Greener growth
Slovenia’s minister of growth, Zigo Turk, talks about his country’s sustainable development challenges

Seizing the initiative
Meet a Belarusian citizen and Polish councilman: both inspiring examples of how to take direct environmental action

The ‘other’ crisis
What will be the post-Kyoto response to climate change-related health problems?

Bali breathes new life into efforts to combat the climate change crisis

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see page 16
We simply are not in a sustainable situation.
Dennis Meadows
Author of *Limits to Growth*

The question is whether we’re able to turn limits into opportunities.
Wolfgang Sachs
Wuppertal Institute

Leading thinkers confront humankind’s key dilemmas at the 3rd World Science Forum

Experts from five continents discussed global conditions for achieving sustainable development during the session “Investing in Knowledge for Sustainability,” which was organised by the Regional Environmental Center with generous financial support from the Italian Ministry for Environment, Land and Sea. The November 8–9 session was part of the third World Science Forum, which took place at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in partnership with UNESCO, ICSU and the European Commission.

Watch the videos at [www.rec.org/wsf](http://www.rec.org/wsf)

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AFP

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Green Horizon reports on the cases and stories that shape the environment and sustainable development in Central and Eastern Europe. The magazine is useful for professionals from businesses, international organisations, national governments, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions and the media.

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There was once a time when many in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) looked to the West for inspiration and models to follow. Western Europe’s democracies, while far from perfect and with many of their own problems to solve—willingly or not—none the less stood as role models for their Eastern neighbours. The West was building a good record on economic prosperity, human rights, rule of law, good governance and, not least of all, nature protection, which many in the East sought to replicate. The aspiration to join with the West was probably the most powerful driver of change in CEE during the transition period of the late 1980s and early ’90s; and those CEE societies which have entered the EU now need to live up to their dreams and become role models themselves—for countries further east, for countries in the global south. But are they ready to do so? This is a question that resonates quite strongly when, for instance, you visit a small town in Belarus that doesn’t seem in any obvious way to be much different from your average CEE community. With tidy schools full of active children, clean and orderly streets, regular public transport, a functional health system, paying jobs for everybody and crowded supermarkets, life in Belarus doesn’t seem so bad. But there is one thing that is missing inside what is often referred to as Europe’s sole remaining dictatorship: freedom of choice. And this is precisely where CEE can serve as a model and inspiration. But this isn’t about choosing between different brands of washing powder or nappies, MP3 players or automobiles. Consumption is part of the picture, and has been here ever since CEE adopted the original Western model. But consumption is only part of a package of choices that also includes choosing where to live or work, which way to travel or whom to vote for. It is the overall package of free choices that CEE has accomplished over decades of transformation that societies emerging from the former USSR or the developing world can look up to.

Many would say that CEE countries still have a long way to go to complete their own transition, and it’s a valid criticism as far as environment and health protection are concerned. Some regional authorities have bypassed nature conservation provisions like Natura 2000 in favour of construction and infrastructure, while others have struggled to ease carbon emissions targets in favour of polluting industries or have creatively avoided energy efficiency planning in favour of new nuclear plants. Maybe this kind of short-sightedness will become a thing of the past. Of all the pressing issues of environmental degradation, one has gained remarkable prominence in recent years: climate change. As with other populations the world over, Central and Eastern Europeans have been exposed to an ever-growing volume of messages—not only from books, newspapers and TV screens, but from cinema, fiction, drama and fine arts. The voices of Al Gore, Leonardo Di Caprio, Madonna and other well-known figures have provided momentum to local leaders advocating more environment and health protection, and have caused a swell in public interest and awareness in CEE. Whether it’s about nuclear power projects in Bulgaria, military radar in Hungary or a national motorway in Poland, mostly young and active citizens are forming dynamic communities that are willing to take and demand action for a better environment.

In making a positive change, each small step counts, such as efforts in Poland to ban free plastic shopping bags (page 12). After effectively clearing its nightclubs of tobacco smoke, Riga is now introducing traffic congestion charges to clear its streets, with Vilnius and Prague following suit (page 24). Another regional frontrunner, Slovenia, now holds the EU’s six-month rotating presidency after the bloc’s successful offensive in Bali where an agreement on the post-Kyoto climate change regime was reached (page 14). The Bali ‘road map’ will also travel through CEE, with climate change convention parties meeting later this year in Poznan, Poland. With a bit of optimism and lots of hard work, 2008 could finally set the region firmly on course toward becoming a role model in environmental sustainability.
Growth is an interesting and complex term, and many people use the term ‘development’ when talking about sustainability. How does the environment fit in with your particular view of growth?

In large parts of Europe, people live well, and they are rich. When you’re getting rich it’s not just a matter of making sure that you’re warm and have food. It’s about needs that are more or less artificial. We change shirts, jackets and shoes before they have worn out. We buy more food and drinks than we need for basic nourishment. We drive cars that are faster and bigger than what we need to get from point A to B. Industry has to motivate people to buy new things, and it does so by shaping values. If you can convince people that it’s good to have a big car, for example, you can also educate them that it’s good to have a ‘green’ car, or that it’s sexy to use public transport. It’s all a matter of value systems within a certain historical period. We wouldn’t have enough jobs if we only produced the food and clothing we need for basic survival; so we can either manufacture things that are useless and stupid, or we can manufacture things that are greener, more environment-friendly, consume less electricity, and help to conserve energy. If we’re throwing out perfectly good washing machines or refrigerators, at least we can replace them with greener ones. There are sound economic reasons for greening of the whole economy: it can create jobs, it can create profit, and it can do a lot to save the environment.

But doesn’t replacing one useless consumption item with another useless consumption item that happens to be greener actually encourage the same paradigm of over-consumption? Shouldn’t we focus on using public transport, rather than buying new cars?

We do both. We cannot say [to people]: “We aren’t going to invest anything in public transport, so you should just cram into these old buses … and leave your car in the garage … and you won’t buy anything new for the next ten years!” To do so is to basically stop the economy. Nobody has to work on anything, nobody has to manufacture anything, nobody has to produce anything, and nobody has a job. It might look nice from an environmental point of view because everything shuts down, but it doesn’t make people happy. People find happiness and satisfaction in working, in doing something useful. So let’s build a new traffic system, a new transport system, a subway. Let’s introduce a new generation of hydrogen-powered bus systems, and so on. Let’s do something that simultaneously provides jobs, salaries and taxes to help the forest, and so on, and let’s transform the economy into something more sustainable.

What is the function of a minister without portfolio in charge of growth, which to my understanding also means ‘without budget’?

[Slovenia’s] Ministry of Growth is looking into the future to make sure that the country is growing. Growing, of course, in the economic sense, but also socially and environmentally, or—if you prefer—growing in a sustainable way. Slovenia outlined a strategy for the future in its Strategy for the Development of Slovenia, as part of its National Reform Programme and within the context of the European Lisbon Strategy and Framework for Social and Economic Reforms. There are 67 measures in [the strategy that describe] what we should do to modernise and prepare for competing at the European level. This office is trying to steer all the ministries in the right direction, and it’s not an easy job. My colleagues and I are in a position of creative conflict, but I would say this is very productive.

One of the development strategy’s five priority areas is sustainable development, or sustainable growth. The concept of sustainable growth simultaneously provides jobs, salaries and taxes to help the forest, and so on, and let’s transform the economy into something more sustainable.

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Belene nuclear project, Putin energy visit, spark Bulgarian protests

Given the European Commission’s nod of approval to begin construction of a nuclear power plant (NPP) at Belene in northern Bulgaria at the end of 2008, Russian President Vladimir Putin travelled to Sofia on January 18 to sign an agreement on facility construction. The Putin visit, however, provoked mass demonstrations organised by numerous Bulgarian environmental NGOs strongly opposed to the energy package.

Located on the bank of the Danube River, the Belene construction site is hugely controversial because of risks from documented seismic activity. The European Commission (EC) officially approved the Belene project in December 2007, grounding its decision on project compliance with Euratom Treaty objectives. Euratom is one of the EC’s founding documents, and has been in force without a single revision since 1958.

“Belene is not needed for Bulgarian energy demands,” said Petko Kovatchev of the Green Policy Institute in Sofia, speaking on behalf of the BeleNE campaign. “There are many alternatives. Belene will only create dependency on Russia, and that is exactly why the Russian president [is pushing] the project so aggressively.”

Some comments published online by Bulgarian daily Dnevnik allege that momentum for the Belene project is largely a political reaction following the partial closure of Bulgaria’s Kozludui NPP, which also operates with Atomstroyexport reactors. The Kozludui shutdown is widely perceived as having been forced on Bulgaria as a prerequisite for EU membership; thus many people believe that the Belene project is compensation to the NEK (Bulgaria’s national electricity company).

According to terms of the Belene agreement, the main contractor is Russian state-owned Atomstroyexport, the firm responsible for building Slovakia’s Bohunice NPP, Hungary’s Paks NPP and the Kukovany NPP in the Czech Republic. The primary subcontractors will likely be France’s Areva and Germany’s Siemens. Construction is expected to begin in the second half of 2008, while the estimated project cost is EUR 4 billion. If all goes according to plan, Belene NPP, equipped with two 1,000-megawatt reactors, will start operating in 2014.

The 22,000-hectare Persina Nature Park includes the Belene island chain, and is Bulgaria’s only such reserve situated along the Danube. Persina contains several important ecosystems and a unique variety of flora and fauna. The park also serves to protect the river habitat’s bird species, which are diminishing in number.

Green groups redraw ‘development’ map

On February 25 European Commissioner for Regional Policy Danuta Huebener appeared before the European Parliament to award ‘RegioStars’ for innovative development projects. CEE Bankwatch Network and Friends of the Earth Europe convened in Brussels on the very same day to launch a new map detailing development projects of an altogether different stripe, while the two organisations also revealed their selection of ‘RegioScars’—i.e. the “three most ill-conceived projects for EU funding in the new member states in the 2007–2013 period.”

The green groups singled out 50 projects in Central and Eastern Europe that are "environmentally damaging and in many cases economically dubious," according to a Bankwatch press release. The projects singled out for criticism are all being carried out via the EU’s structural and cohesion funds and/or European Investment Bank and are worth an estimated total of EUR 22 billion.

The map, titled EU and EIB Funding in Central and Eastern Europe: Cohesion or Collision?, includes "18 waste incinerators promoted at the expense of recycling which is better for both the environment and economic development; 14 motorways ineptly routed through valuable natural areas or residential zones regardless of possible alternatives; [and] eight river engineering and other water management projects set to destroy unique natural sites;" the Bankwatch press release continued.

“Our aim with this map of controversial projects is to warn about the problems before they happen,” said CEE Bankwatch Network EU-Affairs Coordinator Anelia Stefanova. “Most of the 50 projects are still under preparation.”

The three ‘RegioScars’—selected by an NGO jury based on environmental, economic and social criteria—were the following: a EUR 1 billion scheme for building nine waste incinerators in Poland; Poland’s Via Baltica expressway; and the Czech Republic’s R52 expressway (Brno-Vienna connection). The entire map and detailed explanations can be viewed in PDF format at:<www.bankwatch.org/billions/files/CollisionMap2008Press.pdf>.
Leaked report lays into EU biofuels policy

In January, Friends of the Earth Europe (FOEE) and BirdLife International obtained a leaked report from the European Commission (EC) concerning the EU’s proposal to establish a mandatory target of 10 percent for the use of biofuels in transport.

The leaked report allegedly reveals that the biofuels policy would have a net cost of EUR 65 billion, require enormous tracts of land outside of Europe, and might possibly result in zero savings of greenhouse gas emissions.

The EU’s Joint Research Council (JRC), author of the report in question (‘Biofuels in the European Context’), conducted a cost-benefit analysis to establish whether the use of biofuels (agrofuels) will lead to reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved security of supply and job creation. The JRC came back with pessimistic results on all counts.

The report noted that the greenhouse effect of using nitrogen fertilizers is “significantly higher” than earlier estimates, and that deforestation, peatland draining and grassland ploughing resulting from ramped-up biofuel production could potentially release enough GHGs to negate any possible reductions in emissions. Rather than investing greater quantities of biofuels, the report continued, the EU would be better off investing in additional oil reserve storing capacity to protect against short-term supply shocks. The report went on to claim that the missing part of the employment equation is that jobs created in the biofuel sector would merely be offset by job destruction in other sectors.

“Using the same EU resources of money and biomass, significantly greater [greenhouse gas] savings could be achieved by having ... an overall target instead of a separate one for transport,” the report concluded.

Hungary adopts national climate change strategy

On March 17, Hungary’s government quickly and unanimously adopted a national climate change strategy to assist the country in meeting obligations under proposed EU legislation tabled in January, one of which is to slash emissions by 18 percent (from 1990 levels) by the year 2020. Strategy financing will derive from sales of Kyoto carbon credits and funds from the Hungarian government’s environment and energy operational programme, ENDS reported in mid-February. Environment Minister Gabor Fodor stressed that energy consumption must be "separated" from economic growth.

European Union update

EEB assesses Portugal’s EU presidency

In December, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) reflected on the legacy of Portugal’s EU presidency from an environmental perspective, praising the Iberian country’s awareness-raising efforts about water scarcity, its proposal for a worldwide ban on mercury, and leadership in Bali to address climate change. But Portugal did fall short in other areas according to the EEB.

“Portugal’s presidency will be remembered for leading the EU in a united front against climate change in Bali, so that in the end the USA had to bow,” said EEB Secretary General John Hontelez in a published statement. “However, we do not positively view Portugal’s concrete work on pesticides and sustainable development.”

Specifically, the EEB pressed the European Council to take action in all areas where sustainable development was poor, but was disappointed when the EC focused only on the transport sector. Regarding pesticides, the EEB criticised the Agriculture Council for not setting specific reduction targets.

Slovenia’s current EU presidency will likewise be subjected to the EEB’s ‘Ten Green Tests’ criteria for the duration of its six-month term.

Europeans fret over biodiversity loss

According to the first of several opinion polls on environmental issues commissioned by EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas, most Europeans believe that biodiversity loss is a “serious problem.”

More than 25,000 people were polled in the November 2007 Eurobarometer survey. Most respondents opined that biodiversity loss is a global issue, and a majority agreed that Europe has a moral obligation to stop it.

“Given this strength of public support, it is surprising that protecting biodiversity is not higher on the political agenda,” Dimas wrote in his blog in January.

The survey results, however, also revealed poor general awareness of EU environment policies. Few, for example, are familiar with the Natura 2000 network of protected sites, which is the cornerstone of the bloc’s biodiversity policy. This is a particularly worrisome revelation for the environment commissioner, given that the network comprises 20 percent of the EU’s total land area.

Dimas said the commission plans to launch a “major communication campaign” next year.

Protection zone pits EU against Croatia

The extension of a Croatian ban on fishing in parts of the Adriatic has coaxed a strong reaction from Brussels. The EU is urging Croatia to quickly resolve the matter so that the country’s EU accession process can move ahead quickly.

Croatia’s Ecological and Fisheries Protection Zone was introduced in 2004 and originally excluded EU member states, although the restrictions have never been enforced. An extension of the unilateral ban from of January 1 has especially angered Italy and Slovenia. Slovenia and Croatia already have several border disputes, including maritime disagreements. Italy claims that the protection zone also obstructs both fishing and naval exercises, while Croatia claims per annum losses of up to EUR 300 million from lost fish stocks.

Croatia began EU entry talks in 2005, having closed two of a total 35 policy areas in 2006. The Croatian Parliament also plans to harmonise its domestic legislation to EU norms by passing 119 new or changed laws in 2008. The European Parliament hopes to reach a “final decision” on Croatia’s EU accession by 2009.
Poland bends Russia’s ear for land gas route

Poland’s new prime minister, Donald Tusk, travelled to Moscow in February to argue for a land-route alternative to Russia’s proposed Nord Stream offshore gas pipeline, a 1,200-kilometre direct seabed link from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea.

Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland—major transport links for Russian gas—worry that the Nord Stream link increases their vulnerability to being cut off from Russian supplies, while Sweden and Finland are concerned about possible environmental impact.

Russia is eager to further boost its export share to Europe, but would also like to bypass as many transit countries as possible. While the Nord Stream option allows for such bypassing, Russia still awaits permission to transport beneath international waters. The Nord Stream option is also expensive.

“The land pipeline may cost about USD 3 billion. So why pay USD 12 billion if you can pay four times less?” Jerzy Rutkowski, secretary for economic issues at the Polish Embassy in Moscow, told Reuters.

The strongest objection to Poland’s ‘Amber route’ scheme comes from Gazprom, the Russian gas export monopoly. Gazprom, which not only supplies 25 percent of Europe’s gas but is majority owner of Nord Stream, alleges that Amber advocates are only out to collect transit fees.

Claiming that an undersea pipeline would cost 15 percent less to operate than an onshore pipeline in 25 years’ time, Nord Stream spokeswoman Irina Vasilyeva told Reuters that offshore pipelines, far from human activity, actually pose lower environmental risks.

Latvian President Valdis Zatlers remarked that his country would support the Amber scheme, pending agreement between Russia, Germany and Poland: “It has the same economic efficiency but is much better in terms of security and the environment.”

Sturgeon crisis forces Russia to seek state monopoly on caviar

Russia intends to establish a state caviar monopoly and crack down even harder on poachers to save the sturgeon population from extinction, a Russian state official revealed in January.

Caviar, produced from the sturgeon’s delicate eggs, commands such high prices on the international market that poaching threatens to kill off the ‘tsar fish’ for good. State control over illegal harvesting has weakened considerably since the break-up of the Soviet Union, while pollution is also major factor in the drastic decline of the sturgeon population. Most of the world’s sturgeon spawn in rivers that flow into the Caspian Sea, but numbers of the highly coveted beluga sturgeon, for example, have fallen off by 90 percent in the past two decades, according to one Russian estimate.

State officials have been toying with the idea of creating a state caviar monopoly for years, but 2008 could see a draft law brought up for debate, according to Andrei Krainiy, Russia’s head of fisheries. “The idea of a monopoly has been introduced into the draft law—of state regulation of the whole process, from nurturing sturgeon to processing and sale,” Krainiy was quoted in the Russian media. “This does not mean that the private sector will have no place, but it means the state will control all of the processes very strictly.”

By placing the caviar production process strictly in state hands, Russia hopes to prevent poachers and gangs, often heavily armed, from joining with corrupt officials that bring illegal product to market. Krainiy has also mentioned implanting electronic chips to monitor fish numbers and location.

Hungary confronts neighbour over Raba pollution

In February, Hungarian Environment Minister Gabor Fodor accused neighbouring Austria of failure to deal with river pollution emanating from a leather factory situated on a river that flows through both countries.

Fodor made the allegations after visiting the Raba River (the Raab in Austria) at Szentgotthard, a Hungarian town near the Austrian border. According to the environment minister, recent samples taken from the river show that tanning waste has risen threefold in the past five years, despite pressure from Hungary to bring pollution to below acceptable limits.

“Our patience is at an end. Austria has to finally come up with a satisfactory solution,” Fodor was quoted in Reuters. Meanwhile, the Hungarian government has been unsuccessful in urging Austria to revoke the Wollsdorf plant’s operating license. Despite the refusal, the two governments did strike an accord in summer 2007 to the effect that Austria would crack down on pollution and inform Hungary of violations. Hungary claims that Austria has failed to honour its pledge. Austria, for its part, vouches for the effectiveness of the factory’s “state-of-the-art” water-treatment facilities.
World leadership with grass roots

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.
Victr. No spelling mistake here, just a proper name: Victr Makovchik. Victr likes his name spelt with an ‘a’—the proper way to write it in Belarusian, he emphasises. Any arguing that the name actually derives from Latin, not Russian, won’t help; it just brings an innocent, jolly smile to his face, and the inevitable: “Yes, yes, I know.”

Victr, 33, is not a nationalist of any kind, and certainly has nothing against Russian language or culture. He even won a recent essay-writing competition in Russian to study business at a Moscow university. Rather, the point he’s after is one of being different, of standing for one’s identity, of even going against the tide when necessary.

Making such a point in today’s Belarus isn’t easy, and it gets Victr into trouble every now and then. But it often brings him luck. He has recently managed to get a waste-related project off the ground, but only after having spent a year locked in a Quixote-like struggle against windmills. In January, shortly after the Orthodox Christmas, Victr...
organised and delivered his first environmental workshop for teachers in his home town of Beloozersk in south-western Belarus.

The workshop marks the end of a long and difficult wait to begin working with EUR 1.6 million for environmental improvements in border municipalities of Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. The scheme was to support local efforts to improve waste collection and disposal, and to deal with other urban challenges concerning air and water quality. One side benefit of these activities is that they have encouraged partnership between civil society and government officials, which is a challenging task in some of these target countries, including Belarus.

Patience and perseverance pay off
Beloozersk translates loosely in English as White Lake, but Victar’s project aims at improving the town’s solid waste management and disposal system, in addition to that of regional centre Bereza, another small town in Brest Oblast.

Back in 2005, when TCAS was announced, Victar was elected a member of the Beloozersk Local Council of Deputies while running as an independent candidate. Contrary to what many observers might think, running for and winning local office as an independent is not an impossibility in Belarus, as Victar cheerfully explains: “People know each other ‘round here, and if they know you’re good they’ll vote for you.” Running for national office as an independent isn’t as easy, he realises, having been advised by security officers after a previous attempt not to try it again—though, of course, it was “friendly” advice.

In late spring 2006, a training session took place in Minsk at which TCAS consultants from the REC and Netherlands-based Rural Haskoning met with municipality representatives interested in filing EU proposals for funding. It was at this session when I first met Victar—a young man possessing a boundless and almost child-like optimism. Fascinated with his newly acquired knowledge of EU environmental commitments and policies, he exclaimed afterwards that his new “dream” was to get a TCAS project going in Beloozersk.

The dream appeared to have come true just four months later, when the proposal from the Municipality of Beloozersk and Eco Project (a Minsk-based NGO), received the only TCAS grant to be awarded in Belarus. “Our Pride” posters: photos of students excelling either in sports or their studies. The “Agitation Board” was right behind, calling on students and teachers to participate in various activities ranging anywhere from theatre and concert performances to—separate waste collection! The children appeared well disciplined and greeted strangers with courtesy and politeness. I noticed a schedule for sport courses on the corridor wall: times for football, tennis, rowing and more. With everything clean and neat, the walls and windows were fresh, it could have been two decades ago anywhere in CEE. There was, however, one single difference: the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Translated into Russian, the Helsinki Charter is prominently on display in the school’s lobby. Who would dare suggest that no one cares about human rights anymore?

The lecture hall is full, but on this occasion the teachers are seated behind their desks. Victar lectures on and on, thus honouring the strong post-Soviet tradition of monologue rather than discussion. Also, as part of the same tradition, participants are very reluctant to stand up and speak out individually; they’d rather remain within the comfort zone of the group, and speak from their places.

Slowly the talk moves beyond environmental issues. “A single soldier is still a soldier; but having a team makes a difference,” Victar says. How can a small group of people plan an EU project? What funding sources are available for environmental activity within Belarus? How easy is it to obtain foreign funding for an environmental project? The answers come one by one, based on Victar’s already extensive experience. By now Victar has piqued the group’s interest. About midday the bravest of the teachers (mostly women of various ages) stand up and present the environmental project ideas from their groups. Victar approves of everything he hears. He is optimistic, fascinated, cheerful. During the afternoon a wave of enthusiasm and ideas sweeps across the room, while teachers from various schools are working in thematic groups and discussing their first environmental action projects. “I think I’ll be able to put a bit of the money from our EU budget into all these ideas,” Victar whispers between presentations. “They all fit our project goal, don’t they?”

As he did they do. Among the TCAS priorities, approved by EuropeAid, the project needs to be “practical and result in a measurable improvement in the quality of life for the inhabitants of the concerned municipality.” And what could be more practical in Belarus these days than a small group of actively involved citizens who are convinced of their ability to change things for the better? “You don’t need big money or expensive equipment to achieve change,” Victar concludes. “Even a single class at school can make a huge difference.” And so in turning his first workshop into a master class of active citizenship, Victar Makovich is supplying the kind of difference his country needs most.

Our work proves that if you have an idea in the field of environment, it’s possible to find support—both within Belarus and abroad.

Fourteen long months came and went before the newly-inaugurated project manager’s dream had a chance to actually materialise. During this time, however, the TCAS programme term expired, and there was a real chance that the project would never happen after all. Victar’s energy and optimism began to wane, but his persistence paid off when the transfer was made just two weeks before the New Year. Victar’s project could finally get underway. “As a result of [the delays], we’re doing the workshop now, and not last year as planned,” he grins. “Our work proves that if you have an idea in the field of environment, it’s possible to find support—both within Belarus and abroad.”

Same lecture hall, new lesson plan
Victar’s workshop to raise citizen awareness of the importance of separated waste collection was held in one of Beloozersk’s secondary schools, and the primary participants were teachers and extracurricular educators from the two towns. The idea was to get participants involved with separate waste collection and environment protection, and in turn to involve their students. According to the project plan, what should follow the workshop is a coordinated action for local authorities and the public utility company, along with the purchase of collection bins. Victar hopes that these steps will lead to the introduction of a separated waste collection and processing system in Beloozersk and Bereza. But he has even more on his ambitious agenda.

As someone who first attended school in communist-era Bulgaria, it was something like time travel for me to walk into a Belarusian school—even something of a thrilling experience. Welcoming me in the lobby were “Our Pride” posters: photos of students excelling either in sports or their studies. The “Agitation Board” was right behind, calling on students and teachers to participate in various activities ranging anywhere from theatre and concert performances to—separate waste collection! The children appeared well disciplined and greeted strangers with courtesy and politeness. I noticed a schedule for sport courses on the corridor wall: times for football, tennis, rowing and more. With everything clean and neat, the walls and windows were fresh, it could have been two decades ago anywhere in CEE. There was, however, one single difference: the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Translated into Russian, the Helsinki Charter is prominently on display in the school’s lobby. Who would dare suggest that no one cares about human rights anymore?

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A local initiative in Poland takes retailers to task for giving out plastic bags free of charge

Baggers can be choosers

By Wojciech Kosc

Would you like a plastic bag? This is a question being asked in shops, groceries and hypermarkets across Poland that customers aren’t used to hearing. In fact, until recently, cashiers across the country have automatically placed purchased merchandise in plastic bags—even if it’s just a single apple, even if the customer doesn’t particularly want a bag.

This automatic giving of plastic bags to shoppers means that a great many of these bags quickly find their way onto Poland’s streets, into and underneath trees and bushes, hanging from telephone wires, or just blowing around in the wind. But not all the blame for this unsightly waste should be levelled at customers, who, to be fair, aren’t likely to turn down something given away for free, no matter how ephemeral its usefulness. On the other hand, those most critical of the indiscriminate handing out of plastic bags are unlikely to rally too many shoppers to their cause, which is why it has taken a legal effort and major media campaign to try and phase out the millions of plastic bags resulting from the millions of shopping transactions that take place in Poland each day.

According to Krzysztof Piatkowski, a Lodz city councillor from Poland’s Law and Justice party, and the individual who initiated the anti-bag campaign, some 600,000 bags are given out to Lodz shoppers each day. The figure for Warsaw is 1.8 million bags, while the nationwide total is 18 million.

“Most of [these bags] aren’t recovered and recycled, and they simply end up in waste landfills,” says Piatkowski.

At one hypermarket in Warsaw, according to data from Warsaw City Hall’s environment department, some 300,000 disposable plastic bags are given away to customers each month. This same hypermarket also sells reusable bags, and sells about 9,000 in a typical month.

Apart from the fact that most of the disposable bags become waste almost immediately, there are other downsides as well, according to critics. Plastic bags decompose very slowly—for as long as 400 years—which means, even if there are no immediate toxic by-products of degradation, they become an accumulating mass of litter that blights the landscape, and sometimes clogs water drains. The key polluting factor, says Piatkowski, is that the production of plastic bags involves burning fossil fuels, the use of which is almost universally blamed for causing or accelerating global warming.

Taking the initiative

Last summer, Piatkowski tabled a local regulation introducing a ban on the free handing out of plastic bags at local retail outlets, which the Lodz City Council approved. A measure to introduce the ban within respective municipal limits also met with approval from city councils in Tychy, Zabrze, Inowroclaw and Gdansk, but here ran into difficulty.

First off, the Lodz regional governor struck down the Lodz regulation as unconstitutional, alleging that it violates the principle of economic freedom. “The governor’s ruling stalled not just the Lodz initiative, but also those in other Polish towns where similar regulations were ready to pass to a vote,” Piatkowski explains. “But local governments were waiting for the Lodz governor’s reaction.”

In her ruling, Lodz Regional Governor Jolanta Chełmińska stated that a ban on plastic bags could only be instituted by the Sejm (Poland’s parliament) if it constituted a “significant public interest.” Faced with this setback, Piatkowski and local politicians from other towns and cities turned the focus of their campaign energies toward building a persuasive argument that such a ban is, indeed, of significant public interest.

On February 17, representatives of the ‘anti-bag movement’ met in Lodz in order to kick-start a potentially more effective strategy. This time around, city council representatives from across Poland, making a concerted effort, managed to collect 1,000 signatures under the so-called ‘citizens’ draft law’ to change portions of the Packaging Law now in effect.

This was the first step toward persuading the Sejm to add the draft to its agenda, but a further 100,000 signatures need to be collected in order to submit an official draft to the parliamentary body. Only then will MPs be required to commence deliberation on the draft.

“I’m pretty confident that collecting the 100,000 signature requirement won’t prove a problem,” says Piatkowski. “Since the Lodz initiative got through to the media, I have received hundreds of phone calls and emails with support from across Poland. And we also have the support of environmental NGOs.”

According to the draft law on banning plastic bags, a copy of which Piatkowski showed to Green Horizon before its official
presentation to the Sejm, "retail and services must not [give out] non-biodegradable packaging [free of charge]." But the draft text also includes a proviso that the Environment Ministry should come up with a list of goods for which such packaging may be used—like fresh fish, for example.

**Two sides to every story**

As with any environment regulation that affects business, not everyone is happy with the campaign’s efforts to limit the free distribution of plastic bags, and some of the most vocal opposition is coming from the bag producing contingent. These producers have even set up their own lobbying body called the Coalition for Ecological Packaging. The coalition claims that efforts to ban plastic bags are actually more harmful than beneficial—both in terms of customer interest and the environment.

The Lodz initiative, which has now gone nationwide, has even provoked the European Plastics Converters (EuPC) into speaking up on the issue. After conducting its own legal analysis of Piatkowski’s efforts in Lodz, EuPC concluded that “reasons behind the [Lodz] resolution are mainly visual, and are not based on scientific facts but on public perception … [T]he polluters are not the products per se, but the consumers who leave the plastic bags on the streets, in parks, etc.”

Moreover, EuPC said that “[European Union] Member States and local authorities cannot prohibit the placing on the market of a product produced in the EU, respecting the only valid legislation, namely the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive; which is, from a legal perspective, hierarchically higher than any local or national legislation.”

The latter argument is certainly what Poland’s Environment Ministry must bear in mind when proceedings on the draft begin in the Sejm. So far, the ministry has not spoken on the issue in any decisive way, but from various statements of Environment Minister Maciej Nowicki, as well as his aides, one could infer that an outright ban on the free handing out of plastic bags might not be the way to go.

The ministry seems to be referring mainly to the point raised by the EuPC that it is customer behaviour that is primarily responsible for littering Poland’s cities and countryside with plastic bags, not the manufacture and free distribution of plastic bags as such. Therefore, a new media campaign got underway in January to adjust to this perception. “We’d like to promote reusable bags as something that’s fashionable,” says ministry spokesman Michal Milewski.

What Poland’s Environment Ministry appears to be suggesting in rather diplomatic terms is that imposing a ban on plastic bags is to exaggerate the contribution of one component to what is a highly complex problem. Based on data from two UK-based organisations, Carrier Bag Consortium and the Packaging and Films Association, the ministry might actually have a point. These groups calculated that plastic bags account for just 1 percent of total waste output in Britain, and that 80 percent of consumers reuse those bags after bringing them home from a shop or supermarket.

According to Polish environmental NGO Nasza Ziemia (Our Earth), one solution to the problem that might be more effective than introducing controversial regulations or a costly media campaign would be for big retail chains to simply assess the raw numbers—that is, to carry out a detailed cost-benefit analysis. The NGO argues that, instead of buying millions of plastic bags that are then handed out to customers for free, retailers could nearly completely eliminate these costs by presenting customers with a clear choice: "Either you buy a reusable bag from us, or you provide your own bag."

Then again, maybe customer perception would change over time if retailers asked: “Would you like some free garbage?”

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SYLVAN SQUALOR: A heap of rubbish, plastic shopping bags and bin-liners mars a rural setting near Bialystok in northeast Poland.

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"I propose to adopt the Bali Action Plan...and as I see no objections...it is so decided." The speaker of those words, Rachmat Witoelar, Indonesia’s Minister of Environment and President of the 13th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, then struck the gavel on the table. The audience, overcome with relief and emotion, then rose to its feet for a standing ovation. Thus the adoption of the Bali Road Map proved the climax of long, painstaking negotiations—a hard-fought reward for negotiators’ efforts and observers’ patience.

For almost two weeks, negotiators from 192 parties to the convention worked feverishly, sometimes long into the night, trying to craft a final shape to this document—striving to reach a delicate balance between the interests of ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries, environmental interests and economic interests, present generations and future generations. The proceedings were supposed to conclude on Friday, December 14, but delegates took one extra day for round-the-clock negotiations. The last plenary session was adjourned no less than three times, with losses of mutual trust happening through frequent and significant misunderstandings, before negotiators could agree to adopt the Bali Road Map.

It is necessary to look back a few years to gain a better understanding of why the Bali Road Map is such an important document. The UN Convention on Climate Change was signed in 1992, though ratification and entering into force was still several years away. The Parties to the Convention recognised even back then the threats that global warming posed to the planet and humankind, and that it was necessary to mitigate the effects of climate change. Of course, not all Parties to the Convention were equally responsible for the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the Earth’s atmosphere. (The Parties who assumed their historical responsibility are listed in Annex I of the Convention.)

Continued on page 17
BALI’S MOVERS AND SHAKERS: Out of doors it was a colourful display of pageantry and protest; once inside, it was time to get down to serious business.
Health concerns are too often excluded from the great climate change debate

Get-well MESSAGES

By Nathan Johnson

Climate change is a problem of such broad dimensions that it is difficult to break down conveniently in terms of specific impacts on specific sectors. The environmental consequences of climate change are the most obvious, but there are also political, economic, social and security concerns that come into play. All of these concerns were debated, with varying degrees of success, during the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali, Indonesia (Dec. 3–14), but what went largely ignored at the conference were the direct and indirect effects of climate change on human health.

Margaret Chan, director general of the World Health Organization (WHO), has stated publicly that climate change will be this century’s “defining issue for public health.” Given the worst-case climate change scenarios that scientists have modelled (and even some of the more optimistic ones), Chan is not engaging in hyperbole. In fact, nearly every single climate change phenomenon will carry health-related consequences in some way or other. As a result, various health-sector professionals and journalists are trying to come up with ways to communicate more clearly and effectively the close relationship between climate change and health. In the words of WHO’s Roberto Bertollini: “Climate change has moved to the forefront, but not with health as the focus.”

Bertollini agrees with claims that global warming is contributing to an increase in extreme weather events, and is also concerned that many of the major killers (viruses and vector-borne diseases) are climate sensitive. He believes that health professionals and agencies need to study the observable effects of climate change in order to provide tangible links between climate change and health. Precise details are important, he says, because mere predictions and forecasts can be risky in trying to convince target audiences. Bertollini adds, however, that such prognosticating can be useful in terms of trying to set specific health organization goals.

Walking the talk

Robin Stott, vice chair of Medact and co-chair of the BMJ-initiated Climate and Health Council, has spent his entire professional life in the medical field and is a strong advocate for taking personal and collective responsibility for human impact on the environment. Drawing inspiration from figures such as Ivan Illich and Nelson Mandela, Stott echoes the inspirational South African’s call for people to find a way to “live in the world without destroying it”—to bring about instead a “flourishing global civilisation.”

Stott believes that the two greatest problems confronting global society are climate change and the widening resource gap between rich and poor populations. And while many people are deeply concerned about these very issues, he insists that each of us needs to “walk the talk” in terms of changing our lives and habits in order to reduce our environmental impact on the planet, and that failure to do so undermines any moral authority behind any ostensibly green advocacy.

Speaking in Geneva at a late-January ‘dialogue’ between journalists and health professionals, Stott asked how many people in the room knew the size of their carbon footprint, and then if they knew the infant mortality rate of the country in which they lived. From the number of hands that went up (or rather, how many did not), it became clear that many in the room lacked some basic information and awareness of—and, perhaps, commitment to—the very issues that were being discussed.

According to Stott, the United States produces 20 tonnes per person in annual carbon emissions. European Union residents produce half that amount on average, while Chinese and Indian totals are just 3 tonnes and 1.5 tonnes respectively. But the truly alarming figure is that our planet only has the capacity to sustainably absorb annual carbon emissions of 1.4 tonnes per person. Clearly, our current emission levels need to come down, and quickly. Stott even warns that if we are somehow able to reach a global CO2 emissions target of 450ppm, there’s still a fifty-fifty chance of very serious climate change taking place.

In the face of such dire warnings, Stott remains adamantly optimistic that disaster can be averted if enough people commit themselves to reducing consumption. “Not only are there ways to shrink our personal carbon footprint, we can also make the effort to ensure that the organisations we are associated with do likewise,” he says. “It’s not impossible that we advocate for a health-promoting post-Kyoto arrangement.”

Greener lifestyles, better health

Implementing real policy change at national, regional and municipal levels requires clear vision, lots of money, widespread cooperation—and time. Such policy changes will be vital in the long run toward mitigating the effects of climate change, but there are several ways that individual citizens in all parts of the world can make efforts today to not only green the planet, but to enjoy better health. While schools and educational institutions can help tremendously with information campaigns to get young people involved with ways to save energy at home, hospitals, doctors and medical organisations (such as WHO) can encourage more active lifestyles and healthier diets that can lead to many other environmental and social benefits.

Anna Coote, commissioner of health at the UK Sustainable Development Commission, argues that health systems must more effectively prevent people from needing to go to hospital to begin with, but warns that terms such as ‘prosperity’ and ‘the bottom line’ first need to be broadly redefined in order to avoid providing what could actually be described as an “illness service.”

Coote lists walking and cycling as activities that not only benefit respiratory and overall health, but also decrease the amount of motor traffic, which in turn leads to fewer motor vehicle accidents and injuries. In terms
of diet, encouraging people to buy food from local producers and markets is another win-win strategy, according to the health commissioner. Not only does this lead to reduced consumption of fast food (a major cause of obesity), but locally grown foods contain fewer chemicals, and require less packaging and transport. Buying fresh, near-to-home products (even if they are a little bit more expensive) helps to stimulate local economies, and an economically healthy community is also better for mental health, Coote explains.

From the mouths of babes

The two-day Geneva discussion on climate change and health concluded on an upbeat note with some enthusiastic participation from members of the Australian Youth Delegation to the Model United Nations. More than a dozen young people articulated a range of opinion about climate change and health, and suggested several ways that health organisations and green campaigns can communicate to young people more effectively, as the right kind of messages can have significant and lasting effects. One delegate, for example, described his youngest brother as the family’s environmental conscience and ‘energy policeman.’

Other delegates were more cynical and expressed frustration with politicians, governments and polluting industries that either fail to make environmental commitments or pay such problems the merest lip service. Such pessimism is well founded indeed, but the general consensus among these charismatic young delegates and their listeners was that positive messages need to be sent out, and in such a way that each person feels that they can make an important difference. And, hopefully, health issues will soon begin to be mentioned in the same breath with climate change concerns.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the convention’s governing body. A country becomes a Party to the Convention on a voluntary basis; however, the stipulations of Convention decisions become mandatory, and can indeed have significant implications for the economic and social life, legal system or ethical stance of a signatory country.

Obviously, the recognition of climate change as a problem was not enough without taking concrete action. In 1997, during the Third Conference of Parties (COP 3), an outline for the first climate change regime resulted in the now-famous document known as the Kyoto Protocol to the Convention. The Kyoto Protocol identified a period within which parties should limit their greenhouse gas emissions by their respectively assigned amounts. This so-called ‘first commitment period’ lasts from 2008 to 2012. Some of the parties (listed in Annex B of the protocol) adopted quantifiable reduction targets for their greenhouse gas emissions. These parties made a commitment to cap their GHG emissions during the first commitment period at a certain level, known as an ‘assigned amount.’ The typical reduction target is 8 percent, meaning that the party agrees not to exceed their 1990 emissions level, which is reduced by 8 percent and multiplied by five years. Kyoto, which came into force in 2005, also describes ways of applying accounting methods for greenhouse gas emissions, and describes mechanisms for achieving emission targets. Although developing countries did not commit themselves to the reduction targets, the majority have ratified the Kyoto Protocol in order to participate in its economic mechanisms. By the time COP 13 convened in December 2007, only one industrialised country, the United States, had refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. This lone holdout has continually expressed concern along the lines that climate change mitigation efforts will place excessive restraints on the American economy.

The scientific community regularly provides the international community with strong evidence that climate change mitigation efforts carried out during the first commitment period are inadequate by far to prevent further rising of the planet’s average temperature. As a higher incidence of extreme weather events has helped to make clear, responding to the direct consequences of climate change has become just as important as mitigation. Nicholas Stern and other economists have issued stark warnings that choosing to postpone action in order to avoid higher costs will merely shift the burden to the near future, at which time costs to address these problems will have risen at least tenfold.

As the Kyoto regime will expire in 2012, the international community is now trying to elaborate the main features of the second commitment period, which is quite a challenge because there have been enormous geopolitical changes since the convention was ratified. Some of the more dynamic economies among so-called developing countries now use greater amounts of energy, and these countries are increasing their GHG emissions in absolute terms. Thus it becomes clear that attempts to prevent global temperature rises will be impossible without the involvement of all geopolitical players.

The Bali Road Map, or Bali Action Plan (Decision 1/COP.13), represents a negotiating programme for strengthening the UN climate change regime beyond the initial commitments of the Kyoto Protocol. Key to the success of the Bali Road Map is the clear involvement of developing countries. “The developing countries are willing to commit... to measurable, reportable and verifiable mitigation actions,” South Africa’s representative said in a plenary deposition. “This has never happened before. A year ago it was totally unthinkable.” Recognising that developing countries were committed to taking measurable action, the head of the US delegation took the floor for the last time, pleading: “In the spirit of cooperation, the United States will join for the adoption of the Bali Road Map.” The audience greeted this rather unexpected statement with warm applause. Of course, the role of the European Union is difficult to overstate. Having come prepared to encourage compromise and to commit itself to serious reduction targets of 20 to 30 percent, the EU truly steered the course for this round of negotiations.

Does the adoption of the Bali Road Map mean that the international community now has a new climate change regime to save the Earth? Unfortunately, it provides no such guarantee, which naturally makes the agenda a target for criticism from some quarters. Some environmental groups, hopeful for more drastic and immediate measures to address climate change, are already referring to the Bali document as the “Mother of All Indecisions.” And Washington wasted little time in watering down its own hopeful Bali rhetoric, as White House Press Secretary Dana Perino announced on the very day of road map adoption that the US would not make any further commitments unless the biggest developing nations and emerging economies would take on greater responsibilities of their own.

So, is there any hope? There is definitely some. The success during negotiations on topics not under the Convention but the Kyoto Protocol (such as the Ad Hoc Working Group negotiations, the setting of a 2009 deadline, the Adaptation Fund, and providing scope and content for the Article 9 review of the Kyoto Protocol) are clear evidence that the international climate change community is willing to adopt the next climate regime. There is also a strong chance that COP 13 in Bali, Indonesia, COP 14 in Poznan, Poland (2008) and COP 15 in Copenhagen, Denmark (2009) will succeed in finalising the next climate change regime.

You can link to a full report of the World Health Editors Network meeting in Geneva on the WHEN pages of the WHCA.
The Japan Special Fund of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), established in 1993, is a mechanism through which the Government of Japan supports the REC in its efforts to solve the environmental problems of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region.

Bridging East and East

In recent years the Japan Special Fund has turned its major attention to climate change, one of the most challenging environmental issues of our generation. Its aim in this field is to support the CEE countries’ efforts to comply with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.
Continued from page 5

ability is built into the whole strategy, in contrast to the European context where you have the Lisbon strategy—which is visible to some extent—on one hand, and the less visible sustainable development strategy [from Gothenburg] on the other.

As holder of the EU presidency, will Slovenia look to bridge these two EU strategies into one common action plan?

Regarding the Lisbon strategy four areas of action emerged in 2006: knowledge and innovation; competitiveness; social issues and employment; and, environment and climate change. The clear introduction of energy and climate change as one of those pillars is a very good starting point for working toward convergence between sustainable development and the Lisbon Strategy. And this was reinforced last year with the EU setting sustainability targets for 2020. What we’re actually having problems with is that the [issue of] energy and climate change has become so high-profile that it’s taking on a life of its own outside of the Lisbon strategy. The tendency to place this issue outside [of the strategy] is bad, in my opinion, because dealing with climate change requires a focus on research and development—which happens to be Slovenia’s pillar number one. You mustn’t, meanwhile, do things that ruin the economy or harm competitiveness. Instead, you must feed eco-innovation into new generations of industrial products that Europe will [be able to] export when the notion of getting greener catches on elsewhere in the world and countries will be able to afford these products. Keeping climate change well connected to the Lisbon strategy is one of the things we’ll be debating at the European Council in March–June.

Does Slovenia’s proposal that greenhouse gas emissions could still grow by 4 percent, in comparison with the EU Commission’s proposal, fit into that debate?

No. I very much agree that, of the 20% reduction targets by 2020, the most important is that of greenhouse gas emission reduction. We should do what we can in this area. The major problem Slovenia has in this respect is transit/transport, which no country at [a geographical] crossroads can solve by itself. It has to be solved through a coherent European policy. It has to be solved by people who load the truck, and by those who unload the truck, and not by somebody in between. Otherwise, traffic just will go some place else, through other countries, and the route will be longer—so that makes no sense.

One thing you wrote on your blog that impressed me is that the problem with the Lisbon strategy is that people just don’t care. How can Slovenia use its EU presidency to address apathy?

I would dare to speculate that climate change has a higher profile in Western countries than in the poorer countries of CEE. Climate change is not a central debate in Slovenia, so we should, in the context of our EU presidency, do more to raise awareness of this issue.

‘My colleagues and I are in a position of creative conflict, but I would say this is very productive.’

Speaking of awareness, how do you think that public participation in major infrastructure projects could be improved?

Investments in Slovenia that involve land use are generally very slow to develop. Participation of the public and civil society is quite high, and local interests are very much listened to. It takes a long time to establish consensus, and many highways are not built because [achieving consensus] takes years and years. I would also say that the government imposes very few [restrictions] on public participation. Sometimes we’re happy that certain things were built during the Communist era, when the government could say: “It will be here. Period. End of story!” Today, it takes ages and ages to reach an agreement. There are some ski resorts up in the Alps that would probably have no chance [of being built] today, but they bring money for the local population, hotel owners, innkeepers and everybody. Of course, if you speak to NGOs or society at large, they’re never happy about the amount of participation.

Slovenia is widely viewed as the region’s model of transition to a market-based economy. Might Slovenia later be seen as an example for environmentally sustainable development?

Slovenia has done some good things in this area. If you look at Natura 2000, we have about one-third of the country under its protection—lots of forests, lots of clean rivers, etc. Where we are not so successful is transport. Are we a [sustainability] model for other countries? Somehow, we have been able to afford it. And when the region becomes richer, more countries will be able to afford being greener. What is changing as we speak, in terms of new European energy policies and climate change measures, is that you can actually get to each by getting greener, or by investing into green economy, into green products, into green energy.
For the past six years the REC has supported transboundary cooperation and dialogue between Montenegro and Albania through the Skadar/Shkodra Lake component of the EREp project 4.3.23: Transboundary Cooperation through the Management of Shared Natural Resources. During this time, representatives from both countries have participated in building up formal and informal means of cooperation to address this unique transboundary zone.

One of the most notable achievements of the project was the Skadar/Shkodra Lake Forum, which emerged as the main platform for transboundary dialogue between Montenegro and Albania on lake-related issues. Even as an informal body, the forum has managed to facilitate institutional transboundary dialogue. The scope of the forum’s work has expanded significantly, from initially providing a project planning and consulting mechanism to becoming a real actor in the planning and implementation of regional and cross-border policy. The forum is now initiating a discussion to determine its successor—i.e., a new, joint institution to take over the forum’s current functions, in addition to being given greater responsibilities concerning joint management of the lake’s natural resources.

As a formal structure, the Skadar/Shkodra Lake Forum was established as an advisory body to support the planning of project activities. Formerly representing a variety of actors and narrower interests of local communities, the forum evolved into a body developing strategic approaches for the entire transboundary region. The forum ensured that meetings took place each year on a regular basis between key local stakeholders from both sides of the border (NGOs, local officials, schools, tourism boards, water management, nature conservation and national park authorities, environmental inspectorates, etc.). In addition, REC site coordinators, the main local-level facilitators of this process, maintained close cooperation with forum members. Because of this, local stakeholders have been given a significantly stronger mandate to act as real players in decisions and strategies concerning regional development. Forum meetings have also served as efficient cross-sectoral/cross-border coordination mechanisms. From the very outset of the project, the forum helped to build trust and transparency during discussions of broader issues.

Due to its key strategic role in transboundary management, the Skadar/Shkodra Lake Forum has succeeded in initiating discussion and activities toward establishing a new transboundary institution for the lake region that will be even more efficient than existing mechanisms. To this effect, REC Country Office Albania and Country Office Montenegro [had] organised a ceremony for the signing of a statement of cooperation between two newly established NGOs: the Montenegro Skadar Lake Forum and Albanian Shkodra Lake Forum.

Also recognised at the signing ceremony was the Joint Fair of Albanian-Montenegrin Handcraft Producers, which took place on February 2 in Shkodra, Albania. The fair offered participants a unique opportunity to see and purchase handicrafts from the lake region. It is activities such as this that represent the two forums’ efforts to achieve sustainable management of lake resources for the benefit of people, communities and institutions on both sides of the border. Mutual prosperity is, indeed, closely linked to the health of this lake region’s environment and resources.

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**EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Green Pack taken on board in Montenegro**

In Montenegro, the Green Pack will be implemented as part of the West Balkan Green Pack project, a regional endeavour encompassing Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo. During a two-year implementation period the programme’s goal has been to build capacity to transfer know-how, and to establish a basis for further worldwide development in the field of education for sustainable development.

The project module in each country includes three basic phases: feasibility studies; country-specific Green Pack development; and, teacher training and Green Pack dissemination.

The project implementation team organised a scoping visit to Montenegro, along with a meeting with relevant stakeholders, which included the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, as well as national bureaux on textbooks, educational services and examination. Each was presented with Green Pack materials and information on project phases. A public presentation of the Green Pack took place on January 31 at Podgorica’s Hotel Crna Gora. The event, which drew an enthusiastic response, provided reason to be optimistic that such a project can offer meaningful assistance to government efforts in strengthening environmental awareness among young people.

REC Country Office Montenegro’s project manager is now coordinating establishment of a National Council and Project Implementation Working Group to closely monitor developments and provide necessary input to improve project effectiveness and ensure wide acceptance.
Serb master class kicks off CSO campaign

- Strengthening the Role and Function of Civil Society Organisations to Promote Change and Enable Action in the Urban Environment is the title of a series of master classes aimed at capacity building for civil society organisations (CSOs) in the West Balkans. The master class series is part of a Sida-funded programme to promote development of a democratic environmental civil society in SEE, and to promote sustainable development and improved living conditions in urban areas.

The project period is from April 2006 to March 2010.

The first session, the Serbian Master Class, took place in Belgrade from February 4–9 and attracted 36 participants, who completed the five following modules: Lobbying, Watchdogging, Public Participation, Legal Recourse/Advocacy, and Effective Communication and Public Outreach. The overall goal of the class was to provide participants with the tools to address two key questions, namely: “What’s my role in effecting change and environmental action?” and “How can I make a difference?”

According to Jerome Simpson, head of the REC’s Information Programme, the master class series also plays an important role in networking CSOs. As the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme (REEEP) projects for SEE have drawn to a close, there are fewer and fewer national NGO events. The master class inadvertently filled that function, says Simpson. “What’s more, because it’s the only occasion during which so many separate CSO activists are brought together, it’s a welcome opportunity for them to see that they’re not the only ones challenged by poor authority compliance with already weak rules and compliance, or challenged internally by small budgets.”

The remaining master classes, in chronological order, are aimed at participants from Bosnia-Herzegovina (April), FYR Macedonia (May), Montenegro (June), Croatia (September), Albania (October) and Kosovo (November). More home office information on the master class series is available at <www.rec.org/sector/assistance/masterclass.html>.

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

Top journalists honoured in Zagreb

- The region’s first international media awards for coverage of renewable energy and energy efficiency were presented at an official ceremony in Zagreb on March 17. First prize went to Majda Pilibaityte and Mindaugas Nastaravicius for their report “A new nuclear power station for Lithuania: Would it really pay?” Runner-up was Mladen Ilickovic for his report on the state of renewable energy initiatives in Latvia and Croatia. Sharing second prize was Atnanas Georgiev for a series of articles published on utilities, hotels and restaurants in Bulgarian monthly magazines.

The competition was sponsored by the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP), in partnership with the Guardian Foundation and Green Horizon.

Applicants for the award submitted examples of print, radio and television coverage of renewable energy, and a panel of journalists and sustainable energy experts based their decisions on journalistic excellence, quality of information and estimated social impact.

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 Brussels roundtable hailed as a success

On June 29, 2007 the European Commission adopted its first policy document, a green paper on adapting to the impacts of climate change. “Adaptation to Climate Change in Europe: Options for EU Action” describes avenues for action at the EU level, and its main objective is to kick-start a Europe-wide public debate and consultation on the double challenge of making deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change conditions.

The REC partnered with the European Economic and Social Committee in promoting a roundtable to facilitate this debate, which took place in Brussels on February 27. The roundtable was open to all actors: individual citizens, public authorities, the private sector, businesses, towns and cities, academics, networks, policy makers, associations and NGOs.

According to Zsuzsa Ivanyi, head of the REC’s Climate Change Programme, the event was important and successful in that it marked one of the first occasions that EU policymakers stepped up voluntarily to participate in a discussion about climate change—signalling that the issue is finally being taken seriously by top EU brass.

Guido Sacconi, president of the European Parliament Temporary Committee on Climate Change, opened the one-day event, and was followed with introductory remarks from Corrado Clini, chairman of the REC board of directors and director general of the Department for Environmental Research and Development of Italy’s Ministry for Environment Land and Sea. Also giving a presentation was REC climate change expert Yunus Arikam, while REC Executive Director Marta Szgiet Bonifert closed the roundtable with some concluding comments.

The session’s first keynote speaker was Nicholas Hanley from DG Environment, European Commission, who said that it is only in the last couple of years that the European community and Commission has begun to be “somewhat seriously more coherent” in its approach to climate change. “The European Council in March last year gave the commission a clear mandate to come up with a package of proposals with the targets we put on the table on the 23rd of June [2007],” said Hanley. “We in the commission are very keen to see that package go through in order that the community can next year in Copenhagen actually take a strong line in international debate backed up by a substantive engagement with policies of our own.”

Hanley added that climate change adaptation “will upset some aspirations and expectations, agricultural policies and patents,” but that we need the “courage to provoke discussion.”

Vladimir Spidlea, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, also touched on a similar theme in making his final remarks at the roundtable: “The European Union has the means to turn climate change into a technological and social progress factor. I am convinced it will have the will and courage, and will seize the opportunity offered to position itself as a leader on the international field in that domain.”

**CLIMATE CHANGE**

## Knights of the Roundtable: Surveys reveal strong European support for champions of the environment.

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) is a non-profit, non-advocacy, not-for-profit international organisation with a mission to assist in solving environmental problems in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The center fulfills this mission by promoting cooperation among non-governmental organisations, governments, businesses and other environmental stakeholders, and by supporting the free exchange of information and public participation in environmental decision making.

The REC was established in 1990 by the United States, the European Commission and Hungary. Today, the REC is legally based on a charter signed by the governments of 29 countries and the European Commission, and on an international agreement with the government of Hungary. The REC has its head office in Szentendre, Hungary, and country offices and field offices in 17 beneficiary countries, which are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey.

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

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For news and insight on the region’s environment, turn to Green Horizon, the quarterly magazine of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe. Green Horizon alerts readers to developments in the environment and environmental policy, changes in society and innovations in business and technology. It’s your best source of information on the region’s progress toward sustainability.

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Regional mayors extol tolls

Congestion charges haven’t taken hold in CEE, but official support is a key first step

The concept of urban road charging, now as ever, remains a political pipe bomb—one that can vaporise the career of any city mayor who dares touch it. Some would argue that road-use charges would be an especially hard sell in Central and Eastern Europe, where people, for historical reasons, are loath to give up democratic freedoms on collectivist grounds.

However, a few cities in the former socialist camp are pushing forward, albeit slowly and cautiously, with congestion charging schemes along the lines of those adopted fairly recently in central London and Stockholm.

In Lithuania and Latvia, where car ownership has grown more dramatically than anywhere else in Europe (167 and 142 percent, respectively, from 1990–2004, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit), congestion charging has won over the mayors of capital cities.

Latvia’s capital Riga already has a charge for entry into a small part of its historic centre, both to protect buildings from pollution and enhance walkability for tourists. But city mayor Janis Birks wants to curtail car access to an even wider area to address the larger problem of congestion. A feasibility study is underway, although a trial run has been postponed from an originally scheduled starting date in April, according to Janis Lagzdons, an economist working for the Riga City Council. “Now I’m not sure when it will begin,” he says.

In the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, two consecutive mayors have backed a congestion charge proposal for their historic city centre.

They see it as one possible antidote to the routine deluge of commuters that doubles the city’s population from 500,000 to 1 million each workday.

However, the city needs legislative support at the national level to enforce such a charge, according to Mindaugas Laucius, deputy director of the Vilnius Public Transport Agency. Laucius says that prospects could improve with elections coming up later this year, but there’s no certainty.

Congestion charging has been under discussion for at least two years in Prague, which has a higher rate of car ownership (one for every two residents) than 80 percent of European cities. Recently, the city government declared it would implement a pilot road use scheme by the end of 2009. In the meantime, according to city information officer Frantisek Balogh, administrative staff are working on a map of the charging area, carrying out a preliminary strategy study and setting formal goals. Helpfully, the Czech Parliament last year raised the statutory ceiling for road-use fees from CZK 20 to CZK 100 (EUR .80 to EUR 4.00). However, Prague’s mayor’s office still considers national legislation inadequate for efficient implementation of the system.

During a recent conference in Amsterdam, city transport planners and other professionals came together for a perennial meeting of Curacao, an EC-sponsored project devoted to road-user charging. During the project’s two and a half years, the group has come up with a boatload of advice that could help cities bring their proposals to fruition: things like keeping the scheme relatively simple, making sure good transport alternatives exist before road charging begins, and promoting charges as a way to fund transport improvements. For more information, visit <www.curacaoproject.eu>.

The single biggest obstacle, it is agreed, is political acceptance. Road tolls are extremely difficult to sell to voters, and very few city administrations in Europe, or even worldwide, have managed to do it. However, in a few towns here in CEE, mayors have stuck their necks out on the issue and they’ve still got their heads. This is good news for city dwellers.
In ancient Athens, citizens flocked to the amphitheatre to vote on decisions of public interest. When the amphitheatre became too small to accommodate the growing population, Athenians began electing representatives. Now, with the dawn of the information and communications technology (ICT) age, the internet provides us with a possibly new decision-making environment—a sort of virtual amphitheatre.

Besides being a huge source of information and entertainment, the internet is used to interact online and extend social lives beyond working hours. All sorts of virtual communities abound on social networking sites, blogs and message boards, launching forums for participation in campaigns and mass demonstrations. In 2006, for instance, users of MySpace (which attracts some 320,000 profile registrations per day) helped spread the word about immigration rights demonstrations across the US, enabling grassroots information sharing between large numbers of people. Opinions and decisions are also being shared electronically in the environment sector. Parallel with the United Nations Climate Change conference in Bali in December 2007, the REC project piloted a virtual 3D visualisation and planning tool to provide support in public consultation processes: Relying on Google Earth maps, the tool allows online testing of environmental models against various decision scenarios. Malta’s environmental protection agency, since going digital, has noted a “radical increase” in organisations viewing planning applications online, according to information system guru Antoine Zahra, attributing the spike to people no longer having to leave their workplace to stand in queues at the planning office.

With this kind of progress, what are the chances for actually engaging virtual communities in voting procedures? Australia’s Senator On-Line is already leading the way. Touted as the first online democratic party, Senator On-Line’s ten unaffiliated representatives cast their votes based solely on internet response from registered voters.

Politically speaking, one big demographic challenge to address is e-inclusion. With the EU busy rolling out an abundance of e-strategies, a recent UNECE report on knowledge-based economies reveals that many social groups in several countries lag far behind mainstream society in ICT usage. These include recent immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities, the disabled, the long-term unemployed and rural populations.

Meanwhile, in the US, presidential candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are taking a proactive online approach, both having registered on MySpace and gaining 66,000 and 23,000 ‘friends’ respectively. Will voters respond to the environmental merits of such an approach, or will alarm bells ring ‘spam’?

One country where online elections have already taken place is Estonia, and we may soon see virtual voting on day-to-day legislation, policies and programmes, which of course will require a different set of technical solutions to ensure that one person equals one vote. In fact, we may eventually find ourselves asking whether we even need political representation. Now there’s a thought...

Social networking to e-voting
Casting ballots via the internet could reshape the concept of ‘direct democracy’
The Wuppertal Institute hits the mark once again, but it’s an awfully wide target

Fair enough

Daniel Swartz

I first came into contact with the Wuppertal Institute’s groundbreaking research almost 15 years ago while participating in ANPED’S Sustainable Production and Consumption campaign. Wuppertal were pioneers in developing campaigning tools such as ‘ecological footprint,’ ‘ecological rucksack’ and ‘food miles’—terms which have become commonplace in today’s environmental parlance.

In *Fair Future*, published in English translation in 2007, Sachs and Santarius draw from a deep well of disciplines and contributors to explore the topics of social justice and environmental sustainability. While the book is grounded in solid scholarship, conveniently indexed, and (as far as I can tell) carefully translated, it also contains reams of graphs, charts and statistical data that make some arguably excessive demands on the casual reader. (Collecting this information into an appendix might have been a more reader-friendly option.)

The important territory that *Fair Future* covers in its seven chapters is quite broad and beyond the scope of this review, but as a vendor of Fair Trade coffee I was particularly interested in the book’s focus on ‘free trade.’ The authors write: “It would not be surprising if future historians looked back to the Fair Trade movement as a laboratory for the reshaping of the world economy. It is a niche where principles have been tried out that may one day become building blocks for a sustainable system of world trade.” This is a commendable statement, but I still think the book fails to explore Fair Trade in satisfactory detail. Nor is *Fair Future* as pointedly critical of the world’s ‘free trade’ mechanisms as I would expect, given the source.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is, in fact, a powerful global bureaucracy through which unelected trade bureaucrats are empowered to decide the fate of democratically achieved laws. If any local, state or federal law of a WTO member country is found to violate the organisation’s trade rules (focusing on free trade of goods and services), the law must be changed or that country can face economic sanctions. NGOs have voiced concerns that the supposed benefits of free trade have been overtaken by trade sanction threats that are used to dismantle environmental, human rights and consumer protection in favour of corporate interests. For example, positive eco-labelling, such as ‘dolphin-safe’ and ‘turtle-safe’—which let consumers know that drift-nets have not been used in fishing for tuna or sea turtles killed when fishing for shrimp—have become illegal under WTO rulings.

In alternative trade organisations, ‘fair trade’ means that trading partnerships are based on reciprocal benefits and mutual respect; that prices paid to producers reflect the work they do; that workers have the right to organise; that national health, safety, and wage laws are enforced; and that products are environmentally sustainable and conserve natural resources. Worldwide Fair Trade sales total USD 400 million each year, and yet many people remain unaware that such alternative markets exist.

Fair Trade bypasses calls for ‘special deferential treatment’ of poorer southern countries by guaranteeing fairer salaries and conditions for workers, cleaner and ethical production. In the WTO and ‘free trade’ world, the market is still skewed unfairly by state subsidies, such as the USD 1 billion that the US pays its farmers each year not to grow food, and another billion to buy surplus food to keep consumer prices (but not farmers’ incomes) artificially high.

While *Fair Future* is certainly a worthy publication, I find its language and information not quite fresh or ‘cutting edge’ enough for readers already familiar with the subject matter, but too technical for those who are not.
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