number of obstacles against building up a multiple-source and maintained funding mechanism, and therefore continued donor financing is of utmost importance. All attempts should therefore be made to secure continued donor funding of the REC's electronic networking project during the coming period.

## **What are your recommendations for continuing the project?**

Above all, the importance of continuing the present project was emphasised. This project was praised as a reliable and flexible mechanism that provides solid grounds for steady development. In this respect the most important recommendation of the networks was to find funding for a follow-up project.

Another request was for assistance with finding funding for specific networking activities. One example of how such fundraising assistance could be provided was to follow various eEurope initiatives and lobby at the European level to include NGO networking among the eEurope priorities.

Once funding is secured, three networks recommend that the REC organises more training seminars. The topic of these workshops should range from learning Internet skills through content management to strategic use of ICTs for NGOs.

Two of the networks have suggested that there should be a continued focus on providing technical support. This would essentially include the distribution of computer equipment and the coverage of telecommunications costs.

The importance of improved public outreach and network promotion was already discussed earlier — not surprisingly, two of the networks have requested assistance in this field. More specifically, they call for help on public marketing and advertisement campaigns as well as assistance to improve network visibility and media relations.

A couple of networks called upon the REC to continue advocating the concept of networking and cooperation, especially on an international level. They see international cooperation as key to exchanging experience and short-cutting the learning curve. The recommendation here is to organise international networking events that provide an opportunity to discuss common issues in person.

# Center for Electronic Communication, Albania

<http://www.qke-al.org/>

## 1. What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?

The NGO sector in Albania is facing rapid changes especially in the transformation to becoming a more qualitative and real actor in society. During 2003 several activities were developed by NGOs which showed an increased pressure towards governmental institutions in the decision making field.

Besides the achievements, the NGO sector remains very much dependent on foreign donor sources, building up their action plan based on project funded by traditional donors in country and foreign sources. The clear tendency of the donor situation in the country shows a decrease in funding for environmental NGOs, which has a great negative impact on NGO activity.

In addition, the NGO sector is struggling to build up real NGO institution in terms of functioning and organisation. The limited number of membership and funding problems make NGOs quite vulnerable to inactivity and limits their impact on society.

Information exchange in Albania is low and mostly kept to personal contact between individuals. However, the willingness of NGOs to share information is growing, due to:

- Lack of permanent means of communication;
- High fee of communication from other sectors;
- Poorly structured and incomplete information.

The data collected by the need assessment made by CEC in beginning of their work, pointed out that:

- 50 percent of environmental NGOs are without computer facilities
- 16.7 percent of environmental NGOs have a computer on their premises
- 33.3 percent of environmental NGOs have a computer that belongs to one of the members of the NGO
- 16.4 percent of environmental NGOs have access to the Internet
- 61.1 percent of environmental NGOs use electronic mail

The data collected by the need assessment for the NGOs by CEC during the last months, pointed out that:

- 60 percent of environmental NGOs have a computer and 25 percent of them are very old;
- 60 percent of environmental NGOs have access to Internet and e-mail, and 25 percent of them complain about the expense of using those means;

- 83 percent of environmental NGOs express their willingness to collaborate in information exchange;
- 33 percent of environmental NGOs have regular info-exchange with CEC;
- 70 percent of environmental NGOs need more assistance and training for their staff on using the electronic means.

Based on the assessment of the situation and the lack of facilities for communication, REC Albania supported six NGOs with computers and modems. An agreement for further development of the NGO network was signed among the REC, NGO and CEC defining NGO interest and tasks for e-communication.

In addition, CEC developed six training courses in six districts on raising the capacity of NGO members on e-communication.

## **2. What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?**

NGO networking is considered one of the most problematic areas of the NGO sector in Albania. Most NGOs are acting as individual organisation with little campaign cooperation at the local level. Due to support from several donors, interest in networking has increased, with attempts to identify areas of common work.

Due to this interest and good will environmental NGOs got together twice during 2003 to discuss about their networking and cooperation. An annual meeting is becoming a common event where several topics of NGO interest and development are discussed.

The biggest achievement is the grown interest around CEC expressed openly at the National Meeting organising by CEC on e-communication on October 3. The recommendations of this meeting include: improve NGO networking, better facilitation from CEC, bring new ideas on working together, etc.

With the aim to improve access to environmental information in Albania, and to ensure information exchange using the existing networks of environmental NGOs in the region, CEC is working to develop information communication as a tool for environmental NGOs.

Through electronic communication tools, a very open and transparent information exchange for a wider group of people can be achieved. In this way diverse information can be exchanged, such specific environmental issues, up-to-date information on environmental developments, information about the NGOs operating in Albania or abroad, etc.

Weaknesses identified by CEC:

- CEC not known enough by environmental NGOs
- Lack of infrastructure for electronic communication in the country

- Low level of information exchange
- Limited activities by environmental NGOs
- Low collaboration between environmental NGOs

#### Achievements

- Presentation of CEC on the environmental NGO sector
- Institutionalisation of CEC and relations with NGOs
- Promotion of CEC web page ([www.qke-al.org](http://www.qke-al.org)) (five NGO news by week)
- A mailing list established (70 members)
- Network with similar centres on the region
- Development of know-how on information communication tools for NGOs (50 new e-mail addresses)

### **3. What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?**

In order to contribute to the building up the environmental electronic network, Albanian environmental NGOs need support on communication tools such as computers, modems, Internet connections, etc. However, we suggest that a very detailed assessment for the existing level of communication tools, is greatly needed to identify NGOs and their needs.

CEC Albania works on establishing an appropriate situation for information exchange for Albanian society, through:

- Improvement of abilities and capacities of Environmental NGOs on electronic communication;
- Information exchange facilitation;
- Web page to support the Environmental NGOs, contributing as a source of information for the Albanian NGO movement; and
- Creating a mailing list with 70 NGO members, where every kind of information can be exchanged, fulfilling the needs of civil society.

In order to achieve information exchange in real time, the challenge before future work, CEC will try to offer to the NGOs free e-mail and internet service. This will contribute to the establishment of local centres for electronic communication on different cities around Albania.

The network is also registering with the Tirana Court and this makes it eligible to apply for funds from different donors present in Albania. The process is difficult, but support from Milieukontakt Oost-Europa ensures funding for at least a short-term period. REC Albania is in contact with CEC and "pushing" them towards raising capacities on proposal writing and fundraising.

#### **4. What are your recommendations for continuing the project?**

- Follow-up on training sessions on e-communication.
- Support the environmental NGO needs on e-communication (computers, modems, operational costs)
- Promotion of networking and cooperation by Albanian environmental NGOs
- Participation in the regional project Exchanging Information around South-East European Countries

# **EkoMrezaBiH, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

<http://www.ekomrezabih.net/>

## **1. What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?**

NGOs only became a fundamental part of civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) after the tragic events of war and the complete political transition of 1995. Since the mid-1990s, environmental NGOs have made enormous strides, but there is still far to go to meet the modern standards of western democracies and their civil society establishments.

The present status of environmental NGO sector shows a clear lack of strategy and capacity development models, as well as a lack of adequate and dedicated personnel. One of the basic issues is the lack of adequate coordination and mutual cooperation in joints fields of activities according to environmental NGO stated missions. However, some efforts exist, and they mainly appear in a number of meetings, trainings and seminars aimed towards improvement of cooperation amongst NGOs themselves and closer contact with representatives of national and international institutions. Unfortunately BiH NGOs are not in a position to appropriately fulfil their roll in the process of civil society strengthening because they still encounter some basic existential issues such as:

- Problems with funding
- Inadequate structure inside the NGOs themselves
- Lack of appropriate personnel
- Access to information
- Inadequate cooperation with all government levels on a partnership basis

## **2. What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?**

Apart from these obvious problems, which NGOs encounter daily, there are positive examples of attempts to tackle these issues. One of these attempts is represented by the environmental NGO electronic networking project EkoMrezaBiH. This project aims to connect and introduce NGOs and their members, as well as the general public expressing interest, to numerous environmental issues, environmental domestic and international legislature and fresh, updated news from various environmental fields. Members and the public also have an opportunity to post news and articles themselves on this portal (following appropriate procedure).

Since its inception, the members of the EkoMrezaBiH implementing team have also performed two trainings for NGO activists incorporating network promotion, development

of skills needed to add and share content, as well as the basics to writing for the Internet. Within the scope of the project, EkoMrezaBiH successfully conducted a tender for the donation of computer equipment, managing to double the number of NGOs benefiting from the donation applying the “old for new” concept (NGOs awarded with new equipment gave their used equipment to organisations with none). Towards the final stages of the project, the EkoMrezaBiH portal was totally redesigned according to the needs that appeared during implementation and recommendations of its members.

Although a significant step forward EkoMrezaBiH, is a pioneering attempt that still needs support and growth in order to become a serious communication and cooperation tool, which has to be accounted for in all environmental policy considerations in BiH. Although some level of communication was reached, the network was rarely used as a tool for joint projects, actions, and campaigns in the domestic as well as the regional or international context. The number of NGO members that regularly post news on the portal is still unsatisfactory due to a lack of skills (only two trainings), capacity (personnel), equipment or ideas on which news could be posted and shared. Some significant areas in BiH with active NGOs were not covered with information of the network capabilities at all.

### **3. What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?**

The results achieved and the obstacles identified lead to the inevitable conclusion that EkoMrezaBiH has created a momentum which would be a great loss to abandon. Unfortunately, in terms of sustainability (referring generally to BiH environmental NGOs) it is far too early to speak about any successful model since funding is not available for NGOs (Law on ECO-fund is not enforceable). EkoMrezaBiH is not yet able to charge any of its services or introduce membership fees at the moment, while the body of members is being established. Environmental commercial marketing is only a distant future option which necessitates a careful examination of feasibility and models of involving a non-profit network in such activities.

Such a situation leaves no other option but fundraising from other sources which have been in practice to date, and which mostly rely on donations and sponsorship. Accordingly, members of EkoMrezaBiH's implementing team have already created models and recommendations for follow-up of this project, which were offered to some domestic and foreign donors and sponsors with yet undisclosed results.

# Bluelink, Bulgaria

<http://bluelink.net/en/>

## **1. What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?**

A serious analysis of change in the environment NGO sector in Bulgaria could not be done without research or, at least, some statistics. In this case we can express only personal observations. Our opinion is based on participation in different events and personal discussions.

We do not have up-to-date information on the number of environmental NGOs registered. What's important is not really the number but the activities. Bulgarian environmental NGOs consolidated and became partners to the institutions in the country. The annual meetings on the national level are now a tradition and an essential event for the strategic development of the environmental society. Representatives of NGOs are participating in different governmental structures as representatives of civil society.

## **2. What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?**

During the revised two-year period the use of ICT tools among Bulgarian NGOs changed dramatically. The members of the environmental community understood the importance of electronic networking to increase the sharing of information. Correct and timely information is important for the quick response of environmental organisations to serious problems on environment, legislation and decision making. Part of everyday life is now using the electronic network for lobbying, campaigning and common actions.

The most popular NGO mailing list <ngos@bluelink.net> has more than 260 subscribers. Members are not only NGOs, but also institutions, journalists and citizens, concerned about nature and civil society.

Networking is now a tool for cooperation between NGOs in their everyday work or joint project development or implementation.

The BlueLink Information Network created possibilities for communication and exchange of information between NGOs and media that result in better informing of the society on environmental issues.

The encountered problems are:

- Small NGOs do not have enough computers and Internet access.

- Some NGOs do not have qualified personnel to be part of the network.
- NGOs do not have enough time to communicate on a regular basis.

### **3. What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?**

BlueLink is an essential part of the life of the environmental community. Most of the NGOs start their working day by logging onto the BlueLink website.

This is an enormous responsibility for BlueLink. By the end of the current year, BlueLink's decision makers have to start working on the next strategic plan for development, which should include the policy for directing itself towards new NGO target groups and becoming a professional electronic media of the environmental community.

### **4. What are your recommendations for continuing the project?**

- To use the knowledge and capacity of the well developed networks for further development and of the new networks
- To increase the possibilities for face-to-face meetings between the members of networks
- To increase the number of the seminars for strategic use of ICT for NGOs in the country

## **Green Forum, Croatia**

### **1. What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?**

Croatian NGOs agree about the fact that some improvements have been performed since 2001. The Green Forum initiative is just starting and for the first time the network is finally financially sustainable. The network also gathered a few newly established NGOs. Also, the number of NGOs that are actually employing activists has been increased. The network of Green Telephones is also increasing. Subjective opinion is that the level of concrete activities did not increase, but the level of ad hoc initiatives that are "alive" only to the moment that the concrete goal is reached. Environmental issues are becoming more and more interesting and attractive to the concerned public.

Focusing and specialising professional interests is evident within the framework of the Croatian environmental NGO scene. Today, in Croatia we have a relatively high number of excellent activists that should receive stronger education and become better prepared for lobbying and campaigning. Few particular Croatian NGOs are now in a better and more sustainable financial situation (Green Action, Green Istria, Green Osijek, ZEO Nobilis, Sunce and EKO-PAN). Some actions, such as Green Telephone, have broadened from five to 10 Croatian counties. Many different kinds of trainings were conducted, but there is no concrete summary about existing knowledge and skills improved. A good example is the NGO Green Istria, which developed from a small NGO to an NGO with strong credibility with support from abroad through different projects. Green Action is now recognisable as a strong environmental partner for MoE and other governmental institutions.

### **2. What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?**

Unfortunately, there is no big step forward. Electronic networking is still a "hot-spot" for environmental NGOs, although the electronic network of Green Forum and Green Telephones is functioning. The main reason for this is a lack of equipment and the lack of skills and knowledge about how to use this particular media. Green Istria developed the Green Forum mailing list, which starts to work by providing information and comments. NGOs are not additionally motivated to approach Green Forum, which is actually open to new possible members. The plan for the future is to structure a modern website with the possibility for every active member to enter news.

Many smaller NGOs still chronically lack computer equipment.

### **3. What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?**

Plans for the future are to initiate the strengthening of other smaller NGOs and to develop the existing network, which is recognised as a precondition for establishing long-term financial sustainability that is essential for work of the network. An operative strategy for next 3-year period has not yet been developed. Only a poorly articulated vision that is emphasising the lack of financial support exists. Usually, governmental support is only 10 percent of resources that are initially requested for the NGO networking issue. Stronger governmental support is crucial and a solid juridical background already exists for this premise. Smaller NGOs share the opinion that Green Forum should gather more members and initiate cooperation even on a regional level, especially concerning cross-border biodiversity issues.

### **4. What are your recommendations for continuing the project?**

Purchasing the necessary equipment and organising trainings on electronic networking. Green Action is emphasising that everything is already written in a submitted project proposal. Today it is no longer a problem to find funds, but rather to find staff members who are able to spend those funds efficiently. Also, NGO representatives share the opinion that this issue needs stronger marketing and advertising, wider availability to the public, and connecting different networks. There is a general attitude that constructive NGO work is not visible enough and there is not sufficient public media interest.

## **Eko.Net, FYR Macedonia**

<http://www.eko.net.mk/>

### **1. What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?**

- The major change is the increase in the level of information exchange.
- The level of awareness regarding environmental events and incidents, especially with local character, has increased.
- The interest and usage of ITC tools has increased.

### **2. What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?**

There has been definite improvement in the status of networking in the area of exchange and gathering of information (sending and receiving news by e-mail), but still there are not many examples of cooperation through networking and usage of ICT tools. Hopefully that will change after our current activities (Internet workshops on the advantages of the ICT tools in everyday life/work through the whole territory of FYR Macedonia and promotion of the web portal [www.eko.net.mk](http://www.eko.net.mk)). Regional networking is a weak point because most of our efforts and activities were focused on developing and strengthening the local networking and ICT tools usage.

### **3. What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?**

Eko.net's long-term sustainability could be achieved by charging (micro-payment method) some of the services and tolls that we are currently offering or that would be developed in the future. A major factor for the success of this idea is the pre-requirement that [www.eko.net.mk](http://www.eko.net.mk) should be accessible and understood by global users, so the development of a multilingual web portal is essential. Tolls and services:

- Information search/gathering and processing
- Web design and development
- Online campaign support/management
- Need assessment and advisory
- Legal consulting
- Online promotions
- Customised surveys and polls
- Write together

Additional difficulty is the Macedonian legislation that prohibits NGOs of making profit.

#### **4. What are your recommendations for continuing the project?**

Developing a Multilanguage version of [www.eko.net.mk](http://www.eko.net.mk) so the information and tools can be used/accessed globally.

Introducing new services and type of content on the web portal:

- Web design and development
- Multimedia presentation development
- Internet access
- On-line support

Continuing of some current activities:

- *Weekly Eco News* – electronic newsletter
- Weekly content update of the web portal [www.eko.net.mk](http://www.eko.net.mk)
- Monthly Eco News Digest – monthly printed newsletter
- Workshops on ITC (subject: developing and maintaining a successful web presence of Macedonian NGOs)
- Internal capacity building (education in different areas for different members of Eko.Net: web based project management, internet journalism, web development)

# StrawberryNet, Romania

<http://www.ngo.ro/>

## **1. What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?**

Apparently the most significant change is the increased focus on campaigning, an activity which was not so prominent before. However, it is difficult to evaluate without properly assessing it.

## **2. What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?**

NGOs are more aware about using electronic communication, at least mailing lists. Recent successes, like the relocation of Drakula Park, diversion of the path of a planned highway, successful events and achievements against the Rosia Montana mining project proved this, because electronic tools were used successfully to plan and implement the actions. As a result we see more intense communication on the mediu mailing list and a constantly growing number of subscribers. Some NGOs started to post information quite regularly on the website as well, like Alburnus Maior.

We also see significant traffic increase of the ngo.ro portal. During the project we reached a steady individual visit number of 4,000-5,000 per month. A recent increasing trend from September raised visits up to 7,500 per month in November. Also traffic reached an unprecedented 1.5 GB per month.

We managed to start an environmental NGO news service and initiated several information communities/thematic sites around issues like environmental agriculture, persistent organic pollutants, nature protection, the Aarhus convention and public participation. We are also starting a campaign support website. New partnerships have been established, most recent with CENTRAS, the result of which is the new on-line NGO database.

We were involved in several SEE regional activities within the project and international activities within APC.

We also encountered several problems. Some of the initiatives stopped, like the eco-scoala site, regarding environmental education, because of personal changes in the NGO. The environmental news service is a partial success. The partner NGO, ARZM, was quite good in news publishing, but because of a lack of organising skills they failed to build a community of people around this activity, which still has to be done.

We had too many initiatives in a short time and with limited resources. Some things still need to be refined and elaborated in more detail, and also all these initiatives need further development. We did not have enough capacity for outreach and awareness raising.

### **3. What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?**

Sustainability is still an issue. We have to increase our internal communication, project monitoring and administrative capacity. We see our network significantly growing, but also still fragile.

We have to:

- do more outreach
- develop a better defined and committed user base
- increase financial support from the users — it has started with hosting fees for bigger NGO sites
- develop NGO specific services which will make a difference compared to commercial providers
- raise awareness about NGO networking versus commercial networking
- develop an appropriate business model and generate income to support NGO networking
- build up partnerships

### **4. What are your recommendations for continuing the project?**

Continuing the project is of utmost importance. After several ups and downs we have finally reached a period of steady development with the help of this project.

We would recommend to assist with funding, for the region or specific projects within the region. We would recommend to follow the eEurope initiatives, lobby on the European level and find ways to include NGO networking, as well in the eEurope priorities. Currently a significant amount of funding is available for governments for governmental and educational projects, but the NGO sector is quite neglected. Also it would be appropriate to have NGO funding through non-governmental institutions or directly, and in this respect REC would be a feasible partner, taking into account its experience.

# **Volvox, Serbia and Montenegro**

## **1. What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?**

There are approximately 1,200 alternative, not-for-profit NGOs in Serbia and Montenegro nowadays, and roughly 200 of these have an environmental focus. Environmental NGOs are one of the largest and most widespread group of non-governmental organisations in Serbia and Montenegro. The main activities according to the same research are: awareness-raising campaigns (78 percent), education (72 percent), conferences, meetings (69 percent), information dissemination (65 percent) and networking (62 percent). Serbia and Montenegro environmental NGOs see cooperation with domestic and foreign NGOs, and with EU organisations, as critically important to solving environmental problems. This fact alone demonstrates a need for cooperation. NGOs mostly cooperate in project implementation and campaigning, and less in lobbying and fundraising.

The main reasons for cooperation of environmental NGOs in Serbia and Montenegro are: exchange of information and ideas, common ideas and goals, positive experiences, high professionalism of organisations, and, of course, mutual interest. They stated that they cooperate because of better outcome of activities and better realisation of projects and initiatives, achieving stronger public pressure, as well as the possibility for further cooperation in implementation of projects.

## **2. What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?**

Environmental NGOs in Serbia and Montenegro have exhibited strong affiliation for mutual cooperation. In course of this an electronic discussion list (volvox@recyu.org) was set up in December 2002, which became a tool for the information exchange on the environmental issues of the region and country and facilitating communication and overall exchange. It proved that such a communication channel was necessary and that both the discussion list and the meetings helped the environmental organisations to learn about each other and the possibilities for their cooperation. Several joint projects have come out as a result of that, one including as many as 14 environmental NGOs. Stronger cooperation of environmental NGOs resulted in their more significant role in dealing with important environmental issues.

(Editor's note: a 3-page description of activities implemented between 2001 and 2003 were moved from here to [http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE\\_Networking/PDF/VolvoxOverview2001-2003.pdf](http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE_Networking/PDF/VolvoxOverview2001-2003.pdf))

### **3. What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?**

1. Promotion of the Volvox Network to the Public
  - Press releases and press conferences
  - Regular distribution of the Volvox E-Newsletter through the media electronic networks and to the electronic networks of governments and institutions
  - Increasing the inner capacity of the network for PR activities
2. Financing
  - Build relations with the donor community
  - Build inner capacity for fundraising
  - Partnership and cooperation on regional issues
  - Build links with international institutions
3. Local coordinators
  - Focal points of the network in whole country (15country-wide)
  - Obligation (contract terms) towards the contribution to the network

### **4. What are your recommendations for continuing the project?**

- Training seminars and educational programmes for members of the Volvox Network on the Internet (advanced level for advanced users) as well as seminars for strategic use of ICT for NGOs in the country
- Promotion of the Volvox Network in media — organising press releases and press conferences, as well as distribution of the Volvox ECO NGO Bulletin to the media electronic networks. Training programmes for Volvox members in PR activities
- Increasing the number of meetings between members from others networks

## **Sharri.Net, Kosovo**

**(territory currently under UN interim administration)**

<http://www.sharri.net/>

### **1. What were the changes in the NGOs' general situation since 2001 (if any)?**

After the war, (during the period of 1999-2002) the environmental sector has experienced a large development that resulted in creation of Environmental Associations. Recently most of these face a lack of funds, limited capacity and have few possibilities to implement activities. The situation became more difficult when many international NGOs (donors) pulled out of Kosovo.

Local NGOs usually do volunteer work, but in order to implement projects they need a small amount of funds to organise any environmental activity.

Comparing the situation that NGOs faced in 2001, respectively 2003; Environmental NGOs in Kosovo in the beginning (emergency phase 1999-2001), were mostly project or grant driven and this caused many NGOs to shut down. The existing environmental NGOs are more active and more sustainable, they have a clearer mission and set goals, and they cooperate closely with each other (e.g. sharing ideas, experiences, information, developing and implementing joint-projects, etc.)

### **2. What is the current status of electronic networking, compared to 2001?**

In 2001 there was a kind of network among NGOs, but not at the national level. It was mainly a network within the towns or regions. OSCE was one of the main initiators of putting NGOs in contact with one another. NGOs could use the Internet and conference halls for meetings. The main problem NGOs faced at that time were: lack of office space, Internet and telephone connections, etc.

The main source of success for establishing the environmental NGO network was the REC project REReP 2.3. This project gathered all the environmental NGOs and facilitated their agreement to form an environmental electronic network called Sharri.Net.

Sharri.Net network, now works more efficiently than previously because: NGOs are more aware of the benefits that networking brings and through their contribution to network they help the others and gain more for themselves; and communication tools are improved like internet connections, telephone networks, mail service, etc.

The main problems that we as a network are facing are: lack of funds for implementing projects (most of them do not support office costs, equipment, salaries, etc.).

### **3. What are the plans for your network's long-term sustainability?**

Sharri.Net is trying to be the most reliable source for environmental information and a network that helps/assists other organisations. Sharri.Net is trying to play a greater role in decision-making processes and promote public participation. Other plans for Sharri.Net are to help/assist other Kosovar NGOs, not only environmental ones, to exchange information and present their activities (campaigns) on the sharri.net website. Sharri.Net also wants to cooperate (sharing news, ideas, experiences, etc) and implement projects with other NGOs from the region.

### **4. What are your recommendations for continuing the project?**

For Kosovo the continuation of the project for 2004 is crucial. Sharri.Net is in process of building itself up, and financial support is not available for 2004-2005, it will pose a real risk that all the efforts and all the Sharri.Net structures made so far will vanish.

Kosovar institutions are not ready and they do not have funds to support a network such as Sharri.Net. International organisations (donors) that are at present in Kosovo give less financial support to NGOs every year.

I would like to emphasise that Sharri.Net network is relying on the continuation of the project REReP 2.3, and if this project will not continue Sharri.Net as Kosovar Network is in risk of facing clinical death.