En route to sustainability

It is not necessary to live, but it is necessary to sail, ancient mariners said. But even the saltiest of seamen need to occasionally weigh anchor, look at their charts, and consider their next destination. In June representatives of governments, civil society, and business gathered at the REC’s head office in Szentendre to share lessons learned on the journey toward sustainability in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Participants also strove to chart a course and select the right vessels for the next leg of the voyage.

Green Horizon, or as many still call it, The Bulletin, has been the REC’s banner publication since the organisation set sail 15 years ago. For the centre, 2005 was a year to take stock. What was confirmed during the anniversary celebrations is that transition does not end. The route to sustainability is long and a good vessel and capable crew remain indispensable.

The REC was launched for a particular historic moment of political and economic transition, and for navigating a particular region: CEE. With the start of political changes in the region, the REC was christened as a vessel dedicated to environmental democracy. Five years later, at the 1995 Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Sofia, the REC model was recommended for the newly independent states. On its 10th anniversary, the REC was acknowledged as a useful tool for EU approximation and accession.

Today, governments realise that the REC, with its multi-stakeholder approach, is a seaworthy ship whose horizons extend beyond the circumstances and region for which it was built. The anniversary declaration by the REC’s signatory states calls for the REC to play a “greater role” in the EU. Corrado Clini, director general at the Italian Ministry for Environment and Territory, and chairman of the REC’s Board, called for an integrated approach to the centre’s work. “If we isolate decision making by providing information on the environment and encouraging cooperation between regional stakeholders.

The REC’s experts have devised tools, methods, legislation and policies. They have raised issues and provided solutions, and have propagated them throughout society, said REC Executive Director Marta Szegeti Bonifert. “After the anniversary, the REC’s mission has been reinforced and the REC’s position has been reconfirmed. Governments have reaffirmed the centre as their political assistant for sustainability.”

Iskren Petrov, age 13, won a United Nations Environment Programme children’s drawing contest. This entry from Bulgaria was one of 3,500 in Europe.

The REC’s purpose is more than just carrying on activities within the framework of its mission. The 15th anniversary ministerial declaration emphasised that the REC must continue discussing with governments their visions and needs, but also proactively suggest solutions and new areas of activity. The REC has already been doing this — by initiating policy processes in areas like environmental investment, enforcement and compliance, strategic environmental assessment and public participation.

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0 8 SEA gets boost in region

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Donors take stock

Organisation continues to reap well-appreciated returns for investments in CEE

UNITED STATES: CATALYST FOR CHANGE
Judith Ayres, Assistant Administrator for International Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency

The REC played an essential role in making the commitment to environmental protection and subsequent positive results a reality for all. World history provides a poignant context, for it was not long after the Berlin Wall fell that Hungary, the EU and the USA joined to dedicate the new space among the old walls of a silk mill as the Regional Environmental Center’s first home. The extent of the dramatic political, economic and environmental changes that have taken place in Central and Eastern Europe since 1990 is more than extraordinary. The REC has consistently served as a catalyst for positive change.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION: PARTNER IN ENLARGEMENT
Soledad Blanco, Director, International Affairs, DG Environment

The REC played a part in the benefits that European Union enlargement has brought to the environment. These benefits include a 60 to 80 percent reduction in primary air pollutants, a 50 percent reduction in toxic pollutants, and up to an 80 percent reduction in organic matter pollution in water. In the environmental work connected to the expansion of the EU into Central and Eastern Europe, the REC contributed significantly. And because of this, we have a better environment for our continent. The experience gained by the REC should be spread to countries that may one day join or aim for a closer relationship with the EU.

JAPAN: TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE
Kazuko Nose, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of the Environment

In recent years, the REC has been playing a significant role in addressing climate change issues. The frequent occurrence of heat waves in Europe and typhoons in Asia in recent years have made us realise the importance of addressing climate change issues.

The REC was established out of necessity. It introduced a form of cooperation of environmental management that was new. The goals were to help people look beyond their walls and offer more scope to local governments. Ordinary citizens would again have the right to organise, set up volunteer organisations and build a vital civil society while also building their young democracies. The REC has been a champion in carrying out the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme, thanks to its contacts in the former Yugoslavia and the rest of South Eastern Europe. In a region with so many borders, it is good that they are becoming less important. That was precisely the goal with the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. You see, cooperation on environmental protection also serves a higher goal. We want people to live in peace, not only with nature but also with each other.

NETHERLANDS: BREAKING DOWN BORDERS
Pieter van Geel, State Secretary, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment

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Continued on page 8
Look three ways before crossing

At the REC’s anniversary events from June 24-27 in Szentendre, keynote speeches focused on the three pillars of sustainable development: environment, society, and economy.

ENVIRONMENT: THE NEW REGIONAL CHALLENGES

Bedrich Moldan, Director, Environmental Center, Charles University, Czech Republic

When the REC started in Hungary, the communist regime was starting to fall, and the state of the environment was simply disastrous. There were certain factors that were specific to the region. For example, pollution was not as universal and widespread as, say, in Western Europe, but was concentrated in hotspots which were very, very polluted. However, there were still large areas in a rather pristine state.

We all know that soon after the fall of communism big changes took place. As a result of rapid and massive environmental improvement, there was a dramatic rise in life expectancies in all the countries, and we have basically clean air, safe water and safe foodstuffs — a relatively acceptable environment.

The main contributing factors are very well known. First of all was the change to the democratic regime. With it came all the necessary institutions, including the rule of law, ministries of environment and inspectorates. Public support was key. Paradoxically, this support was a response to the communist neglect and indifference toward the environment. People were angry with this and enthusiastically supported measures to improve the environment. The role of civil society, which was very much supported by the REC the region over, has been crucial. In the later stages, the prospect of accession to the European Union was an important incentive, and it availed the region to expertise and inspiration in the shaping of laws.

Gradually we have entered the next phase. Basically all countries have seen rapid economic and social development, which brings new challenges. Two things could be seen as obstacles for further environmental improvement. First is complacency, and hand-in-hand with this comes the second factor: lessening public support for environmental measures.

The environmental challenge is still with us but with new dimensions. Let me mention four of them.

First is rapid economic development. You can see that most new developments haven’t used brown-fields, or old structures, but rather green meadows. The challenges no longer stem from neglect but from conflicts between development and stricter environmental protection.

The second dimension is that given these relatively short 15 years, the old environmental problems have hardly disappeared. Rather boring tasks remain: a more thorough cleanup of water and air, and improvements in waste collection.

You may also look at the state of the forests: 50 percent of the forest in the Czech Republic are still affected by acid rain. Acid rain no longer falls on them, but forests are still damaged and the Czech Republic is no exception. From this point of view, EU policies such as REACH and CAFE are desperately needed, yet fields, or old structures, but rather green meadows. The challenges no longer stem from neglect but from conflicts between development and stricter environmental protection.

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The level of understanding and support for these programmes is quite low in this region.

Third, we have new challenges not readily understood in this region. Consider the underdevelopment all around us. We still have [transport-related] pollution costs from nitrogen oxides and don’t know how quickly a recovery of the soil is taking place. We haven’t identified the critical roads yet. We still have many places in Europe where roads overburden the environment.

This region is still very much focused on itself. People think, “We are a forgotten part of the world, so don’t talk to us about our responsibilities.” But they are here. If we look at the production or consumption of energy per capita in CEE, it is among the highest in the world.

The fourth point is most important: a framework for sustainable development. Efficient solutions to environmental problems, especially here in this region, lie with new technologies that are less burdensome to the environment. These technologies can also improve the economy — the famous win-win solution.

I see a very big potential role for REC in [overcoming] all the problems that I have presented.

SOCIETY: THE HUMAN SIDE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Andrzej Kassenberg, President, Institute for Sustainable Development

• Speaking about the social dimension of sustainable development is not easy for me as an environmentalist who was involved in the issue for years. The environmentalist is too often focused on the relationship between the environment and the economy, and not on social issues.

• I have the same feeling about the social NGO movement: they focus too much on social issues in relation to economic issues, but they can not see the relationship with environmental issues. It is a challenge for the REC to build the relationship between environmental and social NGOs, especially the consumer organisations and maybe the evolving trade unions.

• Many say that in this region democracy has been built. It is true, but it is not yet participatory democracy. We are really at the beginning. The “homo sovieticus” way of thinking still exists. We have just finalised a study assessing to what extent Poland is prepared for access to information and public participation in environmental matters. The sad result is 58 percent — a very low score. The worst score was received for a question regarding how the government wants to develop its own capabilities in public relations. Only 44 percent of the people we asked knew what this was about.

• Not many people will like what I am saying, but if you stop someone on the street in Poland or the Czech Republic — or elsewhere in CEE — and ask them where they live, you will hear the same answer from many: “We are from a poor country. We need aid, we need assistance. We were cheated after the World War, we were cheated by the communist system, and now the West needs to honour a debt to us.” But if you ask people in Central Africa or South America about Poland, the Czech Republic or Hungary, they would say these are rich countries that belong to the EU and NATO.

We in CEE belong to a rich part of the world, but we are not [personally] rich. The time has come for rethinking, for making the switch from being countries which receive aid to countries which deliver it. We have products and very good practices that are highly applicable to countries in transition. It is time to rethink our export policy, not only for goods, but for consultancy and expertise.

• It is also time to rethink the very nice slogan, “Think global, act local.” It is time to build a global ethics, and we need to take responsibility as a region, too. We have to recognise that in a consumer society, we can vote for companies which deal not only with environmental issues, but social issues as well: companies that are concerned about workers, fair trade and impacts on communities; companies that don’t employ children and don’t discriminate against women. We have a very powerful tool in our wallets: our money. We have to learn that money is a tool for a better world.
**ECONOMY: KINDER, GENTLER TRANSPORT**

Takis Athanasopoulos, Managing Officer Toyota Motor Corporation and Executive Vice President Toyota Motor Europe

Creative solutions are urgently needed to realise the EU’s vision for stronger economic growth, greater social cohesion and a healthy environment. This is just as true in transport as in other sectors.

Enhanced personal mobility increases access to essential services where individuals live. But it has come at a significant cost: increased pollution, congestion, risk of death and serious injury, noise and disruption of communities and ecosystems. By 2020 there will be more than 1.2 billion vehicles on the roads, a 50 percent increase from today. Without remedial action now, there will be significant environmental damage.

Today’s responsible companies must predict problems and take corrective measures. This philosophy is embodied in Toyota’s key principle, “Today for tomorrow.” In order to meet the sometimes conflicting demands of sustainable mobility our vision is to “zero-ise” and maximise. This means that we strive for zero negative impacts on the environment, zero accidents and zero traffic congestion.

On our product side, we believe that hybrid technology is a key to that aim. On the manufacturing side we strive for green, clean and lean manufacturing, and in our philanthropy we seek to translate our environmental concerns to raise environmental awareness. In the long term, fuel cell electric vehicles have the most promising outlook. In the meantime, we are focusing on both gasoline hybrids and clean diesel. We consider hybrids as a core technology for these different types of power sources. No external recharging is necessary, because the battery is recharged not only from the energy surplus during the operation of the conventional engine, but also from the energy released during braking or slowing.

Toyota came on the market in 1997 with the first Prius hybrid car, and in 2003 a new model was developed. This month the electric hybrid was launched in Europe. This is just an example at how Toyota looks at practical solutions to the challenges that society faces. We cannot tackle these issues alone, but must cooperate closely with our customers, suppliers, competitors, government and non-governmental organisations.

As a responsible company, we believe we should make philanthropic donations to the society in which we live. Our contributions are oriented towards projects that benefit society, while at the same time lining up with our company’s missions and objectives. For example, if the quality of technical education in a particular region is poor and some NGOs are trying to enhance it, this could be a good opportunity for Toyota’s support. Not only will we provide our customers with better technicians, but this will have positive effects on society as a whole. This way we can give not only money, but also our expertise in engineering, manufacturing, environmental technology and so on. We have created the Toyota Fund for Europe and have identified three focus areas: environment, road safety and technical and engineering education. We believe these areas greatly influence our competitive context.

For example, if environmental awareness increases, society will look more into sustainable alternatives. It is in this area that we are privileged to have the opportunity to work with the Regional Environmental Center. Our history with the REC dates from 2001, when they were selected by our mother company as the only European project to receive funding from the Toyota global environmental grant system. With this funding, the REC developed the Green Pack approach. The Green Pack contains a variety of educational materials for teachers to use throughout the school programme.

For Toyota it is important that people develop more environmental awareness and are willing to explore alternative solutions. We are all pleased with the professionalism and commitment with which the REC and its staff have always delivered on their promises. In Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the Green Pack already is available in schools, and recently the REC started new Green Pack projects in Russia and Turkey. I very much welcome the work of the REC.
Best ways forward

Government representatives discuss their view of sustainability and how best to pursue it

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: A CONCEPT THAT UNITES
Vlado Buchkovski, Prime Minister

- Sustainable development is not an isolated process but one that leads to cooperation and communication between countries. Nothing unites countries more than joint protection of the environment. In this process there are no politics, no conflicts of interest. There is just one thing: protection of the region. A great example for this is the fifteenth anniversary of the REC, which managed to unite the countries of SEE for the future.

I have an idea of holding a regional summit of prime ministers of SEE and the countries of the Visegrad group on environmental protection in the process of approaching the EU. Now is the right time to discuss this issue.

ITALY: A TOOL FOR INNOVATION
Corrado Clini, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the REC

- We have to face the challenges of economic growth and competitiveness using protection of the environment as a tool. It is an engine for technological innovation, for identifying the best practises for conserving natural resources and energy while fostering economic growth and new jobs in our regions. This is a very difficult task.

If we look at the situation of many European countries, like Italy, we are reconsidering how to combine social security and environmental protection. We need to improve our competitiveness based on the creation of new technologies and new services for economic growth.

CZECH REPUBLIC: TRANSPARENCY IS KEY
Libor Ambrozek, Minister of Environment

- The first steps towards sustainable development were initiated and performed by the environmental sector. But it is evident that sustainable development cannot be achieved without partnership and integration of environmental concerns into our structural polices and decision making processes. A horizontal coordinating body for sustainable development can be a tool for promoting this approach at the national, regional and local levels.

Such a body was established in the Czech Republic in August 2003. The main lessons from this very intensive process are very simple. The main way to success is transparent communication which can replace the feeling of competition with trust and partnership.

SLOVAKIA: GAPS REMAIN
Laszlo Miklos, Minister of Environment

- The very basic idea and very basic approach is that there is a big difference between projects — or developing a project — and realising the project. Institutions like the REC are there to develop a project, and then somebody should realise them. But the gap between that and who will have a concrete tool — who will go and work after the end of a nice project — is still there. If the REC could overlap, solve or fill this gap between the end of a nice project and realisation in the field, it would be a great step forward.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: INSTITUTIONS NEEDED
Ramiz Mehmedagic, Minister, Federal Ministry of Physical Planning and Environment

- With the support of the Italian Ministry for Environment and Territory, REC Bosnia and Herzegovina was enabled to systematically address environmental issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2003, ministries of environmental entities were strengthened, a state-level framework law on environment was drafted and a state-level environmental protection agency was established. This is one of the preconditions for Bosnia and Herzegovina to join as an equal in major environmental projects. Bosnia and Herzegovina still needs to build the necessary institutions which can support these activities.
SEA gets boost in region

By Ausra Jurkeviciute

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) gained ground in Central and Eastern Europe during a landmark meeting on the subject September 26-30 in Prague. The REC and the Czech University of Agriculture co-hosted the event, a conference of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA).

The meeting opened discussions between almost 400 SEA practitioners and representatives of development banks, donor agencies and UN organisations. With participants from 72 countries, it was the first ever global conference focused solely on SEA.

SEA gives stakeholders a weapon to prevent environmental pollution, degradation and global problems such as climate change, said Jiri Dusik, the REC’s topic area leader for environmental assessment. It was hoped that the Prague conference would help bring SEA into practice in CEE, thereby promoting sustainable development, said Barry Sadler, a UK-based expert on the practice.

The discussions had five streams: SEA legislation and policy, SEA practice in key sectors, linkages between SEA and other assessment or planning tools, cross-cutting issues and improving standards in SEA practice, and building capacity for SEA. During the meeting, 38 sessions, 85 workshops and several discussions, seminars and ad hoc meetings took place. Many participants expressed the hope for follow-on regional and global conferences.

Participants agreed on the need for SEA capacity building, although they cautioned against static standards. Principles should be developed, but countries need to find their own good practices, participants concluded. SEA should be considered a tool, with sustainable development the ultimate aim.

HUNGARY: GROWING WITH DEMOCRACY

Miklos Persanyi, Minister of Environment and Water

The REC and democracy have grown up together in Central and Eastern Europe. The REC was intended to assist democratisation, and we must admit when we celebrate that this process has not finished in this part of the world. The REC therefore still has many important tasks to do.

The REC was a witness and participant in the development of environmental policies in Hungary as well. When we consider the recent and future enlargement of the EU, this opens new opportunities and also new challenges in furthering European environmental policy within the EU and beyond.

The REC can contribute to bridging between EU member states, South Eastern European countries, Turkey and the region of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

COURSE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Strategies, Methodologies, Policies and Actions for Central and Eastern Europe

The Italian Trust Fund supports the Course for Sustainability, an educational programme for key government officials responsible for the “three pillars” of sustainable development: economy, social development and environment.

The course is designed to give members of various ministries and agencies from 10 target countries a chance to examine the major approaches to sustainable development. Noted professors and experts conduct five modules examining strategies, methodologies, policies and activities to promote sustainability in Central and Eastern Europe.

The third round of the Course for Sustainability got off to a successful start in October of 2005.

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