



BRANCHING OUT: Activities near Croatia's Vuča River promoted organic methods of agriculture.

### The REC

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) was established in 1990 to assist in solving environmental problems in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) by promoting cooperation among non-governmental organisations, governments, businesses and other environmental stakeholders, and by supporting the free exchange of information and public participation in environmental decision-making.

The REC has been involved in Danube environment-related projects since its inception, and has taken an active role in cooperating with key Danube players to enable NGO involvement in international initiatives related to the entire basin. The REC closely cooperates with relevant stakeholders such as the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and the Danube Environmental Forum.

The organisation took part in the Danube Pollution Reduction Programme (1999–2001) by enabling NGO contributions toward the initiative's goals. Additionally, the REC participated in the ICPDR expert group, which developed the Danube River Basin Strategy for Public Participation in River Basin Management Planning 2003–2009. This document was adopted by the ICPDR in June, 2003.

### The Danube Regional Project

The world's most international river basin, the Danube River Basin has been radically altered over the last 150 years by human activity. It has lost 80 percent of its wetlands and floodplains and continues to suffer from pollution from industry, farming and municipal wastewater.

The Danube Regional Project (DRP) was launched in 2001 in cooperation with 13 national signatories of the Danube River Protection Convention, Danube NGOs, the European Union (EU) and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). The DRP's main goal is to help the ICPDR and Danube countries to cooperate in fulfilling their commitments to implement the river convention and EU environmental legislation, especially the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

One of the key activities of the DRP is the distribution of grants to NGOs to help them contribute to this work. With these funds, NGOs have worked to:

- **Enhance public awareness and participation** by carrying out publicity campaigns and reaching out to media.
- **Reduce agricultural pollution** through education and promotional efforts focused on best agricultural practices.
- **Raise public awareness** about the impacts of phosphates in laundry detergents.
- **Conserve wetlands** through restoration efforts and through encouraging water managers to include wetlands in their planning activities.



### Grants for the river

The grants component of the Danube Regional Project was designed to enable environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the Danube River countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to contribute to the reduction of nutrient and toxic pollution of watercourses. This project has two main components, national grants focusing on issues of national priority and regional grants promoting cooperation in trans-boundary projects.

In the second round of DRP grants, NGOs were awarded a combined total of USD 636,000, which was divided as follows:

- USD 177,170 to fund five regional projects, each involving NGOs from multiple countries. These projects focused on facilitating the reduction of nutrient and toxic pollution in the target countries of the Danube River Basin: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.
- USD 458,834 for 57 national NGO initiatives which took a multi-stakeholder approach to address different issues related to Danube pollution.

In total, 62 projects were coordinated and monitored by the REC through its country office network, which covers 11 countries in the Danube basin.

### National grants improve water quality

National-level projects were awarded up to USD 15,000 a piece for work that addressed a broad spectrum of problems facing the Danube and its tributaries.

While attempting to maintain the health of the Danube, Drina, Ipoly, Maramures, Prut, Sava, and Zitova rivers, the NGOs carried out activities directly benefitting both local communities and the wider Danube River basin. Activities encouraging organic agriculture took place in four countries, environmentally friendly detergents were promoted in the Czech Republic, and new wastewater cleaning systems for households and farms were introduced in Slovenia.

NGO initiatives were crucial for initiating public awareness actions in all countries, further playing a catalysing role in tackling all forms of water pollution.

The national NGO grants focused on:

- **Agricultural discharge:** 28 percent of projects addressed agricultural issues through activities such as promoting organic farming.
- **Municipal discharge:** 17 percent of projects dealt with problems caused by municipalities, particularly in the area of wastewater treatment.
- **Land use/wetlands:** 22 percent of the projects involved work such as improving the natural cleansing functions of wetlands and erosion control.
- **Industrial discharge:** 33 percent of the projects involved activities such as raising awareness about household products and alternative solutions to unsustainable consumption habits.

AMOUNTS AWARDED BY COUNTRY			
COUNTRY	USD AWARDED	COUNTRY	USD AWARDED
Bosnia and Herzegovina	49,972	Romania	50,000
Bulgaria	40,000	Slovakia	50,000
Croatia	48,865	Slovenia	40,000
Czech Republic	40,000	Serbia and Montenegro	50,000



## Bringing NGOs into the flow

Second round of national grants for the Danube Regional Project



REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER



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HERD MENTALITY: Cattle ranching in Bulgaria takes an undue toll on the Osam River.



## SERBIA

### LEAPing into action

Few projects succeed on so many levels as the Wastewater Treatment in the Rural Households project in Serbia's municipality of Cacak. With a grant of USD 9,000, the Association of Mountaineers Kablar, Cacak set about to addressing crises in the Zapadna Morava River. The Zapadna Morava is part of the Danube River basin, flows through Cacak, and is therefore subject to damage due to wastewater drainage.

The municipality's local environmental action plan (LEAP) document indicated seemingly insurmountable problems such as polluted water ways and accumulators from the large quantities of pollutants; insufficiently developed environmental awareness; a threat to the very principle of sustainable development of different types of ecosystems; and a great number of septic tanks, which heavily burdens groundwater and soil.

An ambitious plan to address the problems enumerated in the Cacak LEAP document was undertaken with the USD 9,000 grant received. Alongside general awareness-raising activities, two pilot lagoons were established in the municipality. New microbiology culture technologies were used in implementing wastewater treatment systems for rural areas in an effort to eliminate organic pollutants. Stakeholders involved in the project included local farmers, the municipality government, action groups, an NGO and the Institute for Health Protection.

The project is well underway in fulfilling its stated goals: reduction of water pollution in rural areas, development of sustainable solutions for wastewater treatment, implementation of the LEAP, and the reduction of toxic releases from diffuse and point water pollution sources in Cacak municipality.

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## CROATIA

### Workshopping the word

With a grant award of USD 11,970, the NGO Europe House Vukovar went to work spreading knowledge and know-how addressing the issue of agricultural discharge throughout Croatia in the second phase of the Promoting Methods of Eco and Organic Agriculture project.

In Vukovar, Ilok and Tovarnik, the project team worked to raise public awareness about ecological issues, enticed local agricultural producers to implement organic agriculture methods, promoted earth-friendly products to consumers, and involved schoolchildren and teachers in organic farming promotion. The team distributed 800 leaflets and 350 thematic brochures to attendees of 27 lectures and 15 workshops for agriculturists. Educational programmes will continue in five primary schools and one secondary eco-school in Ilok.

Europe House Vukovar's scope expanded further, with activities organised in Sarengrad, Bapska, Tovarnik and Ilaca. Awareness-raising was accomplished through surveys and subsequent presentation of results; distribution of informational leaflets; and public presentations. A study tour to an Osijek eco fair was also organised.

Project workers organised other workshops on ecological cattle breeding; the use of Californian earthworms in eco agriculture; soil preparation for ecological production of vegetables; organic production in agriculture and viticulture; and compost production.

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## HUNGARY

### Mobilised and making a difference

In 2005, the town of Esztergom and surrounding area went through a severe environmental crisis when the local segment of the Danube River was polluted by a hazardous sewage water leak from nearby incinerator. Thanks to a USD 4,186 grant, however, the Esztergomi Kornyezetkultura Association was able to rapidly form a coalition of stakeholders that already represents one of Hungary's ecological success stories.

This group of citizens from the Esztergom area now comprises a wide range of stakeholders, local citizens, local factories, municipalities, NGOs and water management authorities from Hungary and Slovakia. These stakeholders were united to participate in activities seeking to protect the area's entire water basin including the Danube River and smaller bodies of water. Mapping and monitoring were undertaken in order to quantify pollution sources, and data was distributed as stakeholder considered solutions.

The Esztergomi Kornyezetkultura Association organised seven forums for citizens in six settlements regarding the effects of construction and operation of a new cement factory site in the area, ultimately resulting in the defeat of the construction in five referenda. The association also worked out an agreement to prevent further incineration of hazardous waste which could potentially damage local water sources.

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**A Slovenian project gave families using cotton diapers USD 100 for the environmental savings they spared the community.**

## ROMANIA

### Communication for the common good

A success story in Romania can be seen in the achievements of the Association for Ecology and Sustainable Development Iasi. With the help of a USD 9,000 grant designed to be applied to the problem area of agriculture discharge, the association carried out awareness-raising activities and built a platform for controlled deposit of agricultural waste in the village of Prisacani.

In terms of awareness-raising, the association essentially started from scratch to build a network of Iasi County communities, schools, local authorities, NGOs and media. In three public meetings in Prisacani and Mosna, the word on best practices in agriculture was spread through printed matter, CDs, radio announcements, and multi-media presentations.

Most significant to the project, however, was the excellent feedback and willing participation from attendees in audiences of up to 200. Through such communication, the association was able to ascertain that the main interest of community members lay in concrete measures for reducing nutrient pollution.

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## SLOVENIA

### Mother Earth and babies

Two seemingly indispensable consumer products result in problems among the most pressing of environmental issues. Disposable diapers and laundry detergent have been or are being used by virtually every household in modern Europe, yet little is done to seek solutions in disposing these pollutants properly.

In Slovenia, 99 percent of parents use disposable diapers, representing fully 10 percent of non-degradable waste in waste deposits. The Storklja Association of Family Members sought to put a stop to such practices, applying a USD 10,000 to its Environmentally Friendly Diapers and Washing Detergents project. Through promotional material, a website, seminars and the education of parents and professionals, the association hoped to introduce a whole new school of thought in child-rearing.



DOWNHILL: Project work in Cacak, Serbia addressed the lack of treatment facilities for household wastewater.



The association introduced a proposal to the authorities in Ljubljana and Maribor, the two largest communities in Slovenia. An economic study showed that every child who regularly wears cotton diapers yields environmental savings for the community of approximately EUR 100. Therefore, the association argued, families using cotton diapers should receive this money as a reward.

Not surprisingly, the proposal made the project more appealing to community members and by the end of the implementation period, an association study showed that the number of cotton diaper users had notably increased: Thanks to this project, minds in Slovenia have been changed for the better.

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## BULGARIA

### Getting involved

Many national grant projects list "greater stakeholder involvement" among the stated objectives. The results achieved by the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation's project, More Space for Rivers and Safety for People, are therefore enviable.

Provided with a USD 5,100 grant, the foundation set about to improve the status of floodplain ecosystems along the Bulgarian section of the Danube River basin, with particular focus on the Iskar, Vit and Osam rivers. Facilitation of enhancement of the rivers' self-purifying capacity, reduction of organic pollution and flood consequences mitigation were also targeted by the foundation. Activities undertaken by the foundation encompassed the largest variety and quantity of local, regional and national stakeholders in the process of flood management and prevention to date. The project involved three ministries, three regional inspectorates of environment and water, three district governments, seven NGOs, two agricultural services, three scientific organisations and 18 municipalities in addition to various business and local media outlets.

The foundation also carried out a pair of nationwide awareness-raising campaigns on integrated water management and drafted proposals for a manual on evaluation of river zones at risk of flooding and a programme for reduction of flood risk in the Danube Basin.

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# Reducing nutrient and toxic pollution at the national level