

Activities of the Volvox-Electronic Network of Environmental NGOs in Serbia and Montenegro from December 2003 to December 2004

2004

- Third national meeting of the Volvox Network (Save the Tara River), December
- Meeting of local coordinators, December
- Promotional materials
- Advanced level computer training, July
- Steering committee meeting, Belgrade, June
- Technical problems, February
- Study tours, Italy
- Special awards (ongoing)
- Eco NGO-Volvox e-newsletter (ongoing)
- Maintenance of Volvox mailing list (ongoing)

2003

- Second national meeting of the Volvox Network, December
- Distribution of computer equipment to members of the Volvox Network, and formation of the Network of Local Coordinators, March, December

Third National meeting of the Volvox Network (Save the Tara River), December 2004

The Volvox Network held its national meeting on December 13, 2004. The event drew 30 participants from different environmental NGOs from Serbia and Montenegro. The 3rd national meeting (titled "Save the Tara River") involved coordinators of the Volvox Network and the NGO Society of Tara River in addressing problems and undertaking activities of the NGO community.

This environmental problem was well covered through a Volvox mailing list used to spread 67 messages related to the Tara River. A petition was also circulated expressing opposition to the construction of the Buk Bijela Hydro-Power Plant. The petition resulted in an official Tara River declaration, which was adopted immediately afterward by the Montenegrin government.

The meeting received media coverage, and a reporter from the Beta news agency conducted an interview with Miroslav Sljivancanin, president of the Tara River NGO Society.

Besides the presentation of Volvox Network activities, participants were introduced to Italian study tour subjects, which are the following:

- online communication and media relations;
- business planning; and

- technical possibilities of the Network.

Working groups were split into two subjects:

- a media work plan for Volvox action and media contact concerning the Tara River; and
- a business-to-business plan for the Volvox Network.

Results of the working groups will be incorporated into the action plan for 2005.



Photos: the third national meeting (left), and a presentation of the Tara working group

Local coordinators meeting, December 2004

Local coordinators met at the REC's country office for Serbia and Montenegro on December 12, 2004 to review past results.

Maja Spasojevic of REC CO SCG reviewed the use of donated computer equipment. According to the results, most of the local coordinators fulfilled their missions and were shown to have contributed a great deal to the network's activities.

One NGO returned a granted computer to the Volvox Network because of organisational restructuring. The computer will be donated to another NGO in January.

It was concluded that only two organisations failed to achieve expected results, and the Volvox Network steering committee will request a computer in January 2005 and donate it to the another NGO.

The regional distribution of computer equipment was justified, by each beneficiary NGO worked on a relevant priority area. For example the 'Tara River' NGO was working on issues related to a planned hydro-power plant, Eco Center Delfin on issues related to intruding Tumor algae in the Mediterranean Sea, and the Greens of Vojvodina on the problem of GMOs.

The final report from the local coordinator will be submitted by January 15, 2005 along with a complete list of Volvox Network activities.

Promotional materials

The following materials were produced to promote public awareness of Volvox:

- a leaflet of all data related to Volvox Network activities;
- mouse pads; and
- eco-bags with the Volvox logo.

Advanced computer training course, Belgrade, July 2004

Within the framework of project, Volvox organised an advanced computer training course from July 6-9, 2004 for members of the Environmental NGO Electronic Network in Serbia and Montenegro. The course drew more than 20 representatives from NGOs involved in the Volvox network from Serbia and Montenegro, and who will now be able to implement knowledge they gained in advanced Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Internet publishing skills in their further network activities.



Photos: advanced computer training course

Steering committee meeting, Belgrade, June 2004

The steering committee meeting resulted in the following agenda:

- Nadica Nikolic of Young Researchers from Serbia was elected as new moderator and content manager, instead of Branislava Vasiljevic;
- development of promotional materials;
- further network development and improved NGO cooperation;
- initiation of project ideas and coordination of local coordinator activities;
- organisation of advanced level computer training; and
- study tours in Italy.

Technical problems, February 2004

The Network endured technical problems three weeks during February and was operating without a mailing list, news, surveys and forums. This problem was solved.

Ongoing Volvox e-newsletter

Two editions of the Volvox monthly e-newsletter are published that contain all the network-related news. One of the most important conditions for publishing in the e-newsletter is that the news has not been published previously in the electronic or print media.

The Volvox e-newsletter is distributed to subscribers (eko-bilten-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) as well as to the media. There are currently 176 subscribers to the Volvox e-newsletter, but its unique and original nature is bound to attract more subscribers.



Photo: Volvox e-newsletter

Game awards (ongoing)

The network is awarding free internet hours on a monthly basis, based on the following criteria:

- greatest number of published news items;
- most NGO activity on forums (activated during the awarded month);
- highest number of web portal log-ins; and
- most active survey participants.

The first draw was organised on July 2003, and two NGOs were awarded 20 hours of free Internet access. Winners according to the listed criteria receive 10 hours of free Internet access.

Second national meeting of the Volvox Network, December 2003

On December 17, 2003, on the premises of REC Country Office Serbia and Montenegro, the Second National Meeting was held for environmental NGOs gathered into the Electronic Network (Volvox). The meeting was established within the project framework of REReP 2.3 project Electronic Networking of Environmental NGOs in South Eastern Europe.

The meeting brought together representatives of REC Country Office Serbia and Montenegro, which organised the event, and representatives from more than 20 NGOs actively involved in the Volvox Network in Serbia and Montenegro, along with network moderators and representatives of the NGO environmental electronic networks of Bosnia and Herzegovina (EkoMrezaBiH) and FYR Macedonia (EkoNet).

The aim of the meeting was to present results of the Volvox Network and its Activity Plan for 2004, to exchange experiences with electronic networks in neighbouring countries, establish closer cooperation, and to draw up a strategy for future development and sustainability of environmental electronic networks in the region gathered around REReP project 2.3.

The meeting emphasised the use of electronic resources of the Volvox Network, roles of local coordinators in further network functions, media and NGO relations within Volvox, and the presentation of one of the project results — creation of the Volvox website.

The second part of the meeting was dedicated to working group activities:

- dissemination and exchange of information through the network;
- strategy for network development and sustainability; and
- regional cooperation.

Distribution of computer equipment

Within the framework of project activities, REC Country Office Serbia and Montenegro granted electronic equipment to environmental NGOs active in Serbia and Montenegro's environmental electronic network (Volvox) for the purpose of capacity building.

March 2003: distribution of five Pentium IV computer stations to NGO members of the Volvox Network

- "Dragacevo" Guca Ecological Society
- Friends of Tara River
- Krusevac Ecological Center
- Society for Nature Protection and Healthy Food (Vrelo)
- Young Researchers of Bor

December 2003: Distribution of 10 Pentium IV computer stations to NGO members of the Volvox Network

- Society for the Preservation of Wild Animals, Mustela
- Society of Young Ecologists of Niksic
- Society for Protection of Stara Planina, Pirot
- Young Researchers of Belgrade
- Ecological Research Society (Mladen Karaman), Kragujevac
- Biology Society (Dr Sava Petrovic), Nis
- Environmental Movement of Sremska Mitrovica
- Delfin Eco Center, Kotor
- Green Network of Vojvodina
- Orca Organisation for Protection and Care of Animals

The distribution of computer equipment resulted in the establishment of a network of local coordinators and news contributions from different parts of the country. (See Annex 2.)

The Volvox mailing list: a powerful tool for exchanging information

In March the Volvox mailing list was moved to Yahoo groups and now has 223 users (See Annex 1). The Volvox mailing list proved influential regarding the problem with the Buk Bijela Hydro-Power Plant. With this activity (planned construction of the plant in Bosnia and Herzegovina) part of the Canyon of Tara River in Montenegro (a UNESCO heritage site) will be flooded. Because the Volvox mailing list is an open medium (without any censorship), the NGOs comprising the NGO Crisis Group were well covered by the Volvox mailing list, and 67 messages were circulated on the subject. The network also distributed a petition, and the NGO activism resulted in an official declaration of protection of the Tara River, which was adopted by the Montenegrin government on December 14, 2004.

Between the end of March and December 2004, 897 messages were distributed.

