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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 between 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.

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Pavel P. Antonov

Clarification

Some clarification of the article “Chemicals caught in the draft” (Vol. 3, No.3) is needed. The new framework chemical law for Serbia and Montenegro, drafted with the REC’s support, was actually presented to various stakeholders by the Ministry of Environment and the international experts who assisted in the drafting process. The REC’s project carried out the translation of seven EU directives into Serbian, while full transposition is still underway. Targeted workshops were part of the work done by the REC in support of domestic environmental law development.
In 2004 Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and an approach that embraces human rights and women’s rights in particular. At a Green Accord conference last autumn, Green Horizon Editor-in-Chief Pavel Antonov asked Maathai how societies in Africa or CEE can avoid the wasteful lifestyles common in the West.

Sustainable living should be a human right

During the course of history, we have reached points where we raise our moral consciousness to recognise a new level of morality. Over-consumption of resources happens because our level of moral responsibility to other species, and especially to our fellow human beings, is very low. We are comfortable to over-consume our own resources and other people’s resources. We consume them and exploit them completely, unconcerned about the troubles we cause.

Until we raise our morality high enough to feel that we cannot sustain a lifestyle that is so wasteful, at the expense of other human beings and other species, we shall continue to talk about Over-consumption, and we shall not move very far.

I am talking to you from Nairobi, from a poor, developing country. But five percent of the people in Kenya live wastefully and over-consume, just like many do in the developed rich world. That is because everybody wants to live like the rich world lives. But there are not enough [resources]. The rich world tries to exploit the poor world, and a few people in the poor world try to exploit the rest of the masses.

When we are fighting Over-consumption we fight it not only in the rich world but also right here. We are copying the way other people live in the West. The new morality needs to be raised among the rich countries that are over-consumers. But also in our countries, among our own elites who also have very low codes of ethics. They live very comfortably and consume excessively at the expense of their own people.

I know there are many people in the world who are individually practicing sustainable lifestyles. They reduce. They reuse. They recycle. They repair. That’s right. But sometimes our individual effort falls short and we need effort at the government level. Therefore we must continue to demand greater efficiency within UN development agencies, among governments, and among countries.

Sustainable lifestyle has to become part of [universal] human rights. We believe that we cannot do certain things to other human beings. We need to reach a moral responsibility to each other where we can say, “You cannot go in other countries and exploit them, keep them in poverty, when you yourself are leading a wasteful and over-consumptive lifestyle.”

I have been impressed by the people who are now lining up to buy the hybrid car — it uses less fossil fuel. People are trying on the individual level to cut down the use of resources, and they refuse to use products that destroy resources such as water. This is a collective responsibility which must become a global responsibility — just like human rights.

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Regional news briefs

■ Czecks fight trash trade
The German government has agreed to step up controls on its eastern border to stop illicit exports of garbage into the Czech Republic. Czech authorities say that this year, some 15,000 tonnes of German waste has been smuggled across the border in a racket that lets Germans duck domestic disposal fees while letting Czechs make a quick euro.
A report on Radio Praha described an incident that typifies the problem: firefighters were called to the village of Libceves in North Bohemia to extinguish a blaze in a warehouse filled with discarded shoes and clothing from Germany. The property owner had no license to import the refuse.

Responding to formal complaints by his Czech counterpart, German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel said at the end of February that his government had tightened border controls, particularly in the state of Saxony-Anhalt, to prevent further illegal exports. However, Gabriel was also quoted as saying that some Czech companies shared the blame because they had “actively sought German partners for illegal waste trade.”

■ Environment minister demands more
Latvia’s environment ministry has demanded that more of the country’s EU structural and cohesion funding go towards environmental protection. In a letter sent to the finance ministry, Minister of Environment Raimonds Vejonis said that funding shortfalls have jeopardised Latvia’s ability to comply with EU environmental laws. Funding for environmental protection infrastructure is half of what is needed, Vejonis wrote, while funding for water management, biodiversity protection, contaminated land remediation and other areas is a fifth of what is necessary. Latvia currently receives EUR 380 million annually in structural and cohesion funding.

■ Recycling won’t be contained
The Czech senate in February passed stricter targets for packaging recycling, although they would only take effect in 2012. It also passed measures aimed at helping smaller firms with compliance. The ambitious goals are attainable, a ministry spokeswoman said, explaining that the Czech Republic had met all its EU requirements so far and had surpassed EU members such as Ireland, Portugal and Greece. The recycling targets include 70 percent for paper, glass and cardboard and 27 percent for plastic. The overall target for packaging would be 55 percent.

■ Coal miners say law gives them the shaft
Recent changes to Poland’s environmental protection bill, passed in January, will cost the coal mining sector EUR 920 million, according to a statement by the country’s Mining Chamber of Industry and Commerce. The new rules ban the reuse of waste materials extracted with coal and presently used as fill in the reclamation of disused mines. The chamber is pushing for the implementation to be postponed from April to next year.

■ Winds of change in Bulgaria
Bulgaria would get its first large-scale wind farm in a EUR 80 million project planned at Murgash Peak near Sofia. The project, undertaken by the Bulgarian firm Ecosource Energy, would eventually include 44 windmills producing a combined 100 MW of energy.

The first 20 wind generators are to be completed by the end of 2006 and the final 24 over the ensuing two years, according to the company.

HAZARDOUS SPILL

■ Danube capsizing fuels concern
Ecologists predicted no long-term environmental damage from the sinking this winter of a Slovakian tug near the Bulgarian port of Russe on the Danube.

The tugboat Polana, whose fuel tanks contained more than 40 tonnes of diesel, caught fire on December 11 in Romanian waters and burned for 24 hours before finally sinking, according to the BlueLink environmental website.

Authorities said the fire had started in the boat’s engine compartment, and that heat damage to the hull had caused it to sink. Firefighters from Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria cooperated in extinguishing the blaze.

Experts stated that the environmental damage had been limited to an oily film on the river’s surface which threatened migrating waterfowl but not fish, which were hibernating.

CIVIL SOCIETY

■ NGOs boycott consultations
Several Slovakian NGOs pulled out of governmental consultations on the programming of European Union structural and cohesion funds, saying the state routinely ignores their input.

The NGOs had been providing recommendations on how the government will spend EUR 10 billion in EU funds from 2007 to 2013. However, they charged that the state had not been conducting a serious public hearing process, as required by the partnership principle enshrined in EU law.

The NGOs commented on the proposed National Strategic Reference Framework for 2007-2013, demanding support for marginalised regions and social groups such as the Roma.

Helena Wolekova, an NGO representative at the Committee for Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources and former Slovak Minister of Social Affairs, said: “The Ministry of Construction and Regional Development did not accept any of our principal comments. ... Unfortunately our efforts to improve the quality of programming have fallen on deaf ears.”

Juraj Zamkovsky, of Friends of the Earth Slovakia/CEE Bankwatch Network, said, “We have no desire to continue our role in this puppet theatre.”

Efforts to get a response, via email and phone, from the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development, which is coordinating the programming process, went unanswered.
**Conservation**

**Tatras to get natural remedy**

- Pressed by environmental groups who had criticised what was supposed to have been remedial logging following the November 2004 windstorm in the High Tatras, the Slovak government has agreed to let the damaged forests recover naturally, according to the news service Transitions Online. The project, however, will include some human intervention in the form of tree plantings from local sources, as some groups have demanded.

  “The goal [of the project] is not to hasten regeneration but to plant species of trees whose composition and age structure correspond with natural ecological conditions,” said Ivan Stefanec, chairman of the governmental committee coordinating the restoration of the area.

  The plan is a marked change of direction from widespread salvage logging that the government encouraged in the wake of the storm. NGOs complained the timber grab not only hurt ecosystems, it also failed in its purported purpose: to prevent fires. The worst local blaze broke out last July near in the town of Tatranska Polianka and consumed 224 hectares, including parts of natural reserves in the Velicka and Slavkovska valleys.

  Environmental groups say the entire forest administration of the High Tatras needs reform to respond more quickly and wisely to big natural disasters.

  In November 2004, a massive windstorm damaged or destroyed 13,000 hectares of forest, almost 30 percent of the park’s 40,000 hectares of forest cover.

**Epidemiology**

**Virus home to roost**

- Bird flu came to Central and Eastern Europe this winter, with Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia all reporting cases of the virus before the close of March. Other European nations that have discovered the bug include Greece, Italy, Austria, Sweden and Germany.

  In CEE, Slovenia was one of the most recent countries to confirm cases of H5N1 virus, all of them involving dead swans, according to Reuters. With no humans having contracted it in Europe, Slovenian authorities said they would test those who handled the swan carcasses only if they showed signs of illness.

  In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel struck a similarly confident pose, saying that her government had spent months preparing for an outbreak and was ready to combat it.

  “There’s no reason for a panic reaction but I would advise people to be careful,” Merkel told ZDF television.

  In Europe, the virus has been found only in wild birds, with the majority of those cases involving swans. Scientists explained that swans were particularly susceptible to the disease, dying quickly after contracting it.

  They said more hearty birds that can travel with the virus, and not swans, had spread the disease around Europe.

  Although 91 people have died from the illness in Asia and the Middle East, authorities said human cases were less likely in Europe. In Asia and the Middle East, it is more common for domestic fowl to run around uncaged, they explained.

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**European Union Update**

**EU candidacy awarded**

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in December was granted candidacy for membership in the European Union.

“This is a big day for us, we received recognition for everything we have done in the recent past,” Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski told the state-owned Mia news agency after the December 16 announcement by the European Commission.

The Commission has praised the country’s economic progress and its efforts to achieve political stability.

In regard to the environment, the Commission stated in a November 9 formal opinion that “very significant efforts will be needed, including substantial investment and strengthening of administrative capacity for the enforcement of legislation.”

**Breaks for district heating**

New member states of the European Union will be able to maintain tax reductions on district heating under an agreement made February 1 between the EU’s Council of Ministers. According to the deal, states can lower value added tax (VAT) on district heating to 5 percent, a bottom level already permissible for electricity and natural gas tariffs.

Several of the new member states already had discounted tariffs for district heating, while countries such as France tax district heating as high as 19.6 percent.

Interest groups said the move would also help boost renewable energy and combined heat and power (CHP) — an efficient way of producing electricity and heat.

**Romania rallies eco-enforcers**

Romanian Premier Calin Popescu-Taciceanu called on Romania’s environmental enforcers to step up their efforts ahead of the country’s expected with EU accession in January next year. In a January meeting on the economy and development investments, Popescu-Taciceanu said that the ministries of economy and environment were to prepare projects to “streamline” energy efficiency and environmental protection. Full compliance with EU environmental standards is “essential,” he said.

**Stopping the stench**

A recently completed study has recommended ways in which several new member states — as well as Bulgaria and Romania — can come into compliance EU rules on petrol fumes at storage terminals and filling stations. Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia and Malta have been given derogations as late as 2009 to come into compliance with a 1994 EU directive aimed at containing emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) during petrol storage and distribution.

The study recommends delivering technical guidance for businesses and authorities through projects that transfer best practice from old to new member states.

**Polish plan demotes environment**

A recent plan by the Polish government to scrap a separate EU budget line for the environment has raised concerns that country will breach its nature conservation obligations.

EU funding for Poland is currently split between 11 sectoral programmes, including one for environment. This category would be dropped under the plans, raising fears that only big-ticket infrastructure projects will survive.

NGOs worry that smaller projects like those related to nature conservation will be lost.
A government decision on a plan by a Canadian mining company to introduce cyanide leaching to its operations in Bulgaria was postponed in January amid public protest.

Dundee Precious Metals (DPM) failed to gain approval from the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Waters for its plans at the Chelopech mine. The decision was postponed due to opposition by local communities and national pressure groups from the “Cyanide-Free Bulgaria” coalition, according to CEE Bankwatch.

In a public statement, Dundee responded with a threat to quit its Bulgarian operations, which also includes a gold mine near Krumovgrad in southern Bulgaria. “We are concerned that if the current delay in administrative procedures is not corrected there is a risk of discontinuation of the projects — a situation that would be damaging to all concerned,” Dundee said.

Za Zemiata, the Bulgarian affiliate of CEE Bankwatch, responded that Dundee was downplaying significant environmental shortcomings of their plan, including that the plans for both the Chelopech and Krumovgrad mines included cyanide tailings ponds located less than three kilometres from water sources and settlements, thus failing to comply with national regulations.

A compromise ties this guarantee to an operator’s permit, which will link liabilities closer to actual mine waste sites, while allowing for wider geographical scope if stated in the permit.

The proposed directive would include:

- **a requirement for operators to provide financial guarantees applying to any land “directly affected” by a mine waste site.** A compromise ties this guarantee to an operator’s permit, which will link liabilities closer to actual mine waste sites, while allowing for wider geographical scope if stated in the permit.
- **liabilities that remain in force after the closing of a mine.** Operators would be liable for major accident hazards, cyanide pollution and water quality deterioration, but wouldn’t have to carry out waste management plans or provide financial guarantees.
- **provisions on pits and caves left behind after mine closures.** The directive would apply the rules only to pits and caves containing mining waste.
- **provisions on water deterioration:** Parliament prevailed in its demand that mining waste sites are point sources under the EU Water Framework Directive.
- **a statement on Romania and Bulgaria:** The two states, to join the EU in 2007, agreed they will not ask to apply the directive later than other countries.

**Armenia picks water over gold**

- An Indian company promising to create 3,000 jobs and invest USD 100 million in a Soviet-era gold mine in Armenia was recently snubbed by that country’s environmental ministry.

Sterlite Gold Company had been seeking to expand operations of a mine purchased in 2002 in Sotk in the Gegharkunik Province. The proposal involved relocating ore processing operations from a site 200 kilometres away from the mine to the dig itself.

Despite the promised investments, Environmental Minister Varitant Ayyazian sided with environmental NGOs who claimed that the project would destroy the local environment, particularly Armenia’s largest body of freshwater, Lake Sevan, just 30 kilometres away.

According to the Armenpress news agency, Ayyazian stated at a roundtable discussion that the processing plant would utilise hazardous chemicals that would flow into rivers and the lake, jeopardising the welfare of the local environment and population. Ayyazian also cited a law aimed at protecting Lake Sevan, which specifically prohibits ore processing plants around its shores.

**Firm to pounce on mining boom**

- A UK mining consultancy this year introduced new services for environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) to take advantage of industry growth in the new member and accession states of the European Union.

Golder Associates, whose global operations include a 50-member staff in Hungary, believes that growing world demand for precious metals will accelerate mining activity in Eastern Europe, “which has traditionally had a very poor environmental and social track record.”

Golder will help mainly smaller mining companies “gain environmental approvals and a social license to operate,” said Phil Newman, Golder’s mining market sector leader.

Golder expects demand for ESIA will grow not only because of surging mining activity but also due to growing interest among mining companies in the Equator Principles, an international voluntary code initiated in 2003 related to environmental and social responsibility, said Michele Durban, a company representative.

**Mining directive hammered out**

- New European mining waste controls inspired by the 2000 cyanide spill in Baia Mare, Romania were provisionally finalised between the EU Parliament and Council of Ministers.

Johannes Dreisema of the European mining industry association Euromines told Environment Daily news service that the sector was “very pleased” that the two sides had “adopted a directive that is appropriate to our needs.”

The proposed directive would include:

- **a requirement for operators to provide financial guarantees applicable to any land “directly affected” by a mine waste site.** A compromise ties this guarantee to an operator’s permit, which will link liabilities closer to actual mine waste sites, while allowing for wider geographical scope if stated in the permit.
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**Cyanide plan burns Bulgarians**

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### Island rescue

- A floodplain restoration project on the Danube has helped burnish Bulgaria’s environmental credentials ahead of next year’s expected accession to the European Union.

- The project was made possible with funding from the first round of a granting programme of the Danube Regional Project, an initiative of the United Nations Development Programme-Global Environment Facility (UNDP/GEF).

- All three tributaries suffer from similar environmental pressures from farming, industry and human settlements. Another common problem is that all three watersheds lack infrastructure to treat wastewater.

- The biggest barrier to solving these pollution problems is low public awareness about the effects of poor water quality on health and nature. Authorities don’t see water pollution as a priority, local stakeholders don’t cooperate, and polluters lack incentives to clean up their operations.

- The three NGOs involved in the project are the Institute of Applied Ecology in Slovakia (DAFPNE), the Ecological Centre of Pomurje in Slovenia and the Centre for Environmental Information and Education in Bulgaria.

- The project seeks to reduce organic and toxic pollution of the rivers by making existing data on pollution sources accessible for the public, promoting environmentally friendly farming methods, and raising awareness of the importance of urban wastewater treatment.

### Three-part harmony

- Three NGOs have joined efforts to reduce water pollution in three tributaries of the Danube, the Morava in Slovakia, the Mura in Slovenia and the Ogosta Bulgaria. Their joint work was made possible with funding from the first round of a granting programme of the Danube Regional Project, an initiative of the United Nations Development Programme-Global Environment Facility (UNDP/GEF).

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### Another round of funds for NGOs

- Sixty-two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were awarded more than USD 636,000 in March in a second round of pollution-reduction grants by the Danube Regional Project. The NGO projects were launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Projects are expected to run until January 2007.

- At the regional level, five multi-country projects will include building bridges between stakeholders near the Hernad River in Hungary and the Sebes-Koros rivers in Romania. Public participation will be increased in managing the Sava River Basin. Cleaner agricultural practices will be promoted in lower Danube countries, and reusable diapers and environmentally-friendly detergents will be advertised in Slovenia and Croatia.

- At the national level, 57 projects are being supported. They include reducing pollution in various Danube tributaries, promoting organic agriculture, promoting cleaner agricultural practices, promoting environmentally-friendly detergents, and implementing new wastewater cleaning systems for households and farms.

- “The work that these NGOs will do in raising awareness about water pollution issues and solutions is crucial for us,” said Kari Eik of the United Nations Development Programme-Global Environment Facility’s Danube Regional Project (DRP). “Their countries have agreed to clean these waters by 2015 to meet international policy.”

- This second round of DRP grants builds on the DRP’s first round of 65 grants, which started in 2004. “Key successes from the first round included the protection of Slovakian wetlands, improved trans-boundary water protection between Moldova and Ukraine, and raising awareness among 200,000 residents in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina,” said Entela Pinguli, grants manager with the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC).

- This granting programme is managed by the REC’s head office and its offices in the ten countries listed above. The autonomous REC Moldova coordinates and implements the grant programme for Moldovan NGOs.

More information is available at: <www.rec.org/REC/Programs/NGO_Support/Grants/RegionalDanubeGrants/>.
Environmental enforcers need training and better coordination to get a handle on green crime

By Pavel Antonov

A major scandal shook Croatia two years ago as environmental authorities and the police uncovered a major illegal dumping operation. Small loads of hazardous waste, mostly from laboratories and research institutions, had been dumped in numerous locations across the country. According to media reports, some of the illegal dumping sites were near major roads and the Sava River. Investigations showed that the dumping was part of a shady business operation that sprang up following the closure by authorities of a controversial incinerator in 2002. While the case awaits a court judgment, it has already raised serious concerns among the public about the cooperation — or lack thereof — between environmental and law enforcement authorities.

Although Croatia’s criminal code covers pollution and other crimes against environment, environmental inspectors, police and prosecutors remain unclear about who should do what, says Anita Pokrovac-Patekar, a senior environmental inspector in Zagreb. Pokrovac-Patekar says that environmental inspectors need more experience with criminal law, and that criminal justice authorities need to learn more about environmental crime and its consequences.

A tough task

“Simply, environmental issues are too difficult for many police officers,” admitted Henk Ruessink, a senior management advisor for the inspectorate of the Ministry of Environment of the Netherlands and an instructor at the Dutch Police Academy. Traditionally the police and judiciary do not focus on environmental crimes because of the high number of new regulations and the difficulty in judging environmental crime, he explained. “If we have a murder there is a dead body, there is evidence. But in an environmental crime case, nobody sees anything. Police officers need to be educated to get a handle on this,” Ruessink said.

In Croatia, a series of workshops will be carried out over the next two years for the benefit of police, justice officials and environmental inspectors. A PHARE-funded EUR 2.5 million programme to bolster environmental protection will target inspection bodies dealing with water, nature and health, as well as police, customs officials, and prosecutors. A pilot scheme will be established within the project to coordinate environmental protection efforts by these various authorities. “We also would like to improve the knowledge of court witnesses and court experts,” said Pokrovac-Patekar. The programme will be implemented within 2.5 years.

But Croatia is not the only country in Eastern Europe that needs better coordination in this area. In Bulgaria, the police tend to shy away from environmental crime, a top environment ministry official in Sofia confirmed. In 2004 amendments to the country’s penal code streamlined environemental crime provisions into a separate chapter, but a proposal to create a special police force under the purview of environmental protection will target inspection bodies dealing with water, nature and health, as well as police, customs officials, and prosecutors. A pilot scheme will be established within the project to coordinate environmental protection efforts by these various authorities. “We also would like to improve the knowledge of court witnesses and court experts,” said Pokrovac-Patekar. The programme will be implemented within 2.5 years.

Outmatched by outlaws

Preventing, prosecuting and punishing environmental crime provides a clear example of law enforcement difficulties in CEE’s transitional societies, said Mihail Dimovski, a manager of the Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Network for Accession (ECENA). In January the problem was discussed by environmental inspectors from South Eastern Europe at the network’s first plenary meeting in Zagreb.

Enforcement of new laws in line with the EU acquis remains difficult even in the countries that have joined the union. The difficulties are greater in the environment field, which is why efforts to improve cooperation between the law enforcement, inspectors, protected area administrations, and wildlife agencies are on the way.

Getting started

In Poland, the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management funded a series of meetings among judges, prosecutors, veterinary inspectors, police, customs and NGOs to try and improve implementation of EU rules on the trade of endangered species. Guidebooks on implementing the

POACHERS’ PARADISE: In Hungary, authorities have picked up smugglers of endangered skylarks and Greek tortoises.
Combating international environmental crime involves additional actors like the customs and border police, who play important role in combating illegal trade of wild species or substances. Last year, Interpol held a training course for environmental task forces from the different regions of Poland. Similar trainings have been organised in Hungary, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine, said Lauterback.

**Ecomessage across borders**

Interpol has kept an eye on environmental crime since 1976. Its Environmental Crimes Committee set up in 1994 consists of two working groups — on wildlife and on pollution crime, the later chaired by Lauterback. Interpol has tried to synchronise the efforts of various institutions in different countries dealing with environmental crime by creating Ecomessage. Ecomessage is a reporting system that covers all major transborder environmental crimes including dumping of wastes, maritime pollution and the trafficking of radioactive materials and wild species. Ecomessage applies a standardised procedure and routing for environmental crime reports. A standard form is used to collect and transmit crime details.

Data collected via Ecomessage can be analysed to define the size, structure and dynamics of syndicates involved in international environmental crime. Ecomessage allows for cross-referencing within Interpol’s database to identify links with previous crimes. Countries who participate can alert and request assistance from law enforcement agencies in other Interpol states.

Timely exchange of pertinent information is crucial to any campaign that targets criminals who traffic in protected wildlife. But the sources of this information are scattered, reporting methods vary from country to country, and law enforcement agencies dealing with the environment often do not communicate. There is no international repository for the collection, storage, analysis and exchange of useful information to combat environmental crime. Ecomessage is an effort to resolve these shortcomings, explained Ruessink. “Once you get more and more information you can also do analyses to find patterns: where is crime developing, what are the areas in which it is developing, on what substances or issues is it developing,” said Ruessink.

There have been more than 300 cases filed via Ecomessage since the start of the system’s operation in 2000. Only two countries from CEE have joined Ecomessage so far — Slovenia and the Czech Republic so there is still “a world to win” in this region, said Ruessink.

Control of transborder environmental crime is becoming important in an effort to prevent transit of nuclear or other hazardous material that could be of use for terrorist organisations. NATO, Hungary’s parliament and the REC are planning to discuss the issue in September with parliamentarians, academics, authorities, journalists and other CEE stakeholders involved.
Even while idling in a traffic jam, cars and trucks pose a danger to life and limb. Tailpipe exhaust poses health risks to motorists and other road users and an even greater danger to those who live or work within close range of busy roads. And in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the health dangers from traffic pollution are exacerbated by lagging legal standards for fuels and vehicle emissions as well as the older average age of cars. Fortunately, efforts by regional governments and the automotive industry to address these problems are underway.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that more than a billion people worldwide breathe outdoor air pollution exceeding maximum recommended levels. Because of bad urban air quality, up to a million people die prematurely, studies show. Other health effects associated with traffic pollution include cancer, developmental problems, hospitalisation, asthma attacks and bronchitis.

According to Michael Walsh, an expert on fuels and vehicles, over the past decade, dozens of studies from all over the world have shown that spending time in close proximity to heavy traffic, especially diesel truck traffic, is associated with a wide range of health problems as well as premature death. The health effects come from products of combustion such as lead, hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, carbon dioxide and particulates.

According to a study published by the Institute for Risk Assessment Sciences at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, a clear link exists between a road’s truck traffic and the lung function of children living nearby: the greater the truck traffic, the smaller the lung capacity. Another study has shown the relation between the proximity to a freeway and the relative pollutant concentration in the air. The concentration of particle pollution remains high as much as 300 metres from freeways while the concentration of black carbon and carbon oxides is relatively high within a range of 100 metres. The health impacts entail an economic cost: according to estimates for 18 cities in Central and Eastern Europe, if those municipalities met European Union pollution standards for dust and soot, they would avoid 18,000 premature deaths a year and recover USD 1.2 billion in lost worker productivity due to illness.

**Multi-pronged approach**

A comprehensive vehicle control strategy would encompass clean vehicle technology, transportation and land-use planning, adoption of clean fuels, and improved vehicle maintenance, Walsh explained. Progress has been achieved in
RAILING AGAINST CARS: Istanbul’s main promenade features a restored early 20th century tram, which serves as a tourist attraction and well-used means of public transport.

If cities in this region met EU pollution standards, they would avoid 18,000 premature deaths a year and save USD 1.2 billion in lost work.

Several years ago in Bulgaria, the requirement to produce lead-free petrol was included in the privatisation contract that handed over Bulgaria’s state petroleum company to the Russian giant Lukoil. Another regional petrol company, MOL, currently produces petrol and diesel at its refineries in Hungary and Slovakia with sulphur content of 10 ppm, a standard that will become a legal requirement in EU after 2009. The USD 350 million investment into the refineries was due partly to legal pressure and partly to the availability of financing.

The gradual introduction of biofuels in Central and Eastern Europe would be another way to reduce traffic pollution. According to Fatin Alimohamed from the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), the Czech Republic is the biggest producer of biofuel in the region, having made 100,000 tonnes of biodiesel in 2004. It is followed by Poland which produced 1,200 tonnes of biodiesel and 36,800 tonnes of bioethanol and Hungary which made 2,000 tonnes of biodiesel. In several countries the production of biofuel is subsidised by the state.

The quality and age of vehicles are the other major factors influencing emissions from traffic. Most countries in the region have relatively old fleets, with most vehicles between 11 and 20 years old. Automotive maintenance is often inadequate and many of the vehicles lack catalytic converters. New policies are needed to rectify the situation. Countries should ban imports of vehicles without catalytic converters and that are older than a certain age. Many countries in the region already have such bans and impose a minimum requirement for EURO III engines, which meet EU standards for exhaust emissions. Policies should also be adopted for retiring old cars and projects should be launched for retrofitting old bus and truck fleets by installing filters and catalytic converters. Installing a filter can reduce particle emissions by as much as 85 percent and emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) by 25 percent.

Incentives

Economic instruments have proven an innovative and efficient way to direct consumers’ behaviour. For example, tax incentives can be used for phasing out lead in petrol, for reducing sulphur in diesel and petrol or for making cleaner vehicles more affordable than polluting ones. Another instrument involves charging an annual tax based on vehicle emissions. Tax incentives can also be used to promote the use of alternative fuels and vehicles powered by electricity, natural gas or a combination of electricity and petrol, as in hybrid cars.

A joint effort to promote clean fuels in Central and Eastern Europe has been undertaken by the REC, the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles (PCFV), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM). The initiative consists of a comprehensive study in 16 CEE countries and Turkey, a conference and a workshop on clean fuels and vehicles. Follow-up activity in the region includes training on clean vehicles in Bulgaria and roundtables on clean fuels and vehicles in Turkey and Serbia and Montenegro.

Rob Jong, head of the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles, said his group is now working towards the global elimination of leaded petrol by the end of 2008. It is looking to work with countries in CEE to develop strategies and implement activities that will lead to lower sulphur levels, especially in diesel. The efforts will involve joint work with governments, industry, and NGOs in the region to promote the transfer of cleaner technology through pilot heavy duty diesel retrofit projects and the dissemination of tools dealing with cleaner conventional and alternative vehicles.

Ruslan Zhechkov is a project manager for the International Secretariats at the REC. A website on clean fuels and vehicles has been launched at <www.rec.org/REC/Programs/pcf/index.html>. For more coverage on the Balkan environment, see the REReP Record at <rerep.rec.org>.
NGOs from the European Union help eastern peers track and influence pre-accession funding

How to follow the funds

By Robert Atkinson

Romania has passed several laws in the run-up to European Union membership. But due to lack of knowledge at the regional level, implementation lags behind. With major EU pre-accession funds streaming into the country, NGOs and concerned citizens need to learn what’s at stake and how they can take part.

Focus EcoCentre, an NGO based in Târgu Mureş, undertook a pioneering effort to bring authorities and the public together for sustainability planning. Focus EcoCentre ran a project that allowed it to monitor and influence the use of EU funds for regional development. Feedback from the project was collected by Brussels to improve similar initiatives.

Focus EcoCentre worked with the Regional Development Agency to involve other NGOs in the preparation of a Regional Development Plan for the Euro Region of Central Transylvania. The plan consists of a development strategy and an operational programme and will become a component of Romania’s national development programme, which will determine the distribution of EU structural funds, explained Zoltán Hajdu of Focus EcoCentre.

NGOs needed

“IT is important to involve NGOs better in checking how sustainable the programmes are,” Hajdu said. NGO input is particularly needed in certain aspects of the plan, including sustainable tourism strategies and Natura 2000, the EU network of ecologically protected areas. In areas such as human resources and educational programmes, NGOs can serve as a bridge between local governments and the public, Hajdu pointed out.

In September, Focus EcoCentre and other civil society representatives shared their input on the plan with the Regional Development Agency. “We had the impression that [the authorities] were very open to NGOs’ input to the programme,” Hajdu said. The seminar was part of an EU “twinning project” that Focus EcoCentre carried out with Magyar Termeszetvedők Szövetsége, (the Hungarian Association of Environmental Protectionists) and Milieukontakt Oost Europa, the Netherlands. The project aimed to build the capabilities of Focus EcoCentre and to transfer to Romania the experience from new and old EU member states.

Danut Stefanescu of the Environmental Protection Agency in Mureşh County, Romania found the project useful. “It was very important for us to learn the NGOs’ point of view and problems they face and broaden our understanding of sustainability,” he said.

It is one thing for a country’s parliament to adopt EU laws. But in areas like water management, the implementation of the EU’s Water Framework Directive, or Natura 2000, implementation is hindered by lack of knowledge at the regional level, said Paul Kosterink from Milieukontakt.

FORWARD THINKING: Starting from a modest base, communities in EU accession states have the opportunity to develop their economies in a sustainable fashion.

Twinning

Over the last few years, the EU’s Directorate General Environment has tried to help NGOs from candidate and association states and other neighbouring countries with their involvement in the accession process. It has tried to build the countries’ organisational capacities by offering a grant programme that matches NGOs from these countries with counterparts in the EU. In January, Hajdu joined the leaders of 14 other twinning projects awarded in 2004 for a two-day conference in Bucharest to evaluate their projects and make recommendations on the European Commission’s grant programme.

During the meeting, project leaders highlighted positive aspects of the programme results. They stressed that the programme had supported development of cooperation among NGOs and other stakeholders; helped civil society to be better involved in following the EU debate; raised NGO profiles in the eyes of their local and national authorities; and taught them useful skills. The project leaders also stressed the need for continuation — even extension — of the programme, plus the need for other forms of support to the sector. However, they did recommend some relaxation of the finan-

Robert Atkinson is the REC’s Director for Civil Initiatives. The new call for NGO twinning proposals will be posted at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/funding/intro_en.htm> in March 2006.
The Japan Special Fund of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), established in 1993, is a mechanism through which the Government of Japan supports the REC in its efforts to solve the environmental problems of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region.

Bridging East and East

In recent years the Japan Special Fund has turned its major attention to climate change, one of the most challenging environmental issues of our generation. Its aim in this field is to support the CEE countries’ efforts to comply with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.
Within four years, Europeans must stop killing off their plants and animals. Or at least that’s what the pan-European environment ministers declared in an agreement made three years ago in Kiev. Unfortunately, their commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010 collides head-on with one of society’s top priorities: economic growth. In the effort to slake their citizens’ thirst for material gain, many governments are actually accelerating biodiversity loss.

Striking a balance between nature conservation and development poses an enormous challenge, especially for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) where people still clamber for more consumptive lifestyles. Experts warn that regional governments must act quickly to preserve at least a part of their countries’ natural treasures.

“We shall double the length of motorways!” Although it sounds like a slogan from the five-year plans of the region’s Communist past, it’s actually a battle cry from the current election campaign in Hungary. The Socialist party’s pledge — calling for 206 more kilometres of motorways within a year — echoes that of politicians in many other countries in CEE. Many still perceive development of capital-intensive transport corridors as unquestionable priorities, the golden key to economic growth. But they often fail to consider the quality of environment — an equally important prerequisite for their constituents’ well-being.

CEE’s special natural and cultural richness gives it more options than Western Europe for a society striving for a sustainable future, says Janos Zlinszky, a senior sustainability expert at the Regional Environmental Center (REC). Despite the exoduses of economic activities associated with the region’s recent economic development, most countries here still possess a relatively large stock of natural capital compared to Western Europe. Large, intact ecosystems still exist, giving home to a significant part of Europe’s biodiversity and livelihoods to hundreds of communities that would wither without them.

Examples of CEE’s natural values abound, with the Carpathian Mountains one of the most important. With over 200,000 square kilometres of mountain ecosystems and 85,000 hectares of virgin forests, the Carpathians constitute Europe’s last refuge for large mammals like the brown bear, wolf, and lynx. And this mountain range supports the livelihoods of 16-18 million people.

The 2,681 sq km Danube Delta, one of the continent’s largest wetlands, hosts more then 500 bird species, making it a significant ornithological reserve. Large freshwater lakes in the Balkans such as Skadar, or the 4-10 million year-old Ohrid and Prespa lakes, host unique species such as the Ohrid trout and serve as important breeding and wintering grounds for several bird species, including the Dalmatian pelican, the pygmy cormorant, the spoonbill and many others.

If CEE is richer than the West in one thing, it is natural capital. As shown by the 2004 Living Planet Report by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), CEE still consumes the fruits of its natural world within its ability to regenerate. This region can remain sustainable if it wants to, but finding a healthy medium between nature conservation and development requires efforts of not only the countries themselves but also support of more economically advanced nations in Europe, says Rob Wolters, director of the European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC).

Various initiatives in CEE have successfully tested development alternatives that build on a community’s locally available resources — natural and human. One such initiative is the Carpathian Eco-Region Initiative. Launched by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), it won the support of governments and paved the way for the Carpathian Convention, an international agreement on conservation and sustainable development. The treaty entered into force on January 4.

Other examples include the Green Belt, a 22-country conservation initiative covering the territory along the former Iron Curtain and coordinated by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Another is the five-year project Transboundary Cooperation Through the Management of Shared Natural Resources, implemented in the West Stara Mountains, the Neretva River estuary and Skadar/Shkodra Lake.

In all these examples, biodiversity and nature conservation run hand-in-hand with building the capacities of local communities, engaging them in nature conservation and enhancing local democracy. The fact that countries like Albania and Serbia and Montenegro, which had long been isolated, have come together to discuss management of their shared Skadar Lake, is a major accomplishment in the region, says Mira Mileva, a REC biodiversity expert. Mileva managed the above-mentioned REC project on transboundary cooperation, which contributed to the recent designation of Skadar/Shkodra Lake as a protected area of international conservation value (see “Shoring up assets,” page 21).

Despite such efforts, burdens on nature are increasing globally, including in Europe. According to the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report by the World Resources Institute, fossil records show that the current rate of species extinction is 1,000 times higher than during prehistory. What’s worse, the report warns that should today’s pressure on species and habitats persist, the extinction rate will increase another 10 times.

Continued on page 20

by Ors Marczin
All the loss of the EU’s biodiversity by mental degradation is speeding up rather
The last stand

Text by Wojciech Kosc  •  Photos by Janusz Korbel

The best way to honour the beauty of a forest is to go there and drink it in first hand. Janusz Korbel, an academic-turned-environmentalist, often does just that, spending his nights under a makeshift tent fashioned from sticks and a waterproof coat. In this way, Korbel has gotten inside, both intellectually and physically, his greatest environmental passion: the Bialowieza Forest. The ancient glade straddling the Polish-Belarusian border constitutes the last big piece of primeval deciduous forest in the northern temperate zone of Europe. Korbel and other environmentalists in Poland and across Europe have made it their mission to protect Bialowieza from what they see as a tide of exploitation carried out under the guise of sustainable development.

Among other distinctions, Korbel is publisher of Dzikie Zycie (Wild Life), a monthly publication that helped stoke the conservation movement in Poland during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Four years ago he moved to Bialowieza, a village in the heart of the forest, where he got busy writing and organising conservationist campaigns. Korbel also heads the NGO Association for the Protection of Landscape.

Korbel seems to have taken on the role of the Ents — the animated trees that protect the forest in J.R.R. Tolkien’s fantasy classic The Lord Of The Rings. Just like an Ent, Korbel has accepted this burden on the grounds that nature cannot protect itself. He stands for conservation issues around the world, although Bialowieza rarely comes off the front burner. Just this March, he helped organise a series of demonstrations in front of Polish embassies across the globe under the slogan “One Forest!” The appeal referred not only to the exploitation of the forest, but also to the fact the Polish-Belarus border cuts through Bialowieza.

Korbel’s dream is to have the entirety of the Bialowieza Forest come under protection, a seemingly impossible goal considering the present political differences between Poland and Belarus and the fact that one country belongs to the European Union and other does not. Moreover, not everyone shares Korbel’s vision of conservation. The timber and tourism industries see it as a basis for livelihoods, while government authorities, both local and
ne of Korbel's compatriots in the cause is Tomasz Wesolowski, a professor from the University of Wroclaw. Wesolowski points out that the handling of the Bialowieza Forest during the last 16 years illustrates the corruption of the phrase "sustainable development" on the one hand and the parallel demonisation of the term "conservation."

"Sustainable development has turned into a universal catchphrase that underlies devastation of the forest," Wesolowski told Green Horizon. Wesolowski claims the forest should be preserved as a biological benchmark, "the only place one can observe ecological and evolutionary processes once typical of deciduous and mixed-deciduous European forests."

The Bialowieza Forest covers more than 1,600 square kilometers, with 40 percent lying in Poland. Within the Polish part, the Bialowieza National Park occupies about 38 percent. The last stands of old-growth timber that form its core and most biologically precious parts comprise a pale remnant of what the forest used to be.

Unusually for ancient European forests, Bialowieza is neither a poor timber producer nor inaccessible. It was a human decision — the designation of the forest as a royal hunting ground about 600 years ago — that preserved the forest until early 20th century. After that, Wesolowski said, "the era of preservation was replaced by a period of timber extraction that is still ongoing."

The basic controversy centres on how much of the forest should be preserved and how much should be open to logging. The conservationists want the Białowieza National Park expanded over the entire forest so as to rein in logging. Conservationists claim that the pace of logging is outrunning the forest’s ability to regenerate. Where once the logging of 1,000 trees a day had a minor overall impact on the forest, the same rate today "constitutes a loss measured in percentages," said a Bialowieza-based scientist who declined to be named.

The scientist also claimed that the area can no longer be considered pristine, a characterisation that parties on both sides of the dispute routinely use to their own ends. Due to logging, the forest's natural characteristics have survived only in selected patches under strict protection. Wesolowski notes that forest looks very different there: multi-story tree stands; large amounts of dead and uprooted timber; trees of huge girth, height and species variety.

According to Wesolowski, the currently warped notion of sustainability informs forest management from the local level on up to the European Union. He points out that two basic EU environmental directives, the 1979 Birds Directive and the 1992 Habitats Directive, mitigate against conservation by singling out particular species and types of habitat for protection. In a forest that has grown for centuries with little to no human influence, humans should not favour any species or habitats over others, Wesolowski said.

Ryszard Kapuscinski, head of the Forest Protection Department of the State Forests, which manages woodlands nationwide, dismisses that view. "We're working to retain the natural qualities of the area, while also considering the concerns of local communities, including tourism and economic factors," said Kapuscinski. Similarly, Environment Minister Jan Szyszko said, "I totally agree the Białowieza Forest should be protected, but I follow the principle of protection through use."

According to the current management plan, running from 2003 to 2012, logging in Białowieza should bring 150,000 cubic metres of wood per year. Unsurprisingly, State Forests as well as the Environment Ministry and regional and local authorities, get the brunt of criticism from NGOs and environmental journalists, even if they have limited sway to effect change. "As of now, [NGOs] are not decision makers," Kapuscinski said. "You cannot treat the whole area en bloc anymore, which is what the conservationists are doing." Kapuscinski repeated an oft-heard criticism of NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe: they are not willing to compromise.

Kapuscinski says logging poses no danger to Białowieza. "That's what you have the National Park and strict reserves for: to learn about natural processes as they happen. There's no need to expand them." But Wesolowski argues that with replanted forests too young to be cut, logging continues in old-growth stands — and even in nature reserves — where it is carried out as "sanitary" or "management" logging.

Korbel believes expansion of the park would not only curb logging, but also bring order to tourism. "Today, the forest is fragmented by many projects that aim at boosting its tourism appeal," said Korbel. He gave the examples of a border crossing opened last year that is likely to increase traffic on connecting roads as well as a plan to open a narrow-gauge sightseeing rail line.

On the community level, both the conservationist and pro-development sides claim they have the political edge. Korbel shows a list of about 1,000 signatures his organisation gathered in support expanding protected areas, while he dismisses protests against the idea a few years back as being fuelled by the State Forests. According to Mikolaj Pawlik, administrator of the Narewka commune, 60 percent of which lies in the Bialowieza Forest, the protests were genuine. "Twenty-five percent of the people live off the forest," said Pawlik. "They are foresters and wood-processing workers. Besides, the commune receives about EUR 70 from each hectare of managed woodland, and just half that from protected ones. Now calculate how much we will lose on expansion."

According to Minister Szyszko, the forest is the inheritance primarily of the locals and their foremost right is to make the best use of it. However, conservationists' interpretation of "best use" differs substantially, entailing a shift from a local economy largely based on timber exploitation to one based on tourism in an expanded national park. That approach runs counter to the idea of leaving the state forests authority, which rely on wood sales, while an expanded national park would be financed from the budget.

According to Korbel, the state forests have too big an influence in the area. He gives the example of a state forest official who also has an elected position in a commune that lies mainly in the Bialowieza Forest. Korbel sees this as a conflict of interest and remains convinced that democracy and market economy, which Poland as a new EU member is committed to, should go hand in hand with protection of nature’s riches for the generations to come.
The report identifies five main drivers of biodiversity loss: habitat change, climate change, invasive species, over-exploitation and pollution. The authors warn that because all these pressures are either already severe or increasing, our generation could witness a severe decline in nature’s ability to maintain a healthy and habitable environment for humans.

This is why European governments made their commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The target entails an ambitious and strict schedule. By the end of 2006, all European farmland supporting important species should be mapped based on commonly agreed criteria. The Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN), which is being developed as the largest and most ambitious European system of protected areas and ecosystems, should also be mapped this year, and then implemented over the following three. ECNC has already coordinated the preparation of maps for large parts of Europe, including CEE and the Balkans. Biodiversity indicators to assess progress towards the 2010 target are under development.

From February 22-24, experts and high-level decision makers met at the Plitvice Lakes in Croatia for the Fourth Intergovernmental Biodiversity in Europe Conference. They concluded that Europe has a long way to go to meet the 2010 target. Implementation of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), the main tool for pan-European cooperation on nature, needs to address land use, financial needs and economic considerations. Progress toward the Kiev targets lags behind, and several countries have not even started to develop their contributions to the Pan-European Ecological Network.

The Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), Council of Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC) governments within the Environment for Europe process. <www.strategyguide.org> Biodiversity Service for Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States (UNEP/CEN, European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC), REC; assists the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in CEE/NIS countries. <www.strategygude.org/bioserve>

The Carpathian-Eco-Region Initiative (CERI); an NGO network created in 1999 based on WWF’s Global 200 Eco-Region Programme. <www.carpathians.org>

The Carpathian Convention: a framework convention signed in 2003 by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia and Ukraine. <www.carpathianconvention.org>

Countdown 2010; an IUCN initiative implemented through the partnership of governments, NGOs and international organisations. <www.countdown2010.net>

The European Green Belt: a pan-European IUCN-led initiative with a vision to create the backbone of an ecological corridor. <www.greenbelt.eu>

The Dinaric Arc Initiative; a framework for cooperation among WWF, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Regional Office for Science and Technology for Europe (UNESCO-ROSTE), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IUCN and the Council of Europe.

Commerce and conservation can work hand in hand, according to the managers of a project promoting locally made goods in the Czech Republic. Since the initiative began last fall, more than 15 products have received a special label guaranteeing their origin from the participating regions of Krkonose, Sumava and Beskydy. All the regions have territory in the EU’s protected area network, Natura 2000; the labelling scheme intends to promote locally made goods while pointing to the virtues of Natura 2000.

The first group of products to receive the label includes foodstuff and other agricultural products such as milk, cheese, meat, bread, fruit and vegetables, honey, wine, beer and other drinks. Other natural products, including mineral water, wild berries, tea, medicinal herbs, wood, and compost, are also eligible. Handicrafts, jewelry and art objects made of wood, straw, glass, paper, metal, ceramic can also carry the label.

The labelling scheme includes specially written criteria for each region assuring that products are of high quality, environmentally friendly, and made where they claim to be made. Labelled products also need to have some exceptional quality associated with the region of their origin. At present, the label’s main benefit is that it allows producers to sell their products at special new events such as markets, fairs and exhibitions. These have included the biggest Christmas Fair in Prague’s Old Town Square.

Participants have noted that the label gives them an advantage against competitors, with the proof being in increased sales.

“We did not expect such sales growth,” said Pavel Cerman of the honey producer Apicor, which was among the first to use the new brand for its goods. Cerman said that during the end of 2005, sales of its mead rose by one-third year-on-year due to the label. “We gained access to new markets, mainly in Prague,” said Cerman.

The label is awarded to products by a certification commission comprising local producers and representatives of local and regional governments, nature-protection authorities, chambers of commerce and farming organisations.

The initiative was developed through a project financed by the European Commission, DG Environment. It is hoped that its lessons can be shared with other European countries.

The REC’s Country Office Czech Republic managed the project, but in the long term it will be carried on by newly formed associations dedicated to the labelling of local products. The associations will include local stakeholders such as producers, local government authorities, nature-protection officials and NGOs.

The EU hopes the scheme will draw attention to the areas in the Czech Republic that have been incorporated into the Natura 2000 Network. Healthy, high-quality local goods reflect the networks basic values.

Nature conservation initiatives in CEE

- The Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), Council of Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), endorsed by 55 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) governments within the Environment for Europe process. <www.strategyguide.org>
- Biodiversity Service for Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States (UNEP/CEN, European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC), REC; assists the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in CEE/NIS countries. <www.strategygude.org/bioserve>
- The Carpathian-Eco-Region Initiative (CERI); an NGO network created in 1999 based on WWF’s Global 200 Eco-Region Programme. <www.carpathians.org>
- The Carpathian Convention: a framework convention signed in 2003 by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia and Ukraine. <www.carpathianconvention.org>
- Countdown 2010; an IUCN initiative implemented through the partnership of governments, NGOs and international organisations. <www.countdown2010.net>
- The European Green Belt: a pan-European IUCN-led initiative with a vision to create the backbone of an ecological corridor. <www.greenbelt.eu>
- The Dinaric Arc Initiative; a framework for cooperation among WWF, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Regional Office for Science and Technology for Europe (UNESCO-ROSTE), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IUCN and the Council of Europe.

Europe’s biodiversity targets for 2008 and 2010

By 2008:
- National forest programmes developed and implemented in line with sustainable forest management principles
- Ecosystem management approach applied in Europe’s forests
- Biodiversity-sensitive management in place for a large portion of farmland of high natural value
- Financial subsidy systems in place to promote conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity
- Core areas of the Pan-European Ecological Network adequately conserved
- Pan-European Ecological Network in place to guide land use and spatial planning
- Pan-European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species implemented in half of the countries
- Substantial increases made in financial investments in biodiversity promotion activities
- Conservation policy supported by coherent programme on biodiversity monitoring and reporting
- National communication, education and public awareness plans in place in half of the countries

By 2010:
- Halting the loss of biodiversity
By Pavel Antonov

Just three weeks before Christmas, conservationists across Europe received a long-coveted gift from Albania. On November 2, 2005 the government in Tirana placed under protection a 495 square kilometre of the Albanian portion of Lake Shkodra and surrounding habitats. The area complements the protected zone on the Montenegrin side of the lake established in 1985. The lake (known as Skadar in Montenegro) is now entirely protected in a 900 sq km reserve. It is home to approximately 250 recorded bird species, including the Dalmatian pelican and golden eagle, and 45 fish species. Large mammals like dolphins and bears can be found in terrestrial and coastal protected areas bordering the Albanian side of the lake, according to the WWF. The new status will protect freshwater, terrestrial, and delta systems of exceptional value and beauty, according to the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The lake is the largest freshwater body in the Mediterranean basin.

The newly proclaimed protected area in Albania will include typical freshwater habitats, shore land and habitats adjacent to the Buna River and the Viluni lagoon. The Albanian government proposed the area as a Ramsar site, giving it status as a wetland of global conservation importance. This is an important example of how one of the poorest countries in Europe has managed to make nature protection a major policy priority, said Tobias Salathe, the regional coordinator for Europe of the Ramsar Convention. “It is inspiring to see a joint conservation effort between two countries that were in an isolation for decades in the past,” said Mira Mileva, who has managed a REC project for the conservation of Shkodra Lake since 2001. The project received support from the Swiss Agency for International Development.

The REC, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and other international organisations had been working for Shkodra’s protection through several nature conservation activities aimed at building cooperation between the two countries. Folk music and a fair featuring wine and organic products from both sides of the border accompanied the January 24 ceremony on the lake’s protection.

Host of the celebration, Albanian environment minister Lufter Xhuveli, said his government would double the size of nature protection areas in Albania. “We want to rise to the level of all West European countries in this respect by 2010-2012, which means having 15 per cent of the country’s area protected,” Xhuveli announced.

The Albanian government understands that Shkodra is a unique asset with which other countries can’t compete, Salathe explained.

Securing the support of local people was probably the greatest challenge in winning protected status of the Montenegrin side of the lake, said Vasilije Buskovic, from the Nature Protection Institute in Podgorica, Montenegro. From 1991 to 2004 in the ministry of environment, Buskovic worked directly for the inclusion of the Montenegro part of the lake into the Ramsar convention’s list. “It was difficult for people to accept the transition from a fisheries-based economy which had lasted for centuries,” said Buskovic. Albanians will now face the same, he warned.

Hearts and minds

To win public support in Albania, the REC undertook several activities involving local authorities, fishermen, NGOs and research institutions. The REC worked in the Shkodra region to involve local authorities and stakeholders in negotiations with Albania’s Ministry of Environment. Under the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe, some 50 projects were implemented entirely or partly in Albania with the support of the Albanian Government and local NGOs.

The next step should be the sustainable development of the local economy, said Buskovic. Residents could be involved in small-scale commercial activities such as bed and breakfasts or the production of traditional agricultural products like the famous local Vranac wine, grape brandy, Shkodra tobacco, and garlic, he said.

Many challenges lie ahead, Salathe warned: “Obviously with economic development there will be more pressure on nature.” He observed that houses have cropped up along shore areas where they do not belong, but said the government of Montenegro was “more or less obliged” to accept waterfront development. Looking at the Albanian side, it is high time to develop a land use plan, Salathe said.

But spirits in Albania are high. “I hope in the near future support for environment will increase — not only from the state, but from the public,” Xhuveli said.

For more coverage on the Balkan environment, see the REReP Record at <rerep.rec.org>.
THE ITALIAN TRUST FUND

From renewable energy to sustainable agriculture; from climate change to hot spots; from NGOs to national officials; the Italian Trust Fund supports sustainable development in Central and Eastern Europe.

A targeted contribution to the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe by the Ministry for the Environment and Territory of Italy, the Italian Trust Fund is committed to a sound environment. The ITF offers expertise on risk assessment, environmental management and best practices, while championing partnership on critical issues such as climate change mitigation, strategic environmental assessment and waste management. The Italian Trust Fund — a helping hand for Europe.

www.rec.org/rec/programs/itf
CLIMATE CHANGE

Protocol pointers

Key players in the field of climate change got on update on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’s plans to implement the Kyoto Protocol at a February 6-7 workshop. REC Country Office Macedonia organised the event, held in Skopje, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Macedonian Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoE).

The workshop was part of a joint project between UNDP and REC dedicated to developing a national strategy for implementation of the Kyoto Protocol in Macedonia. The project aims to help the country participate in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), a tool by which industrialised countries can curb their carbon emissions by carrying out reduction projects in developing countries. The REC-UNDP project also seeks to ensure public participation in the process of drafting the Macedonian national strategy.

Dragoljub Matovski, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, and officials from the REC and UNDP counted among the event’s 60 participants. During the workshop, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Kyoto Protocol were introduced and presentations on the CDM and status of its implementation were made.

According to Zsuzsanna Ivanyi, acting head of the REC’s Climate Change Programme, the collaboration among the Macedonian environment ministry, the REC, UNDP and the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory should jump start further partnerships in the region promoting the protocol’s implementation.

The Kyoto Protocol, an international and legally binding agreement to reduce greenhouse gases emissions worldwide, entered into force on February 16, 2005.

LOCAL ACTION

Swedes boost Balkan towns

This April in Serbia and Montenegro, a regional workshop concerning environmental projects in 21 Balkan communities will be held to determine which initiatives in each town will receive financing.

The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), has allocated EUR 600,000 to 800,000 each to Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina for these various local environmental action projects (LEAPs).

The LEAPs address problems common to many Balkan municipalities: poor waste management, lack of sewerage systems, damaged green areas, lack of environmental management capacity and low environmental awareness.

Creating LEAPs engages municipal staffs, NGO representatives, and local institutions committed to monitoring the environmental aspects of selected projects.

Pogradec, Albania, an Albanian city of 40,000, is a good example. Its city council adopted a LEAP in June 2005, together with a priority list of activities to be carried out by 2015. A city known for its wild flowers and endemic Koran trout, Pogradec has chosen projects aimed at improving hygienic conditions, sewage treatment and drinking water.

Although the city can expect EUR 80,000 in support from the Swedes, it has pledged to pitch in 10 percent from its own budget. A board represented by several local stakeholders has also been established. To strengthen capacities within the municipality itself, the whole evaluation process will all take place at the local level.

Similar processes have started in other municipalities in the region. The LEAPs in the Western Balkans initiative provides a major contribution by addressing environmental problems at the local level.

For more coverage on the Balkan environment, see the REDep Record at redep.rec.org.

RECYCLING REJUVENATED

On December 5 last year, Romanian Ministers Sulfina Barbu and Gheorghe Flutur showed up at a recycling centre in Sfantul Gheorghe Square with reams of used paper and used PET bottles to mark the launching of the REC’s Natura Romaniie programme. Both were greeted by representatives from REC Country Office Romania and the Save the Danube and Delta Association of Catavencu Academy (ASDD-AC).

As organisers of the official launch ceremony for Natura Romaniie, a corporate social responsibility programme, REC Romania and ASDD-AC selected the location due to its poor management and appearance, virtually unchanged since the communist era.

The event attracted several prominent figures from environmental public institutions and the private sector. The guests were invited with a letter written in a playful style reminiscent of communist times. The invitation read:

“Dear Comrade, it is of utmost importance for the advancement of our multilateral developed socialist country that environmentalist ideology be embraced by working-class people.”

Natura Romaniie, the first programme in the country to develop alternative funding mechanisms for green NGOs, garnered EUR 50,000 from ECOROM Ambalaje SA for its first year of operation. The money was distributed to five NGOs in Timisoara, Pitra Neamt, Tunsad, Braila, and Sighetul Marmatiei through grants and technical support for project management and environmental communications.

ECOROM’s aim is to attain packaging waste recovery targets in accordance with EU Directive ECC/12/2004. ECOROM is a non-profit organisation established by Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, Tetra Pak and other companies responsible for producing the largest share of packaged products in the country’s market.

SACKED: At left, Romanian Minister of Agriculture Gheorghe Flutur was one of many state officials at the launch of Natura Romaniie, a corporate social responsibility programme.
**Aid for civil society**
The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) is working with the REC to open a new four-year programme supporting civil society organisations (CSOs) in the Western Balkans. Tentatively entitled SECTOR, the programme will help groups working on sustainable development and the urban environment. The programme will begin this spring with a survey and assessment of environmental CSOs in the target countries. The results will be used to further shape the programme.

*For more coverage on the Balkan environment, see the REReP Record at <rerep.rec.org>.*

**New law programme**
The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), together with the Faculty of Law of Pazmany Peter Catholic University in Budapest and the REC, has launched a fellowship programme for a summer course on international and comparative environmental law. The course, which will provide theoretical and practical knowledge, will run July 17 to August 4 in Budapest. Candidates must be 25 to 40 years old and have a background in law or a sound working experience on environmental issues. For more information, visit <www.unitar.org/elp/fellowship.htm> or write to: <elp.fellowship@unitar.org>.

**Peace park gains ground**
Following the opening of the Balkans Peace Park Project’s (BPPP) Information Centre in Shkodra, Albania and a grant received last fall, BPPP has developed a relationship with Fractal, a Serbian NGO. New links have also been forged with a number of potential project partners, such as Green Home (Montenegro), Plav Forum (Montenegro), and the Centre for the Protection of Birds (Montenegro). In association with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), BPPP has also initiated a programme of workshops, desk and field assessments and conferences in the region to examine issues related to the development of the Peace Park, other trans-boundary protected areas and more general conservation issues. The BPPP has also become a member of the World Conservation Union’s (IUCN’s) Trans-boundary Protected Areas e-forum.

**Border towns unite**
Cross-border cooperation and environmental quality will be improved in one go with the implementation of a REC project related to investment and planning.

The project, which saw a round of workshop ending in March, involves three pairs of cross-border communities in the Western Balkans. It aims to improve contacts and cooperation while addressing the region’s need for environmental investment. The project trains local decision makers and relevant experts to identify and prepare environmental investment projects and to create professional financing applications. Priority problems concern water supply and the collection and discharge of wastewater.

**Government relations**

**Green president shows his colour**

During a visit to the REC’s head office in Szentendre, Hungarian President Laszlo Solyom promised to invigorate public discussion on a national sustainability plan. “We have no sustainable development strategy [in Hungary], but I promise to look after that,” Solyom said in an address to REC staff during his March 17 visit. He added that the environment has been more damaged in the new member states than in the Balkans.

Solyom, who has been called Hungary’s first green president, was elected by Parliament last July after being nominated through an NGO petition. A constitutional lawyer, he had supported several environmental causes, including the Hungarian campaign against the Gabčíkovo–Nagyvárad Dam across the Danube on the Slovakian border. More recently, he had joined a protest against the NATO radar station on Mount Zengo in southern Hungary.

Solyom told REC staff he would like to build a European network of green presidents.

**Energy efficiency**

**Saving lives and energy**

Poland has more than 800 hospitals, all of which have the potential to cut their energy use by 20 to 40 percent. However, the complicated financial situation of hospitals in Poland and most other countries in Central and Eastern Europe makes it difficult to solve the problem. Energy service companies (ESCOs) and banks are rarely willing to fund and implement energy efficiency projects in the healthcare sector. A project funded by Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP) aims to establish a financial model to address these barriers.

Poland’s National Energy Conservation Agency, which is implementing the project, will work with Piaseczno City Hospital, an institution owned by the local municipality and operated by the Polish Ministry of Administration and Internal Affairs. The project will develop a model for implementing an ESCO energy performance contract within the hospital. If successful, it could be replicated across Poland and in other countries in the region.

The project in Poland is one of 32 new projects kick-started by a recent round of REEEP funding. In total, REEEP has disbursed EUR 2.2 million for clean energy projects with tangible results expected by March 2007.
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 the free exchange of information and public participation in environmental decision making.

The REC was established in 1990 by the United States, the European Commission and Hungary. Today, the REC is legally based on a charter 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, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Turkey. Recent donors are the European Commission and the governments of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as other inter-governmental and private institutions.

The Regional Environmental Center exhibited its Green Pack multimedia education package at Europe’s largest education fair, Didacta. The REC stand attracted EU Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism Jan Figel and German Minister of Education and Research Annette Schavan.

Organisers of the Hanover event were partners of the German Commission of the UNESCO and were especially interested in activities in support of the UN’s Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in Germany. One section of the fair focused on best-practice projects in education for sustainability. The REC and Toyota, the general partner of the Green Pack, presented existing and future language versions of the package.

Green Pack makes splash

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EuropeAid invites municipalities near EU borders in Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine, and the whole territory of Georgia, to submit proposals for funding to the

Tacis Cities Award Scheme (TCAS).
A project funded by the European Union

The scheme will award a total of EUR 1.6 million distributed over approximately 10 grants for selected environmental sustainability improvements. Proposals for funding of up to EUR 160,000 are expected for projects targeting solid and hazardous waste management, water supply and water treatment, air pollution, energy efficiency in municipal buildings, and access to information.

Applicants need to cover at least 20 percent of the project costs.

All proposals must be in English and received by June 30. Documents, application forms, guidelines, applicant training and local language help desks are available at <http://tcas.rec.org>.


For further information, contact the TCAS Support Project.
Tel. (36-20) 383-9851, fax: (36-26) 311-294, e-mail <team@tcas.rec.org>
Can’t avoid cutbacks

Despite strides in resource efficiency, consumption is rising in Europe

Efficiency alone can’t curb consumption
By Pawel Kazmierczyk

In some European countries, economic growth has been decoupled from material and energy consumption over the past two decades. In general in the European Union, however, production has risen faster than efficiency, meaning resource consumption has not decreased in absolute terms. This is the conclusion of a recent EEA report, “Sustainable use and management of natural resources.”

The EU-25 today uses slightly fewer natural resources per unit of production than the United States, but this ratio is twice as high as in Japan, the report notes. There are, however, large differences between EU countries. On average, resource and energy productivity in Western Europe is several times higher than in the new EU member states.

Maintaining the availability of natural resources and ensuring sustainable yields is becoming more difficult. It is also becoming more difficult to manage the environmental impacts of resource use and to determine whether ecosystems can absorb pollution. Most experts believe limits to natural resources and eco-systems’ carrying capacity will restrict continued economic growth.

EU environmental policies have resulted in better management of the environmental impacts of resource use since the 1970s, especially in the areas of water, air quality and waste management (recycling and recovery).

However, each policy domain has tended to develop its own approach to using and managing natural resources. There is a need for better integration of environment and resource-related considerations into economic policy. Recently, the EU and some individual countries have focused on decoupling resource use and environmental impacts from economic growth.

Due to the “rebound effect,” in which gains in efficiency are offset by increased consumption, it is unlikely that resource use can be reduced by technological improvements alone. Instead, a mix of policy instruments is required. We must combine incentives that encourage cleaner technologies with economic instruments that encourage producers and consumers to adapt their behaviour towards more responsible resource use.

Critics argue that environmental protection and sustainable management of resources are costly and reduce competitiveness. However, the evidence suggests that good policies can help the economy. Large investments in environmental protection have already helped to create around two million jobs in the European eco-industry. Emphasis on materials and energy efficiency could also help to reduce unemployment further.

The EEA report can be downloaded from: <http://reports.eea.eu.int/eea_report_2005_9/en>. For more information, contact Pawel Kazmierczyk at <pawel.kazmierczyk@eea.eu.int>.

NEW CD ON Clean Fuels and Vehicles IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND TURKEY

This CD-ROM contains information on the status of clean fuels and vehicles in 16 Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. It includes presentations from the Conference on Clean Fuels and Vehicles which took place in October 2005 in Szentendre, as well as other publications of the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles at UNEP.

For more information contact Ruslan Zhechkov at telephone number (36-26) 504-060 or email RZhechkov@rec.org

Cooperation needed for sustainable households
By Lars Mortensen

A new EEA report on “Household consumption and the environment” suggests that pressure from our consumption patterns continues to have a serious negative impact on our natural environment. Consumption growth outweighs the gains we are making in consumption and production efficiency.

The report analyzes emerging consumption patterns within food and drink, housing, personal travel and mobility and tourism. All of these activities are having a high or growing impact on the environment, the report says. The report discusses ways to combat this trend, and concludes with a recommendation to public authorities, businesses and consumers: Work together towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

The report can be downloaded at: <reports.eea.eu.int/eea_report_2005_11/en>. For more information, e-mail <lars.mortensen@eea.eu.int>.
When your average non-techie encounters a “wiki,” Wikipedia is likely the first association to come to mind. But while the MediaWiki freeware behind the collaborative web-based encyclopedia is designed to allow anyone with an IP address to login and edit content, United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) regional offices for South and Eastern Europe and Central Asia have put wiki to work for a much smaller community.

Last fall the regional office in Bratislava launched WaterWiki, an interactive knowledge map and collaboration tool for those dealing with water governance, i.e. the management of water resources to enhance human security and ecosystem integrity. Online at: <europeandcis.undp.org/WaterWiki>, the website consists of a map of the region, each country of which is hyperlinked to a resource page with country-specific backgrounds, including UNDP and non-UNDP-sourced project briefs, reports, legal documents and conventions, statistics and data, organizational and event information.

Experts in water governance — including UNDP staff from 33 countries, colleagues from projects and partner organisations, and independent experts — login to WaterWiki and upload information. Its main function is to allow people to share resources, and recent user activity can be monitored by following the “history” link under any country’s resource page. For instance, the Kazakhstan page has seen the addition of about 20 links to reports, project summaries, and organisational resources over recent months. Resulting content ranges from a Human Development Report to contact information on the Kazakhstan Water Partnership. The pages of Armenia, Moldova, and Tajikistan brim with information while other country profiles (e.g. Hungary’s, Malta’s, and Bulgaria’s) have scarce information.

“The idea was to give all practitioners working on water governance somewhere in the context of UNDP in Europe and CIS a platform,” explains Bratislava-based Juerg Staudenmann, UNDP Water Governance Advisor. To this end, developers at UNDP modified MediaWiki software to enable WaterWiki users to create personalised watchlists, track changes on pages of interest, edit or monitor a particular user’s recent edits, and view and compare versions of articles and restore earlier drafts. As with Wikipedia, experts can also author their own online resource site without the need for programming skills.

To become a WaterWiki contributor, one must contact the site facilitator via <juerg.staudenmann@undp.org>. However, you don’t need to be a registered user to take advantage of the available information. Just click on “general resources” or browse the country pages and you’ll find reports and resources ranging from sanitation to wastewater profiles. A full-text search allows you to find content quickly.

Individuals or institutions considering the use of the MediaWiki software will find WaterWiki a best practice waiting to be adapted for specific needs, such as enhanced workspaces, publishing functionality, and of course, information sharing. Interested parties can access useful “how-to” information via the WaterWiki’s “workspaces” link on the main page. Here the WaterWiki’s development process is recounted, and suggestions made regarding technical, logistical, policy, and knowledge management considerations. Click the MediaWiki icon at the bottom right-hand corner of any page to download the free software.

However, potential hosts should keep in mind that the main challenge of any wiki is its accuracy, relevance, and currency. And this depends largely on its users. If they take an interest, the site builds itself. If they don’t, the site is relegated to the content management graveyard.
A World Trade Organisation (WTO) panel ruled on February 7 that the European Union’s moratorium on genetically modified products, effective between June 1999 and August 2003, constituted a barrier to free trade, breaking international rules. The same decision condemns Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg for imposing unilateral import bans on such goods.

The decision is seen as a victory for the governments of United States, Canada and Argentina, leading producers of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), who in May 2003 filed a formal complaint to the WTO against EU regulations on GMOs. The Europeans have the right to appeal.

The European Commission claims the decision refers to legislation that was changed in May 2004, and that since then, EU markets have been open to safe GMOs. “Contrary to US claims, the EU is one of the largest importers of GMOs and derived food and feed,” the commission stated. GMO exporters have also challenged the validity of the current regulatory system, claiming it imposes a de facto moratorium due to lengthy procedures, high standards for product safety and strict rules regarding labeling and traceability of GMO products.

The WTO decision could have especially dramatic impacts on developing countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa, which have taken tougher stands against GMO imports. Now that they have seen the international chastening of the EU, poorer countries may reconsider their tough stands. In Europe, where consumers on an individual level are suspicious of GMOs, it is not believed that opening markets to GMOs will lead to an increase in their consumption. A Eurobarometer survey published in February reveals that 62 percent of respondents across the EU-25 are “worried” about the food safety risks posed by GMOs.

In essence the WTO’s decision requires the EU to drop the precautionary principle whenever international trade issues are at stake. The precautionary principle, a bedrock tenet underlying international environmental law, was defined by the Rio Summit in 1992 as follows: “Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.” The WTO ruling contradicts this, finding the EU in the wrong because it did not present adequate scientific evidence of the harm it tried to prevent by imposing the ban.

The decision casts doubt on the WTO’s authority to solve trade conflicts when environment and human health issues are at stake. It raises fundamental questions in international law: Can trade rules override national authorities’ sovereign right to take measures to protect environment and the health of its citizens? Do trade rules prevail in multilateral environmental agreements?

What is for sure is that this decision will spark even more acute opposition from environmentalists and governments willing to make sure that no product or new technology threatens the environment and their citizens’ health.
Words that work

Communications on sustainability should be “moving, personal and practical”

Kristina Vilimaitė

**Words that work**

Communications on sustainability should be “moving, personal and practical”

**Communicating Sustainability: How to produce effective public campaigns**

UNEP, Futerra, 2005. 67 pages

While most soft drinks produced by multinationals have negligible nutritional value and leave an unpleasant aftertaste, people guzzle them down in Danubian quantities every day. What better evidence do you need that human beings are irrational? Advertisements make consumption cool. Just imagine if similar principles were employed in the promotion of sustainability.

Sustainability communication is often limited to providing information. Unfortunately, research shows that raising awareness — and even changing attitudes — does not bring sustainable development principles to life. To put society on a truly sustainable track, people must also change their behaviour, according to the authors of this publication.

National and local authorities can bring this change about through communication that is moving, personal and practical and combined with good policies that enable people to make the right choices. This publication is an inspiring guide for authorities that aim to reach beyond the citizens already committed to sustainable development to the wider population. The guide outlines the process of developing a communications plan, points out the key obstacles to government communications, and recommends ways of getting useful guidance from communications experts. Sixteen case studies from around the world illustrate the advice given, and lists of publications and organisations point the way to further action.

This book is available online at <www.unep.fr/sustain>.

**From bean to cup: how consumer choice impacts upon coffee producers and the environment**

Consumers International and IIED, December 2005. 61 pages.

For some good reading over your morning cup of coffee, delve into this guide on how you can help the poorest in the world to prosper by choosing the right brand of java. Globally, some 100 million people are involved in the growing, selling and other steps in coffee production, states the report. Many of these tasks provide livelihoods in developing countries.

While being one of the world’s largest commodities, coffee commands a modest price compared to its production costs. The price for an average cup of joe doesn’t account for the heavy environmental toll of coffee growing and it yields a very meager wage for the workers in the industry.

Certification schemes have emerged as one approach to raise the economic, social and environmental standards of coffee production and trading. The report presents the results of a survey carried out in two developing and four developed countries on the growers of certified and conventional coffee, the status of certified coffee and barriers to market expansion. Five existing coffee certification schemes are compared: Fairtrade, Organic, Rainforest Alliance, Utz Kapeh, and Bird Friendly.

As developed countries consume the most coffee, the report targets stakeholders there who can influence consumption patterns. The publication ends with recommendations for promotion of certified coffee to consumer organisations, retailers, coffee importers and institutional buyers. Surprisingly, each of us may contribute to raising the standard of living and quality of environment in such countries as Brazil and Vietnam — if only we drink the right roast. This book is available online at <www.consumersinternational.org>.

This book is available online at <www.consumersinternational.org>.
Our aim: to accelerate and expand the global market for renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies.

We are an active global partnership that formulates policy initiatives for clean energy markets and facilitates financing for sustainable energy projects.

The REC serves as the regional REEEP secretariat for 15 countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as Turkey.

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

Join the drive for sustainable energy!

www.rec.org/reeep
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about Waste Management & Recycling

See you there!
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