

ELECTRONIC NETWORKING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

Statement of the First South East European Regional Electronic Networks Meeting

Sofia, Bulgaria, March 28 – 29, 2002

This is a statement of cooperation, exchange of content and online collaboration from the participants in the First South East European Regional Electronic Networks Meeting that took place in Sofia-Bistrica, Bulgaria on 28/29.03.2002. The statement aims to represent the electronic networking initiatives of environmental NGOs in the SEE region. This statement was prepared and adopted by the electronic networks initiatives from Albania, Bulgaria - BlueLink Information Network, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sharri.Net – Kosovo/a, Macedonia - Eko.Net, Moldova - OrangeNet, Romania - StrawberryNet, Yugoslavia.

The participants agreed that their further efforts aim to:

- Promote electronic networks as strong tools for communication among various stakeholders in the field of environment in the region of South Eastern Europe.
- Support NGO activities in the field of environment, health, education, social issues, human rights and developing civil society
- Encourage cooperation among the different networks (in other fields than electronic) in South Eastern Europe
- Promote and encourage wide recognition of the right to access to the Internet, the right of private discussion and debate free from surveillance and the right to online freedom of speech.
- Strengthen communication among NGOs, the general public, governments and institutions, donors, media and other groups in society
- Promote openness, cooperation and transparency in all these processes

The participants will support a request to prolong the end of the REReP 2.3 project of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe on electronic networking for SEE until the end of 2003.

Objectives

1. The participants in this meeting agreed that the following topics require special attention during the process of development of electronic networking in the region:

- Improvement of relations with the NGO users – increasing their participation in the provision of information and strengthening their sense of ownership of the e-nets
- Strengthening the capacity of the networks' teams to meet their institutional requirements better and to respond successfully to the needs of the respective environmental communities
- Strengthening the capacity of the electronic service users in all countries of the SEE
- Find concrete ways to assure better levels of Internet access in the region
- Find ways and build strategies for the further financial sustainability of the networks
- Develop the regional exchange of information through mutual cooperation between the e-nets

2. With this statement the participating networks commit themselves to support each other in order to exchange experience, knowledge, and information content and to have online collaboration. Accepted ways for such exchanges are the initiation of topic-oriented work-meetings, based on case studies from the experiences of BlueLink and StrawberryNet – the two already existing electronic networks of environmental NGOs in Bulgaria and Romania.

3. Special attention should be paid to the integration of the Action Applications Toolkit of the Association of Progressive Communications (APC) in all country portals as a means for facilitating regional information content sharing in future.

4. The participants in this meeting acknowledged the role of Milieukontakt Oost Europa (MKOE), as well as the role of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) in facilitation and consultation regarding electronic networking in SEE.

5. The regional cooperation process will be open to other countries around the region, such as Turkey, Malta, Cyprus and Greece.

6. The regional networks agreed on the need for working to improve the capacity of the environmental NGOs, including support and help in providing basic equipment to access information and communication technologies and the Internet.

Communication channels

1. This statement will be disseminated via the lists of the regional and national NGOs, donor institutions, ministries, media, Task Force meeting of REReP, local REC offices and others.

2. Further discussion and communication between the participants in the meeting will continue by means of the mailing list <regnet@bluelink.net>.

The participants in the meeting express their deep regret that the Kosovo/a environmental electronic network's representative was turned back from the Bulgarian border. Despite this fact, Kosovo/a remains actively involved in the electronic networking process in the region.