Lasting impressions

REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

ANNUAL REPORT 2011
Rich in endemic plant species, the Central and Eastern European region is exposed to the various impacts of climate change. Changes in temperature and rainfall patterns are predicted to lead to biodiversity loss, and many of the region’s native plants are likely to become increasingly vulnerable.

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For this year’s annual report, members of staff were invited to contribute their favourite nature pictures. In addition, the Hungarian Natural History Museum kindly allowed the REC to photograph pressed flowers from its historic collection. One of the selected flowers dates from as far back as 1833.
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A member of the plantain family, Wulfenia baldaccii is native to Albania and can be found in shady, rocky areas. It has narrow leaves and tubular blue-lilac flowers.

The purple spring crocus, *Crocus vernus*, can be found widely in wooded mountain areas of Central and Eastern Europe.

Primula farinosa is commonly known as the Bird's-eye primrose. This, and many other species of primrose, can be found in the Baltic States.

One of the nation's symbols of Hungary, the Colchicum hungaricum, or Hungarian crocus, was first identified in the nineteenth century.
Lasting impressions

Durmitor National Park in Montenegro is a World Heritage Site. The name Durmitor comes from the Balkan Romance word for sleeping.

Albanian and Croatian species were identified by Hungarian botanist Arpad von Degen.

A rich diversity of landscapes contributes to the colourful character of the region.

Derdap National Park on the Danube in Serbia.
The yellow-flowered Degenia velebitica, which belongs to the mustard family, is endemic to the Velebit and Kapela mountains in Croatia and has become a symbol of the region.

Positive developments in 2011 had a major impact on the REC’s work. Amendments to the REC Charter entered into force, approved by over two-thirds of the signatories, and will help streamline REC operations in response to their changing context.

The text of the international agreement on the status of the REC was agreed on after several years of hard work on the part of an international group of lawyers and diplomats. Latvia, Montenegro, Hungary and Albania signed the agreement in 2011 and began the ratification process. This opens a new page in the development of the REC as an international organisation, which we hope will bring with it the many benefits of a harmonised legal status and more favourable operational conditions.

The Hungarian EU Presidency brought with it major opportunities for building on the REC’s expertise to address EU environmental priorities. These opportunities included participation in the Informal Environment Ministerial Council Meeting; support to the Danube Strategy Secretariat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and hosting and contributing to a number of key international events related to climate change, water management, international environmental issues and sustainable development.

The expansion of REC operations to Belarus became a reality after a contract was signed with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency for activities to strengthen local environmental planning and environmental civil society. We hope for a similar development in Ukraine. A first Sustainable Development Academy course was offered to participants from Ukraine and Belarus, and Green Pack Ukraine was launched in Kiev.

During 2011, the REC began to implement its new strategy for the period up to 2015. New projects and programmes were launched in line with identified priorities, new partnerships were established, and exchanges of knowledge and best practice between regions and countries were further intensified. All this has helped to create a solid basis for implementing the REC Strategy and marks new milestones in the REC’s professional development.

I trust that the year ahead will witness new developments, new horizons and new perspectives for the REC in the fulfilment of its mission, both in our traditional countries of operation and with new partners. It is clear that only with the solid support of donors, governments in the REC region and other partners will the REC be able to face the tasks and challenges ahead. Thanks to all who contribute to the REC’s success!

Jaakko Henttonen, Chair of the Board
In 2011, the REC began to implement its new five-year strategy, which was developed with the strong support of our signatory governments on the basis of a comprehensive needs assessment. The 2011-2015 strategy identifies strategic groups within our beneficiary countries, taking into consideration their key environmental issues and individual political status. Our strategic goal for the next five years is to promote and put into practice governance for sustainability, and to facilitate the transition towards a green economy in the REC’s beneficiary area and beyond.

This new framework helped us to develop new activities and to implement ongoing projects and programmes such as SINPHONIE, a complex research project focusing on health, environment and climate change; CIVITAS VANGUARD, which advances sustainable urban transport in an enlarged Europe; capacity building in the field of environment in Turkey; the setting up of the Environmental Management Center in Serbia; the SEARCH II project to improve the school environment and respiratory health of children; local environmental action planning for sustainability in Kosovo†; and strengthening local communities and sustainable schools in South Eastern Europe.

On behalf of the whole REC team I would like to express my gratitude for the financial, political and technical support we have received from governments and other stakeholders, including the Italian Trust Fund and the Japan Special Fund. Highlighting our latest achievements, the following pages offer a summary of the 2011 activities of the REC’s topic areas, including key 2011 projects.
Biodiversity

The REC hosted an international conference on wetland protection in Poland, attracting over 100 representatives of national parks, research institutions and conservation organisations in five countries. REC Poland also hosted the final conference of the Kampinos Wetlands project.

REC Slovakia launched the GreenNet project, focusing on the implementation of transnational strategies for the sustainable management of ecological networks along the former border between Eastern and Western Europe.

- Elaboration of Restoration Measures for Kampinos National Park – Warsaw University of Life Science
- LIFE+: European Capital for Nature and Biodiversity – German Environmental Aid
- Urban Spaces: Enhancing the Attractiveness and Quality of the Urban Environment – EU CENTRAL EUROPE Programme

Climate Change and Clean Energy

The topic area continued to support the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the promotion of clean energy use.

At the 34th session of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation, the REC organised a side event on tools for decision makers at national, regional and local level. The REC had a stand at the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC and contributed to the EU stand at the South African Climate Change Response Expo. The REC’s executive director made a statement during the plenary meeting.

As a regional focal point for Article 6 of the UNFCCC, related to education, training and awareness raising, the REC organised a third training session to help state negotiators improve their knowledge and skills in international climate negotiations.

In the framework of the Europe-China Clean Energy Centre (EC2), the REC organised study tours, published newsletters, and held an online e-learning course reaching nearly 300 experts in Chinese cities.

- Creating a Low-Carbon Pathway via Green Procurement – British Embassy, Ankara
- EC2 – European Commission and Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea
- Financing Low-Carbon Refurbishment – Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, the Netherlands
- Impact of Climate Change for Food Production in the Western Balkan Region – Embassy of Japan, Hungary

Brown bears are found in the Carpathian forests, Romania. where honey production is falling due to droughts.
The poppy seed can germinate many years after lying dormant in the soil. The magnolia is an ancient species that evolved before bees, so the flowers developed to encourage pollination by beetles. The photo above was taken in the garden of the REC head office, Szentendre. The fruit of the dog rose is rich in vitamin C and is used to make syrup, tea and jam.
EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

The REC developed the five-year framework programme Education for Sustainable Development in the Western Balkans. With support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, activities began in Kosovo*, Montenegro and Serbia. As part of the ongoing School for Climate programme, aimed at transferring climate and energy knowledge to teachers of 13- to 19-year-olds, the REC developed an e-learning website, published a teachers’ guide, and made seven radio broadcasts. A total of 115 trainers were trained.

In partnership with DigiTurk, REC Poland produced a documentary on the state of Polish agriculture six years after Poland’s EU accession.

A funding agreement was signed for the Blue Pack, which will complement the REC’s internationally recognised Green Pack. The Blue Pack will focus on energy, climate change and the efficient use of resources.

- Baltic Sea Challenge – City of Helsinki Environment Centre
- Design and Implementation of Public Awareness Strategy on Forestry – Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration, Albania
- Naturnet Plus Bulgaria – Czech Centrum for Science and Society
- Green Pack Junior Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Austrian Development Agency

ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCING

Through the Regions for Sustainable Change (RSC) project, supported by INTERREG IVC, the REC continued to support partners from eight EU member states to move towards low-carbon economic development. The final RSC publication, the handbook Building a Low-Carbon Economy, aims to help and inspire regional bodies throughout Europe to shift towards low-carbon development and introduces the extended online handbook. The REC presented a summary of the project findings on low-carbon development at regional level and the main outputs of the three-year project at the final conference held in Cornwall, UK.

The REC, together with DHV Consulting, hosted the Danube and Black Sea (DABLAS) Task Force Secretariat. In 2011, DABLAS produced two guidance documents on project pre-appraisal and river basin management planning. A regional meeting of Black Sea countries and the Black Sea Commission was organised.

- Launching the Global Fuel Economy Initiative in CEE and EECCA – United Nations Environment Programme
As part of the project to set up the Environmental Management Center in Serbia, in partnership with the Serbian Government and with funding from Norway, two national conferences were organised and memorandums of understanding were signed with 10 industrial facilities in Serbia.

The REC contributed to reports by the RainRebuild project, which aims to design a comprehensive value chain strategy to generate a change in the thinking of public and private building owners regarding the link between energy efficiency and value, and to encourage retrofitting in residential buildings.

After successful negotiations with the International Partnership for Expanding the Waste Management Services of Local Authorities, the REC hosted the sub-regional secretariat.

The REC prepared waste factsheets for SEE countries in cooperation with the Copenhagen Resource Institute, Denmark. Under the three-year Eco-innovation Observatory project funded by EC DG Environment, the REC and Technopolis elaborated country briefs for Bulgaria and Hungary.

As a consortium member of the European Topic Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production, the REC was contracted by the European Environment Agency to analyse national resource efficiency policies and instruments in Europe and compile a study on policies for sustainable housing.

- Development of Skadar Lake Management Strategy – Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, Montenegro
- Remediation of Bor Mining Waste Dump Sites – Witeveen+Bos

**Environmental Management**

Environmental Management
GREEN TRANSPORT

As secretariat of the CIVITAS Initiative, City-Vitality-Sustainability, the REC organised the annual Forum conference "Recipes for Success: Realising Sustainable Urban Mobility Together", attended by over 300 experts and politicians.

As part of the project Attaining Energy-Efficient Mobility in an Ageing Society, the REC published the book Staying Mobile. It also produced a website, newsletters and presentations, and provided communications support for the final conference.

The topic area contributed to www.eltis.org, the leading portal for transport news, policies and practices from European cities.

Under the project Local and Regional Initiatives in Energy Efficiency and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), the REC prepared case studies on local initiatives in CEE where ICTs were used to improve energy efficiency in housing and transport.

As a member of Mobile 2020, launched in 2011, the REC represented six partner countries in CEE and worked with national stakeholders and local authorities, promoting cycling in small and medium-sized cities.

- CIVITAS ELAN – Municipality of Ljubljana
- CIVITAS VANGUARD – EC DG Energy and Transport
- South East European Mobility Management Scheme – Municipality of Athens

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

The SINPHONIE project (Schools Indoor Pollution and Health: Observatory Network in Europe), supported by the EC DG for Health and Consumer Protection, aims to develop health and environment policy and strengthen cohesion between sectors in relation to air quality and health. Field activities were carried out in schools in 24 countries, comprising environmental monitoring and the health assessment of children, and resulting in indoor air quality guidelines for schools.

The SEARCH II project (School Environment and Respiratory Health of Children) focuses on improving air quality and children's health in schools in 10 countries. The World Health Organization mentioned both projects as important examples of cooperation for the implementation of the Parma Declaration, in particular Regional Priority Goal 3 on air quality and children's health.

- Plant and Food Biosecurity Network – Agroinnova
LAW DEVELOPMENT, ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE

The REC continued to develop the Themis Network, a platform for cooperation between candidate countries and potential candidates in SEE on natural resources management and the combating of illegal logging and other environmental crimes.

The topic area carried out research for the Regional Forest Law Enforcement and Trade Action Plan in all SEE candidate countries and potential candidates, with an emphasis on illegal logging and cross-border trade.

The topic area co-organised three training sessions on environmental inspection and the prosecution of environmental crimes with the US Environmental Protection Agency and the International Law Enforcement Academy in Budapest.


- Environment and Security Initiative Regional Activities – United Nations Office for Project Services
- Technical Assessments under Infringement and Complaints Contract – ARCADIS Belgium

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The REC supported and contributed to the development of local sustainability action plans and their integration in national strategies in 27 municipalities. Work also continued on the REC’s flagship programmes to support local environmental action plans and local biodiversity action plans throughout SEE.

Turkish communities benefited from REC capacity-building programmes in the field of the environment, which strengthened local-level management capacities and the active participation of environmental stakeholders, and delivered direct support.

- Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Western Balkans – European Centre for Nature Conservation
- Local Communities and Sustainable Schools – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland
- Local Environmental Action Planning – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

During the Ottoman Empire, the tulip was a symbol of wealth. The name Tulipa is said to come from the Turkish word ‘tülbend’, or turban, which the flower resembles.
Kick-off meetings for four projects supported by Germany and Finland via the ENVSEC Initiative to build capacity for implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers were held in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, and work plans were agreed. The programme began with a training in Lukavac, Bosnia and Herzegovina, to prepare cement factory specialists and ministry and municipal officials to carry out transparent decision making with public participation in the permitting procedure. The REC also brought together representatives of the judiciary, officials, legal experts and NGOs for a roundtable on access to justice and provided a one-day training in Belgrade, Serbia for civil society on using rights under the convention. The REC prepared an assessment of institutional, legal and training needs as part of updating the Strategy and Action Plan of the Aarhus Convention and strengthening its implementation in Albania, and a capacity-building programme was proposed.

Public consultation meetings were organised and facilitated by the REC on the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development’s revised Public Information Policy — in Moscow for EECCA NGOs and stakeholders, and in London for CEE countries and European and international organisations.

After successful fundraising, a three-year programme was launched in December to support environmental civil society organisations in Belarus and Moldova, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

○ Support for the Albanian Judicial System – Spanish Agency for International Cooperation
○ Supporting Environmental Civil Society in Serbia – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

The flowering scurvy grass, Cochlearia tatrae, grows in the Tatra Mountains in Slovakia and Poland. The leaves have a peppery taste and are rich in vitamin C.

The common chickweed, Stellaria media, is said to have medicinal properties. Aggtelek National Park in Hungary, home to the largest cave system in Central Europe along with the caves of the Slovak karst, provides a habitat for rare plant species and traditional varieties of fruit trees.
Four capacity-building courses were organised in 2011 for over 100 government officials and representatives of local authorities, businesses and civil society. The courses balanced theory and practice and encouraged exchanges of knowledge and the creation of international networks — a must for safeguarding the environment and shared resources in an increasingly interconnected Europe.

Newcomers Belarus and Ukraine benefited from a specially tailored course on sustainability, while enhanced programmes were developed for beneficiary countries in CEE, the Balkans and the Black Sea region.

Thanks to technical and financial support from the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea through the Italian Trust Fund, and the contributions of new and consolidated partners such as Venice International University, Agroinnova, Bahcesehir University and Bogazici University, the academy achieved its 2011 goals.

- Strengthening Environmentally Active Journalism in Montenegro – US Embassy, Podgorica
- Turkish Certificate Programme – Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY**

**WATER MANAGEMENT**

The REC and partners completed the project Promoting the Replication of Good Practices for Nutrient Reduction and Joint Collaboration in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Black Sea, Danube, Baltic Sea and Caspian Sea.

With Norwegian support, the REC finalised the project Enhancing Cross-Border Cooperation in the Drina River Basin, aimed at reducing transboundary water pollution risks.

The REC is a partner in the INTERREG IVC WATER CoRe project that provides a platform for exchange on water scarcity and drought issues for seven European regions. As part of a consortium, the REC supported DG Environment in the technical challenges of implementing the Water Framework Directive in Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia.

In Albania, the REC carried out disaster risk reduction assessments in the Shkodra region, including post-flood support. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the REC designed a regional action plan for the protection of the Ukrina River basin.

- Cross-Border Assessment and Management Plan for the Druksiai/Drisviaty Lake Basin – ENVSEC Initiative
- Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) – RAMBOLL Denmark

Marta Szigeti Bonifert, Executive Director
The island of Saaremaa, Estonia, lies between the Gulf of Riga and the Baltic Sea on a migration path for waterfowl that connects north eastern Europe with the Arctic. Thousands of migratory birds visit Saaremaa in spring and autumn each year, many of which are now protected species.
Commonly known as lily of the valley, in Bulgarian and Macedonian Convallaria majalis is called lass’s tears. It is a symbol of purity.

A species of Berberis, or barberry, Gymnospermium shqiptarum is native to Albania. It has thorny shoots and edible berries.

The white-flowered European dwarf cherry Prunus fruticosa is native to Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary.

The snowbell Soldanella hungarica is native to European mountain regions, including the Carpathians and Balkans.
For over 20 years, the REC's activities have been made possible through the generosity of its donors. Their financial contributions enable the REC to continue investing in the region's ecological future, ensuring that its rich resources are protected and preserved.

The REC is able to draw on a wealth of human resources within its office network. The photographs supplied by staff from the REC's head office and country offices are a celebration of the enormous diversity and unique qualities of the region.
We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide an opinion on the financial statements in accordance with IFRS. Our audit was conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing. Those standards require that we comply with ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement.

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe as of 31 December 2011, and of its financial performance and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards. Those standards require that we comply with ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement.

In our opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position as at 31 December 2011, the statement of revenue, expense and changes in fund balance and movements of cash for the year then ended, and of its financial performance and its cash flows for the year then ended. We consider the financial statements to be free from material misstatement.
INDEPENDENT AUDITOR’S REPORT

TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, which comprise the statements of financial position as of 31 December 2011, the statements of revenue, expenses and changes in fund balances for the year then ended, and a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information.

Responsibility

The management is responsible for the preparation of these financial statements in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards and International Standards on Auditing. Those standards require that we comply with ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement.

Decision on Liability

An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates made by management, as well as considering whether the company’s internal control is adequate and operating effectively.

Opinion

We have determined that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion. In our opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe as at 31 December 2011, the statement of revenue, expenses and changes in fund balances for the year then ended, and a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information.

Management’s Responsibility for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation of these financial statements in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards and International Standards on Auditing. These standards require that management design, implement and maintain internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error. In this context, achieving high levels of accountability is essential. Failure to maintain adequate internal control and a reasonable assurance about its effectiveness is a significant failure.
For over 20 years, the REC’s activities have been made possible through the generosity of its donors. Their financial contributions enable the REC to continue investing in the region’s ecological future, ensuring that its rich resources are protected and preserved.

The REC is able to draw on a wealth of human resources within its office network. The photographs supplied by staff from the REC’s head office and country offices are a celebration of the enormous diversity and unique qualities of the region.
The way ahead will be filled with new challenges for the REC as the organisation responds to a changing context for its activities. There is plenty to look forward to in the region as the seeds of environmental awareness sown over the last two decades continue to bear fruit.
Marta Szügeti Bonifert  
Executive Director

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Deputy Executive Director
for Operations

Radeje Lausevic  
Deputy Executive Director
for Environmental Policy

Kent Richardson  
Director for International Relations
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Director of the REC Sustainable
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Head of the Italian Trust Fund

Gordana Kocuharova  
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The fragrant Hungarian lilac Syringa josikaea is native to Central and Eastern Europe and can be found in the Carpathian Mountains.
Jaakko Henttonen
Chairman of the Board
Director of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership Support Fund, EBRD

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Lasting impressions

ANNUAL REPORT 2011
As they carry out their work, the dedicated staff of the REC have many opportunities to reflect on the vulnerability of the majestic and inspiring landscapes of the region. This annual report is a keepsake to treasure of an inheritance that is ours only for safekeeping.
THE REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE is an international organisation with a mission to assist in addressing environmental issues. The REC fulfills this mission by promoting cooperation among governments, non-governmental organisations, businesses and other environmental stakeholders, and by supporting the free exchange of information and public participation in environmental decision making.

The REC was established in 1990 by the United States, the European Commission and Hungary. Today, the REC is legally based on a charter with over 30 signatories. The REC has an office network in 17 countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey. The head office is located in Szentendre, Hungary.

The REC actively participates in key global, regional and local processes and contributes to environmental and sustainability solutions within and beyond its country office network, transferring transitional knowledge and experience to countries and regions. Recent donors are the European Commission and the governments of Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as other inter-governmental and private institutions.

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* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.