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Green Horizon is the quarterly magazine of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), published from 1990 to the spring of 2004 as The Bulletin. Green Horizon assists the REC in its mission to promote public participation in environmental decision-making by providing information on the environment and encouraging cooperation among regional stakeholders. Green Horizon reports on the cases and stories that shape the environment and sustainable development in Central and Eastern Europe. The magazine is useful for professionals from businesses, international organisations, national governments, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions and the media. The views and opinions expressed in Green Horizon do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe. Green Horizon is not responsible for the contents of paid announcements and advertising published in the magazine. Green Horizon is available on the Web at <greenhorizon.rec.org>.

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ON THE COVER
You are what you eat … and spray … and apply …
To 16th century painter Giuseppe Archimboldo, the portrait of man included trees, flowers and seasonal vegetables. Can we get back to these “simpler” times, or are we faced with a life full of chemicals?

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Films and chemicals

The ancient satirist Juvenal observed that emperors needed just two things to tame the Roman masses: *panem et circenses*. The same recipe holds in today’s consumer society, with shopping malls providing the bread and show business taking the circus to the far-reaches of imagination. The masses have also evolved – becoming voracious consumers of goods, information and entertainment. And with the right to vote, they now have the power to change the rules of the game.

People are waking up to the fact that quality of life depends on sound health and a clean, natural environment. Showbiz has capitalised on this trend with films such as the climate change disaster flick, *The Day After Tomorrow*. Some Greens have criticised the film for failing to suggest meaningful ways to avoid environmental Armageddon. They groaned at the official website’s suggestion that better shopping habits could combat climate change. “Buy products which will compensate for (‘neutralise’) every tonne of CO₂ you produce,” the site suggests. “Or buy gifts which neutralise a friend’s CO₂.” Despite these poorly considered ideas, the movie drew more attention to global warming than any environmental report ever has, scientists admit.

With fewer special effects and a much smaller budget, another film made a more convincing critique of contemporary consumerist behaviour. *Super Size Me* spotlighted one of today’s most vexing health-related problems: eating too much, too fast, and too unhealthily. Starting from the fact that in the United States, 37 percent of children and two out of three adults are overweight or obese, film producer Morgan Spurlock looked at the legal, financial and physical costs of America’s hunger for fast food.

A recent survey by Consumers International revealed that Europeans’ preference for cleaner, organic products is often abused by producers who dress up their goods with meaningless or fraudulent labels. Consumers should demand clear proof of a product’s environmental benefits and healthfulness, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, where norms and rules on eco-friendly labels are lacking. Consumers International warns: “‘Green’ labels often hide emulsifiers, preservatives, colourings, stabilisers, and taste enhancers. Ironically, these products don’t look or taste like real food. Beyond edible additives lurks the larger consumer market, which is crowded with chemically loaded goods whose effects on nature and human health remain unknown.

A draft directive on registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals (REACH) aims to reconcile the interests of human health, industry and environment. Scheduled for submission to the EU Parliament this autumn, REACH has scared the chemical industry with its potential trade implications. A heated argument rages in Brussels over expected costs of implementation, while criticism from the US and major EU traders was backed by the chairman of the European Parliament’s Environment Committee Karl-Heinz Florenz. REACH might not be put to a vote during its first reading at the end of 2005, Florenz said in the *Environmental News Daily*. Chemistry promises to be the first tough test for the newly nominated EU Environment Commissioner斯塔夫斯·丁马斯。European health depends on him receiving top marks.
Media have an unhealthy attitude

Aside from sensational articles about earthquakes and mass epidemics, the topic of environment and health rarely makes the headlines. Panelists at a June roundtable in Budapest said the media ignores important stories about the price of mismanaging our resources.

**AKOS NAGY**

**Business: Journalists interested in economics, not science**

NAGY: Strangely, having information about diseases does not motivate people into doing something. A survey connected to osteoporosis, which is a very big problem in Hungary, asked people who have the disease: “Have you ever heard of osteoporosis?” Ninety-six percent answered that they know of this disease. Half knew the risk factors. Only 30 percent spoke about it with their doctor. About 11 percent went to have a screening. It seems hard to motivate them, not just give them the information, but to make them do something for themselves.

Often when companies try to push information through the media, they are rebuffed: “O.K. you can buy advertising, you can pay for publications, but we don’t care about this kind of information” is the usual answer. We need to break through these walls. We need help from the other side, too.

The regulatory environment is very strict both in Hungary and Europe on healthcare communication. One year ago the EU refused to pass rules that would have eased restrictions on communications about diabetes and other major diseases. Mass media’s economic dependence and the strict rules are the two reasons why we are now working in a communications twilight zone. In the long term, this will kill the interest of news organisations in new business products and we’ll communicate to the public only via advertisements and ads. Maybe these forms of communications are exactly why people know about the diseases, but they are not motivated at all to do anything.

It is also characteristic of Hungary that scientific themes are not topics in the general media. Journalists simply do not care what happens in research or what the most important scientific themes are. Journalists are interested only in the economic side and nothing else.

**CORRADO CLINI**

**Government: Bias for the extreme distorts truth**

green HORIZON is a very successful example of how to correctly and accurately communicate on environmental issues. But in general, mass media seldom address environment and health issues without creating an alarm or a sense of emergency. I think this is the wrong approach, because if communication related to the environment should necessarily be linked with a state of emergency, the right information needed to successfully manage environment and health problems would never make it through.

Let’s take as an example a typical, relevant, economic and political cross-sectoral issue like energy. If we look at environment and energy we can see good results in the explication of the positive role of environmental protection in addressing energy security and economic growth. Addressing environment and health protection from the point of view of energy could have interesting results in communications because we could show how, in concrete terms, protecting the environment could drive energy security and economic growth.

Another example is GMOs. I think the press and TV in the EU addressed GMOs in incorrect terms. On many occasions the information was extreme. Some say that GMOs affect the environment and the health of the population, and so they are dangerous. But some say that GMOs are useful for the environment. Maybe a correct representation of the issue would require a figure about the effective costs in positive and negative terms of the introduction of GMOs — calculating both the effects on agriculture and productivity, as well as the environmental damage.

Concerning GMOs, I think that we need to take a critical look at the situation in Europe and in the new EU countries. First of all, we have science: five or six important scientific institutions working on this issue in Europe. They are offering different cases for understanding the issue.

We do not have a European scientific institution or agency able to prepare, elaborate and communicate information to consumers and governments. And this is a dramatic gap, because in Europe we are now in a passive or defensive situation because of this gap. The media is playing a difficult but not positive role, because they refer to different points of view in a relationship with different actors.

The discussion on environment and health in CEE’s media was held at the launch of green HORIZON at the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Budapest. The organisers were the REC, the Bellagio Forum for Sustainable Development and the Reuters Foundation. Lending help were the World Health Communication Associates, the Italian Trust Fund and the World Health Organization — European Office. Opinions from NGOs and scientists will be printed in the magazine’s next issue.
Environmentalists have questioned Slovakian energy authorities for their declared intentions of building new nuclear power plants to replace the 1,700 MW in capacity that will be lost in 2008 when both the units at Bohunice V1 and four coal-fired plants will shut down.

Greenpeace and the Energy Centre in Bratislava claim Slovakia can compensate with cleaner, safer sources, such as natural gas or renewable technologies.

Slovakia’s Industry Minister Pavol Rusko claims two new nuclear power stations will be needed in Mochovce. President of the Slovak Nuclear Forum Tibor Mikus said Slovakia had no extra capacity for hydro power and could only meet its Kyoto goals with new nuclear capacity.

Juraj Rizman of Greenpeace in Slovakia and Igor Ilias of the Energy Centrum Bratislava claim that 860 MW of capacity could be created with a combination of biomass, solar and small hydro if Slovakia would bring in place proper support measures. This would compensate for the closure of Bohunice V1. Economically effective energy efficiency measures could add the equivalent of 2.95 MW, Ilias claimed.

Reported plans to restart of Block II of Hungary’s Paks Nuclear Plant have provoked a protest by Greenpeace, which cited safety concerns surrounding the possible contamination of its fuel rods.

“There are rumours that part of the nuclear fuel rods used for the Paks 2 re-start have rested before in a pool together with damaged fuel rods from an accident in 2003,” Greenpeace wrote in a July news release. “These used fuel rods could therefore be contaminated, which could have a negative influence on the stability of the reactor, once started up.”

But authorities claim the worries are unfounded. “The fuel elements are in good shape,” said Istvan Vidovszky, president of the Hungarian Nuclear Society. “However, if there should be any kind of problem, it will be discovered during the start-up procedure.”

Vidovszky noted that this start-up will proceed with more caution than usual, due to the long outage time.

Greenpeace has appealed to Hungary’s prime minister, the Hungarian Nuclear Energy Agency and others calling for cancellation of the restart and an independent safety study.

Hungary’s monopoly electric power distributor is running at a deficit, according to Greenpeace, which has raised financial pressure for the restart at Paks.

A broken pipe allowed 3,000 litres of radioactive water to leak onto the containment floor of Temelin Block II in the Czech Republic on June 6. The Czech State Office for Nuclear Safety (SUJB) claimed no radioactivity was released into the environment, and Greenpeace issued a statement agreeing there was no need for panic.

However, the Czech chapter of the World Information Service on Energy, an anti-nuclear group, claimed that the 40-hour delay before the Czechs notified authorities in Austria was longer than necessary. The incident was widely reported in Austria, and the reaction by NGOs was vehement.

The news agency ITAR-TASS claims that Russia has received 48 tonnes of nuclear waste from Bulgaria’s nuclear power plant, Kozloduy. The waste was shipped to the Zheleznogorsk mining and chemical combine in Krasnoyarsk Kray, a political region in Siberia, according to the report. Within a week of arrival, the fuel was to be immersed in a pool of water, where it would sit for 20 years before being moved to dry storage.

The accuracy of the report couldn’t be verified. But Russian contacts of the Bankwatch Network questioned one of the particulars, stating that Krasnoyarsk Kray has no dry storage for nuclear waste and has no plans to build one. Still, the gist of the story could be true, said Petko Kovatchev of the CFE/CEE Bankwatch Network. Although, Russia has outlawed the storage of radioactive waste, it permits storage of spent fuel that can be processed for future use. Kovatchev said the designation of the material can be easily changed for political convenience.

An e-mail query to the Bulgarian energy ministry went unanswered, which didn’t surprise Kovatchev. As long as the Bulgarian government is pressing for a new nuclear power plant at Belene, it will make little effort to elicit public comment on the issue. The government wants to show European donors that storage of spent fuel presents no obstacles to the project, he said.

“So far the issue was kept more or less out of the public’s eyes,” Kovatchev wrote. “They do NOT want to have an open and honest discussion.
Putin offers *quid pro Kyoto*

Speaking at a joint press conference with EU leaders in Moscow in May, President Vladimir Putin said that Russia had changed its attitude toward the Kyoto Protocol in exchange for Europe’s approval of Russia joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), Russian and Western media reported. The EU “met us halfway on certain issues during the WTO negotiations. This cannot but have a positive effect on our position on the Kyoto Protocol. We will speed up Russia’s moves toward ratifying the protocol,” Putin said.

Earlier this year, some influential Russians had raised their voices against the country’s ratification of Kyoto, which would effectively doom the protocol. Putin’s conciliatory remarks are good news for the protocol’s proponents, but they shouldn’t be taken as gospel, said Maria Khovanskaia, a project officer at the REC’s Climate Change Programme. “As long as there is no ink on paper I would be cautious,” she said. “And Putin has left the escape door free. If Russia fails to ratify, he can always say that it’s all the Duma’s fault.”

Still, during a June meeting on technical aspects of Kyoto protocol commitments mainly on the basis of a well-prepared operational plan for decreasing greenhouse gas emissions which defines the measures for all relevant sectors,” said Milena Marega, director of REC Country Office Slovenia. The plan was prepared in close communication with main actors from the energy sector and industry, Marega explained. The allocation plan includes 98 heavy industrial companies with total GHG emissions of 26.3 millions tonnes of carbon dioxide.

According to its ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, Slovenia has committed to cut its 1990 level annual emissions by 8 percent during the commitment period of 2008-2012.

**European Union Update**

**Slovenian emissions plan approved**

Slovenia became the first new EU member state — and one of just five union wide — to gain approval for a national plan (Nap) for the EU greenhouse gas emission trading scheme. Three other states won conditional approval. The development marks an important step forward for the scheme, which is due for launch in January.

Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Sweden were the other countries to win full approval for their Naps, while Austria, Germany and the UK have been given a list of changes before approval will be granted.

Meanwhile, the Commission is to send Greece and Italy first warnings of possible court action for failing to submit their Naps for scrutiny. All other EU-15 countries, plus five of the 10 new member states, have now sent at least draft plans, the Commission said. Its assessment of these is due in September.

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**GMO corn stuck in EU’s teeth**

EU governments in July could not agree on whether to allow imports of GMO corn for human consumption, but the European Commission approved the same product’s use for animal feed, the Associated Press reported.

The controversy concerns US-based Monsanto’s Roundup Ready corn, which is widely grown in the United States and elsewhere. The patented crop, which is engineered to resist the firm’s Roundup herbicide, was approved by the European Food Safety Authority last year.

EU Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom has backed Monsanto’s application, and nine EU countries gave their assent — the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and Britain. Nine others voted against — Latvia, Denmark, Cyprus, Malta, Italy, Greece, Austria, Portugal and Luxembourg. Hungary, Slovenia, Germany and Spain abstained, while Estonia and Poland expressed no view.

Environmental NGOs across Europe remain largely opposed to GMOs.

“GMO’s favour pharmaceutical companies, large seed companies, the petrochemical industry and the pesticide industry,” said Matthew Hayes, of Hungary’s Open Garden Foundation, a group that promotes organic farming. “They provide no credible benefits for small-scale producers or subsistence farmers.”

Environment ministers split along similar lines last month when considering Roundup Ready corn imports for animal feed.

That application was approved Monday by the European Commission. Under EU rules, if ministers don’t agree in 90 days, the Commission decides.

However, imports for feed can’t start until the equivalent approval has been granted for food. That means they will have to wait until after September 29, when the food application is expected to go back to the Commission.
Slovakia plans crackdown on illegal dumps

Slovakia would clamp down on illegal waste dumps, according to a draft government proposal. The country’s environment minister Laszlo Miklos put the number of illegal dumps nationwide at 9,000 and the price tag for cleaning them up at about EUR 2.5 million per year.

The proposed law would establish for the first time an integrated framework for investigating and prosecuting illegal landfills.

There would be a maximum fine of up to SKR 10 million (EUR 250,000). Currently, Slovak rules on illegal landfills are dispersed in sectoral legislation, and there are few successful prosecutions.

An environment ministry official told the Environment Daily that he expected fierce opposition to the proposed law from other ministries and industrial companies.

The 1999 EU landfill directive requires all landfills to be licensed. This is posing significant challenges in many EU members, old as well as new.

Baltic fishermen targeted in trawling protest

Environmental groups urged the United Nations to ban bottom trawl fishing in international waters, a method that counts fishermen of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as its main practitioners.

In bottom trawling, fishing boats drag massive nets along the ocean bottom in extremely deep water near underwater mountains known as seamounts, destroying coral, sponges and deep-sea habitats.

The technique is unregulated in extensive areas of the world’s high seas because most seamounts are located beyond the reach of national laws, according to the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition.

Croatia holds line on illegal buildings

In the face of rabid protest by property owners, the Croatian Ministry of Environmental Protection has held strong in an ongoing campaign to eliminate the blight of illegal construction in the country’s scenic tourist areas.

This spring, the ministry took aim at unpermitted developments on the Dalmatian Coast. A private investor from Split began building a large tourist vacation centre, and despite the lack of a building license, managed to sell all the resort’s flats, including one to the popular Croatian singer Mladen Grdovic, who has well-known connections to the country’s political elite. Grdovic angled for public sympathy by protesting in front of the state’s bulldozers, but the stunt backfired. The public applauded the state for targeting the country’s political elite.

The campaign against illegal structures started in 2000 along the seacoast, and marked the government’s first tough measures to assert the rule of law in the physical planning of the country. The campaign’s first salvos were seen by some as heavy-handed state’s bulldozers, but the stunt backfired. The public applauded the state for targeting rich and powerful violators, not just poor ones.

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Bulgarian villagers protest EU financed incinerator

Villagers from the Stara Zagora region are protesting a proposed national hazardous waste centre, a project funded by the EU and sited on nearby land. Following a recent presentation on the centre by the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment, locals arrived at the planned project site with banners declaring, “No to the hazardous waste centre” and “We yearn for a breath of clean air — understand us.”

The project includes a hazardous waste incinerator and is similar to a project the ministry proposed several years ago. At a public meeting designed to allay local fears about the project’s impacts, local villager Georgi Binev commented to officials, “Why are you still lying to us? You’ve been showing us the same presentation for the last four years. Tell us about the dioxins.”

The National Hazardous Waste Center is planned to be located near the village of Kovatchevo. It will include two hazardous waste incinerators with capacities of 15,000 and 30,000 tonnes of hazardous waste per year, a tank farm for liquid organic waste, a solidification facility and landfills. An additional landfill is to be built in the Soﬁa area.

According to the project’s feasibility study, half of the EUR 55.5 million investment is expected to be covered by an ISPA grant and half by a European Investment Bank loan.
Making use of the measures available under the rural development part of the CAP will be especially important. Such measures include so-called agri-environmental schemes, aid for less-favoured areas, farm advisory services and aid for small, semi-subsistence farms. But substantial administrative resources are needed to implement these measures successfully.

Grasslands

The main concern over land abandonment is with grasslands of high nature value that need limited grazing by sheep and cattle to maintain their richness. CAP payments can support farming income in these areas to some extent, but specific agri-environmental schemes will be needed as well.

A separate report by the EEA and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) warns that the EU will not reach the goal of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 if it does not do more to prevent the decline of its most biologically rich farmland.

With less than one third of the EU’s high nature value farmland covered by nature protection sites, the conservation of such farmland also depends largely on rural development measures under the CAP, according to the report High Nature Value Farmland: Characteristics, Trends and Policy Challenges.
Once upon a time, people thought that nature had just four basic elements: earth, water, fire and air. But today’s science posits a more complex view, with more than 100 basic elements and thousands of compounds and chemicals. From the time you wake up in the morning, you’re surrounded by them: from chemical finishes on your nightstand like glues and paint, to anti-stain protectors and flame retardants on your pillow, which, due to their durability, have lasting effects on the environment. Morning routines involve a further wave of chemicals: cosmetics, toiletries and perfumes with synthetic fragrances, toothpaste, toothbrushes and mouthwashes containing substances with names unfamiliar to most people. With breakfast, we ingest the stuff in earnest: any food that has been preserved, coloured, scented or made from agricultural products raised with pesticides and fertilisers contains chemicals. The milk in your coffee can contain residues of growth hormones and antibiotics.

The chemical industry has created a world containing countless previously non-existing substances, and in some cases people use them unwittingly, and hence, without any control. A new EU directive on the registration, evaluation and authorisation of chemicals — REACH for short — aims to put things back in order.

When Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring in 1962 exposed the hazards of the pesticide DDT she eloquently questioned humanity’s faith in technological progress, and helped to set the stage for the environmental movement. Since that time many chemicals have been subjected to rigorous regulation. DDT use is now restricted in most countries. But we need to ask whether this was enough.

In Europe manufacturers must routinely test new substances to see that they meet various criteria, and report the results to the authorities. However, most information obtained in this way remains in the domain of confidentiality. What is more, new standards do not apply to chemicals already on the market. Yet, when existing chemicals were recorded and catalogued more than 20 years ago, there were already over 100,000 of them in general use. There is very little information about proven or suspected environmental and public health impacts of the vast majority of chemicals that we use today.

And this is to say nothing of the countless ways chemicals can cause harm in combination with each other. This system complies with neither the polluter-pays principle, since authorities bear the burden of proof nor the precautionary principle, since when in doubt the existence of risk must be proven rather than the safety of the product.

A further problem is that current legislation discourages the innovation of new, safer substances because it’s easier and cheaper for industry to stick with the old chemicals that were grandfathered into the market.

The aims of the REACH directive, whose latest draft was presented in October of 2003, are to better protect human health and the environment from the hazards of chemicals, and to enhance the competitiveness of the EU chemical industry. The new directive will replace about 40 existing directives once it comes into force.

REACH will close the knowledge gap by providing safety information about chemicals produced or imported in volumes higher than one tonne per year per manufacturer or importer. The burden of proof now will be on industry. The applicant must demonstrate that the chemical can be used safely, and how to do so. Every firm in the supply chain will be obliged to ensure the safety of the chemicals they handle. To the extent possible, animal testing will be minimised. Testing programmes involving animals that are required for certain high-volume substances need to be agreed with the responsible authorities through an evaluation procedure before experiments begin. This is to ensure that the studies are designed to produce scientifically valid, relevant data while avoiding duplication.

Innovation of safer substances will be encouraged under REACH through reporting exemptions for chemicals used in research and development (as opposed to those that enter mass production) and lower registration costs for new, safe substances. The directive will require industry to consider substitute substances in certain cases, which will help decision-takers make authorisations and restrictions. Industry will be responsible for assessing the safety of identified uses before production and marketing. Authorities will be able to focus on issues of serious concern.

The total cost of the implementation is expected to be between EUR 2.8 and 5.2 billion over the next 10 to 15 years, while Europe will reap EUR 50 billion worth of health benefits over a 30-year period, according to the Commission’s impact assessment. It is likely that some substances won’t even be submitted for registration because manufacturers will be

Continued on page 14
Making the right chemistry safer and more transparent, but producers say it threatens their global competitiveness.

by Peter Bodo, Marton Herczeg and Robert Nemeskeri
The good, the bad and the RUSTY

As European mining moves to places like Romania, Serbia and Turkey, it's time to evaluate the best and worst practices

by Justin Hyatt

Over the centuries ore mining has been gradually shifting from the continent’s centre towards its peripheries. In today’s Europe, most large-scale mining takes place along a ring that passes through Sweden, Spain, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. A fair amount of activity is now taking place in Central and Eastern Europe, making it critical that people of the new member states examine mining practices and the trends in regulatory oversight.

Intense excavation has always been necessary to get raw materials for metal products. Today, rare metals are mined on a gargantuan scale to meet the needs of the modern IT industry. In order to satisfy an ever-expanding demand for microchips for computers, cars, mobile phones and other everyday devices, large amounts of ore must be mined. Among the metals needed are iron, copper, zinc, gold, molybdenum, and such rare earth elements as metallic tantalum, which is derived from the ore coltan (short for columbite-tantalite).

Mining’s toll on the earth can be conceptualised with the “ecological rucksack,” a measurement of the amount of material that a product consumes over its lifespan minus the mass of the product itself. As an example, to produce a 5 gram gold ring, two to three tonnes of rock must be excavated and reduced. It is not likely that the demand for metals will abate anytime soon, therefore better mechanisms are needed for safer, more environmentally sustainable mining. It is also crucial that people who live in mining areas are informed of developments in the region.

In Rosia Montana, Romania, a considerable amount of gold sits underground. The Canadian company Gabriel Resources, which owns the Rosia Montana Gold Corporation, hopes to turn it into Europe’s largest open pit mining operation by opening up four pits and creating a massive tailings dam. The project would involve a vast expansion of the mining already being carried out by the state. Even though no official permits have been granted, the new developer has already been buying up local farms and relocating residents to a replacement village.

It has been only four years since the trans-boundary mining disaster at Baia Mare, Romania. In that catastrophe, 100,000 cubic metres of water laced with cyanide and heavy metals spilled from a tailings pond and into the Lapus, Szamos, and Tisza rivers, and eventually into the Danube. It has not gone unnoticed that the proposed mine at Rosia Montana would also employ cyanide-leaching technology and a tailings pond connected by waterways to the Tisza.

The company, however, has pledged to use a somewhat safer process. Whereas in...
Baia Mare cyanide was reused in the existing tailing pond in a plateau dam, the Rosia Montana mine promises to run a course of cyanide detoxification and make use of an engineered rock dam, located in a valley. The authorities claim the operations will avoid a repeat of the Baia Mare spill, and the firm promises to abide by the strictest environmental regulations as well as certain voluntary codes. Yet local and international NGO opposition remains strong, and the Romanian Academy of Sciences has issued repeated declarations against the project.

**Impact on the community**

Apart from fears of a natural catastrophe, the social disruptions of relocating the local village have already been felt, and the company has experienced setbacks. Although Gabriel Resources has already spent USD 67 million to acquire properties and build a new village, only 38 percent of the villagers have sold their homes. The company is running behind schedule, having recently announced a one-year postponement of mine development until the second quarter of 2006. In an earlier report, the company stated that waning political support for the mining industry coupled with Romania’s bid for EU accession may doom the project.

This prospect has eroded share values and dampened investor confidence. Nonetheless, the US-based Newmont mining company recently announced plans to buy a 10 percent stake in Gabriel Resources, with the possibility of gaining 18.6 percent ownership by the end of 2005.

Mines elsewhere in the region face similar issues. The Ovacik mine on the west coast of Turkey is being cultivated by the Australian mining company Newmont/Normandy. Located near the town of Bergama, the project began gold and silver excavation in May of 2001 after a nine-year wait for permits and environmental impact assessments.

Before getting the green light, a study was commissioned of the project’s mine waste management facility. The study lauded the planned rock-fill impoundment structure, which has a higher level of safety than dams in the area. The operators installed a composite liner which helps to prevent leakage from the reservoir area. The amount of cyanide in the tailings pond is well below the 0.1 mg/litre level required by the Turkish Ministry of Environment and the 50 mg/litre level suggested by the United Nations Environment Programme. Due to the reuse of tailings water, there is no discharge to surface waters. This and other risk assessment studies led to the granting of all permits in 2001. Nonetheless, there has been fierce opposition from locals who fear the use of cyanide and believe that the region is under threat of grave contamination.

**Successful closure**

In the Mecsek Mountains in the south of Hungary near the city of Pécs, an old uranium mine has been shut down and recultivated with flora specially selected to contain contamination. This mine operated from the 1960s through the 1990s. After its full closure in 1997, the operating company began recultivating the landscape and laying off workers. The company’s payroll shrank from 8,000 employees to 220, although hundreds of others continued to work in spin-off businesses. The recultivation and other environmental protection measures have been of outstanding quality, according to Jozsef Hideg, of Mecsekere Rt, the mine’s present-day operator.

The Mecsek example showed how an operator could offset job losses by providing workers a lifetime compensation of 63 percent of their former wages while releasing them to pursue new jobs. Early retirement was also granted, and Mecsekere contributed extensive know-how about production systems. There are plenty of opportunities left after mines shut down. Robert Nemeskeri, head of the Business and Environment Programme at the REC, believes there are many such situations where dislocated mining professionals can transfer their skills to roll out fields such as recultivation and monitoring work, environmental consulting, geology and hydrology. Legal work in the area of mining and other industries that affect the environment has seen progress in the wake of Baia Mare. The Protocol on Civil Liability and Compensation for Damage Caused by the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents on Transboundary Waters was signed by 22 states in May 2003 and is now going through the slow process of ratification. The protocol makes industrial operators liable for compensation to states or to persons damaged by accidents, and as such, it serves as a precautionary instrument for planned projects. A directive on waste produced by extractive industries is currently under debate in the European Parliament.

To urge the mining industry to take a more proactive approach to reducing risks and avoiding liabilities, a set of guidelines has been created called “Governance Principles for Foreign Direct Investment in Hazardous Activities.” It is hoped that with strong liability rules in place, companies and investors will familiarise themselves with risk reduction and will carry out their projects in an environmentally sustainable fashion.

The Baia Mare disaster also inspired the creation of a network of mining experts, environmentalists and academicians—the OMENTIN network. Initiated as an EU Fifth Research Framework project, the network became 100 percent financially sustainable just this year. The objectives of OMENTIN are to increase public understanding of ore mining technologies and act as a nucleus for dialogue among experts across the continent.

The OMENTIN network not only promotes preparedness for accidents but also preventative measures against environmental catastrophes. The network has had considerable success as it now spans Europe from Norway to Turkey. According to Kristina Vilimaite, the REC manager of OMENTIN, the responsibility for protecting the earth from mining hazards belongs to each individual. Each project can be bad and good at the same time. There is always the dilemma between environmental and economic interest and the solution depends on the decision of each country and each individual consumer. Because increased consumption is what makes increased mining necessary.
Aspiring to become the world’s most competitive economy, Europe has recognised the need for better, more complex and integrated resources management. In communal or consumption waste management, utilisation must be improved because most of the waste stream still goes to landfills or incinicators.

Industry was the first to see the potential of waste utilisation. This practice is positive and economically sound when the by-products are free of harmful substances or when they are safely conditioned to remain inert in the environment. Several concerns involved in the reutilisation of waste have been highlighted in a recent study led by the REC. Although familiar to science for more than three decades, the risks to the environment and public health criteria. Therefore, thousands of previously developed, human — is imperative to sustainable development, the utilisation regime of all processes in which they work, while clinical health researchers focus on highly specific cause-and-effect relationships. Thus it is imperative that science put the mosaics together and in which they work, while clinical health researchers focus on highly specific cause-and-effect relationships. Thus it is imperative that science put the mosaics together and

Reutilisation schemes for industrial wastes can have environmental drawbacks a REC study finds

by Robert Nemeskeri

COVER STORY | chemicals and health

when recycling’s

RISKY

in which they work, while clinical health researchers focus on highly specific cause-and-effect relationships. Thus it is imperative that science put the mosaics together and show how these reuse schemes can affect public health, regardless of current economic, social and political paradigms.

Relevant literature reviewed by the REC’s team demonstrated strong evidence that these coal industry process residues often contain radioactive elements as well, including uranium, strontium and rubidium. These findings are based on studies reported by researchers all over the world, including a recent one in Hungary using USEPA instrumentation and methodology. Remarkably, the coal lobby has managed to keep this information largely out of the decision makers’ view.

Another suspected risky utilisation that the REC’s study shed light on is that of residues containing heavy metals from the iron and steel industry. In some EU countries, such residues are mixed into fertilisers, thus polluting the food chain.

Since the efficient utilisation of all resources — energy, materials, flora and fauna, and human — is imperative to sustainable development, the utilisation regime of all process residues or wastes has to be carefully designed and monitored in line with strengthening EU environmental and public health criteria. Therefore, thousands of previously developed industrial standards need to be reviewed to satisfy these new criteria.

Robert Nemeskeri is the Head of the Business and Environment Programme at the REC

Continued from page 10

► deterred by the cost. The Commission estimates that this will be the case for 1-2 percent of substances currently on the market.

Non-governmental organisations generally support the idea of having better knowledge and control of chemicals. However, during the last couple of years of consultation, industry has complained that the directive will be too costly, discriminatory, bad for its competitiveness, and especially burdensome for small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs).

Even the American Chemistry Council (ACC) has weighed in, launching lobbying activities in Europe. In May, Greg Lebedev, the president and CEO of ACC, boasted that he’d marshalled international press coverage against this “bad European idea.”

ACC gained the support of the Asia Pacific Economic Community, which raised questions about the international implications of the proposed regulation. “We arranged for multiple elements in our government — the Department of Commerce, the U.S. Trade Representative, the Environment Protection Agency,

Regardless of what

the chemical industry wants and says, REACH will happen.
The chemical industry in Europe says the directive will threaten its global competitiveness and cost jobs. Nevertheless, trade unions in the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark and Spain support the proposal to the extent that it improves workplace safety for those who handle chemicals. It is estimated that 300 million working days are lost in the EU annually due to working with chemicals. German trade unions claim that “the tactics of the German chemical industry with the REACH directive are endangering both the health of workers and the state of environment.” Spanish trade unions (Comisiones Obreras) submit that the directive will actually create jobs rather than take them away. They say that improved conditions for innovation will create new niches in the market for less hazardous chemicals.

The chemical industry in the new member states centres on production of petrochemicals and polymers, fertilisers, fine chemicals and performance chemicals such as flame retardants and paints. SMEs are especially active in the detergents and paints sub-sectors. These companies face difficult challenges with the introduction of REACH — as do SMEs in Western Europe — because the directive does not take company size into account, but only the gross amounts of chemicals produced or imported, and their threat on environment and health. And due to keen competition in the local markets in these sub-sectors, any added regulatory burden can threaten the viability of firms that lack the wherewithal to innovate.

The industry could well suffer job losses, as many firms have warned. Nevertheless, the chemical industry is rather capital intensive and its contribution to employment in the manufactoring sector is typically lower than its contribution to production. Furthermore, it may be that the directive will create such a demand for safer chemicals that these job losses will be offset by opportunities in the better-paid sphere of research and development.

Without question, steering the economy onto a more sustainable path will require sacrifices by businesses for the public good, our environment, our society and the greater economy.

“Regardless of what the chemical industry wants and says, REACH will happen,” said Catherine Day, director general of DG Environment, during this past June’s GreenWeek in Brussels. The remaining questions are when and how well it will serve the citizens and businesses of the European Union. 

The authors of this article work in the RECs Business and Environment Programme
Trolling the aisles of the local supermarket, the socially and environmentally conscious shopper gravitates toward products tastefully packaged with images of idyllic barnyards and baskets of produce, and scrawled with hand-lettered catchphrases such as “natural,” “bio,” “dolphin-friendly” and “free range.”

Many of us gladly pay a premium for such goods, as we assume they represent a more humane, environmentally friendly option than mass-produced goods. But is this always the case?

Unfortunately not. So concludes a recent study entitled, “Green Food Claims: An International Survey of Self-Declared Green Claims on Selected Food Products.” Conducted by Consumers International (CI) and eight of its member organisations from Europe and North America, the study found “a large number of logos and claims that were vague or meaningless” because they weren’t subject to third party verification and abided by no standards.

Three of the eight member organisations involved in the study are from Central and Eastern Europe: the Consumers Defence Association (SOS) of the Czech Republic, the Romanian Association for Consumers’ Protection (APC Romania), and the Slovene Consumers Association (ZPS) of Slovenia. Research in these countries found the markets of CEE are no strangers to bogus, unsubstantiated or misleading claims.

In Romania, researchers found egg cartons claiming to originate from free-range farms, but there was no way to verify this. According to the report, labels such as “natural” and “bio” are not regulated in Romania so they are widely used improperly and thus guarantee nothing.

The report gives examples of labels showing quaint family farms intended to give the impression of more traditional, small-scale production. Usually, the reality is quite different, with the ingredients coming from large farms and the processing taking place in rather unromantic factories.

What does ‘bio’ mean?

Alpha Bio, a Slovakian company with products on the Czech market, is an example of a brand name that can be misleading, as most of its products lack organic certification. Czech legislation prohibits the use of the word “bio” on products that do not originate from certified organic farms. However, products such as those from Alpha Bio slip under the radar, as the company is registered under this name. Consumers don’t always distinguish between the brand name and other labels on products.

Jan Lunter, the founder and director of Alpha Bio, doesn’t believe that customers are misled by his company’s brand name. “When we came up with our name, the claim of “bio” was not well-known. And at the same time we can say that in our 13-year history, we have never gotten a warning from our customers that we have misled them with our brand name.” To Lunter, the term “bio” refers to the fact that the products are vegetarian and healthy, which is the company’s aim. Alpha

DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL.
Prague shoppers enjoy the sanitary conditions at the mall. But how clean are the goods?
Bio includes organic items in its product line and Lunter predicts more will be added as the market for them expands.

This problem of interpretation is compounded by language and regulatory differences as products cross borders. Terms such as “organic” and “bio” mean different things in different markets, and certification bodies have different criteria, making it difficult for consumers to know what they’re getting.

The principle to which logos and claims were compared for this study was ISO standard 14021:1999(E), which requires that self-declared environmental claims and any explanatory statements shall be:

- accurate and not misleading;
- substantiated and verified;
- relevant to that particular product, and used only in an appropriate context or setting;
- presented in a manner that clearly indicates whether the claims apply to the complete product, or only to a product component or packaging, or to an element of a service; and
- unlikely to result in misinterpretation.

This principle is supported by a variety of other international and national conventions and laws. One of the major problems is that regulations on food labelling are not followed and poorly enforced. For example, according to the report, “ISO 14020 and 14021 are declared Slovene standards (SIST), but do not appear to be well known to consumers, producers or government officials.” Marjana Peterman of ZPS concedes that “labelling changes are not something that happens overnight” and that “claims of this nature will continue forever.” But progress is possible. ZPS launched a campaign on labelling in Slovenia three years ago, sponsored by the government and the European Commission. According to Peterman, in the first year approximately 76 percent of labels did not comply with applicable legislation. That number dropped to 67 percent in the second year of the campaign, and to 45 percent in the third.

Consumers International and its partners laid out a comprehensive set of recommendations that they believe will help shoppers understand exactly what labels mean.

Will consumers stop seeking out more environmentally friendly products after they read the report? Peterman acknowledges there is risk of this.

Consumers dedicated to shopping responsibly do not, however, need to feel completely lost. Karel Pavlik of SOS states that “the aim was to make people think about this and not to trust absolutely everything on the packaging. Consumers should ask questions, not just of themselves, but of the producers.” SOS helps consumers to discriminate between product claims by providing evaluations of the trustworthiness of different labels on its website.

Todd Schenk is a project officer in the REC’s NGO Support Programme

Recommendations from Consumers International

- Labels and claims on food should be clear and unambiguous — where they are not, enforcement action should be undertaken to ensure that they are.
- Misleading and unsubstantiated images should not be used to convey inappropriate messages, particularly about production methods.
- Whether private or public, all food standards for food labels and claims should be developed with stakeholder involvement and respond to the public interest.
- Where explicit claims and statements are communicated to consumers, these should be validated by third party verification to ensure validity and consumer confidence.
- Claims that state or imply that “legally required standards” are being met are irrelevant for consumers, and should be prohibited.
- There is a need for the development and adoption of a mandatory, harmonised worldwide standard for catching tuna that does not harm dolphins.
- Consideration should be given to adopting harmonised international organic logos and labels.
- Brand names should not be derived from emotive words and images such as natural, quality, pure, fresh and bio.
- The nature of any association, endorsement or link, with, for example, an environmental or farming organisation, be it for fundraising, awareness raising or endorsement of a particular quality or production standard, should be stated explicitly and clearly alongside the logo or claim.
- Guidelines for interpreting misleading food claims, words and terms should include sustainability issues.
- Further research is needed to investigate the extent of language and translation problems of food claims, to agree definitions of terms, and to ensure that consumers are not being misled.

For more information, visit: www.consumersinternational.org

Label to look for

The EU maintains a set of standards that regulate the production, processing and marketing of organic products. They hold for organic goods produced in the EU or imported into the EU. Only agricultural products that meet these regulations can use the EC’s ‘Organic Farming’ label.
A global conference on renewable energy this summer in Bonn drew promises from China, Germany, the World Bank Group and several others to get more serious about sustainable energy sources. But renewable advocates were largely disappointed at the modest outcomes, and noted that the talks won’t mean anything without follow-through.

Some 2,000 decision makers in the energy field, including 74 government ministers, met June 1-4 to agree on a plan to advance the development of renewables around the world. The conference also invited 600 members of the media. The programme included dialogues between the different players in the renewable energy field, presentations of best practices and success stories, discussions of regional differences, and, finally a ministerial session on follow-up action.

Meanwhile, 60 side events took place on everything from a proposal to electrify rural Afghanistan, to energy sources for islands, to the roles of export credit agencies. More than 52 exhibitors set up booths, including renewable advocacy groups, public utilities, power generating companies and institutions like the EU.

The conference continued a process begun at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, where a coalition of countries (80 to date) made a commitment to the development of renewable energy.

Dimming prospects

Some observers questioned whether the Bonn gathering lived up to the promises made in South Africa.

“Renewable 2004 was a very well-organised conference in terms of arrangements of meetings and information dissemination,” said Motoharu Yamazaki, head of the REC’s Japan Special Fund.

“However, when it comes to the political agreement in the plenary session, it cannot be denied that the progress made was small, which disappointed a lot of participants, including myself.”

Yamazaki said there remains a wide political gulf, first revealed in Johannesburg, between what he termed as “progressive” European states and large industrialised countries such as the United States and Japan. Neither country was very visible at Bonn, Yamazaki said.

He added that while Bonn was a good reminder of the importance of energy conservation, “the true worthiness of the conference depends on how it is followed up by international communities.”

The Brussels-based European Wind Energy Association noted that while the Bonn talks marked “the first time in history that people from 154 countries got together to talk about renewables,” the final political declaration was “weak and disappointing.”

“Concrete engagements are still missing and targets have been left out, as was the case with the Johannesburg Summit,” read a statement by the group’s president, Arthouros Zervos.
Public debate on climate change is one of ‘Day After Tomorrow’s’ best special effects

Film focuses on hot topic

By Paul Iredale

Hollywood has discovered climate change. This summer’s blockbuster, The Day after Tomorrow, may be far-fetched, but it underscores how far global warming has come in the public imagination.

Although a tidal wave is not expected to engulf New York any time soon, extreme weather events are high on the agenda when scientists meet with policymakers. The film was playing in a nearby cinema when European environment and health ministers gathered in Budapest for a World Health Organization conference in June.

Conference participants discussed the film’s real-world implications. Most could accept the basic premise of the movie — that global warming-related melting of the polar ice caps might disrupt the Gulf Stream — but said the plot dramatically shortened the time frame in which such an event could happen. The subsequent story line, including temperature plunges of hundreds of degrees a minute, was pure nonsense.

Despite these failings, Professor Andy Haines of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine welcomed the film because “it made the public aware of the problems.”

Crisis heating up

Last summer’s heatwave, blamed for 30,000 deaths across Europe, brought extreme weather events into sharp focus. The failure to protect the most vulnerable during the scorching weeks of August served as a wake up call for the international health community. France alone registered 15,000 deaths in the first three weeks of August last year, with temporary morgues set up on Paris boulevards.

The conference discussed France’s new Heatwave Alert System, the Plan Canicule, and the elaborate plans to test it out in early July. Municipalities throughout France have produced lists of vulnerable people, the government has given grants for cool rooms in hospitals and homes for the elderly, and the emergency services received training on dealing with the effects of heatstroke.

“The effects of climate change may have disproportionate effects on future generations unless urgent measures are taken,” the World Health Organization’s Bettina Menne said at the conference.

Conference documents talked of pronounced warming during the last quarter century and an increase in the annual number of warm extremes twice as fast as expected. A probability graph presented by one expert showed temperatures an average of six degrees Celsius higher in 70 years time. Data from the International Panel on Climate Change predict an average increase in global temperature during the 21st century of 1.4-5.8, and a maximum of 7-10 degrees Celsius.

Scientists at the conference urged policy makers to consider the changing climate and its implications for long-term city planning. There should be more green open spaces and trees to provide shade and less heat absorbing surfaces. Ventilation and air flow management between buildings should be a priority.

Building design should also garner attention, with more thought given to the thermal capacity of structures. Measures to promote passive cooling and to control solar irradiation were important.

Energy saving, change of consumption patterns, new policies on traffic and industrial production technology improvements are the priorities for Central and Eastern Europe, says Zsuzsa Ivanyi of the REC’s Climate Change Programme. The region needs vulnerability assessment and a programme for mitigating the harmful effects of climate change.

A speaker from the host country gave a sunny assessment: “We have laid down new international goals for the increased use of renewables,” said Germany’s Federal Environment Minister Jurgen Trittin. “The action plan will mobilise billions in investments in generating energy from wind, solar, biomass and geothermal sources.”

Julia Bartos of the Czech Environmental Institute sees a more ambivalent situation. She points to how western countries tend to promote renewable energy technology as an export opportunity for national and foreign industry and accelerates renewables technology development, which brings down costs of renewables,” Bartos said. “On the other hand, this leads to the misuse of the notion ‘development for third world countries’. One wonders, for example, how a rural area in China that lacks clean drinking water and other basic facilities benefits from a sophisticated solar street lighting system.”

Powering to the masses

Conference organisers listed several positive results, including:

• Various countries, international organisations, financial institutions and others agreed to 165 voluntary actions and commitments.

• China pledged to increase the share of renewables in its total installed energy capacity to 10 percent by 2010, including 60 GW from small hydropower installations, wind energy, biomass and solar. The total cost is expected to be EUR 50 billion.

• The Philippines pledged that renewable energy sources will fulfill 100 percent of its energy needs by 2013. Officials hope to make the country a regional titan in the solar-cell industry.

• The Global Environment Facility agreed to use USD 100 million per year to support renewable energy projects in developing countries. The money would leverage total investments of USD 500 million per year.

• The World Bank Group will push for a 20 percent annual increase in annual commitments to renewables and energy-efficiency projects. The increase would last five years with annual financing reaching USD 400 million by 2010.

• The German government pledged to set up a renewables fund of EUR 500 million to be used over five years for reduced-interest loans for renewable and energy-efficiency projects in developing countries. Berlin had already offered EUR 1 billion in 2002 at Johannesburg. The Germans also set a goal of increasing the national share of renewables to 20 percent by 2020.

A speaker from the host country gave a sunny assessment: “We have laid down new international goals for the increased use of renewables,” said Germany’s Federal Environment Minister Jurgen Trittin. “The action plan will mobilise billions in investments in generating energy from wind, solar, biomass and geothermal sources.”
Sparingly populated Estonia depends on state to create viable public transport

More routes needed

By Ylle Rajasaar

In Estonia, a sparsely inhabited country of 1.4 million people, it is impossible to develop sustainable transport without state subsidies. Under the present scheme, both the state and local governments support transport systems in cities, which house half the population. The scheme fails to guarantee countrywide mobility.

Estonian Vice Minister of Environment Olavi Tammemae said in June that the real danger to the health of Estonians is their culture and values. “Estonia has developed only up to the 1980s of the previous century,” Tammemae said. “We are dealing with the problems but not with their roots. We are used to comparing ourselves with the rest of the world and as things are comparatively good, the prevailing attitude is indifference.” In this climate, one cannot expect a breakthrough in transport issues until the air in cities becomes too polluted to breathe and the number of fatal traffic accidents becomes unbearable.

Valdur Lahtvee, managing director of the Estonian Sustainable Environment Institute mentioned the bus line connecting the cities of Tallinn and Tartu. The line serves the populations at both ends very well while ignoring the needs of nearby, smaller communities. People from other towns have to make their own way to a city centre because public transportation comes by their homes twice a day at best.

The rail system in Estonia is poor, with the only remaining service being the commuter trains in the Tallinn metro area and between Tallinn and Tartu. Preference is given to the transit of oil. The Tallinn-Tartu express train is slower than the bus. Schedules change frequently to accommodate freight trains, which get the green light wherever and whenever they go.

Transport that lasts

Tammemae spoke at a pan-European workshop on Sustainable Development of Transport, hosted by the REC in Szentendre, Hungary. Running concurrently in Budapest was the World Health Organization (WHO) Fourth European Conference on Health and Environment. There environment and health ministers from 52 countries approved a children’s health protection plan, which took into account the many health risks faced by children that stem from urbanisation and transport.

Sustainable transport is a system that fulfils peoples’ transport needs while producing only limited amounts of waste, according to Lahtvee. “Such a system is characterised by light transport such as public transportation, bicycles and so on. The biggest problem during the past decade has been the increasing number of cars, whose numbers have been growing more than 10 percent annually, and the parallel decline in the use of public transportation. Due to the skillful lobbying by road builders, the majority of public transport investments go to roads development, including the widening and extensions of existing ones. And that supports the use of cars.”

A differentiated excise tax for privately owned vehicles is needed that takes into account a car’s age, engine and type of fuel. The resulting revenues should then be invested in public transport.

“Reconsider the reconstruction of shuttle rail traffic which would give new opportunities to travel around the country.”

Lahtvee added that although electric trains, trams and trolleybuses are great, Estonia lacks power production. “Our electricity is produced from oil-shale and as long as energy policy doesn’t change, there remains a contradiction.”

People love to buy new cars. They don’t see it as a problem since modern cars are manufactured with more environmentally friendly technologies and are more safe and economical,” Tammemae added.

Same mistakes

According to Lahtvee, Estonian solutions differ little from those tried in the rest of the world. Today, the focus is only on the symptoms. The country responds to traffic jams by widening the roads. “The most critical step is a change in public investment and fiscal policy,” Lahtvee said. “Along with road infrastructure development, public transportation infrastructure must be developed. The state must invest in light transport in order to reduce dependency on cars in densely populated areas. Bicycle paths and light transport routes must be built.”

In addition to public transport development, the need for mobility should be decreased — people need services and jobs near their homes. In Estonia’s biggest cities, where air pollution during peak hours exceeds regulatory limits, traffic calming methods could be introduced. But such measures can only be used when people have public transport alternatives.

“People’s most sensitive organ is their wallet,” observed Tammemae. “We could work out different bonus systems for commuters. Pooling should be encouraged and city centres should be emptied of cars by directing people to use public transportation. The most difficult thing is to change established habits.”

Ylle Rajasaar is a Tallinn-based editor for Tasakaal (Balance)
Encouraging personal responsibility will be key to sustainable development in Turkey, says the organisation’s newly appointed Regional Director for Turkey Sibel Sezer in her first interview with green HORIZON Editor Pavel Antonov

Turkish trailblazer

Which environmental problems require immediate action in Turkey?
At the macro level, as it is with other countries in the region, sustainable development is a challenge in Turkey. The major reasons are the country’s large size and diverse topography, the high growth rate of the population, the high rate of urbanisation and its rather high and fluctuating economic development rates. I would argue that in order to improve the environmental situation in Turkey, one of the first steps to take would be to promote a sense of personal responsibility for nature — from the country’s president and prime minister to each citizen.

It is important to strengthen environmental efforts by the central government, municipalities and the private sector. Fortunately, responsibility and efforts by the stakeholders seem to be increasing in number. I believe Turkey’s status since 1999 as a candidate for EU membership is one of the main reasons behind this increase.

Some of the country’s specific immediate needs would be to improve air quality in major urban centres; ensure that industrial pollution, chemicals and risk management laws are in line with the acquis; establish appropriate collection, treatment and disposal of waste; clean up contaminated land and rivers; protect ecosystems, habitats and species; collect data and prepare inventories; improve and extend water supply networks; improve and extend wastewater collection and treatment plants; enforce rules and regulations; increase environmental awareness and much more.

Clearly, it is a tremendous challenge for Turkey to implement the requirements of the above mentioned processes in particular and environmental protection policies in general. This is mainly because of the scarce financial resources, inadequate policy development, implementation and enforcement capacity, insufficient cooperation among and between public institutions and environmental stakeholders, limited public commitment and insufficient public awareness and participation. Hence, the environmental sector in Turkey needs vast amount of technical and financial assistance as well as guidance to address the above-mentioned challenges. In addition, the dynamic process of EU environmental acquis and policy development needs significant deliberation for alignment.

What will be REC’s first priorities in Turkey?
We operate in four programme areas: capacity building and environmental education; environmental information, grants; and a special programme offering services to the business sector. REC’s mandate is to assist and support the environmental stakeholders in the country in order to develop their institutional and technical capacity on the way to EU accession; and thereby facilitate the effective implementation of the EU environmental acquis in the country. The first thing to do is to adopt or change national laws, rules and procedures so that the requirements of the EU are fully incorporated into the legislation. Another challenge would be to ensure adequate institutional framework, budgetary requirements and implementation procedures.

Overall, Turkey needs to implement environmental policies and strengthen enforcement capabilities; invest in an environmental infrastructure; provide for public participation and increase public awareness of environmental problems; integrate environmental concerns into economic decisions. We will provide assistance in meeting the vast amount of national and international commitments of Turkey.

What are your advantages in dealing with the challenges?
The REC is the only organisation in Turkey whose structure and objective were specifically established for providing a full range of services in the field of environment. The REC’s 14 years of hard work in the region, its country network, its reputation among the international donors and the experience with EU accession add up to our competitive advantage in the country. Of course, the support of the Turkish Government is an essential pre-condition for REC’s success. We strongly believe in the importance of improved cooperation between stakeholders.

Your title reads ‘regional director for Turkey.’ How is it that one country can be a region of its own?
Indeed Turkey has been considered a separate region of Central and Eastern Europe within REC’s structure. We are neither a country in transition nor are we really in the same geographical region as other CEE countries. But Turkey strategically belongs to the CEE family primarily because of its EU accession.

How would your work be funded?
The European Commission has provided EUR 15.5 million from the 2002 financial cooperation for the framework programme called “Capacity Building in the Field of Environment.”

We hope that the European Commission will devise new funding programmes for Turkey for heavy-cost investments and other needs. Today, it is estimated that Turkey’s cost of compliance with the EU environmental acquis is around EUR 30-40 billion. It is clear that the environmental sector in Turkey will need significant financing to address the costs of EU accession.

UN TIES

Education
- Undergraduate degree in economics from Columbia University, New York.
- Masters in Business Administration from Bilkent University
- PhD from Bosphorus University, Institute of Environmental Sciences.

Work history
Extensive experience in the private sector and with international organisations. Having worked in the United Nations system for the past decade, her most recent positions were with the Habitat Conference in Istanbul, the Global Environment Fund’s Black Sea Environmental Programme and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Last post
Managed the National Programme on Environment and Development, a joint programme between Turkey’s Ministry of Environment and the UNDP.
The danger of development aid

The promise of EU development aid has always been one of the most popular benefits of EU membership for the 10 new member states. Known as EU "regional policy" or "cohesion policy," this aid comes in the form of public investment funds mostly targeted at regions with less than 75 percent of the EU average GDP. Over EUR 20 billion has been allocated for the 2.5 years remaining in the current funding cycle, with the aim of boosting GDP and bringing the new EU states closer to the fold economically and socially.

Two financing instruments, the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, will co-finance investments in public infrastructure, agriculture, human resources, business support services and other measures to increase economic competitiveness. The complex development plans which will determine the specific uses of the funds have been approved by the European Commission, but the management and disbursement of the money has been relegated to the new member states. These countries have scrambled to put together the administrative agencies and personnel required to prepare investment plans and programmes, project application and appraisal processes, paying authorities, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The enormity of the task has meant that many important issues not directly related to absorption of the funds have been overlooked. Two of the most critical oversights have been the investments' environmental impacts and their effects on sustainable development.

In all of the new member states environmental authorities are responsible for the environmental aspects of development planning, but the actual planning and disbursement of funds is controlled by ministries of economy, finance, or regional development. The extent to which the investment funds help or hurt the environment depends on the capacity of the environmental authorities to participate in the process. This includes development and evaluation of plans and programmes, the setting of priorities and measures for funding, developing criteria for selecting and monitoring investments, project appraisal, and more. Environmental authorities must not only make sure they get adequate investments for environmental projects, but that EU investments in all spheres avoid negative impacts on the environment and promote sustainable development.

Huge challenge

The magnitude of this challenge led the REC to organise a conference in May with support from the EU PHARE programme and the Italian Ministry for Environment and Territory. The conference brought together environmental and development authorities, along with key environmental NGOs from the new member states, to examine the environmental aspects of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund. Conference speakers included representatives of the European Commission, REC experts, and officials from new as well as old EU member states. Speakers presented challenges and good practices in dealing with all aspects of the funding cycle. The final conference session was devoted to the outlook for the future and the ongoing reform of cohesion policy for the 2007-2013 funding period.

Environmental authorities' lack of time and staff to properly address environmental issues in the time allowed by the funding cycle was one of the main issues. Exacerbating matters is the popular perception that environmental authorities need only to oversee projects with environmental objectives. Good examples from Italy and Finland showed ways to overcome the challenge through establishing networks of environmental partners and using the Structural Funds themselves to hire and train environmental experts. Another strategy was to use experience to open the process up to outside economic and social partners, and to improve the quality of the plans and programmes from all perspectives. The assessment of plans and programmes for cohesion policy funding in the upcoming period will be subject to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive of July 2004, so this will be a useful tool for environmental authorities.

Conference participants recognised the need to form networks at an international level, not only to share experience and best practices, but also to help environmental professionals raise the profile of environment and sustainable development issues within each member state. The first step will be the re-launch of the environmental experts' coordination group by the EC DG Environment; this is scheduled for September 2004. Depending on demand, other events could be organised, including working meetings on specific issues and capacity-building activities.

Jennifer McGuinn is head of the REC’s Environmental Policy and Local Initiatives Programme. More information about the conference is available at <www.rec.org>.

EU structural and cohesion funds should be handled with care
HAZARDOUS ACTIVITIES

Governance principles debated

A lively debate took place at a June workshop organised by the REC concerning foreign investors who carry out environmentally hazardous activities. The event, entitled “Responsible Foreign Investors: Protecting Future Generations through Governance Principles,” was part of the Healthy Planet Forum, which ran parallel to the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held June 23-25 in Budapest.

At the workshop — funded by the Ministry of the Flemish Community — Marta Szigiti Bonifert, executive director of the REC, emphasised the increasing need for tough environmental safeguards, ones that go beyond guidelines of corporate social responsibility (CSR). “Mining, single-hull oil tankers, waste treatment and disposal, and other hazardous activities are still on the fringes of corporate social responsibility,” Szigiti Bonifert said. “Traditional CSR instruments will not reach hazardous activity investments, which are often poorly capitalised and labour-intensive — therefore politicised and highly risky.”

At the workshop a distinguished panel of experts further elaborated the draft Governance Principles for Foreign Direct Investment in Hazardous Activities, developed by the REC and several stakeholders over the past three years.

The participants also considered whether or not the Governance Principles could be applied to the controversial gold mining proposal by Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC) in Romania. Representatives of NGOs and the mining company held an intense debate on the application of the Governance Principles in the process of determining whether the investment should go forward.

SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

Balkan states learn to LEAP

REC country offices in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro received funds from the Swedish government to carry out local environmental action plans (LEAPs).

LEAPs will be designed and initiated in 21 municipalities, including the town of Backa Topola, Serbia and Montenegro. In the picture, Radoje Lausevic, the REC’s South Eastern Europe regional director (left), and Babi Atila, the town’s mayor, sign an agreement concerning a LEAP to be carried out in Backa Topola.

The projects will be carried out over 30 months and each one will have a strong accent on regional cooperation and gender-related work. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) granted a total of EUR 2.8 million for the LEAPs, which will complement the 25 to 50 percent in-kind contribution expected from each beneficiary municipality.

In FYR Macedonia, the LEAPs will help implement new EU-harmonised legislation and contribute to the decentralisation process by strengthening municipal governments, said Teodora Grncarovska Obradovic, assistant head for sustainable development at the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning.

The project will involve intensive training, direct investments in the cities, exchanges of experiences and cooperation between the participating countries.

Sava commission established

The Sava River Commission was officially established at a ceremony in Belgrade on June 1. The event followed parliamentary ratifications of the Sava agreement by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and Slovenia. Speaking on the behalf of the Stability Pact, which brokered the agreement and played a key role in fundraising for the establishment of the commission and secretariat, Special Coordinator Erhard Busek commended the countries for this achievement.

Assistance to the Interim Commission for the Sava River Basin was given by the REC, the European Commission and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, among others. The legal framework on the Sava River Commission includes regulations on the waterway’s navigation, water management, hydroelectric plants and environmental protection. Slovenia serves as depository for the Sava Commission’s legal instruments, while the seat of the Sava River Commission is in Zagreb.

NEWS BITES

Network of funds

Formed in March, the Network of Environmental Funds builds on earlier REC experience with CEE and South Eastern Europe (SEE) environmental funds. Facilitated by the REC, the network agreed to a draft work programme for 2004. A meeting to explore state aid models in Western Europe and mechanisms for co-financing the environmental components of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund will follow.

Drina River meeting

For the second time, a river basin stakeholders forum was held in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina April 8-9. Government, business and NGO representatives reviewed a feasibility study and work plan for a solution to the problems of waste accumulation in the Drina River and agreed to prepare an application for a grant to the Norwegian government for the purchase of equipment to control the waste problem.

Infrastructure projects

Environmental experts, public utilities and consultancies from SEE as well as representatives from funding institutions active in the region participated in a REC seminar on May 16-19 in FYR Macedonia. Participants received hands-on training on identifying and attracting bankable environmental infrastructure investments.

Grants for the Western Balkans

A sustainable development grants call drew 27 submissions from Balkan NGOs. In the first concept paper stage, 10 grantees were given start-up funds to prepare full proposals, which were submitted by May 21. EUR 160,000 is available for these regional grants, offered by EC Europe Aid.

Sava River Commission

The Sava River Commission is in Zagreb.

REC STAFF CHANGES

New staff

Sibel Sezer — regional director for Turkey (and also the director of Country Office Turkey)

Departures

Attila Morotz — project officer, Business and Environment Programme

Other changes

Ors Szidar Marcin — became a project officer for the Environmental Policy and Local Initiatives Programme

Robert Atkinson — has been appointed as the director for civil initiatives

Joszef Slezak — became a project officer for the Business and Environment Programme

Christy Duijvelaar — international development manager, began her maternity leave
The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) is a non-partisan, non-advocacy, not-for-profit international organisation with a mission to assist in solving environmental problems in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The center fulfills this mission by promoting cooperation among non-governmental organisations, governments, businesses and other environmental stakeholders, and by supporting 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 signed by the governments of 26 countries and the European Commission, and on an international agreement with the government of Hungary. The REC has its head office in Szentendre, Hungary, and country offices and field offices in 16 beneficiary countries which are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, FYR Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as other inter-governmental and private institutions.

A Well-Being of Society initiative has been launched by the Renaissance Europe think-tank programme, an affiliate of the REC, the Progressio Foundation and European Partners for the Environment.

The initiative investigates strategic changes that could be incorporated in the EU’s programme for 2004-2009 with the goal of fostering a more ethical globalisation. The initiative will look into several fields, including social spending, health system effectiveness, ageing populations, labour market trends, education, the effects of poverty on health, the environment and natural resources preservation, gender inequities, cultural differences and universal human security.

The Well-Being Society focuses on projects that implement one of the three core objectives of the Union, as defined in the draft European Constitutional Treaty. It addresses competitiveness in a new way, based on personal development and on the three pillars of sustainable development.

Such a society is characterised by prosperity and quality of life, solidarity and equity, justice and universal fraternity. The instrument to be used in Europe is unity and public participation in environmental decision-making.

Recent donors are the European Commission and the governments of Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as other inter-governmental and private institutions.

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Next Stop: Sustainable Transport
A Survey of Public Transport in Six Cities of Central and Eastern Europe
Sustainable transport meets the mobility needs of society without endangering the environment and public health. Next Stop: Sustainable Transport presents case studies of public transport needs, development priorities and financing in six European capitals, along with expert policy analysis and suggestions for sectoral integration.
For more information, visit the programme’s web page: www.rec.org/REC/Programs/EnvironmentalPolicy/PublicTransport/

October 19-22, 2004
Prague, Czech Republic

3rd BERCEN Exchange Programme
Exchanging experience, sharing knowledge, enhancing cooperation
for Environmental Inspectors and Regulators

UNDER THE PROJECT
Strengthening the Environmental Implementation and Enforcement in the South Eastern European Countries forming part of the Stabilisation and Association Process — Support of the Activities of the Balkan Environmental Regulatory Compliance and Enforcement Network (BERCEN)

Funded by European Commission’s assistance programme CARDS

Participants: environmental inspectors and regulators from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro will be exchanging experience with their colleagues from the Czech Republic and other EU member states that are part of the IMPEL network.

Contact: Sibal Dimovski • sdimovski@rec.org
Ruslan Zhechkov • ruslan@rec.org

INTERNSHIP AT THE REC

The Information Programme of the REC’s head office in Szentendre, Hungary seeks an intern to compile an inventory of shareware applications for use within environmental information systems.

INTERNSHIP AT THE REC

Environmental information systems are defined and detailed in a “snapshot” report on their development available as a PDF for download at: www.rec.org/REC/-Programs/REReP/InformationSystems/

Beginning November 1, the internship will last for 8-12 weeks, depending on the availability of the applicant. A small stipend of up to EUR 300 per month will be offered as well as on-site accommodation in the REC’s guest house.

The inventory (PDF) will include short descriptions with best practices being showcased at a workshop hosted within the framework of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe, in Belgrade in June 2005. (see: www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REREP/)

The internship is hosted as part of a project entitled “Connecting Networks” (linking environmental information professionals from government, media and NGOs).

Please send a CV and cover letter expressing your reasons for interest in the position by Friday, Oct 15.

For more information, please contact Jerome Simpson (JSimpson@rec.org) or Gabor Heves (GHeves@rec.org), or phone the REC at (36-26) 504-000.
Busy Bavarians

A century after hunting and drying of habitat killed them off, beavers return to Serbia

Bavarian environmentalists from Bundensnaturshutz, together with Serbian scientists from the Ministry of Science and Environment and Faculty of Biology, released some 30 Bavarian beavers into the tiny Zasavica River about 90 kilometres west of Belgrade. The reintroduction, which followed two years of research and planning, is the German group’s third in the region, after successful projects in Romania and Croatia.

“There, I’ve seen one of them gnawing my willow, but it’s OK, they told us not to touch them,” a resident of a village along the Zasavica told EkoForum.

The marsh-dwelling rodents were released in the Zasavica Special Natural Reserve, covering 680 hectares, including a 33-km stretch of the Zasavica. The reserve is also home to 125 bird species, 200 plant species and two endangered and very old vertebrates — the otter and mud minnow.

The beavers, now found only in some parts of Europe, North America, Siberia and Mongolia, were relocated from the Regensburg area in Bavaria from places where their migration had brought them too close to urban centres or roads.

After an exhausting 1,200-kilometre move, they were implanted with traceable microchips and turned loose into four manmade lodges on the river. The animals comprise four families and a couple of individuals and it is hoped they will reproduce as early as this spring.

“Unfortunately, one of the beavers has already been killed by a truck while trying to cross the road near Zasavica,” said Sladjan Papic, deputy manager of the reserve.

Serbian environmental authorities plan to bring another group of beavers to Obedska bara, a marsh near Belgrade, in October.

Beavers were last seen in Serbia in 1903, though two centuries earlier they thrived in marshland across the northern Serbian province of Voivodina, eastern Croatia, southern Hungary and western Romania. In Zasavica the last beaver was seen, according to some travelogues, in 1825, said Papic.

They died out due to excessive hunting by fur traders, but mostly because the Catholic church, which is very strong in Voivodina, had permitted the consumption of beaver meat during fasting periods. The only threat to the reintroduced beavers are hunters, despite a ban on their killing and the fact that they do not eat fish or have very desirable pelts.

Leopards spotted

Leopards have been observed in Georgia for the first time in more than 50 years by the Noah’s Arc Centre for the Recovery of Endangered Species (NACRES). The group circulated an international appeal to stop the poaching of the cat in a protected area of the country. In a May announcement, the group claimed that wild animal populations have dropped precipitously over the last decade due to the government’s “almost non-existent policy on environmental protection.”

At the end of April remote-sensing cameras in the Vashlovani State Reserve, an arid spot in the country’s southeastern border with Azerbaijan, shot pictures of a leopard. The images confirmed 2003 sightings of leopard tracks by NACRES zoologists.

Since the middle of the last decade, the arid and semi-arid ecosystems of Georgia have been prioritised in NACRES research.

Remote camera pictures of wildlife poachers in the same area provoked NACRES to request that President Mikael Saakashvili toughen control on Georgia’s unique reserves.

Join us in the Training for Young Environmental Leaders Programme!

The Training for Young Environmental Leaders Programme is the right step towards professional work for environmentalists between 20 and 30 years of age that are active in NGOs as volunteers or employees. The programme is designed for youth interested in contributing to the development of NGOs through improving their own management and leadership skills.

CEE Youth: Remaining sessions for 2004 will take place: September 6 – October 2 and October 18 – November 13.
For more information visit: http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/JFellows.html

NIS and SEE Youth: Remaining session for 2004 will take place: November 15 – December 10.
For more information, visit: http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/YoungEnvLeaders.html

For further information, contact Adriana Craciun at (36-26) 504-000 or acraciun@rec.org

Ready to take a big step forward?
Many companies in Central and Eastern Europe must overcome legacies of the Socialist era, including obsolete manufacturing technologies and equipment, and an outdated approach to management. Budapest-based Dunapack Ltd., a manufacturer of paper packaging products, serves as a good example of a long-established company that has adapted and thrived in the deeply changed economic, social and regulatory environment.

It was not long ago that the company’s pollution far exceeded regulatory limits, and its resource efficiency lagged well behind industry standards. In the early 1990s an Austrian investment group acquired a controlling share in the company, but kept the operational management in place — a decision that has since been vindicated. Over time this management reorganised the company and developed it into a market leader in Hungary, with subsidiaries in Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Poland, and Croatia. Even more, the company is now sharing managerial know-how with peers in the west.

These remarkable results are a credit to Dunapack’s adoption of the integrated management system (IMS), a scheme that addresses issues of quality, environmental performance and occupational safety and health and is certified according to the international standards ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 14001. The company is also registered with the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) and has adopted the OHS 18001 standard. The systems were introduced gradually beginning in the mid-'90s. The motivation was — especially in the case of the environmental management system (EMS) — a recognition that a manufacturer of paper products must make environmental performance a top priority.

Dunapack was among the very first to introduce environmental and quality management systems in Hungary. Today, the different components of the IMS reinforce each other, creating a synergistic effect and producing several economic and environmental benefits on a continuous basis. Dunapack’s improvements in the area of environmental protection can be grouped into three main areas: product development, resource usage, and pollution abatement. For instance, since one of the main aspects of product development is to attain full reusability, containers made solely of paper are favoured over difficult-to-process ones made of multiple materials. In some cases paper-only packages have replaced ones that previously contained no paper at all.

Other types of innovation streams have included the reduction of certain products’ specific weights as well as increasing the amount of recycled materials with which the company makes its packages. Already, 98 percent of the firm’s raw material is recycled. These innovations have improved Dunapack’s competitiveness and have garnered several international awards.

The operating EMS has also reduced the company’s product-specific heat demand by approximately 15 percent and has cut overall fresh water demand by half. Emissions into the air of most pollutants are far below regulatory limits and the chemical oxygen demand (COD) of discharged water has been halved.

The economic benefits attributable to the IMS, including its environmentally driven measures, can be assessed in savings of money and less tangible benefits. Financial benefits come from the savings of energy, water, and raw materials, while intangible benefits comprise better organisational operation, improved organisational culture, and better understanding of technological problems and solutions.

This success story was compiled by the REC Business and Environment Programme in support of the Dutch EU Presidency begun in July.
A new “environmental democracy” clearing house was announced in July by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The instrument at <aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org> aims to highlight and promote awareness of issues covered by the Aarhus Convention. The site showcases good practices in the area of citizens' environmental rights and is expected to make implementation of the Convention more effective.

Aarhus is the Danish city where the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was signed in 1998. The convention, commonly referred to simply as the Aarhus Convention, has been described by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan as “the most ambitious venture in environmental democracy undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations.”

A demonstration version of the new website was launched at the third meeting of the Aarhus Convention’s Task Force on Electronic Information Tools in Geneva on July 2. The clearing house provides information for a wide range of users, including governments, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, students, researchers, and the general public.

The Aarhus clearing house provides a forum for the collection, dissemination and exchange of information on laws, policies and good practices relevant to the rights enshrined in the convention. In addition, the clearing house contains information relevant to the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted at the Earth Summit in 1992. It therefore has the potential to become a leading global repository of information on this theme, a press release by the convention secretariat suggests.

According to Svetlana Zhekova, chairperson of the Aarhus Convention’s Task Force on Electronic Information Tools, “The Aarhus clearing house is a cost-effective electronic information tool providing a window on environmental democracy worldwide. Easy access to information on how countries are applying the Aarhus Convention can provide an invaluable source of inspiration for other countries that work on developing their own procedures, mechanisms and legislation.”

The clearing house will help the convention’s compliance mechanism by providing ready access to information on national implementing legislation and practices. Information gathered through the reporting requirements under the Aarhus Convention will be available through the clearing house. NGOs may also submit information.

Kaj Barlund, director of the UNECE Environment and Human Settlements Division, hopes that the parties to the convention will embrace the clearing house as “a mechanism for promoting access to information and widespread participation in the development of environmental democracy throughout the region and beyond.”

Packed up for Slovakia and the Czech Republic

The Green Pack, an educational toolkit from the REC, will be released in Slovakia and the Czech Republic in October. Following up on the programme’s success in Poland (where it has been updated and re-released by popular demand) as well as in Hungary and Bulgaria, the multi-media materials have been translated into Czech and Slovak, and the contents adapted to the environmental situations in each country.

A toolkit for teachers, the Green Pack includes interactive, multi-media presentations about local, regional and global environmental challenges.

For information about the Green Pack launches in Bratislava or Prague, or to obtain a copy of the Green Pack, please contact Vladimir Hudek in Bratislava [Tel: (421-2) 5263-2942, e-mail: rec@changenet.sk] or Martin Smutny in Prague [Tel: (420-2) 2422-2843, e-mail: rec@reccr.cz].

The English version of the Green Pack CD-ROM can be accessed at: http://green-pack.rec.org. Information about the Green Pack programme can be found at: www.rec.org/REC/Programs/Greenpack/
Watchdog has right to bark
European court upholds Latvian group’s right to criticise government officials

The Riga-based Vides Aizsardzības Klub (VAK) won a free-speech case against the Latvian state in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) this May. The group’s victory in Strasbourg drew praise from advocacy groups all over Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as it reinforced their right to publicly criticise officials.

The ECHR held unanimously that Latvia violated Article 10 on freedom of expression of the European Convention on Human Rights. A panel of seven judges awarded VAK — an affiliate of Friends of the Earth Europe — EUR 4,000 for non-pecuniary damage and court costs.

VAK, whose name translates as the Environmental Protection Club, filed its complaint with ECHR in May of 2000. In November 1997 the general meeting of VAK adopted a resolution expressing its concerns about the conservation of coastal dunes on the Gulf of Riga. The resolution stated, “The situation was caused by the irresponsible and illegal acts of the Mersrags County Council. The chairperson of Mersrags County Council signed illegal documents, resolutions and certificates, thus facilitating illegal construction in the dunes, and deliberately disregarded the instructions of the Environment Department of the Ventspils Region which required cessation of illegal construction.” At the same general meeting, VAK requested a rescinding of “illegally adopted resolutions” and an assessment of whether the chairperson and her secretary were “qualified for their positions.” The resolution was published in the regional newspaper Talsu Vestis.

The county chairperson sued VAK for spreading false information and demanded a retraction of its charges and LVL 500 (today’s equivalent of EUR 755) in restitution. The Court of First Instance for the District of Talsi found in favour of the chairperson, saying that VAK had not proven its charges and ordered it to publish an official apology and pay damages. That judgment was upheld on appeal by the Regional Court of Kurzeme. The Senate of the Supreme Court dismissed an appeal by VAK in February 2000.

The case against VAK was a typical strategic lawsuit against public participation, according to Stephen Stec, head of the Environmental Law Programme at the REC. Such lawsuits cripple the democratic process by discouraging citizens from seeking up for their rights or acting as “watchdogs” over government agencies, he said.

The background of this case was the absolutely corrupted court system of Latvia, according to VAK’s representative in the case and the group’s vice-president at the time, Janis Matulis. Latvian courts ignored VAK’s evidence, including statements from the Prosecutor’s Office and Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the body that oversees the cities’ handling of environmental matters, Matulis told green HORIZON. “The Latvian courts decided what we should think and ordered us to retract our statements — something we could not accept,” Matulis said.

In Strasbourg, the ECHR determined that VAK’s purpose had been to draw public attention to an issue deserving public attention, namely mismanagement of an important sector by local authorities. As an advocacy group with a relevant specialty, VAK had assumed its role as “watchdog” under the Environmental Protection Act. This kind of participation by an association is essential in a democratic society, the court ruled. To perform its task effectively, VAK needed the freedom to impart information of interest to the public, give its assessment and thus shed light on public authorities’ activities.

VAK has been roundly vindicated, and not just in Strasbourg. Higher authorities in Latvia followed up on the group’s charges and found that the county council had broken the law in several instances. Two officials were punished, and the local government received an official warning in the matter.
The ABCs of SEA
Learning to accurately and efficiently evaluate environmental plans

Strategic Environmental Assessment in Action
By Riki Therivel, Earthscan, 2004 276 pages

This book is a practical guide to setting up strategic environmental assessment (SEA) systems. It focuses on the implementation of EU directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment and the UNECE Protocol on SEA.

The manual is based on the author’s experience implementing the SEA directive in Europe — two projects he was involved with in the United Kingdom — as well as on studies by other organisations.

With a coherent “how to” approach and a number of practical examples, Part I presents an overview of SEA — including its aims, principles and problems — and looks at the SEA directive. Part II examines the process of SEA and discusses techniques, approaches and issues.

Freshwater in Europe: Facts, Figures and Maps.
UNEP/DEWA-Europe, 2004. 92 pages

This report gives an overview of the state of freshwater in Europe with the help of several maps, graphs and other illustrations. It states that few Europeans suffer from serious shortages of water or poor water quality. However, it does show that water resources are unevenly distributed between and within countries and that shortages, flooding, pollution and ecosystem change threaten water sources in many places in Europe.

The review continues with a description of freshwater consumption, including water supply, use, stress and sanitation-related issues. The chapter on freshwater quality discusses ecological quality, major pollution sources, wastewater treatment and water-borne diseases. Freshwater ecosystems, including wetlands, groundwater, lakes and reservoirs, are also covered. Eighteen watersheds are presented as case studies, including the Danube, Oder and Vistula rivers of Central and Eastern Europe. The last chapter of the report discusses international, transboundary, European and national institutions and their initiatives on freshwater management.

Making EU Funds Work for People and the Environment: Case Studies from Eastern and Central Europe
CEE Bankwatch and Friends of the Earth Europe, 2004. 30 pages

The European Union has a long way to go to make its financial aid to Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries the driving force for sustainable development in the region, according to this new publication.

The book’s case studies are based on NGO monitoring of the implementation of the Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (ISPA). Seven in-depth studies from as many countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia) are summarised. Long versions of the individual case studies are available online.

The report assesses the appraisal process of ISPA projects, with particular focus on environmental impact assessments (EIA) that, according to the authors, are often of sub-standard quality. Effective public participation is absent in the EIA processes, alternative possibilities for solving problems are often neglected and the appraisal process lacks transparency, the authors conclude. The report provides recommendations relevant to the current management of the ISPA programme and also indicates the need for urgent changes to the procedures and guidelines for the 2007-2013 EU aid programmes.

This new directory from the REC gives an exhaustive listing of environmental information resources throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Among other useful information, it lists:

- 361 libraries from 15 countries;
- contact data for each library; and
- detailed breakdowns of their holdings.

Environmental Information Centres, Resources and Services (edited by Kristina Vilimaite, the REC, 2004) is an indispensable tool for researchers, NGOs, public officials, businesses or anyone else interested in environmental issues in CEE.

The directory also targets donors and support agencies, governmental and intergovernmental institutions and other international bodies and watchdogs with an interest in examining library development, information society, and the digital divide. It’s available in hard copy and online at: <www.rec.org/EnvInfDirectory>.
The Mediterranean Renewable Energy Programme (MEDREP) seeks and develops opportunities to invest in improving the energy management of companies, utilities, municipalities and governments.

Initiated by the Italian Government at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, MEDREP is a type II partnership for modern, quality, sustainable energy services, and for the mitigation of climate change by increasing the share of renewable energy technologies in the energy mix.

With support from international expert organisations such as IEA, UNEP, the REC, the WB, ADEME, ISES, MEDENER and OME, MEDREP is mobilising substantial capital (millions to hundreds of millions of euros) for sustainable energy management in the vast Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.

This September MEDREP’s North African training centre, the MEDREC, will open in Tunis. Next year, the REC will follow this with its own sustainable energy training centre for the North East Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, with facilities in Hungary and in Turkey.

For more information on the MEDREP initiative, contact the REC at energy@rec.org
The Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP) is a coalition of progressive governments, businesses and organisations committed to accelerating the development of renewable and energy efficiency systems. It is a Type I Initiative of the World Summit on Sustainable Development partnership providing a new and flexible means of cooperation among governments, businesses and NGOs to achieve common goals: to accelerate and expand the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency systems in our own economies and in our energy portfolios.

The benefits of sustainable energy are clear: energy security, economic development, social equity and environmental protection.

The REEEP works with all stakeholders to translate commitments for sustainable energy into concrete actions on the ground. The REEEP focuses on specific actions in three key areas:

• policy and regulations: assisting governments with regulatory policy frameworks which integrate renewables into the energy mix and to help establish “investor friendly” climates;
• innovative financing: assisting with the creation of renewable energy funds, financing models, ESCO business models, tradable renewable energy certificates schemes, and bundling of small scale projects; and
• communications: knowledge dissemination, project finance matchmaking, local capacity building and in-country media support for renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.

The REC serves as the regional secretariat of the REEEP and covers Central and Eastern Europe and Turkey.

The first REEEP regional meeting for CEE and Turkey, Building the Partnership for Sustainable Energy, will take place in Budapest on September 30, 2004.

Call for proposals to finance renewable energy and energy efficiency projects will be announced in October 2004.

For more information <www.rec.org/reeep>