Cool response to tepid results
Denmark’s Svend Auken criticises the Kyoto Protocol and laments CEE’s diminished environmental role

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Cops and bloggers
Online environmental activists are making all kinds of friends in all the wrong places

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No place to call home
Already disadvantaged economically and socially, many of Europe’s Roma are also environmental casualties

see page 12 ►
E3G and its network of change agents call upon European leaders to extend democracy to every citizen. With a firm mandate in hand, Europe can make political choices that ensure its security and prosperity in an interdependent world, and spread the call for global sustainability. Europe in the World is based on a series of "thinking events" held over the spring and summer with the support of various partners such as the REC. A passionate debate hosted by the REC in 2006 in Szentendre, Hungary, which featured various stakeholders, contributed heavily to the content of the publication.

THE ITALIAN TRUST FUND

The Italian Trust Fund ITF – a targeted contribution to the Regional Environmental Center (REC) by the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea – and the REC assisted the development of the Europe in the World pamphlet. ITF is committed to a sound environment in the region both at the local level and on a global scale. From concept to strategy, from hot spots to sustainable development, the ITF is a step ahead in supporting all-in sustainability solutions for Central and Eastern Europe. For more information on ITF’s activities visit www.rec.org/rec/programs/itf.
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An avalanche
of change

This summer I learned a lot about avalanches during a journalism seminar in the Russian Caucasus—at the foot of Mt. Elbrus, Europe’s highest peak. There, just like anywhere else, snow piles up slowly day after day until critical mass is reached. Then it starts tumbling down, triggered by an unpredictable, often insignificant event. Gathering speed and volume, the mass races down the mountain, sweeping away everything in its path until eventually coming to a halt.

Optimists hope that Europe can generate sufficient political will at the top to trigger an avalanche that can clear the way for social and economic policies that have some seriously positive environmental impact. Hungary’s ‘green president’ Laszlo Solyom is one such optimist: “The year 2007 has every potential for Europe to develop into a groundbreaking year for sustainable development. It seems that a long sequence of European and global efforts is near to bearing fruit.”

Some facts and statements to emerge in the past year have generated momentum for such optimism. One highlight was the 2006 publication of the Stern Report and the political backing it received from European leaders. Tony Blair hailed the publication as the most important report during his 10 years as PM, and EU President Angela Merkel supported a 20 percent emissions cut by 2020. Further weight was added by continued German and British lobbying at the G8. Two high-profile events scheduled for late-2007 could prove the tipping point: October’s Environment for Europe (EfE) ministerial conference in Belgrade, and November’s World Science Forum, initiated by Solyom.

The Belgrade conference will be the first EfE gathering since the latest rounds of European Union expansion. The conference aims high: namely to evaluate progress in implementing agreed commitments and to examine implementation difficulties and their causes. There are looming uncertainties, however. Some of the most promising outcomes of the previous conference in Kiev (2005) exist merely on paper and have yet to be ratified. The celebrated Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention, for example, has been ratified only by the EU Commission and four nations—Estonia, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland. The EfE process also seems to be leaning toward the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia—mostly a consequence of EU enlargement. So far, the countries of South Eastern Europe seem eager to enter the EU fold, but the remainder of Eastern Europe’s non-EU countries appear to be willing to explore other options as well.

At the same time, however, there’s a good chance that Belgrade will bring together the actors needed to take a decisive step ahead toward sustainability. For this to happen, stakeholders need to join together to achieve the ultimate result—as in the farmer/turnip fable. It might be unrealistic to hope that the Belgrade conference will meet or exceed all expectations, but the event could definitely add significant bulk to the mass of support clearing the way toward sustainability.

editorial

Keep pulling together

The present political/environmental situation calls to mind a folk tale that is well known in parts of Europe. The tale tells of a peasant who grows a splendid, enormous turnip, but the turnip is so big that he lacks the strength to pull it from the ground; so the peasant turns to asking help from family members, then from friends living nearby, and finally from various farm and field animals. The line of helpers grows longer and longer, but the turnip remains stubbornly in the ground—until, that is, the tiniest of creatures, a mouse, contributes his modest strength and the turnip is pulled free.

Oh, but turnip, if you will, has been planted by the world’s scientists, and coming up with a plan to uproot it just might be the biggest challenge that humankind has had to face. To make sustainable development a reality will require effort and contributions from people from all walks of life: to take stock; describe processes and accurately assess the situation; to define criteria and analyse data; to invent and develop technological solutions to maximise resource efficiency; to create viable economic and management alternatives; and to develop and negotiate political plans and agreements on necessary governance, including spending.

Breathing life into the ideas and decisions of the past decade and a half has been difficult work, indeed, but despite the spent energy and resources, the lost time and occasionally squandered inertia, it is important to consider just how much has been achieved—to recognise just how close we are today to reaching our goals!
Looking at the melting glaciers of Greenland, how would you evaluate Kyoto and the global effort to prevent climate change so far?

I am very critical of the Kyoto Protocol because it has not resulted in a real reduction of emissions. In the EU, if you discount the effect of deindustrialization in East Germany and the rest of CEE, actual emission levels are rising, not falling. The US is now 20–25 percent above 1990 levels, but was supposed to reduce them by 7 percent.

And if you look at China, India and other places with responsibility for the climate, emissions are just going up. When we made Kyoto, emissions were increasing by 1 percent each year, but we knew this was bad and that we had to stabilise and reduce them. But since Kyoto, after 2000, our emissions have increased instead by 3 percent; so in fact we are not really addressing the problem successfully.

Kyoto has far too many complexities, far too many loopholes, and far too many avenues for creative bookkeeping instead of real reductions. If the whole approach is limited to emissions trading, joint [implementation] projects and clean development initiatives, Kyoto ends up being a sort of credit-taking marketplace where the money is deciding what should be done.

The danger I see now is that, while overcoming one basic flaw—which is that many countries like the US and the big emitters of the developing world are not included in Kyoto—the document will be further complicated and watered down. If that is the end result, we’d be better off doing nothing. However, if we truly believed that climate is a threat at least on the same level as terrorism or other big threats, then we would deal with it in a much more aggressive fashion. We would fix target reductions for each country, and find a way to mobilise the world community and enforce the rules. Make rules less complex, and with less loopholes. And persuade the Chinese, Indians and others to come on board by giving them a generous no-tariff agreement, access to our market, access to technology, funds and resources.

And in return they should accept targets for stabilisation or small increases. It’s measures like these that are necessary.

Shouldn’t biodiversity be brought back into the debate on climate solutions?

Biodiversity and deforestation should not be left out of the picture when dealing with climate change. Deforestation, which is happening in Brazil, Siberia and elsewhere, is in fact contributing to 22 percent of the world’s climate change emissions. If you reduce forest areas rapidly, as the world is doing now, it has a tremendous effect on climate. Add to this the fact that 60 percent of all known species live in tropical rain forest habitats.

What is the role played by Central and Eastern Europe in the European and global effort?

Unfortunately, the role of Central and Eastern European countries has changed a bit [for the worse]. When we were in Kyoto, CEE countries were our allies. Nowadays it seems as if the bookkeepers have taken over. Many of these countries find it unfair that they have to reduce [emissions], which is why they are taking the European Commission [to court]. From the climate point of view, I find it very sad that the CEE countries that used to be in the avant-garde are now on the negative side...What’s important is to be positive and to find solutions together.’

I find it very sad that the CEE countries that used to be in the avant-garde are now on the negative side...What’s important is to be positive and to find solutions together.’

Denmark’s Svend Auken played a key role in shaping 1998’s Aarhus Convention and was also instrumental in making his country the world leader in wind energy. The former environment minister, while attending September’s ‘Religion, Science and Environment’ symposium in Greenland, spoke to Green Horizon’s Pavel Antonov about a range of environmental issues, from the Kyoto Protocol and the role of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to the Environment for Europe process.

‘I find it very sad that the CEE countries that used to be in the avant-garde are now on the negative side...What’s important is to be positive and to find solutions together.’

by Pavel Antonov

AUKEN: Urging more aggressive environmental action

Continued on page 14
**CLIMATE CHANGE**

**July heat proves deadly in CEE**

As the United Kingdom experienced serious flooding in mid to late July, a strong heatwave from Africa caused dangerously high temperatures in many parts of Central and Eastern Europe and pressed health and emergency services to the limit. The excessive heat was blamed for an estimated 500 deaths in Hungary alone.

Thermometers soared to 46°C (115°F) in parts of Serbia and Greece, and reached 45°C (113°F) in Bulgaria, Bosnia and Macedonia. Average temperatures in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania during the heat wave were between 35°C and 40°C (95°F and 104°F).

Hungary’s chief medical officer, Ferenc Falus, told the press that excessive heat in central Hungary during July 15–22 “contributed to the early deaths of 230 people, which nationally means about 500 deaths.” Pal Gyorfi, a Hungarian emergency services spokesman, claimed that calls for ambulances during the week were up 30 percent, and double the normal rate when temperatures peaked on Friday, July 20.

Romania’s health minister acknowledged that at least 27 heat-related deaths had occurred in that country, with hundreds of people collapsing in the street from heat exhaustion—most of them elderly and suffering from circulation problems.

Meanwhile, European firefighting units struggled to cope with thousands of forest and brush fires. Hungarian teams were called to battle blazes on 3,000 occasions—two and a half times the national average, according to the *Financial Times*. It was also reported that up to 1,800 separate forest fires were burning throughout the week in Bulgaria, and that it was necessary to request assistance from Russia to provide firefighting planes.

It has also become clear that the July heat was a heavy blow to farmers and the agricultural sector, but the cost and scale of the damage has yet to be determined.

Later in the summer, high temperatures and arson were blamed for devastating fires in Greece that claimed dozens of lives.

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**FINANCING**

**EBRD responds to critics of Tbilisi water-supply project**

On July 10 the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) struck a loan agreement worth EUR 25 million with the Tbilisi Water Supply Improvement Project, but Georgian NGOs allege that the introduction of a public-private partnership (PPP) involving the Tbilisi water utility will lead to price rises that will have harmful effects on the Georgian capital’s 1.5 million residents.

Concerned groups are demanding that the EBRD carry out a social assessment to identify mitigation measures to aid low-income households most adversely affected by price hikes, and are pressuring the government to guarantee enforcement of such measures. The groups also expect the EBRD to provide access to project documentation—including complete details of the project feasibility study—and to organise public hearings on how best to provide Tbilisi’s citizens with safe drinking water and sanitation services.

The *CEE Bankwatch Network* wrote that there are also concerns about project efforts to introduce collective water block metering that would involve payment of fees per block based on the number of family members.

“Roughly 50 percent of Georgia’s population lives below the poverty line,” said Dato Chipashvili from *Bankwatch*. “And if, as we fear, water tariffs increase as a result of the project, then a proportion of the population might be without drinking water and sanitation due to disconnections.”

Contacted by *Green Horizon*, Biljana Radonjic Ker-Lindsay of the EBRD Communications Department replied that the bank had responded to NGO concerns by writing a letter to *Green Alternative* on July 12 and by participating in several follow-up meetings in Tbilisi.

“Since project preparation, the EBRD has paid careful attention to addressing residential block metering and its potential social impact,” the bank stated. “Metering the consumption of water is a preferred solution as the bills are directly linked to actual consumption […], and is more transparent than the current practice.

“In regard to social impact, the project ensures that associated tariff increases are well within international guidelines with respect to affordability which state that the average water bill should not exceed 4 percent of the average household income,” the statement continued. “It also makes sure that the company has no existing or planned policy to limit or cut water supply to customers in individual flats who do not pay their bills. […] Lastly, the support for the poorest segments of the population is foreseen through the existing procedures administered by the [Georgian] Ministry of Finance, based on information provided by the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health is responsible for registering persons below the poverty line and these are eligible for reduced public utility billing in accordance with national law.”
EU’s waste policy weakened

- European environment ministers voted on June 28 to establish a five-step waste hierarchy that prioritises prevention, reuse and recycling over recovery and landfill. The council’s decision, however, was widely condemned by green groups for the former’s decision to reclassify municipal waste incineration as ‘recovery’ rather than ‘disposal’. The primary challenge to the decision is that incineration has been moved further up the waste hierarchy in order to be given a ‘cleaner’ image.

- Critics also denounced the council’s failure to attempt to reach an agreement on the European Parliament’s ‘first reading’ recycling and prevention targets, and argued that this shortcoming could actually promote further waste incineration.

- The Environment Council has postponed discussion of the vital recycling and prevention targets—supported by Parliament in February—and has instead focused on fiddling with the bottom of the waste hierarchy, said Michael Warhurst from Friends of the Earth Europe.

Polish government relents on roadway construction

- The Polish government, facing sharp criticism from green groups and NGOs and mounting legal pressure from the European Commission (EC), made a last-minute decision not to proceed with planned construction of a controversial stretch of motorway in northeast Poland—at least for the foreseeable future.

- Construction of the Via Baltica expressway through a protected swathe of pristine wetlands in the Rospuda Valley was scheduled to begin on August 1, despite the fact that such activity clearly violates EU law. Responding to threats that construction would go ahead as planned, the EC acted quickly by filing an application on July 28 to the European Court of Justice for an interim measure to prevent work from taking place on the Natura 2000 site.

- Poland’s decision comes as a relief to all parties opposed to the Rospuda construction plans, but NGOs remain concerned about proposed alternate routes from Warsaw to Helsinki through other protected sites. Of particular concern is the Biebrza Valley, for which a road building permit was issued by regional authorities earlier this year. Green groups argue that construction of an alternate route through the international corridor—invoking building a bypass for the northeastern town of Augustow (pop. 30,000)—can take place without causing irreversible harm to wildlife and protected habitats.

- Green taxes fall to 10-year low

- Even as EU energy consumption continues to rise, statistics agency Eurostat calculated in June that EU environmental tax revenues have dropped to their lowest level in a decade. Based on 2005 figures, green tax comprises just 2.6 percent of bloc-wide GDP and 6.6 percent of total tax revenue. Both figures show a “slight decrease” from 2004, according to Eurostat.

- While green taxes have remained more or less stable, lower energy taxes are to blame for the dip in revenue, European Commission officials explained, alleging that rising global energy prices have pressured EU governments to lower taxes accordingly.

- UK think tank knocks ETS

- British think tank Open Europe warned in June that “fundamental” design flaws will result in failure of the EU’s carbon trading scheme (ETS) to reduce industrial emissions during the scheme’s second phase (2008–12).

- The report, Europe’s Dirty Secret: Why the EU ETS isn’t working, predicts that credit oversupply from carbon offset projects in developing countries will submerge the market. Such an oversupply could, in turn, deflate carbon prices and make it difficult to achieve domestic cuts in Europe, the report says, adding that carbon permits, which cost next to nothing for first-phase compliance, will jump to approximately EUR 19 per tonne during phase two.

- The report also argues that Kyoto’s flexible mechanisms will allow installations to purchase allowances on the international market—a practice disallowed in the first phase that will drive up external credits.

- European Commission spokeswoman Helfferich, according to ENDS Europe, rejected claims that the second phase will prove a failure, adding that use of “dirty secret” in the report title is inappropriate because the commission was transparent in addressing any potential problems.

- Biofuels target not a food risk, EC claims

- A new European Commission assessment concludes that the EU’s target to raise the share of biofuels in the transport sector to 10 percent by 2020 can be met “without disrupting domestic food, feed and non-food markets.” Study results were based on predictions of large projects involving second-generation biofuels that convert a majority of crop biomass into usable fuel, and also on the assumption that such developments will account for 30 percent of the market in 13 years’ time.

- The commission’s agriculture department estimated that 15 percent of total arable land would be committed to biofuel production if the target is met, calling the impact “relatively modest.”
On June 27 the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP) announced plans to disburse EUR 3.2 million in funds for 35 new, clean energy projects. The REEEP’s sixth round of funding is the largest in its four-year history.

The Norwegian government’s announcement in March to pledge EUR 3.7 million was a key event behind the REEEP’s increased funding. As a new donor government, Norway joins the United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy and New Zealand as a project donor government. Norwegian funds are being used primarily for project support in Brazil, China, India and West Africa.

The REEEP is now directly commissioning projects for the first time, in addition to selecting projects via public tender. Forty-four percent of projects receiving REEEP funding are dedicated to energy efficiency.

“Projects we’re backing are delivering replicable models for renewable and energy-efficient development,” said REEEP International Director Marianne Osterkorn. “Our partnership of governments, NGOs and businesses is helping to establish a stable global marketplace for clean energy.”

Power plant threatens Tokaj wine-growing region

Plans to build a coal-burning, 884-megawatt power plant in the southeast Slovakian town of Trebisov (Toketerebes), 20 kilometres from the Hungarian border, are raising environmental concerns—especially in Hungary’s Tokaj region. The brownfield investment envisages plant construction on the site of a former sugar factory, and a university study undertaken on behalf of the project’s unnamed Czech investor concluded that the plant’s 163-metre high smokestacks could emit up to 4 million tonnes of pollution annually, according to Hungarian daily newspaper Magyar Nemzet.

Peter Szamosvolgyi, mayor of the northeastern Hungarian city of Satoralajujhely, alleged in a letter sent to various government officials that the prevailing winds at the proposed project site practically guarantee that a majority of pollution from the plant would be concentrated in Tokaj—Hungary’s most famous wine-growing region and a World Heritage site—which, in addition to creating health problems for the local population, could also undermine the region’s viticulture and tourism-based economy. He also warned of harm that could come to several rare species located in Hungary’s Bukk National Park. These fears are justified, according to the Hungarian branch of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites).

Peter Kiss from the Hungarian Office of the Prime Minister replied to Szamosvolgyi that permission for plant construction was granted in January 2007, but added that the Slovak government failed to notify Hungarian officials—a violation of the Espoo Agreement which requires elaboration of an international feasibility study regarding transboundary environmental issues.

Should the Slovakian government defy environmental warnings and popular opposition by proceeding with plant construction, Hungary is seemingly in a position to garner enthusiastic legal support from within the EU.
Education is the **key** to sustainability.

"Education, in addition to being a human right, is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and an essential tool for good governance, informed decision-making and the promotion of democracy.”

UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development

Building on the success of its educational toolkit, the Green Pack, the REC is proud to announce the launch of **Green Pack Junior**, a new set of environmental education materials for younger school children. **Green Pack Junior** gives educators original and accessible materials for teaching sustainable development issues in an engaging and motivating way. The materials present the key issues facing the world today — why the world is the way it is — and allow pupils to think critically about these problems, as well as to discuss what we might do about them.

The **Green Pack Junior** launch event will be held at the **REC’s stand** during the **Environment for Europe Conference** in Belgrade from **16:45 on**

**October 10, 2007**
Fidanka and Eoin McGrath, a newly married couple of nature lovers, spent two of the hottest days of August in quite unusual circumstances: they were being interrogated by police. Even as summer blockbuster Die Hard 4 portrays Bruce Willis’ character as cooperating with hackers to save the day, it is becoming increasingly commonplace for authorities in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to target activists for things done—or not done—over the internet.

If you were looking for a model of coexistence between European integration and environmental sustainability, the McGraths would be a good one. Fidanka, a Bulgarian environmental activist, and Eoin, an Irish computer programmer, settled in the countryside to tend their own bio-farm. But their pastoral existence was disturbed abruptly this summer when the two were called in by the local unit of the GDBOP (the Bulgarian acronym for the Chief Directorate for Combating Organised Crime). The GDBOP is a vestige of the communist State Security agency, which broke up after 1990.

Eoin accepted an informal invitation to appear in person at the Blagoevgrad precinct—with neither a lawyer nor a translator—only to learn that he was the suspected author of a bomb threat. News of the threat in question, sent from a Russian server and signed by a non-existent environmental group, was published in the Bulgarian mass media in February. The threat warned that controlled explosions were set to initiate a catastrophic avalanche over the Bansko Ski Resort—revenge for alleged environmental damage caused by resort construction. Police found no explosives, although resort operations were suspended for a few hours, the media reported.

Responding to the news, environmental organisations from the ‘Save Pirin coalition, which had campaigned against the resort’s development, condemned the threat as a provocation. Half a year later, interrogating officers urged McGrath that a confession would “make things easier,” online daily MediaPool reported. After more than two days of questioning, however, neither of the McGraths admitted to any involvement in the email threat.

“The police were friendly, but that may have merely been an interrogation technique,” Fidanka McGrath told MediaPool. The police officer in charge of the investigation refused the media any comments.

The incident sparked outrage among environmental campaigners, as it was the second time within a month that authorities had applied pressure on activists for conducting allegedly illegal online activities. In July, Michel Bouzgounov was called in by the GDBOP in Sofia and advised in similarly ‘friendly’ fashion to refrain from covering environmental protests on his blog. That same month, protesters angry about over-construction on the Black Sea Coast took to the street after the Supreme Administrative Court in Sofia had stripped Bulgaria’s largest natural park, Strandja, of its protected status, thus green-lighting yet another major coastal hotel project. After Bouzgounov promoted the street protests on his personal blog Optimiced, he was ordered to “refrain from quoting other sources of information when possible violation of the law is involved; namely, the organising of non-permitted civil protests,” and to sign his name in agreement. No copy of the warning protocol was handed to him.

Upon his release, Bouzgounov returned to his blog and wrote: “Yes, I wrote about Strandja because I care about whether or not this park will exist tomorrow! No, I did not call for riots, illegal action, violence or anarchy!” He went on to complain that a government agency equipped to fight organised crime was instead using its resources and personnel to “investigate bloggers, free people, writing about Bulgaria’s nature—reporting on past and future protests in [nature’s] defence.”

Are environmental activists in Central and Eastern Europe being singled out for harassment?

**Blocking the information superhighway**

By PAVEL ANTONOV

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Police action against bloggers writing opinion or posting information on the environment is completely unacceptable, agrees Dan McQuillan, coordinator of Amnesty International’s Irresistible Internet rights campaign. Lawyers from the Access to Information Programme in Sofia back this opinion. Freedom to publish information on the internet, which includes blogging, is a form of expression guaranteed under the European Human Rights Convention and by the Bulgarian Constitution, the organisation stated.

Who’s safe in cyberspace?

Unfortunately, Bulgaria is not the only country in the region putting the squeeze on internet environmentalism. On March 12, 2004 Romania’s Eugen David was called in for questioning by Romania’s General Police Inspectorate (GPD). David is the president of Alburnus Maior, a non-profit group campaigning against a proposed gold-extraction project in the Rosia Montana region. The group claims that the project would involve the involuntary resettlement of over 2,000 people and destroy unique archaeological and natural sites. After details of archaeological findings in the nearby Cîrnic Mountain were posted online, the author of the report filed a complaint and cited copyright infringements. Police responded by questioning David for nearly two hours without explaining the detainee’s legal status or role in the alleged wrongdoing. Furthermore, David was read only random excerpts from the police report without being allowed to view the official document.

Ancient Gold Mines of Dacia: the Rosia Montana District, a report written by Beatrice Cauuet, a scholar at Toulouse University in France, detailed the existence of valuable archeological findings in the potential gold-mining site. Stefanie Roth explained. Roth, who received the Goldman Environmental Prize for her campaigning work in Rosia Montana since 2002, is outraged by the police action: “They were looking for one guilty person, playing ‘good cop, bad cop’ to single out who posted the report online.” Roth said, adding that the activists stood by their claim that the campaign had more than a thousand volunteers from all over the world, and that any one of them could have posted the report. The case concluded satisfactorily, Roth recalled, when the court ruled that it served the public interest to publish the report.

The aggressive expansion of copyright and intellectual property rights poses another major threat to internet freedoms, especially where the environment is concerned, Amnesty’s McQuillan commented. Corporations are already responding aggressively to the use of their logos in online environmental campaigns, although organisations like Greenpeace are putting up a robust defence. He also warned that websites could face forced shutdown through legislation such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, a possible tool for legalised harassment and disruption of online campaigning web sites.

“IT’s not surprised to see examples of pressure against bloggers in [CEE],” said McQuillan, explaining that internet speech and other freedoms we take for granted need to be rigorously defended as not to be eventually weakened or undermined completely. Cyberspace has certainly opened doors for new types of surveillance, intimidation or manipulation. The appearance of internet moles, for example, on online discussion forums has become increasingly common, said long-time Hungarian environmental activist Laszlo Perneckzky—known to most of his readers as ‘Pepe’.

“Internet moles are anonymous contributors propagating certain political or business interests in almost every type of public forum,” Perneckzky explained. “We sometimes even know who they are and who pays their salaries, but there’s nothing we can do. It’s all legal, but this is the nature of the internet.”

In 2004, Hungarian authorities employed some sleight of hand against campaigners who opposed the construction of a NATO radar installation on Mount Zengo. Fake news items were filed at Hungarian Indimedia, an independent online outlet run by individual citizens. A contributor to the portal, presented as a Zengo-area resident, submitted several articles in favour of the controversial construction project, according to ‘Fidusz’, the Indimedia editor at the time. After checking the sender’s internet protocol address, Fidusz realised that the articles had been sent from the web address of the Ministry of Defence’s Security Investment Department, the NATO project’s key proponent. The case was made public, and the internet-led campaign proved influential enough that the radar project was relocated from Zengo, Fidusz added.

Environmental cases aside, Central and Eastern European cyberspace appears to be becoming more tolerant. In 2006, for example, Croatian police investigated Zombix, a well-known blogger and contributor to the country’s second-largest newspaper, Jutarnji List, following a complaint by Hrvatski Telecom (HT).

“I drew Hitler-style moustaches on images of [HT] management personnel, and used a small, animated GIF to turn the form the letters ‘HT’ into a swastika,” Zombix told Green Horizon. “Guys from the police were laughing with me. The company wanted to close down my blog, but the government told them ‘no way!’”

In spite of the reprieve, Zombix remains sceptical about the government’s actions: “Their tactic is not to repress but to ignore whatever anybody wrote about them ... so I write, and write ... and write.”

Internet rights fight

Threats to online activism have not gone unnoticed by the international internet rights community. In 2004 Romanian e-network Strawberry Net, which hosted <www.rosiamontana.org>, alerted the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), a global civil society network supporting the use of information technologies for social change. The APC maintains a rapid response network for moving threatened content across national borders. In Bulgaria, APC member BlueLink.net launched a campaign in support of freedom of internet expression at <www.freenet.bluelink.net>. As a network of environmental NGOs, BlueLink has hosted and provided online support to major environmental campaigns since 1998, including Save Pirin. Incidentally, both Bozgounov and McGrath are the present and former web managers of Bluelink.

The FreeNet campaign demonstrates how the dimensions of online freedom, environmental protection and public participation overlap, said APC Executive Director Anriette Esterhuysen. Since 2005 APC has launched an initiative for analysis and global promotion of Aarhus principles and other instruments that bridge the policy gap between the information society and environmental sustainability, she continued. McQuillan has also identified a deeper imperative of the information society, which is the fact that the internet itself is becoming an actor in many thematic fields of activism, including environmental missions.
Social and economic conditions are forcing many of Europe’s Roma population to the fringes of society. Roma are often born separately, live separately—and, as a graveyard in the east Slovakian village of Rudnany reveals, even buried separately. In addition to facing an array of socio-economic woes, the collapse of Rudnany’s mining economy has also left the local Roma population to bear an unequal share of environmental stress.

Rudnany was undoubtedly divided along ethnic lines in the past, but former employment opportunities at the now-defunct mining company had at least allowed for multiple interactions between the majority and minority populations; current conditions, however, also expose the magnitude of inequality that many of the world’s most disadvantaged people suffer as a result of environmental degradation.

As a graduate student at Central European University, I witnessed such conditions while performing field work in eastern Slovakia from 2002–2005. In Patoracke, just outside Rudnany, I visited cellars in which up to 10 family members slept on sinking concrete floors in structures that threatened to collapse at any moment.

Rudnany’s municipal government is trying to work closely with NGOs and international organisations to address these social and environmental threats, but it will be difficult to solve anything quickly unless the state gets more involved.

Stark divisions

From a distance, Rudnany’s most identifiable feature is an abandoned mineshaft and lift tower in the very centre of the valley. Most of the local inhabitants occupy nice, two-storey homes that encircle the old mine works. The town is surrounded by forests that betray a long-term proximity to industrial production.

If you enter Rudnany by the main road from Spisska Nova Ves, the nearest town, the first thing you see is a Roma community living on an abandoned and derelict factory site at Zabijanec. If it happens to be summer, you might see children playing in the polluted stream that runs nearby.

Leaving Zabijanec, you encounter two-storey houses and apartment blocks, beyond which is the hill that was home to the mining company administration at Patoracke—a building that looks like a bombed and gutted relic from World War Two. On the slopes surrounding the building are small huts and houses cobbled together with scrap materials. You might still be in Rudnany, but you’ve crossed into a different world. The line might not be visible, but the inhabitants feel the demarcation clearly enough.

Up to the beginning of the 1990s, mining and metal processing were the main sources of local employment. The sudden collapse of the industry had drastic social consequences for all inhabitants, but the minority Roma population has suffered most.

A living nightmare

The Rudnany area has been identified as one of Slovakia’s 10 most problematic ‘hot spots.’ As a result of heavy industrial development, the whole territory is contaminated by toxic emissions, waste dumps and abandoned mines. The toxic mine tailings contain traces of mercury, which can cause mental illness, birth defects, kidney failure and other diseases. The abandoned mines are gradually collecting water from underground and surface sources, and in a few years they will start to release highly toxic effluents into the environment.

There are two main shantytowns in Rudnany: Patoracke, home to some 270 people (after two waves of resettlement into public housing—the latest in March 2007); and Zabijanec, home to roughly 500. Several families also live in two segregated blocks of apartments on the western outskirts of town.

Patoracke was settled at the beginning of the 1970s, and was at one time home to as many as 800 people. Two water taps serve the entire community, which is also without a sewerage system or sewerage treatment facility. Hygienic conditions are extremely poor—especially in summer.

There are no toilets with running water, and no places to bathe. Children collect water in plastic jars and bottles, and an abundance of rotting, uncollected garbage surrounds the shantytown.

Patoracke lies about a kilometre above Rudnany, and its sole transportation link is an unpaved road. Snow or inclement weather often prevents children from attending school in the winter. Access for emergency medical treatment is also problematic. Dotted with makeshift homes built from waste material, stones and tin, the shantytown is on company land where public or commercial use is technically prohibited. The Roma are neither owners nor tenants. The former administrative building, meanwhile, is not an existing legal entity, and it was supposed to have been destroyed and decommissioned at the beginning of the 1970s.

Part of Patoracke actually sank in 2001, and while the incident did not cause any fatalities, it did provoke the government into taking emergency action. The first plan was to provide some housing by reconstructing the old mining company’s ‘In the late 1980s we installed smokestack filters, and pollution went down to almost zero. Then, just after this, the mine closed. They closed the mine like you close the door. No preventive measures, no conservation, nothing.’

- An unidentified Rudnany resident and ex-mine foreman

People at the social and economic fringes of society are also those most vulnerable to the hazards of environmental degradation, and Rudnany, Slovakia’s Roma population is no exception.

Toxic waste and its victims: the plight of Rudnany’s Roma

Text and photos by Richard Filchak
administrative building—a hundred metres from the shantytown. While landslides and unstable surfaces are no longer a problem, the location is still isolated from the majority population and surrounded by waste dumps. New flats were created for 27 families in 2007, but more than 200 people still occupy the shantytown as they wait for the remaining flats to be built or simply have no place else to go.

Zabijanec, the second shantytown, is located directly in the former industrial zone. There is a block of buildings built for mining company administration, but which have since been transformed into unofficial housing units surrounded by huts to accommodate the number of homeless. Metal ore was collected nearby and the area was used as a transport hub. The company relocated these activities closer to the actually mining sites in the mid-1960s and abandoned the buildings. Roma began to occupy the buildings a few years later, and have lived there ever since. The Roma dwellings lie directly behind the concrete front of the building that was once used to store poly-metal ores. Piles of mining waste shroud the foot of the hill.

The settlement has one water tap with drinkable water for roughly 460 inhabitants—a pipe at the bottom of the hill. The source is a nearby forest reservoir that collects underground water. Shantytown inhabitants (mostly women and children) collect the water in bottles and jars and bring it into their homes. There is no sewerage system or sewerage treatment in the settlement, nor do the homes have toilets.

There are two primary sources of pollution in Zabijanec. The first is the surrounding area’s toxic dumps of mining waste. Located on the slope above the settlement, rain and snowmelts release high contents of heavy metals into the settlement. Inhabitants then track contaminated soil into their houses or breathe in toxic dust during summer. The second source of contamination is the settlement location itself, the soil of which carries residues of heavy metals, oils and other hazardous materials from previous industrial activity.

The example of Rudnany serves to illustrate how social and environmental aspects influence each other, and should encourage us to seek ways to address problems faced by populations that endure both extreme poverty and constant environmental threats.
Greenland’s ice cover is melting faster than anyone would have expected, scientists warned at the ‘Religion, Science and Environment’ symposium in September.

‘There are other areas that could benefit from the freedom of access we have in the field of environmental information.’

There has been an impression of insignificance, however, because EU countries say they are doing so much, while Caucasus and Central Asian countries feel rather desperate, and the Balkan states have so many other problems. But there is a good case for reinvigorating the process.

Among my fondest memories are those of meeting colleagues from CEE in this cooperation—setting up projects, doing things, adapting legislation, but also putting money into implementing all of this. It has been an extraordinary experience. I very much hope that we succeed in taking up this huge task of Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasian states and Central Asian republics.

Aarhus was also pioneering in strategic uses of IT back when the internet was not so well known to governments, especially in Eastern Europe. Whose vision made this possible?

No doubt, the Aarhus Convention has been the international agreement that adhered to the fundamentals of the global electronic community. It came at the same time [as the popular usage of internet].

When we drafted and negotiated the Aarhus Convention, we already had people who were thinking a lot about the enormous potential of electronic communication. We tried to make Aarhus not a top-down process, but a bottom-up process involving non-governmental organisations, media, people—throughout all of the former communist countries. Very often, the only way to reach them was through the net. That wasn’t a coincidence—the net did play a big part. What else could we have done? We supported the building of websites, framing, and internet usage. We did not want the convention to be [owned by] only a few Western governments; we wanted it to be something thoroughly controlled by East European countries—and not only by governments. We also wanted civil society to be involved. The internet was there from day one.
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REEEP a sustainable energy future
“What’s the worst thing that could happen in Belgrade?” I asked the man walking next to me in the rain.

“Well, the worst thing that could happen would be for the process to collapse,” he answered. “That would certainly be the worst outcome.”

The man in question was Adriaan Oudeman, coordinator of the International Environmental Affairs Directorate, and the Dutch delegate for the Third Meeting of the Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials, which took place on August 29–31 in Geneva, Switzerland. The ‘process’ to which Mr Oudeman was referring is Environment for Europe (EfE), launched in 1991 at Dobris Castle in the former Czechoslovakia, shaped and guided through subsequent ministerial conferences in Lucerne, Switzerland (1993), Sofia, Bulgaria (1995), Aarhus, Denmark (1998) and Kiev, Ukraine (2003), and which now continues—though on much less certain footing—with the Sixth Ministerial ‘Environment for Europe’ Conference, to be held on October 10–12 in Belgrade, Serbia.

I travelled to Geneva in August to meet individuals planning to take part in the Belgrade proceedings—many of whom have been involved in the process for many years—and to try and gain some clearer insight into this political and bureaucratic process that has been, despite its daunting breadth of scope and complexity, hugely influential in steering pan-European environmental policy. The primary purpose of the ad hoc meeting, which took place at the Palais de Nations, was to achieve consensus on the wording of the draft ministerial declaration.

My conversation with Oudeman took place on the morning of the 30th, prior to the second round of talks. The first round had proven, at best, non-productive—at worst, a disaster. Norway delegate Eldrid Nordbo had summed up the previous day’s lack of progress with a biting comment from the floor: “What we are doing now is a complete waste of time.” Walking to the second session I got caught in a downpour without an umbrella. I managed to escape the deluge by standing beneath the awning of a nearby hotel. Oudeman emerged by chance a few seconds later from the hotel lobby, and recognising him from the day before, I introduced myself. He was kind enough to grab another umbrella from the hotel; and so we set out in the rain, talking along the way.

On recalling this incident, I thought about how in my quest to cover the ‘environment’ from a news perspective, I had completely neglected to pay attention to the actual ‘weather’. And I kept thinking while writing this article that perhaps the future of the Environment for Europe ‘process’ lies in its ability to move beyond words and achieve real success ‘on the ground’.

Style over substance?

To begin with, Environment for Europe is a consensus-driven process, which means that the wording of each paragraph of the ministerial document to be adopted for each conference requires unanimous approval from all nations taking part in the negotiations. By contrast, participants from other groups and organisations, such as NGOs, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the EBRD, which contributes funds to the EAP Task Force and Project Preparation Committee—or, PPC) may help steer discussion, but do not have an official vote in adoption procedures.

The inherent dilemma posed by this consensus-based construct is that official wording must be vague and open-ended enough so as not to court opposition from a single party, but at the same time must contain enough actual substance to render the process meaningful. It’s relatively easy to make all parties agree on the importance of ‘moving forward’ but much more difficult to agree on just how to do that.
LAST-DITCH EFFORTS: (top) A distressed Belgrade resident attempts to phone for help during Sava River flooding in 2006; (bottom, left to right) The Palais de Nations in Geneva, venue for the ad hoc Working Group of Senior Officials; a railroad worker walks along flooded tracks at Belgrade’s main cargo train station; Romanian soldiers build a makeshift dike in the community of Chiselet, southeast of Bucharest.

is, in addition to a lack of consensus on how to move environment for Europe conference in Belgrade provide or prove the end of an era?

K or SWIM by Nathan Johnson
What is taking place right now is a very general political debate, with very few specific commitments. The ad hoc sessions I attended in Geneva were mostly focused on attempts to agree on precise wording of the ministerial document, to which last-minute textual changes and amendments were being proposed and discussed—initially to little avail. During one of the breaks I spoke with Gordana Kozuharova, head of department for European integration at FYR Macedonia’s Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, who expressed some disappointment that the current document was longer than hoped for—or at least longer than what was envisaged at the Kiev conference—but stressed nonetheless the vital importance of reflecting the enormous regional-level and political changes that have occurred since 2003 (most significantly, the accession of 10 countries to the EU in 2004, and last year’s accession of Bulgaria and Romania).

“It might help in the future to schedule a mid-term review [of the ministerial document],” said Kozuharova. “A major concern about document preparation is that it shouldn’t contain unnecessary duplication and overlap.”

Zaal Lomtadze from Georgia’s Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, argued that the document is less about length than substance: “The real problem is: What does it mean? The EEE process right now is lacking a mid-term review [of the ministerial document],” said Kozuharova. “A major concern about document preparation is that it shouldn’t contain unnecessary duplication and overlap.”

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Claude Rouam is head of the Enlargement and Neighbouring Countries unit (within the DG Environment European Commission). He cited 1998’s Aarhus Conference and impetus given to the establishment of EECCA REC’s and process high points, and also mentioned the instrumental role of the Kiev conference in shifting environmental focus to EECCA countries.

“As for Belgrade,” said Rouam, “I hope that wisdom will prevail over a ‘business as usual’ approach. The main danger would be to agree to a long list of topics that are dealt with in other forums and on which the EEE process would have little influence; what would follow would be a poor sense of ownership, limited action and, ultimately, poor results. By contrast, a more focused approach could be useful. Two examples I find challenging are making improvements related to water and sanitation in EECCA countries, as singled out by the EAP Task force, and the Central Asia initiative.”

EU expansion: a paradigm shift?

One of the most intriguing aspects of Environment for Europe is that the focus of the process has shifted eastward, even as many countries of Central and Eastern Europe have joined—or are preparing to join—Western Europe’s political and economic alliance, the European Union. This development should not be viewed, however, as paradoxical. Prior to joining the EU, the bloc’s 12 newest members required huge investments from the ‘West’ in order to meet the strict environmental criteria necessary for accession.

It should be borne in mind, however, that each country and region faces its own unique challenges. “The process got underway in 1991, which means that those countries which joined the EU in 2004 and 2006 have now had 16 years to develop and improve, including through EEE efforts,” said Orea Ivanova-Nacheva, deputy director of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC). “But the war in the former Yugoslavia ended in 1999, which means many of these countries have had only seven years of assistance. It is therefore unrealistic to expect from them the same level of commitment and environmental performance.”

But how much impact will EU enlargement have otherwise on consensus-building, cooperation and programme implementation efforts?

“The EEE’s historical perspective has certainly been transformed by EU enlargement, although we have to recognise that the process itself contributed to the enlargement,” commented Massimo Cozzone from the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea. “However, compared with the situation before enlargement, I do not foresee any particular challenges in achieving consensus on priorities and actions. Our task is to clearly identify those new priorities and actions.”

Andrey Terentyev, principal administrator of environmental protection at the Russian Regional Environmental Centre, wrote to Green Horizon that new member states and candidate countries have their own weight to pull, and that some are already doing their fair share of the work. “Taking into consideration the numerous issues and challenges inside the EU, it is up to the EU to decide whether or not to provide further support to sub-regions,” said Terentyev. “But new member states are already participating in environmental cooperation, and even act as donors to other states. The Czech Republic, Poland and some others are such countries. Other states aspiring to EU entry should make the effort harmonise their standards [with those of the EU] and to correlate their approaches. I think this first of all concerns a big and important country such as Turkey.”

A somewhat more nuanced outlook comes from Talalib Makeev, executive director of Central Asian REC (CAREC). “On one hand, EU enlargement has indeed changed the EEE process,” said Makeev. “In particular, the shift of focus to the East has caused new member states to somewhat lose interest in the process. On the other hand, the enlargement process is an example for all non-EU states of what environmental cooperation can achieve.”

Having said this, I am confident that member states will remain interested in Environment for Europe because the process also addresses transboundary problems that extend beyond EU borders.”
Given the past successes of Environment for Europe, can October’s conference also deliver?

The road to Belgrade

by Nathan Johnson

In order to understand where the Environment for Europe process is going, it’s helpful to have at least a minimal understanding of where it has been. One must also bear in mind how much Europe itself has changed politically and economically during EfE’s lifetime.

It was in Dobris 16 years ago that the call was first made for a comprehensive assessment of Europe’s environment, and to develop long-term strategies toward creating an environmental programme for the entire continent. Among the many basic guidelines agreed to at the conference, one was to provide assistance for integrating environment-related health issues, while another was that each country would bear responsibility for global environmental problems. Dobris attracted environment ministers from 34 European countries, Brazil, Japan and the US, in addition to representatives from UN bodies and both governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Two years later, in Lucerne, 45 European countries were represented, along with officials from Canada, Israel, Japan and the US. Ministers adopted the ‘Ministerial Declaration’ during the 1993 gathering, which was critical in establishing EfE’s political dimension. Efforts at this time were focused primarily on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and Lucerne participants established what is now known as the EAP Task Force to implement the Environmental Action Programme for CEE. The core activities of the EAP Task Force are to help countries develop their own national environmental action plans, run training programmes, involve the private sector, and to improve management of priority conservation areas.

The agenda for the 1995 EfE conference in Sofia had already been decided at Lucerne. Ministers from 49 countries in Europe, North America and Central Asia (the United Nations/Economic Commission for Europe, or UN/ECE region) attended the third conference, while Australia, Japan and Mexico were also represented. The ministerial declaration adopted in Sofia, in addition to representing a reaffirmation of commitment to European environmental protection, placed new and special emphasis on assistance to Central and Eastern Europe, especially in terms of environmental financing and private sector involvement. In addition, the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy was adopted at Sofia.

Fifty-two member ECE member states took part at 1998’s EfE conference in Aarhus, the tone for which was set by Europe’s Environment: the Second Assessment, a report that identified main achievements of the process. As a result of these findings, conference ministers agreed to boost the level of support for the Newly Independent States (or, NIS—countries formerly part of the Soviet Union) and for CEE countries not yet part of the European Union accession process. There were a number of important resolutions and adoptions that took place at Aarhus, not least of which was the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Also gaining significant support were two new convention protocols pertaining to long-range transboundary air pollution and persistent organic pollutants. Ministers also endorsed a pan-European strategy to phase out leaded petrol. Finally, given the generally eastward shift of EfE focus, it was agreed to host the fifth conference of ministers in one of the NIS countries.

Five years had passed by the time the fifth EfE conference kicked off in Kiev. Ten CEE countries were just one year away from EU accession, and the terror attacks in New York City in 2001 meant that environmental cooperation had taken on heightened importance in terms of promoting wider peace and security. It was in Kiev that all Carpathian countries adopted a convention to promote environmental protection and sustainable development in that region. The conference also succeeded in adopting a landmark environmental strategy for the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). In addition, Central Asian countries were congratulated for their efforts in helping to develop the Central Asian Initiative on Environment, Water and Security. With the results of Kiev ensuring continuance of the EfE process, the stage is now set for a sixth ministerial conference; but several factors and developments during the intervening four years have resulted in great changes that are challenging EfE’s future—even its survival.

But what are these changes exactly? And what are the related challenges? And does everyone agree on the problems and solutions? These are a few of the questions I wanted to ask various experts in the few weeks preceding the October conference in Belgrade.

To learn more about the Environment for Europe process’s history, structure and the Belgrade conference, go to <www.unece.org/efe/welcome.html>.
lacking could now prove EIE’s greatest challenge.

“There is indeed a sub-regionalisation of the process that is taking place, which is supported by the EU,” Makeev continued. “Working from Central Asia [Kazakhstan], we see the benefits in this, but we also understand that the process is the main connection between EU and Central Asian environmental policies, and that the value of the process lies exactly in being the bridge between the two. A process that would leave the EU member states out of the picture would have much less significance for our region. In particular, the knowledge accumulated by new member states during the enlargement process is of special value for Central Asia and the whole EECCA [Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia] region. There are also environmental business opportunities for companies and other institutions of new member states that should not be lost.”

Russian REC’s Terentyev also acknowledged the EU’s commitment to the region, but noted that regional differences have been apparent from the very beginning of the process.

“In spite of evident EIE successes, not all of the objectives have been reached,” said Terentyev. “The difficulties in achieving more tangible results are connected not only with the scale of the process, but to internal situations of recipient countries. There are also different approaches between CEE and EECCA countries in terms of how environmental issues are addressed. Nevertheless, cooperation between sub-regions should continue. What is really needed is for EECCA states to assume greater ownership of such initiatives as the EECCA Environment Strategy adopted at Kiev, as well as other initiatives within the EIE process. These countries also need to commit themselves to international conventions and multilateral agreements, as this will facilitate consensus and regional-level cooperation.”

FYR Macedonia’s Kozuharova remarked that the EECCA countries are interesting in that a lot of funding could soon be moving their way: “Although these countries might not share a lot of the same goals—EU accession for example—the EIE process is something that gets them gathered around the table.”

In terms of funding (another key issue confronting EIE) and action on the ground, Eldrid Nordbo, special advisor for international cooperation from the Ministry of Environment Norway, explained that the EBRD is getting more and more involved in the EECCA region, adding that water-supply projects are especially high on the list of regional priorities. She also pointed out that the EBRD has provided funding to support the PPC Secretariat.

“One project worth mentioning is the Khujand [Tajikistan] Water Supply Improvement Project,” said Nordbo, referring to a signed, EBRD-backed agreement worth EUR 4.9 million. “Of course, funding is harder to come by these days, which means that it needs to be put to effective use. And this means that countries need to take responsibility and be actively involved [in project implementation], as the EBRD can’t be expected to put lots of people on the ground.”

Brendan Gillespie, head of the Environment and Globalisation Division at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), spoke to Green Horizon in July about the EIE process, and mostly about the OECD and EBRD’s work in the Caucasus and Central Asia. He started by explaining that the OECD largely oversees policy and institutional reform, while the EBRD manages environmental investment.

“There are a couple of things to bear in mind regarding the EECCA region,” said Gillespie. “First, the countries are certainly wealthy as a whole. Second, they are quite economically, politically and environmentally diverse, and this diversity has actually increased over the past 10 years. We try to design activities that are appropriate for all countries, and then adapt them according to national and sub-regional needs. We look to EU directives as models, but they’re not necessarily to be copied in every respect. EIE, as an ad hoc process, provides quite a bit of flexibility, but this also creates some uncertainty in terms of planning.”

“Sanitation problems and a ‘seriously degraded’ water network are top regional priorities requiring large investments of time and money, according to Gillespie, but he also mentioned that some environmental concerns—for example, reduction of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)—can be carried out more comprehensively and cost-effectively than within the EU.

“Part of building trust and confidence comes from realising that neighbouring countries everywhere share various ecosystems and environmental problems,” Gillespie continued. “What we don’t want to see become are new barriers, such as the Iron Curtain, and the discussions leading up to Belgrade do show that richer countries consider cooperation with EECCA countries a priority.”

**Dialling for donors**

Another pressing problem facing Environment for Europe is that funds for the process are dwindling. Because of budget pressures elsewhere, the European Commission has emerged as the most important donor, Gillespie claimed.

Georgia’s Lom tadze, meanwhile, stressed that “external funding can’t solve everything,” and that national governments themselves need to make the financial commitments necessary to fulfil environmental goals.

“The Georgian government has made it clear that its number-one priority is economic development, but the government is also expanding the country’s national park system with its own money,” said Lom tadze.

When asked what lies behind the problem of ‘donor fatigue’, Italy’s Cozzone responded: “This is a difficult question to answer. What you call ‘donor

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‘Donor support should not be seen as a one-way road but as a process through which all partners benefit’

— Talaibek Makeev, executive director, REC for Central Asia
fatigue’ is the result of a combination of different factors, including the changing economic situation of many donor countries facing the challenge of globalisation and suffering from loss of competitiveness, and therefore bringing the whole system to a lower level in terms of availability for cooperation. Mechanisms such as the EIE process, however, are still of added value in terms of financial support, although less so than before.”

Makeev asked the same question, acknowledged that funds are indeed harder to come by these days: “It’s therefore important that recipient countries clearly demonstrate the benefits of support—and this is also important for the donor countries, themselves,” said Makeev. “Donor support should not be seen as a one-way road, but as a process through which all partners benefit. Recipient countries should now be contributing more to project implementation to demonstrate their commitment. Kozuharova remarked that FYR Macedonia, having achieved candidate status and now in the approximation phase, is therefore eligible for big infrastructure investments, but that about 80% of this investment has been allocated to the transport sector.

“Of course the lack of financial resources is a major difficulty, but so is the lack of administrative capacity,” said Kozuharova. “New ministries and environmental investments are expensive. We also need more experts, and capacity to educate experts. You also need money for public awareness programmes, which is another important priority.”

**The people on the ground**

John Hontelez, secretary general of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), has been involved in the EIE process from an NGO perspective since the very beginning, with his first involvement coming as a member of Friends of the Earth International. Having joined the EEB in 1996, Hontelez recalls the excitement and optimism that led to the first EIE meeting and the energy that was channelled into what is arguably the high-water mark of the process: 1998’s Aarhus Convention, EIE’s most sweeping and influential legally binding document—and a document he believes is “likely to outlive the EIE process” itself.

“Things were exciting in ’91, and the mood was really hopeful,” said Hontelez. “As attending NGOs, we were only able to comment on drafts, but we came extremely well prepared. Following the political and economic changes, we saw the necessity for the West to engage the East in discussing environmental issues—and possible support. It was quite clear from the beginning that the emerging process would be moving in a west-to-east direction, as the biggest environmental problems were legacies from the political system that was being done away with. One of the keys, however, in the early years, was that some countries really took the lead in steering the process—Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, for example.”

Hontelez claimed that NGOs over the years have, perhaps, achieved less than hoped for in terms of lasting results, but that long-term political success is no the only thing to be gained from participating in the process; EIE, for example, continues to be an important framework for NGOs in terms of getting to know each other and striking up new partnerships. He also referred to the important role that NGOs play in addressing difficult issues: Are Western Europe’s environmental problems solved? How does the EU plan to continue growing economically while shrinking consumption? What are the consequences of transport sector liberalisation?

In terms of REC contributions to the EIE process, Hontelez particularly praised the “invaluable” work of Magdolna Toth-Nagy in making Aarhus a reality, and the organisation’s efforts to defend Aarhus in follow-up negotiations. He also credited REC Moldova for doing good work, but added that some offices and NGOs have moved further away from the notion of participating with civil society.

Victoria Elias, chairperson for the European EcoForum, is based in Russia and works for the World Wildlife Foundation. Elias said that there is no “special selection process” for NGOs wishing to be part of the coalition participating in the EIE process; the only prohibition is being affiliated with a national government. Like Hontelez, Elias would like to see EIE move forward more effectively in terms of achieving legally binding agreements.

“Implementation and commitment are now really important, but to me it’s a big question of whether an ‘implementation’ conference would really attract many ministers,” said Elias. “And the big problem now is that funding is going down and down. Then it depends on donor rules and what they want to contribute to. Maybe they’re willing to put money into water and sanitation—which is important everywhere—but will there be any funds available for biodiversity?”

Elias’ comments echo those of several individuals who feel that the process lacks larger focus and unified commitment.

“Maybe the process should become issue-driven—maybe something like conservation,” Elias continued. “What should be improved first? What sort of economic instruments should be used? It would really be nice to see governments commit to programmes over ten years or more—to phase out unsustainable energy practices, for example—moving toward sustainable consumption strategies.”

“As far as new initiatives,” Hontelez wondered, “which is the next? Right now things are definitely more complicated and the willingness is disappearing. Sometimes the [European] Commission is wondering why they have to travel to Geneva for something that can be sorted out in Brussels. If the process continues, maybe it should ideally consist of countries who really want to be part of it. But in any case, the countries of the former Soviet Union are the countries that need the process the most; they’re the one’s that will suffer the most if it disappears.”

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) has been involved in the Environment for Europe process since its beginning, providing increased assistance with each consecutive ministerial conference, from Sofia (1995) to Aarhus (1998) to Kiev (2003).

The documents, reports and publications on this CD present facts, experiences and lessons about the problems and possibilities of environmental improvement in Central and Eastern Europe. Prepared in cooperation with South Eastern European governments, international organisations, institutions and many other partners, they should enrich your preparation for the debates at the Sixth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Belgrade, October 10-12, 2007.

The REC wishes to express its gratitude to the Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea of Italy for making the production of this CD-ROM possible.

**CATEGORY I DOCUMENTS**
- Mobilizing Finance for Environmental Priorities: Recommendations for the Future (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/22)
- Public-Private Partnership for Reduced Air Pollution from Vehicles Through Lead-Free and Low-Sulphur Fuels (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/24)

**CATEGORY II DOCUMENTS**
- Acceptance and Implementation of UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements in South-Eastern Europe (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/INF/19)
Euroregion application officially accepted after just one year

Stara Planina joins AEBR

By Tijana Stamenkovic

Just one year after being established, Euroregion Stara Planina has been officially accepted into the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). The AEBR executive committee accepted the Stara Planina application of June 29. Furthermore, AEBR Secretary General Martín Guillermo-Ramírez sent an invitation to Euroregion Stara Planina members to participate at the AEBR’s general assembly and annual conference, which was held on September 13–15 in Lappeenranta, Finland. The September gathering will provide an opportunity for Euroregion exchange and discussion about similar EU structures.

The Euroregion Stara Planina general assembly adopted the AEBR’s charter, statute and fee regulation during a May 18 meeting in Pirot, Serbia. Official correspondence and preparation of all needed documents were carried out by REC site coordinators from Serbia and Bulgaria. The AEBR, now in its 36th year, is a registered association acting on behalf of European border and cross-border regions. Its principal aims are to: identify particular problems, opportunities, tasks and projects; represent regional interests; initiate, support and coordinate border region cooperation throughout Europe; and exchange experiences and information to best take advantage of opportunities and to develop coordinated solutions to shared problems.

Siding with the future

Euroregion Stara Planina working groups on both sides of the border began work on a strategic document during a two-day workshop in Lukavica, Serbia (Dimitrovgrad Municipality), a village near the Serbia-Bulgaria border and in Berkovitza, a town in Bulgaria. The participants were local experts in environment, culture & sport, tourism, infrastructure and agriculture. The first draft of the document was sent to all interested participants for comment, and it was agreed to hold a public discussion in September.

The first draft was then presented to Euroregion mayors at the third assembly meeting on August 10 in Babin Zub, Knjazevac Municipality, at which the Euroregion logo was discussed. The logo will be protected by international law and presented to the media in October.

It was also agreed at this meeting that a project proposal for a REC grant would help to strengthen the Euroregion’s work capacity. The REC’s “Implementation of Pilot Action from the Euroregion Action Plan” project for this year is within the framework of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Program (REReP).

As part of the same project, REC site coordinators organised a June study tour for Euroregion Stara Planina mayors and secretaries to the Euroregion comprising northeast Slovenia and the Austrian state (or, Land) of Styria. One of the aims of the study tour was to create partnerships for future joint initiatives. Maribor’s development agency director, Marjana Krašner Lozina, hosted the event. Representatives from Serbia and Bulgaria had a chance to see several projects undertaken through the Austrian-Slovenian partnership, which was established in 2001. Visiting mayors, meanwhile, met with Maribor Mayor Franc Kangler.

Making a particular impression on tour participants were projects on Mount Pohorje that were finally completed after having been abandoned during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. Efforts from the Maribor Development Agency have now transformed this alpine location into an extremely popular tourist destination. Participants also had a chance learn about various tourism, infrastructure and cultural exchange projects between Austria and Slovenia.

Close and growing closer

Euroregion Stara Planina was created through a framework agreement signed by both parties in Sofia on June 20, 2006. The signatories are associations of municipalities representing local border authorities, the Regional Association for Tourism Development in the North-West Balkans (representing seven Bulgarian municipalities), and the Association for Development of the Stara Planina Region (representing four Serbian municipalities). The purpose of Euroregion Stara Planina is to foster cross-border cooperation in tourism, agriculture, culture, environment and infrastructure—priorities chosen to allow broad stakeholder interaction on both sides of the border. The aim is also to assist the Bulgarian and Serbian governments in planning and execution of their territorial cooperation and regional development policies.

The aforementioned activities have been carried out under the project Transboundary Cooperation through the Management of Shared Natural Resources in South-Eastern Europe, and implemented in three transboundary areas: Skadar (Shkodra) Lake, the Neretva Delta and West Stara Planina. Additional support has come from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation within the framework of REReP. The West Stara Planina component of the project dates back to 2001.
Twelve Russian journalists received hands-on training on how to provide better coverage of the effects of climate change in mountain regions. Green Horizon’s chief editor Pavel Antonov led the course, which took place at the foot of Mt. Elbrus, Russia’s and Europe’s highest peak (5,642 metres). The second course trainer was Steve Connor, science editor of the UK’s Independent newspaper. The Russian REC organised the course, while the UK Embassy to Moscow provided funding. Instruction was carried out according to a hands-on methodology developed in 2002 by Green Horizon and the Guardian Foundation. Each journalist worked on a feature story that the trainers reviewed and commented on; these stories were then published or broadcast either in Russia or abroad.

Accompanied by scientists from the Moscow State University, journalists hiked up to the Mt. Elbrus glaciers to study how and why they are melting. Interviews with park administration personnel, various experts and local and national authorities assisted the journalists in preparing high-quality articles.

The stunning natural beauty of the mountain and its surroundings proved a major source of energy and inspiration for everyone present, according to Antonov, who added that it was good to work with young, energetic and inspired people who are willing to work and generate positive change in their country. Connor, meanwhile, found the training both fascinating and informative.

“It gave me great insight into the working practices and thoughts of Russian environmental journalists, as well as those of the very capable representatives of REC Russia, who did a splendid job in making it all happen,” Connor said.

The Russian REC has planned a series of follow-up activities, which includes the granting of an award for media stories on climate change. Updates on the REC and Green Horizon’s work with journalists are available at <http://media.rec.org>.

Serbia’s Minister for Environmental Protection Sasa Dragan visited the REC on July 27 as part of his official visit to Hungary. Although just recently established, the Serbian Ministry for Environmental Protection (MEP) has already committed itself to several important tasks, Dragan said while addressing REC senior management personnel. He cited pollution prevention as a key in-country priority, and spoke at length regarding intensive legislative work—focusing on enforcement, transparency and public participation in all activities.

Dragan highlighted preparatory work for the sixth pan-European Environment for Europe conference, which Serbia will host in October, as his ministry’s main international activity. He concluded by saying that the MEP very much appreciates the REC’s support with the preparatory process, and particularly praised the organisation’s coordination efforts in South-Eastern European countries. He also confirmed that the ministry considers the REC’s Belgrade office as an important international partner in all other activities.

The REC established its Serbian office as an international organisation following a memorandum of understanding signed by the REC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the former republic of Yugoslavia in June 2001.

During Dragan’s recent visit, REC executive director Marta Szigiéti Bonifert outlined the REC’s strategic goals in Serbia: to provide high-quality, innovative, demand-driven services to stakeholders that can be of the highest benefit for Serbia and the global environment; to implement sustainable development in practice; to provide a neutral platform for dialogue, networking and cooperation among stakeholders and partners—at and between national and local levels; to maintain the independent character of the organisation through a successful model of governance, international legal status in Serbia, diversified funding and quality of work; to continue the organisation’s proactive development and fulfil its mission in Serbia during a period of deep political change, social flux and economic reconstruction.

At the end of the meeting, Dragan accepted an invitation to visit Szentendre next year when the conference centre will be reopened as a zero-emission building.
Cross-border project proves successful in SEE region

Authorities and experts from public utilities from three cross-border regions of South-Eastern Europe learned to formulate and plan future activities. The conference took place in Montenegro on September 6–7 as part of the Cross-Border Cooperation through Environmental Investment and Planning project. The project was funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by the REC for CEE.

Participants presented key project results from their sites. Key achievements of the project were noted: four national standard feasibility studies for water resources quality improvement were prepared by teams of local consultants under the guidance of the REC project team; the project team applied a participatory approach to involve local stakeholders and communities from early stages of the project; and a training programme for local consultants on methodological analysis methodology, tools and contents proved successful. It was also established that since the project contributed to improving the capacity of local authorities and experts in investment preparation, the project methodology can be replicated in other municipalities and cross-border areas in SEE where the need for environmental investments is critical.

Banking on partnership: Zvornik, Bosnia and Herzegovina (left), lies just across the Drina River from the Serbian town of Mali Zvornik.
More case studies for better urban transport in Europe!

Share the results of your action through the ELTIS case study database!

• A typical ELTIS case study describes an activity undertaken by a European city or region to improve its local transport system.
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So please consider:
• Include the results of your implemented actions or strategies – even if they were less successful or even failed!
• Case studies are short, usually not longer than one page. Hence it takes no more than 30 minutes, maximum one hour to complete this task.

Submission is easy using the on-line form at <www.eltis.org/case_study>.

If you have any questions please contact Gabor Heves at G.Heves@rec.org.

Master Class

Strengthening the role and function of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to Promote Change and Enable Action in the Urban Environment

A five-day programme of capacity building is being offered in each country/territory of the Western Balkans from Feb. 2008–Nov. 2008. Targeting CSOs active in the field of urban sustainability, it will look to address two key questions: “What’s my role in effecting change and environmental action?” and “How can I make a difference?”

Within each national programme, five training modules – tailored to the country conditions and hosted in the local language – will build knowledge and skills on “how to” successfully accomplish:

LEGAL RECOU RE/ADVOCACY • LOBBYING • WATCHDOGGIN G • PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

Each module will span 1½ days. Participants will be expected to share their experiences and will receive a certificate of completion. More details are available online: <www.rec.org/sector/assistance/Masterclass>.

Because the programme places emphasis on both theoretical and practical learning, it includes two parallel programmes. Places are therefore offered to up to two individuals per organisation. To register your interest, download an application form today and submit by one of the following deadlines:

LOCATIONS, DATES AND DEADLINES FOR SUBMITTING APPLICATIONS

Go public!
The European Union is finally focusing on an urban transport policy

Traffic jams have been an all-too-familiar experience during my 15 years of driving in big East European cities. In fact, at one point I thought I’d grown savvy enough to avoid them instinctively. But things are getting worse. Just like extreme climate, extreme traffic is getting more and more difficult to predict. And having recently spent an hour in an unexpected traffic swarm—on a seemingly calm Saturday morning—I finally made up my mind to go public. To use public transport, that is.

I’m glad that urban transport has finally become an EU concern. I am just one among 80 percent of Europeans who live and work in urban centres, and developing a new policy on urban transport is among the European Commission’s strategic priorities for 2007. As a result of a year-long consultation, DG Energy and Transport announced the September publication of a ‘green paper’ demonstrating a commitment to move sustainable urban transport to the front of the EU policy queue. Jacque Barrot, the EC’s vice-president in charge of transport, said in June that the green paper and its follow-up activities will “form the basis of a genuine European policy on urban transport—one which reinforces policies at other levels of government, and particularly in the cities themselves.”

Barrot also referred to one of the major difficulties that the new policy aims to resolve: subsidiarity. In other words: Who’ll be in the driver’s seat when deciding on urban transport? Will it be municipal or national governments that will establish and implement such policies? As with many other CEE cities, public transport in Budapest is run by the municipality, and is pretty well organised. At the same time, Hungary’s government recently released HUF 450 billion (EUR 180 million) worth of funding for five urban public transport projects, according to national news agency MTI.

In order to collect different views on the green paper and urban transport in general, between January and June 2007 the European Commission organised an internet consultation, four technical workshops and two stakeholder conferences. The EC received over 900 responses from citizens and stakeholder organisations. According to Zoltan Kazatsay, deputy director-general of DG Energy and Transport, ‘subsidiarity’ should not be viewed as an obstacle, but rather as a challenge and an opportunity. At the second technical workshop in Szentendre, Kazatsay explained that while European cities are “in the best position to select and implement the right portfolio of measures, the EU’s role will be to identify, in partnership with all parties, whether there are obstacles to successful urban transport policies and to propose joint solutions for specific actions.”

The EU green paper provides new bases for sharing good practices, harmonisation, coordination and cooperation, financial support, simplifying existing legislation and, in certain cases, introducing new legislation.

Responding to rising demand for information, the EC launched the European Local Transport Information Service (ELTIS), a portal for local transport news and events, transport measures, policies and practices implemented across Europe. It now contains over 800 online case studies, some of which have been translated into Czech, Polish and Hungarian, said ELTIS coordinator Robert Pressl. Such EC initiatives show well how local action can be efficiently coupled with Europe-wide cooperation.

More information on the green paper on urban transport can be found at: <ec.europa.eu/transport/clean/green_paper_urban_transport/index_en.htm>.

FULL STOP: Parking is yet another car-related problem for cities to deal with.

ELTIS – European Local Transport Information Service

Europe’s number one web portal on urban transport and mobility

• Daily news and events
• More than 800 case studies
• Free training materials in 16 languages
• EU policy papers and calls for proposals

Now also in Czech, Polish and Hungarian!

ELTIS is an initiative of the European Commission’s Directorate General for Energy and Transport

www.eltis.org
Calculating cost
Seven sue Brussels over lower carbon emissions caps

Latvia and Lithuania recently became the sixth and seventh EU members in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to sue the European Commission (EC) over its decision to curb the number of carbon emission allowances for industry in the national allocation plan (NAP) for the second phase of the EU trading scheme. Five other EU members have already taken similar action: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

Government representatives of the seven countries are protesting the EC’s “top-down” approach in establishing new (i.e. lower) carbon caps for a number of member states. Hungary, for example, saw its 2008–12 CO2 annual emissions cap decreased from 30.7 million tonnes to 26.9 million—12.4 percent lower than the country’s proposal. EC spokeswoman Barbara Helfferich, according to ENDS Europe, claimed that the EU calculated carbon caps uniformly across all member states, adding that EU executives are “confident” that their actions will stand up in court.

Industry widely views the cuts as a direct blow against compatibility on the European market. And while it remains too early to determine the consequences of the cuts for Hungary’s energy sector—as the Hungarian government has yet to take a decision on how to allocate reductions—Jozsef Vlaska, CEO of Hungary’s Matra Power Plant, told Green Horizon that the cuts could likely result in higher electricity producer prices.

Many environmental groups, however, strongly back EU efforts to pressure national governments to uphold their environmental commitments. Peter Kardos, climate change manager at the Budapest-based Energia Club, said that he believes the EC calculations are to be trusted more than those carried out by the Hungarian government.

“We believe a strong industrial lobby has influenced the decision of the government,” said Kardos.

On the other hand, Hungary’s senior environmental negotiator Tibor Farago is convinced that the CEE countries disputing the EC calculations have correctly determined their quotas.

“We have proved in the past that we support a stronger EU,” said Farago. “But the new member states want to catch up with EU-15 in all aspects—and that is the real meaning of cohesion.” Meanwhile, the surprising aspect about Riga’s decision to challenge the cuts is that it was taken in spite of a decision announced by the EC in July to increase the 2008–12 allocations for five member states—including Latvia.

Stephen Stec, a senior legal expert at the REC, suggested that new member states from CEE should not view the commission’s actions as stemming from a lack of trust in government estimations. In fact, quite the opposite is true, according to Stec, who explained that in this case the EC is applying an equal approach to all members by approving lower emission caps than those proposed originally, and by proposing small increases on verified 2005 levels.

“It’s the new member states who are asking for special treatment for their continued economic growth, but under the 2003 Directive on Emissions trading this is not a valid criterion,” said Stec. “In their complaints, new member states from CEE are claiming that the EC decision is discriminatory to their growth. What’s sad is that the version of growth they have in mind is the traditional, highly polluting one. If the [European] Court decides in their favour, it will certainly have a negative impact on Europe’s ability to be a leader in the field of climate change.”
Taking advocacy online

The jury’s still out on internet potential to boost campaign effectiveness

The July 4 release of the BBC’s kid-napped Gaza correspondent, Alan Johnston, was “a victory for campaigning,” according to Amnesty International’s Steve Ballinger. Besides a constant barrage of verbal calls, demonstrations and political lobbying on the journalist’s behalf, some 200,000 individuals showed solidarity in signing an online BBC petition calling for Johnston’s release—evidence that the internet has become a natural extension of advocacy work.

To cite just one example, climate change action group Avaaz recently used the internet to strengthen a campaign initiative. In March, Avaaz—an online community with membership of roughly 1 million—delivered a petition with 100,000 signatures to environment ministers of the world’s most-polluting countries. The group claims that its efforts were instrumental in securing a pledge from Germany’s environment minister and German chancellor Angela Merkel to place climate change at the top of the agenda for the G8 leaders’ summit in June 2007—a pledge that was upheld.

The fact that the internet is becoming more easily accessible worldwide means that online opposition is no longer restricted to the ‘developed’ world. In Chile, for instance, activists challenged the new Transantiago transportation policy on the popular (6 million members) 3D online environment, Second Life. During their virtual protest Second Life avatars burned Transantiago buses in front of government buildings and wore specially printed t-shirts—while others simply undressed. What was really remarkable, however, was a restrained police response, as opposed to the tear gas or violence that is commonly used against Chilean demonstrators. Nor was there any environmental damage caused by protestors. And while nothing has yet emerged in terms of tangible policy, the protest garnered plenty of media coverage, which in turn has caught the authorities’ attention.

So what is it exactly that’s drawing campaigners and protestors into cyberspace? Simply put, the internet offers a means to rapidly recruit and mobilise large numbers of supporters. Virtual campaigns are also cost-effective to mobilise and offer a means of convenient response.

Others, however, are more guarded in their enthusiasm for online campaigning. “There’s little doubt that e-activism is powerful, and garnering attention, but it would be a shame if we start to use the simple signing of an electronic petition as an excuse for not doing more,” says Todd Schenk, a project manager within the REC’s NGO support programme. “To this end, it can’t replace traditional activist approaches like protesting or meeting face to face.”

Governments at least have begun to take note of the online community, and are inviting more and more virtual responses to proposed policies, projects and programmes. But with regard to online protests (including ever-increasingly popular blogs), the question we may find ourselves asking is: How long before governments begin policing cyberspace? Amnesty International has already

WAY TO GO: Campaigners were instrumental in securing journalist Alan Johnston’s release.

Call for Interest

NETWORKING SOCIAL CAPITAL: Communicating for Action

The REC is looking to identify four promising civil society networks to participate in an organisational assistance programme between February 2008 and June 2009. Networks whose activities emphasise urban environment protection and sustainable development across the Western Balkans will be selected with a view to fostering their longer-term financial and institutional sustainability. Methodologies will include organisational self-assessment, practical learning and experience sharing (subsidised through grant assistance) in the following domains:

- Organisational management and development
- Ensuring financial viability
- Using communications tools effectively
- Enhancing visibility and membership

To express your network’s interest, download a form today from www.rec.org/sector/assistance/networking.html

Submission deadline: Wednesday, Oct. 31, 2007
A Guardian correspondent uses effective imagery to warn of climate change

Global Warning: The Last Chance for Change

By Paul Brown
Published by Guardian Unlimited Books

Paul Brown, The Guardian’s environment correspondent until 2005, has compiled a book full of stunning photographs, alarming data and passionate quotes to illustrate the global warming crisis. The book’s publication is timely: according to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, EU countries are committed to reducing their carbon emissions by 5–8 percent by next year! With Europe experiencing record temperatures, violent storms, floods and wildfires, it’s getting easier to win over climate change sceptics; but, it should be noted, increased petrol taxes and graphic warnings on cigarette packages haven’t persuaded that many individuals to give up driving or smoking.

Brown’s book presents beautiful and dramatic photos illustrating the problems of climate change, and images of the rapid retreat of glaciers on Mt. Kilimanjaro and the immediate danger confronting small island nations from rising sea levels are particularly poignant. But it’s also significant that the publication also introduces and describes possible solutions.

Current solution attempts, such as carbon credit trading, are really just license to pollute elsewhere. Nor is nuclear energy a carbon-friendly solution if one takes into account its entire lifecycle; moreover, this option simply trades long-term environmental disaster for short-term global catastrophe. For the cost of an atomic plant, thousands of safe micro-hydro, solar, wind and insulation projects could be completed at a fraction of the cost. Consider also that standby lights on televisions in the United States—just TVs, just in the US—use up as much energy as one nuclear power plant produces in one year! Add to this video and DVD players, stereos and the rest of the world, and it’s clear that simply turning off standby lights can make an immediately significant short-term difference.

Instead of new sports stadiums or monuments to the past, governments should be investing in renewable energy technologies, energy efficiency and insulation. What use will a monument be if it’s underwater? Or a sports stadium that’s too hot to enjoy? Denmark, for example, now gets 20% of its energy from renewable resources. Germany has committed to bringing all its housing up to modern energy efficiency standards within 20 years. Mandatory procurement and new building standards can also make new technologies “normal” and less expensive; Spain passed legislation in 2005 requiring all new buildings to incorporate solar water heating systems.

Ultimately, we cannot depend on governments or corporations to do the right thing. We can, however, make easy and inexpensive contributions to slowing climate change. Unplug appliances not in use, or use an extension cord with a master switch; buy appliances with an A/A+ energy rating; use energy-efficient light bulbs; use public transport, cycle or walk and avoid cars and planes; insulate your home; get a free energy audit from a local NGO or project like Energy Brigades; buy organic and local; and vote! Organisations like the US-based League of Conservation Voters track politicians on their environmental records and issue report cards.

While Brown’s Global Warning isn’t a textual revelation, the effective use of comparative photographs should inspire some individuals to take actions. Most of the world has known about the grave nature of climate change for nearly two decades. We have no excuse to ignore it further.

With financial support from the Italian Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea, the Handbook on the Carpathian Convention has been produced by the REC and the European Academy in Bolzano (EURAC). The Handbook provides guidance on how to interpret the legal provisions of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians. It is designed to be user friendly, and contains several case studies and practical examples.

This handbook is an indispensable and practical tool for local authorities and relevant stakeholders for understanding and implementing the Framework Convention.

The Handbook on the Carpathian Convention can be downloaded at:
www.rec.org/REC/Programs/environmentallaw/carpathian/default.html
ANNOUNCEMENT

Keynote Speaker:
Professor Norman Myers, Oxford University, Duke University, on “Sources of Environmental Security Concerns”

The workshop will be held in conjunction with committee meetings of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Participants will include political actors and key policymakers (parliamentarians), academics and stakeholders, including governmental authorities, journalists and members of civil society. It will provide an opportunity to promote understanding, on the basis of sound scientific knowledge, among critical players whose actions will have a major impact on the future course of development and on security-related matters. Anticipated global, regional and transboundary threats to security resulting from energy and environmental policies and conditions will be presented and discussed. The workshop will bring together key experts on relevant issues such as climate change, natural resources management and renewable energy, risk assessment and risk management, institutional theory, and conflict resolution.

Fee for participants from the business community: 500 EUR
Financial support may be available for other participants

For further information, as well as the workshop agenda and registration form, please visit the website http://www.rec.org/natoworkshop/index.html
Placing the hottest issues on the agenda

REC SIDE EVENTS
AT THE BELGRADE CONFERENCE, SAVA CENTER

Partnership for Better Air Quality through Cleaner Fuels and Vehicles
Wednesday, October 10, 12:00 – UNEP stand
Addressing global leaded gasoline phase-out and sulphur reduction in fuels and promoting cleaner vehicles and vehicle technologies

Enhancing SEE Regional Cooperation in the Climate Change Initiative
Friday, October 10, 13:00 – Room 5/1
Launch of the Initiative with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Republic Hydrometeorological Service of Serbia

Roadmap for Local Sustainability – Local Initiatives in South Eastern Europe
Wednesday, October 10, 13:15 – Room 8/2
Presenting support programmes for local communities

Green Pack Junior
Wednesday, October 10, 16:45 (after the plenary session) – REC stand
Launch of the Green Pack Junior – a new educational tool for primary schools

Adriatic Sea Partnership
Thursday, October 11, 8:00 – Room 3/1
Legal and content aspects of international cooperation on the Adriatic Sea

Preventing and Reducing Respiratory Diseases (SEARCH)
Friday, October 12, 8:00 – Room 4/1
Implementation of the European Environment and Health Policy Action Plans; regional participation in prevention and reduction of respiratory diseases of children due to air pollution

Civil Society Organisations in Central and Eastern Europe: Trends, Challenges and Barriers in Leadership towards Sustainability
Friday, October 12, 2007, 08:30 – Room 5/1
Presentation of the assessment outcomes with the Swedish International Cooperation and Development Agency and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Lessons, Experiences and Remaining Challenges in Implementing the Aarhus Convention: Common Approaches and Best Practices
Thursday, October 11, 2007, 13:00 – Room 5/1
Sharing recent experiences and difficulties with, and examples of, Aarhus Convention implementation (organised jointly with the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat)

Implementation of UNECE Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment: From Kiev to Belgrade and Beyond
Friday, October 12, 2007, 08:30 and 10:00 – Room 3/0
Review implementation of the UNECE Protocol on SEA and launch of the Belgrade SEA Initiative for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (in cooperation with UNECE and UNDP)

For more on the REC’s contribution to the Sixth Environment for Europe Conference in Belgrade, please visit www.rec.org