A daunting array of challenges needs to be met for sustainable development, economic prosperity and lasting peace to take root in the Black Sea region.

Turn, turn, turn
The International Energy Agency’s Nobuo Tanaka explains what to expect from an ‘energy revolution’

Counterintuition
CEE countries challenge conventional free-market wisdom through alternative food-related practices

Take me to the river
Budapest and Warsaw offer starkly different waterfront development schemes
For environmentally aware readers, small impressions are good impressions. REC Publishing has nearly two decades of specialised experience in printed and web-based documents dealing with sustainability. We have the substantive knowledge to edit and shape the message, and the technical know-how to publish it with minimum ecological impact.

To make the right impression with your message, contact REC Publishing
Tel: (36-26) 504-000 Fax: (36-26) 311-294
E-mail: publishing@rec.org
Green Horizon is the quarterly magazine of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), published from 1990 to the spring of 2004 as The Bulletin. Green Horizon assists the REC in its mission to promote public participation in environmental decision making by providing information on the environment and encouraging cooperation between regional stakeholders.

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

The views and opinions expressed in Green Horizon do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe. Green Horizon is not responsible for the contents of paid announcements and advertising published in the magazine. Green Horizon is available on the Web at <http://greenhorizon.rec.org>.

MAGAZINE TEAM
Editor in Chief: Pavel Antonov
Editor: Nathan Johnson
Designer: Patricia Barna
Proofreader: Michael Lindsay
Administrative officer: Zsuzsa Tovolgyi
Webmaster: Laszlo Tar
Intern: Emma Brown

EDITORIAL BOARD
Climate and energy: Zsuzsa Ivanyi
Corporate finance: Otto Andras Szabo
Environmental law: Stephen Scey
Environmental policy: Greela Ivanova
Environment and security: Marta Szegedi Bentler
EU member states: Beata Wiszniewska
Green financing: Ruslan Zhechkov
Information and research: Jerome Simpson
Public participation: Magdalina Toth Nagy
REC PR: Zsolt Bauer
South Eastern Europe: Radoje Lauwerein
Sustainable development: Janos Zlinszky
Turkey: Sibel Sezer Eralp

CONTRIBUTORS
Maria Khovanskaya
IWojciech Kosc
Cecile Monnier
Sibel Sezer Eralp
Jerome Simpson
Greg Spencer
Daniel Swartz

ART
Pinar Akpinar: Bulgarian Bird Protection Society
Flickr.com
Rehngham PR Limited
istockphoto.com
Bartosz Modrzeski
MaiMultVerde
Reuters
Still Photos
UNESCO

PRODUCTION
Printing: Gelbert, Hungary
Pre-press: Gelbert
Green Horizon is printed on Cyclus Print recycled paper.

SPONSORS AND PARTNERS
Funding for this issue comes from IMELG; the CEE Secretariat of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership; the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; the European Commission CARDS 2005 Regional Programme; the SPUTNIK and CURACAO projects funded by the EC’s 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development; and the Tacis Cities Award Scheme, funded by EuropeAid.

ON THE COVER
Black Sea blues
Rock formations at Lipite Beach, north of Silistar on the Bulgarian coast. Countries bordering the Black Sea, a region of significant economic and strategic importance, are facing serious threats from environmental degradation, as is the sea itself.

COVER ART
Flickr.com

SECTIONs
Forum 4
CEE News 6
Insight 10
Cover Story 14
REC Bulletin 19
Climate Watch 22
Sustainable Transport 23
Legal Matters 24
Information Technology 25
Green Literature 26

CONTACTs
Editorial:
editor@greenhorizon.rec.org
Advertising:
advertise@greenhorizon.rec.org
Subscriptions:
subscribe@greenhorizon.rec.org

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe
Ady Endre ut 9-11
2000 Szentendre, Hungary
Tel: (36-26) 504-000
Fax: (36-26) 311-294
Web: www.rec.org

FORUM
5 Energy for change, power for the future
In an exclusive Green Horizon interview, Nobuo Tanaka, executive director of the International Energy Agency, shares his recipe for a balanced approach to global energy supply, energy security and climate change.

INSIGHT
10 Hungry for alternatives
Can some of Central and Eastern Europe’s Soviet-era traditions help to correct the world’s gross food imbalances?

On the waterfront
The capital cities of Budapest and Warsaw make quite different uses of the rivers flowing through their midst.

COVER STORY
14 Healing nature’s wounds
Recent violence in the Caucasus can be added to the list of obstacles standing in the way of achieving political, economic and environmental stability throughout the Black Sea region.
No more ‘business as usual’

When violence reared its head in the Caucasus this summer, one thing became perfectly clear: Things can no longer be the same for the international community in general and the European Union in particular. The re-emerging ambitions of its large neighbour to the East are putting to the test the principal issue of the 27-nation bloc’s identity—i.e. the concept that economic growth and prosperity go hand in hand with democracy, self determination and human rights.

Thus far, United Europe has been largely successful in upholding this concept. During the Cold War the EU was known for its economic strength and improved quality of life for its citizens. But a major part of the West’s appeal has been its attendant values: freedom of speech and expression, respect for personal dignity, political self-determination, government accountability, fairness and justice—and, not least of all, a healthy environment. These values offered hope and courage to the people of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) during the Soviet era and the transition period that followed. Even today, while enjoying the fruits of investment and economic growth as EU members, CEE societies also benefit from the implementation of EU rules and norms built around the same core values.

But for those states not near enough or lucky enough to join the EU, the picture is increasingly blurry. Obtaining good contracts for Western companies and securing cheaper supplies of oil and natural resources often overwhelms commitments to human rights, stronger democracy and nature protection; but these shortcomings are even more amplified under oppressive regimes. In such states, consumption and profit making have replaced democracy and human rights; ‘business as usual’ persists over demands for change and reform.

Now, with Georgia recently the scene of armed conflict, European public opinion has been shaken into recognising a paradigm shift where energy is concerned. While haunting memories of the not-so-paradigm shift where energy is concerned.

Forums like light, heating and transporta-
tions will not provide environmentally

and for the first time—clearly compre-
hend what used to be a vague political
sound bite: energy dependency. When
forced to consider just how tenuous are
the political and economic links to neces-
sities like light, heating and transporta-
tion, the urgent need for sources of alter-
native energy becomes crystal clear.

In the wake of the Georgia-Russia conflict, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown warned at an emergency EU summit that it would be “no more business as usual” with Russia. To my mind, the best solutions are found within the EU itself, which is already on the right track in already having made commitments to renewable energy. In the words of REC Executive Director Marta Szigeti Bonifert: “Energy efficiency is the lowhanging fruit, and it is hard to understand why Europe is not reaching up for it.”

A decisive policy and technology shift is due if the EU is to wean its economy off fossil fuels. The Stern Review has already delivered decisive proof that a shift to a lower-carbon economy will even be better business than ‘business as usual.’ With a demanding and supportive citizenry from East to West, it’s high time for EU leaders to take decisive and timely action.

Letters to the Editor: Public consultations and Czech car imports

Dear Green Horizon,

Your article ‘Public consulted on revised EBRD policies’ (Green Horizon, June-Aug. 2008) paints a picture that the very act of organising consultative reviews of governance policies ensures for international development financiers that they are delivering on a commitment to public accountability and international best practice.

I agree that policy reviews, accompanied by multi-stakeholder consultations such as [those] recently carried out by the EBRD, may in principle bring the voices of communities affected by projects to relevant bank departments and decision makers. However, what your article did not make clear is that, of the hundreds of comments from stakeholders that were received by the EBRD as part of the consultations, only a low number were ultimately integrated into final policy texts.

During the past three reviews of the disclosure policy, community stakeholders have repeatedly pressed the EBRD to start releasing broader environmental information on the projects that it finances. They have also asked the bank to minimise the current list of exceptions to disclosure that continue to be justified on the basis of “client confidentiality.” Other than agreeing to release confidential information in extreme cases where disclosure would avert serious harm to public health or safety, the EBRD has not moved an inch in the direction of full transparency as promoted by the Aarhus Convention. Thus people in Kazakhstan are still unable to access reports on the dangerous emissions released by Arcelor Mittal’s steel-making facilities in Karaganda and related coal mines that have received substantial EBRD financing for upgrades.

As long as international creditors such as the EBRD fail to fully recognise their public role and favour legitimate public interests over economic interests, these policy review consultations will not provide environmentally sound and sustainable development.

Svetlana Spatar
Green Salvation
Almaty, Kazakhstan
How do you envision a revolution in the utilisation and production of energy?

What I mean by ‘energy revolution’ is that, because of climate change challenges and the current state of supply and demand, we have to significantly alter our approach to energy efficiency. High levels of energy efficiency are necessary, but not enough. We have to reform the power sector through carbon capture power storage, nuclear or renewable energy, but this is also not enough. We need to revolutionise the transport sector by switching from gasoline-combustion engines to things that run on de-carbonised power, whether electricity, biofuels, advanced hybrid or hydrogen fuel cells.

All of this is very costly, by the way, so energy will be very expensive. So the ways of using energy will change, and even distribution channels could be different. Put simply, business or government regulation should focus more on these facts, and profit and investment targets should be changed accordingly, depending on which new elements emerge in the future.

Energy for change, power for the future

By Pavel Antonov

Nobuo Tanaka serves as executive director of the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA). Tanaka spoke recently with Green Horizon at the Asia-Europe Environment Forum Sixth Roundtable in Dublin, and explained what he means by an ‘energy revolution.’

WORTH THE COST: Addressing changing energy needs involves expensive choices that have to be made, Tanaka argues.
Having just come to terms with the European Commission’s (EC) demand that Poland reduce emissions in its 2008–12 national allocation plan by 27 percent, the country is now volubly criticising the post-2012 configuration of the EU’s Emission Trading Scheme (ETS). Warsaw is also trying to persuade other member states to form a wider front against what ‘eurocrats’ are calling the cornerstone of the EU’s climate change policy.

While the EC’s climate change plan remains largely in blueprint form, its chief stipulation is that all ETS-covered installations will have to bid via auction for CO2 emission permits. This introduces a fundamental change from the current system in which emission quotas are given to installations free of charge, with extra costs involved only for overshooting quotas.

Poland’s energy sector has long opposed the EC’s reduced allowances. It has also fought, with some success, for a more favourable allocation of reduced allowances, arguing that too tight a cap will result in rising energy prices, which in turn will put the brakes on the entire economy.

It comes, then, as no surprise that Polish industry, led by the energy sector, is balking at the obligation to pay not a fraction, but the entirety of its allowances. Any Brussels-based decision resulting in exponentially higher costs is unlikely to be taken lying down.

In sounding the alarm of an economic slowdown, industry has some figures to support its case that are indeed worrying. According to various reports from industrial circles, the EU’s climate policy will cost Poland an estimated EUR 600 million annually through 2010, and between EUR 2.4 billion and EUR 4.2 billion annually after 2020.

One of Poland’s industrial bodies, the Polish Electricity Association, has called for the government to prepare a legislative action plan to soften the blows from the EC’s climate change package. Also, high-level rumours that Warsaw would work to assemble a coalition of states to have the plan watered down turned out to be true. Such a coalition emerged during the July 2008 meeting of EU environment ministers in Paris, at which Poland and seven other CEE countries articulated their concerns about the EC’s plan.

“Poland would like the auctioning to concern 20 percent of allowances in 2013, a share that would grow by 10 percent annually after that,” said Poland’s Environment Minister Maciej Nowicki, who later argued that the plan, if implemented, would cause a 70-percent increase in energy prices. Similar claims came from other CEE ministers.

An even stronger message came from Warsaw in early August, when Michal Boni, the top aide of Prime Minister Donald Tusk’s strategy team, told the Polish Press Agency that “Poland [is] working to create a blocking minority so as to block EU plans about post-2012 emission allowances [i.e. full auctioning].”

The EU arithmetic, however, is such that Poland requires the support of all new member states. Given the unlikelihood of such a united stand against the EC, Poland would very probably turn to one or more of the bigger EU-15 states for support.

The degree of effectiveness of Polish lobbying can only be speculated as of print deadline, but the European Parliament began proceedings in late August on the legal means of ETS implementation.

Polish industry to challenge EC on emissions bidding

Combating global warming a ‘fad,’ says Czech PM

Three months before his country assumes the EU presidency, Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek has warned that Europe will suffer serious energy shortages if current climate policy “dogma” prevails.

Addressing the Bled Strategic Forum on August 31, Topolanek said that “despotic” regimes in the Middle East and Russia will have Europeans more dependent than ever on fossil fuels “as a consequence of erroneous recent and present policy making on account of […] submission to the fad of combating global warming and egotistical efforts running counter to nature.”

In taking over the EU presidency in January, the Czech government is tasked with finalising an agreement on the European Commission’s comprehensive package of climate and energy measures. The Czech prime minister champions a huge expansion of nuclear power as a means of curbing emissions and decreasing fossil fuel dependence.

While not wishing to “call into question the validity of environmental protection,” Topolanek told forum members that the EU energy debate has become unbalanced.
Europe lagging behind Kyoto targets

According to survey data from the European Environment Agency, released June 18, many European countries remain well short of meeting their Kyoto targets for reduced emissions. Of course, only ‘old’ member states (i.e. EU-15) have a joint Kyoto target of 8 percent below 1990 levels, while there is no formal joint target for today’s EU-27 (see table).

The EEA’s 2006 figures, published after a usual delay of two years, show that the EU-15 reduced emissions by 0.8 percent between 2005 and 2006, while the cumulative total in reductions from 1990 levels is just 2.2 percent.

“This data is alarming,” said Sonja Meister, climate campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe. “The small emission cuts achieved are not the result of real political action but mainly due to warmer weather conditions. Europe needs to seriously step up its action against climate change.”

The largest recorded decrease in emissions came from households and the service sector, the result of warmer weather in 2006. Emissions grew the most (0.7 percent) in the road transport sector.

Regarding new member states, nearly all have made significant emissions cuts from 1990, and should easily meet Kyoto targets, but the results are compromised in that these reductions are more the result of economic collapses of the 1990s than effective environmental policies. In fact, roughly 50 percent of Germany’s reduced emissions can be attributed to the breakdown of industry in eastern Germany since reunification. There is even the danger that surging economic growth in CEE countries could actually reverse the downward trend of emissions in coming years.

### Table: Europe’s Kyoto performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Kyoto target</th>
<th>Emissions in 2006 compared to Kyoto base year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>-13.0%</td>
<td>+15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>-7.5%</td>
<td>+6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>-46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>No target</td>
<td>+66.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>-23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>-21.0%</td>
<td>+1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>-55.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>-4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>-21.0%</td>
<td>-18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>+25.0%</td>
<td>+24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>-6.0%</td>
<td>-31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>+13.0%</td>
<td>+25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>-6.5%</td>
<td>+9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>-55.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>-53.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>-28.0%</td>
<td>+1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>No target</td>
<td>+45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>-6.0%</td>
<td>-2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>-6.0%</td>
<td>-28.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>+27.0%</td>
<td>+38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>-43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>-32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>+1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>+15.0%</td>
<td>+49.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>+4.0%</td>
<td>-8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>-12.5%</td>
<td>-16.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EC adopts eco-design plan

In July the EU adopted a key policy package of first-ever eco-design standards for appliances, thereby fixing maximum power consumption for ‘standby’ modes across a range of products. The measure is the first of its kind proposed by the EC, and several others are likely to follow, though green groups are urging even stronger action.

“We are happy that the commission has finally published these proposals,” said Michael Warhurst of Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE), “but it is essential that they be widened to properly address the environmental impacts of all products, not just focus on energy-related products.”

According to *Ends Europe Daily*, EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas claimed shortly after the plan’s adoption that the scope of a revised directive would grow from covering one-third to two-thirds of all products on the EU market.

EU citizens less wary of nuclear power

A Eurobarometer survey from July reveals that 44 percent of EU citizens support nuclear power as an energy option, up from a 2005 survey result of 37 percent. The main reasons for the marked increase are heightened environmental and energy security concerns.

Concern about nuclear waste management remains high, but Eurobarometer says that nearly two-thirds of the population believes that nuclear power can curb greenhouse gas emissions and reduce dependence on oil imports.

Up to four in ten respondents currently opposed to nuclear energy said they would change their mind if a “permanent and safe solution to radioactive waste was found,” *Ends Europe Daily* reported about the survey.

Austrian incinerator alarms Hungary

The Hungarian government decided on September 10 to confront Austria over the proximity of a proposed waste management plant to the Hungarian border. Hungary’s Ministry of Environment and Water argues that the planned capacity of the incinerator is much greater than the amount of waste produced in the province, and that the selected location will interfere with sustainable development plans in Hungary’s Szentgotthárd area. Austria and Hungary have already jointly developed an ecological rehabilitation plan for the Raba River—a project that has been awarded EU tenders worth roughly EUR 3.12 million.

Romania’s beaches well below EU standard

Last summer, inspectors tested bathing water cleanliness at 14,552 coastal beaches and 6,816 inland bathing spots throughout the EU, discovering that 95 percent of coastal sites meet or surpass the bloc’s mandatory cleanliness standards, with 88.7 percent of river and lake sites making the grade.

Two recent EU members, however, have some work to do. Just 68.4 percent of Slovenia’s Adriatic beaches are deemed clean enough, while just 28.6 percent of Romania’s Black Sea beaches pass muster. Romania’s Black Sea coastal region stretches for 244 kilometres, while the Adriatic coast of Slovenia is comparatively small at just 46 kilometres.

### Europe Union update
Citing environmental and public health concerns, the ‘Cyanide-free Bulgaria’ coalition presented a petition to the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy and Energy on July 15, urging its government to carry out a proper environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the Chelopech copper and gold-mining project. Two days later, a draft amendment to Bulgaria’s Environmental Act won majority support from the European Affairs Committee of the Bulgarian Parliament, clearing a path for further discussion this autumn, according to environmental NGO network Bankwatch.

Campaigners and citizens are most concerned that plans to expand the existing mine, worth an estimated USD 200 million, include the introduction of controversial cyanide leaching technology and onsite processing. The Canada-based mine owner, Dundee Precious Metals, has consulted directly with local communities but allegedly has not involved communities located downstream in the decision-making process.

“There needs to be a high-quality consultation of the Chelopech [EIA] before any final concession agreement is signed,” said Bankwatch coordinator Daniel Popov. “The Pazardzhik, Plovdiv and Haskovo regions accommodate roughly one million people. These communities are heavily dependent on the Maritsa River for drinking and irrigation water.”

A January 2000 cyanide spill (see image below) at a precious metals recovery plant near Baia Mare, Romania wreaked havoc on neighbouring ecosystems, most notably along Hungary’s Tisza River.

**C H E M I C A L S**

**Toxic cargo row continues in Kosovo**

According to the latest available details, Bulgarian trucks carrying the highly toxic chemical compound dimethyl sulphate remain detained in an industrial park in Shukovc, a neighbourhood on the periphery of Mitrovica, north Kosovo. The controversy, dating back to June 1, has resulted in the firing of two senior public officials, as well as a written request from the prime minister to concerned and angry citizens that they remain calm until the chemical cargo is either safely stored or destroyed.

The three trucks in question, under investigation for carrying false documentation, were en route from Iran to a Kosovo company with an alleged shipment of car fuel. They arrived in Kosovo through FYR Macedonia. The trucks and their then-unidentified cargo remained in limbo at the border neutral zone for a number of days until several Macedonian police and border authorities requested medical assistance for “coughing, headaches and increased blood pressure,” Balkan Insight reported on June 5. Kosovar authorities later allowed the trucks entry from the Macedonian border, but decided to send them back to Iran; neighbouring countries, however, subsequently refused to allow the trucks to make a return trip through their territory while still carrying toxic materials.

Tensions between the two countries were relieved somewhat when the trucks were moved north from the border to Mitrovica, where they have remained since, as of late August. In late July, however, Balkan Insight wrote that residents “have held daily protests against the government’s decision to store the trucks in the area.” The Kosovo Police Service has confirmed police intervention in the protests, while residents claim that their health is being undermined on a daily basis.

Alleged inability to deal with the matter has meanwhile cost two public officials their jobs: Director of Customs Naim Huruglica and Permanent Environment Ministry Secretary Muhamet Aliu.

On August 13, Prime Minister Hashim Thaci attempted to diffuse the volatile situation, writing on the Website of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo: “According to information received, such materials have been brought into Kosovo without difficulty in previous years, thus endangering the life and security of the citizens of Kosovo. This incident continues to be under investigation and the government expects the appropriate authorities to do their work [...] Meanwhile, the Government of Kosovo has taken the decision that the ‘dimethyl sulphate’ will be destroyed in a safe and transparent manner. The entire process of destroying this substance has already begun and will be done under rigorous safety measures protecting the biological environment.”

More recently, the Kosovo government announced that a taxpayer-funded tender would be announced for destruction of the harmful substance, the designated site being Trepca-Mitrovica. The destruction process allegedly got underway in August, but local news reported that KFOR personnel ordered a stop to the proceedings.

For more coverage on the Balkan environment, see the REReP record at <rerep.rec.org>.
Take renewable energy, for example. It’s easy to say that we need to depend on renewables, but according to the IEA’s ‘road map’ scenario, renewables could account for 50 percent of power generation, which is a huge number. Thirty percent is almost the maximum that the grid can digest because of fluctuation. Fluctuating power is very difficult to manage, so there always needs to be a back-up supply of base load, but this means not really saving much on CO₂ emissions. A large, smart and computerised grid would likely enable us to utilise far greater amounts of renewables.

So you have to invest in system design and smart metering, and consumers must be more efficient and knowledgeable about peak prices and low prices and let them change their ways of power usage. Industry must also adapt to new metering methods. Business, manufacturing and our general way of life could be very different quite soon, which is what lies behind this so-called revolution.

But today the fossil fuel-driven industry is in charge, and utterly dominant in many countries. How can these people be convinced to move in another direction?

In the end, the market will decide because the market price sends a signal as to where investment should take place. Fossil fuel manufacturers should understand that they have to start investing in something new. We know that Saudi Arabia is saying it’s not an oil country, but is becoming a solar country. That country is investing a great deal in solar photovoltaic technology. It has sun, but other countries have wind.

Here in Ireland they have wind, tidal and ocean power. It all depends on the geographical location or geological structure. Without certain geological structures, carbon can be captured but not stored. Fossil fuel companies are investing in different places. Maybe some are moving into biotechnology, some are moving into gas, some into services.

Countries of Central and Eastern Europe are experiencing their first serious oil crisis. Is the CEE region now more vulnerable, or are there unique opportunities?

Some Central European economies are seeking security within the EU framework as member states. Also, these countries have excellent human resources and historical roots in industry, and have thus been quite successful in attracting EU investment. It’s also true that East European countries are more dependent on oil and gas imports from Russia, so individual countries are in a relatively weak position in terms of energy security. But these countries will be in a strengthened power position as members of Europe—if Europe becomes a single energy market.

Having said that, individual members must give up some control of energy to the European Union as a whole. By doing so, I think that [member states] can secure sources [of energy]. Of course, you have to engage more with energy efficiency first of all, which is very important in terms of cost-effectiveness. You also have to invest more heavily in source diversification. The Nabuco Pipeline is a very interesting initiative.

Greece, Hungary and Bulgaria are participating in an alternative pipeline project sponsored by Russia. Does this have the potential to weaken Europe’s ‘single voice’?

Things should be done in unison, rather than as individual, country-by-country approaches. If conducted in unison, different projects will complement each other, because the more routes and sources you have, the better. If a single route is accidentally disturbed, you have other options.

Of course, gas won’t be enough for Nabuco. You have to have more sources from other places. At the same time, there are so many countries in between that there’s increased shipment risks for the investor. As Germany and France are not party to the pipeline projects, there’s no warranty for demand. Europe as a whole needs to offer assurance to investors for this project.

Is there something politically taboo about discussing energy efficiency?

Politicians have started speaking a great deal about energy efficiency, but it sometimes hits voters by way of higher gasoline taxes, which is very incorrect politically. Sometimes politicians must do things that voters may not like, so it’s a tough choice. They have to make convincing arguments on behalf of energy efficiency, but also have to help sectors that are hardest hit, like life support for businesses.

These are political decisions that have to be carried out properly, but what we’re saying is that they shouldn’t jeopardise energy prices. If you subsidise energy or oil prices, those who gain most are the richest people driving the biggest cars, not the poor people. So our recommendation is to use proper methodologies to support those hit the hardest, but to not use the energy price mechanism to do so.

Is there a place for values like human rights, nature protection and social equity when energy supply is at stake?

Equity is very important, because a democratic country without equity cannot remain stable politically, and political stability is very important for economic growth. The political role is to simultaneously achieve economic equity, sustainability, economic competitiveness and growth. This is very challenging, I understand, and the conditions vary from country to country, so we have to select the right policy mix. We don’t have any clear solutions for each country, but we do lots of policy analysis of different countries and make policy recommendations, and in general we try to advise using the energy sector in the most efficient, market-oriented way. This is not only the best way to make efficiency happen, it also increases security.

Are you optimistic about sustainability’s chances for success?

Yes, I am. I think sustainability and energy security can be achieved together. Our analyses clearly show this. It is a matter of political commitment to huge investment in the future. If we can manage that, I think we can achieve both at the same time.
The political and economic changes taking place in Central and Eastern Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union have touched practically every walk of life for people living in the region, and one of the most radical changes involves how food is grown, procured, distributed and sold. Despite the fact that the Western ‘supermarket model’ has spread quickly throughout CEE, intensifying global food shortages and recently leaked concerns that biofuels production is to blame for sharply escalating food prices should be clear signals that existing models related to food production, distribution and consumption are seriously—even fatally—flawed.

Something to chew on

A World Bank study leaked to the media in early July revealed that biofuel production is to blame for pushing up global food prices by roughly 75 percent—far higher than earlier estimates. Reacting to recent surges in agricultural commodities, the World Food Program’s Josette Sheeran has already warned of an impending “tsunami of hunger,” while European MPs quickly agreed in July to slash bloc-wide biofuel targets from 10 percent of transport fuels by 2020 to just 4 percent by 2015.

The reduced target levels and Sheeran’s stark metaphor are just two hints at the magnitude of the global food crisis. With more than 6 billion people on the planet, the United Nations estimates that nearly 1 billion suffer from chronic hunger. But even this number “leaves out those suffering from vitamin and nutrient deficiencies and other forms of malnutrition,” claims Fred Magdoff, professor of plant and soil sciences at the University of Vermont in Burlington. “The total number of food-insecure people who are malnourished or lacking critical nutrients is probably closer to 3 billion—about half of humanity.”

Magdoff, in a recently published article titled The World Food Crisis: Sources and Solutions (Monthly Review), outlines some of the principle reasons behind today’s soaring food prices. The first is “related directly or indirectly to the increase in petroleum prices.” Developed ostensibly to lessen the dependence on petroleum products, the use of food crops such as corn (for ethanol), soybeans and palm oil (for diesel fuel) clearly means that less food is produced and distributed for human consumption. Bloomberg, for example, estimates that roughly one-third of the US corn crop will be used to produce ethanol over the next decade.

A second reason is increased demand for meat in Latin America and Asia—especially China—driving upward the prices of corn, soybeans and soy cooking oil, demand for which has risen sharply to feed cattle, pigs and poultry. In fact, global per capita meat consumption has more than doubled since 1961 (New York Times).

Magdoff highlights a third important reason: Key countries that were formerly self-sufficient in terms of food are now importing food in large quantities—namely, China and India. Part of the net food loss in these countries is that farmland (primarily used to grow rice) is being given over to development projects.

Hyper-activity

Central and Eastern Europeans, generally wealthier and in far less immediate danger from food shortages than many other nations and populations around the world, are witnessing a rapid diffusion of supermarket and hypermarket-based retailing networks—a trend that began in earnest in the mid 1990s. The first wave of supermarket expansion in the region took place in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, and accounted for 40–50 percent of food retailing in these countries within a decade. The region’s second supermarket wave broke over Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia, where the share of supermarket-based food retailing stood at 25–30 percent in 2004 but is growing rapidly. Income and urbanisation conditions in Eastern Europe existed for the region’s third wave to have risen earlier, but policy reforms lagged; as a result, supermarket-based food retailing was as low as 10 percent in Russia in 2004 but the country has since emerged as a top FDI destination (Journal of Agricultural and Development Economics).

Supermarket retailing is closely identified with notions of progress and develop-
ment in the post-communist era, but not everyone believes that everything from bygone days deserves the fate of the dodo.

“Rocketing oil prices and security of supply has raised big questions about intensive food production that relies on long transport chains,” Joe Smith, senior lecturer in Geography at The Open University, told Green Horizon. “The supermarket model so successfully exported to CEE has severely damaged the ecological, economic and social sustainability of regional food systems.”

Petr Jehlicka, another geography lecturer at the Open University, has carried out extensive work with Smith in both Poland and the Czech Republic concerning traditional and evolving food practices. The pair are critical of government/NGO environmental policies and approaches that fail to properly take into account the popularity and potential of traditional food procurement practices in these countries.

“[CEE] countries could lead the way in demonstrating how different approaches to food can greatly reduce the environmental impact and insecurity of supermarket-driven systems,” Smith said. “The region sustains grow-your-own and barter traditions alongside other locally based food systems that should be nurtured. Encouraging the expansion of these practices could see CEE countries lead the world in sustainable food.”

The researchers argue in one study, An Unsustainable State: Contrasting Food Practices and State Policies in the Czech Republic, that much of today’s ‘sustainable environment’ literature focuses on responsible and informed consumption, and tends to be “dismissive of ideas of restraint and restriction” and voluntary simplicity. Hence there is an “abundance of useful information on a range of issues framed by the current neoliberal discourse on sustainable consumption such as fair trade, organic food and air miles.”

This is not to suggest that Smith and Jehlicka resist such market options and practices, which they do view as complementary to self-provisioning, etc; they do point out, however, that “both fair trade and organic food remain negligible phenomena in Czech society” in terms of money spent. Czech citizens, for example, spent only a little more than EUR 200,000 on fair trade products in 2006, while just 0.06 percent of food sold in the country in 2003 was organically produced, according to the researchers.

There’s no place like home

CEE countries, despite the rapid shift away from Soviet-era policies, are uniquely positioned to teach some valuable lessons to the ‘free-market West’ that were learned through decades spent in ‘economies of shortage.’

Another Smith and Jehlicka study, Stories around Food, Politics and Change in Poland and the Czech Republic, explores some of the “diverse responses to ‘transition’ that are resistant or alternative to dominant narratives of linear progression towards Western ‘normality.’”

The authors claim that “in the years preceding the political changes of 1989, there were widely shared practices of thrift and self-reliance at the individual household level in many spheres of everyday life in CEE countries.” Some of these practices included self-provisioning and barter, and originated from government policies that resulted either in “high costs or unavailability of fresh fruit and vegetables.” Another factor was that state-related work, if undemanding or unfulfilling, allowed many people the leisure time necessary to grow their own food, and to share or trade edibles with friends and neighbours.

It would seem that expanded consumer choice in a market-based economy is inimical to self-provisioning and barter, but other market and cultural forces to consider are that urban populations are pursuing higher incomes and have less free time, and that there are more households with two working parents. Also, rapid expansion of car ownership, along with improved infrastructure provision (water, electricity), has converted many former smallholdings into private dwellings.

But contrary to expectations, “suburbanisation and the growth of supermarket shopping [in the Czech Republic] has not eradicated widespread systems and self-provisioning” (Food Stories). A Smith and Jehlicka survey from 2005 revealed that 41.5 percent of Czechs sampled used a garden or allotment to produce fruit or vegetables for personal consumption. Another surprise is that economics do not appear to be the primary motivating factor. In fact, those Czechs with the highest living standards are more likely to grow their own food (43.6 percent) than those with the lowest (35 percent).

A provocative case study like this shows, in Smith and Jehlicka’s own words, “how official discourses of sustainability [have] ignored culturally and historically embedded, socially widespread and largely non-market practices. This is despite the fact that they are closely compatible with ideas of sustainable consumption as reduced or lower consumption.”

Circumstances demand that we must seek ways to tackle the world’s pressing food shortages and environmental threats. For many people in Central and Eastern Europe, some of the best answers might lie just outside the front door.
One doesn’t necessarily need to invoke the Amazon rain forest to make people concerned about the environment, or to mobilise them into protective action. Sometimes it’s enough to point to something closer to home. Poland provides one such example. Activists supporting Warsaw’s Ja Wisła foundation took action in August against the environmental mayhem created by quads (or all-terrain vehicles) by issuing the following campaign announcement: “If you don’t fancy stopping frequently to nail down red ‘Nature Reserve’ signs, don’t come. If you’re afraid of criminals, don’t come. However, please do come if you think your children should benefit from positive action. The aim of this trip is to limit devastation of the Wyspy Zawadowskie and Wyspy Swiderski nature reserves caused by quads, motorcycles and SUVs. We’re going to ride along the border of protected areas and nail down the signs. If we happen to meet motor-sport aficionados, we’ll all get out our cameras and take pictures—as well as call the river police.”

This wasn’t just another ride in the park for this group of Polish activists, as there is actually quite a lot at stake environmentally speaking—both for the city of Warsaw and its river, the Vistula.

The Danube’s bustling Budapest

Over the centuries, many of Central and Eastern Europe’s present-day capital cities emerged and developed in relation to favourable river-based locations. Budapest, Prague and Warsaw are some of CEE’s most iconic cities, and the rivers which have nurtured them (the Danube, Vltava and Vistula) are responsible for much of their character and vitality. Not all of these cities, however, have similar models of urban and riparian coexistence. One such example is the contrast between Warsaw and Budapest.

Green stretches and clusters of overhanging trees dominate the Danube’s riverbanks a mere 15 kilometres both downstream and upstream from Budapest. The trees arching into the water form a green buffer that hides predominantly sandy banks. On warm sunny days, exposed sandy sections of riverbank fill up with sunbathing parents, teenagers fishing and young children wading in the shallows. A multitude of kayakers and canoeists take delight in skimming across the river’s surface. But in the city itself the natural banks give way to a stained concrete quayside sloping into the brown water. The Danube bank is one of Budapest’s focal areas, and offers several meeting points between distinct quarters of Buda and Pest; but many natural attributes of a river—birds, trees, foliage—are nowhere to be found.

It’s not, however, as if the Danube is flowing through a dead zone. Here, flanked by magnificent architecture, including the iconic Parliament building, the river is home to a different kind of life. Citizens and tourists walk, drink and dine along its shores, and take boat cruises past the majestic skyline. The bridges are crammed with pedestrians, cars, trams and bikes, but the water flowing beneath hardly resembles the clean waters of the Natura 2000 site just upstream from the Hungarian capital.

Even so, the sheer number of boat-housed clubs, restaurants and hotels docked along the Danube is evidence that the river plays an integral role in Budapest culture. The lack of nature notwithstanding, the river retains a metropolitan sense of majesty that continues to draw locals and foreigners alike to its banks.

The Vistula: ‘It’s alive’

For years, the mantra of Warsaw’s city planners and developers has been for the city to grow with its back turned to the river—and for the Vistula to play a minor role in urban commercial life. Warsaw, in fact, is one of few European capitals to have sections of its home river designated Natura 2000 sites within city limits. Asked to identify other major cities in Europe where rivers are actually something more than just water flowing through concrete half-pipes, regardless of their historic surroundings, Greenpeace Polska activist Łukasz Supergan is somewhat stumped.

“That would be very difficult, but Paris, Vienna and Bratislava do take each and every advantage of their rivers. The oldest
districts are usually located directly by the rivers, plus there are harbours or restaurants on the river banks,” Supergan says. “But in their respective cities, the Danube and the Seine are completely regulated rivers, devoid of any environmental qualities. They have been 100-percent harnessed.”

Supergan notes, however, that Warsaw is wholly unique in this regard: “The Vistula where it flows through Warsaw is still unharnessed, without concrete. In other words, it’s still alive. Things like harbours, pedestrian crossings or bicycle paths aren’t going to cause any harm, but attempts to put the river ‘in order’ in such a way as cities elsewhere in Europe will result in destruction of its natural features. And people won’t find it attractive either.”

Thanks to the fact that previous municipal authorities proved too weak to impose the city on the river, Warsaw enjoys the advantage of being able to learn from mistakes made elsewhere and come up with actions that could keep the river relatively unspoilt, making the city a major attraction for both locals and tourists.

A more detailed look at Warsaw’s current plans to catch up with its Hungarian counterpart in terms of how to integrate the city and the river, however, reveals a certain break with ideas shared by Supergan and the Ja Wisła foundation. According to the latest plans, Warsaw wants the left bank—already a place where people go to walk or ride bicycles—to become a haven for cultural and recreational activities. The other bank, wilder and home to most of the Vistula’s wildlife, will continue to be green, though the idea is to widen the river and create islands to serve as bird sanctuaries.

While the plan is ostensibly very environment-friendly, greens would rather see the city take a more grass-roots approach and first crack down on the construction companies carrying out illegal sand-digging from the river bed. The activists would also like to remove tons of rubble and garbage piling up along the Vistula’s banks. Lastly, they claim, construction of sewage treatment infrastructure should be started.

Green and clean

In July, Greenpeace received some declarative support for its recent ‘The River Isn’t Sewage’ campaign from Warsaw Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz.

“I proposed that Warsaw should finally turn towards the river, and a clean river at that,” the mayor said during Greenpeace’s campaign inauguration, the mayor said.

In terms of actual developments, however, it’s hard to pass out high marks to Warsaw City Hall and Warsaw Province authorities, as there is little evidence of protective action on the Vistula’s behalf. Warsaw is one of very few European capitals that directly river-dumps as much as 50 percent of its waste—untreated. Volume-wise, this amounts to 50 million cubic metres. Interestingly, the corresponding percentage figure for Budapest, with its ultimately ‘harnessed’ Danube, is the same.

The good news is that, following the entry of Hungary and Poland into the European Union, Budapest and Warsaw have received major financial help that is being spent on developing sewage treatment plants. A new treatment plant under construction in south Budapest will likely treat 90% of municipal sewage by 2010. Also, Warsaw City Hall has the financing to expand and modernise the city’s sewage treatment infrastructure by 2010.

Actually, City Hall had little choice. In order to conform to EU regulations, Poland must upgrade all of its rivers to at least class-II status.

While the EU can impose certain overall regulations on water management affecting city sections of rivers in CEE, it may not dictate how to expand over and along rivers. With regard to Budapest, the case is rather hopeless, as it’s hard to imagine anyone willing to take on the costs of giving the downtown section of the Danube more of a natural makeover. Warsaw, however, is in a good starting position to make the Vistula equal parts ‘hustle and bustle’ and a birdwatchers’ paradise.

Alice Walton contributed to this article.
Explanations of the name ‘Black Sea’ are both numerous and obscure, but today the Black Sea poses more pressing questions about the state of its environment and ecosystems, as well as the region’s political and economic difficulties.

By Sibel Sezer Eralp

The Black Sea’s unique ecology has been damaged in past decades by an influx of pollutants from the Danube, Dniester, Don and other large rivers, while economic development along its shores has added further environmental stress. The sea has also become an important transit corridor for energy supplies from East to West; experts and politicians thus agree that an even stronger effort involving all six riparian countries (i.e. Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine) is now needed to achieve a functioning environmental/economic balance.

An ecological catastrophe and nothing less” is how the Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs describes the environmental situation in the zone of the military conflict between Georgia and Russia. Indeed, nature is always the first to be sacrificed and the last to recover in times of war, but the Black Sea was cause for environmental concern long before gunfire erupted in the Caucasus late this summer.

In June, a group of high-level experts gathering in Istanbul to participate in a seminar on sustainable development concluded that the very concept of sustainable development is misunderstood in the Black Sea region, both among decision makers and the general public. Zoriana Mishchuk from the Institute for Sustainable Development in Ukraine claims that politicians are making long-term sustainable development policies more difficult by pursuing short-term goals.

Countries on the Black Sea littoral face a worrisome array of economic and social challenges. Macroeconomic difficulties and the current state of health and primary education reveal that these countries still need time to make socioeconomic progress. Annual per capita GDP in the region is quite low compared to the European Union, ranging from Georgia’s USD 4,700 to Russia’s USD 14,692. The EU’s highest per capita GDP figures, for example, belong to Luxembourg and Denmark (USD 83,456 and USD 38,864 respectively). There is also high unemployment in all the Black Sea states compared to the rest of the EU. Inflation among Black Sea states is highest in Russia (11 percent) and lowest in Bulgaria (4.5 percent). Black and grey economies and poverty are also widespread throughout the region, while other problems include gender inequality, social exclusion and lack of public participation.

According to the Brundtland Report (1987), sustainable development entails meeting the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of future generations. The report suggests that the best way to go about doing this is to integrate environmental protection and social justice into economic development, but most sustainable development efforts in the region are proving difficult to advance beyond the planning stage. Some countries finalised their national sustainability strategies by the 2005 deadline agreed upon at the 2002 Johannesburg summit, while others are still working on them.

Spoils of war

The region’s environmental vulnerability was made clear amidst an exchange of accusations between Georgia and Russia in the wake of armed conflict between the two nations. Georgia blamed the blasting and sinking of Georgian vessels by Russian forces at Poti, a Georgian Black Sea port, for spilling large amounts of hydrocarbons (diesel and benzine) and hydraulic oil into the sea. Georgia’s Foreign Ministry claimed that some 50–70 tonnes of oil were spilled, calling the quantity “unprecedented in
The Black Sea provides livelihoods for many, and relaxation for more. (Left to right) A stretch of boardwalk in Samsun, Turkey; frolicking in the Black Sea surf; a pier attracts passersby in Eforie, Romania; weathering repairs at a shipbuilding facility at Alaplı on the Turkish coast. (Bottom) A horse-cart driver steers past a crowded beach at Vama Veche, Romania.
Georgia’s coastal zone.” Sea currents then moved the spill north toward the Kolkheti National Park and its protected coast.

According to the ministry, “the protected zone of Kolkheti National Park and its surroundings are in a state of ecological catastrophe, which could have serious negative impact on the whole Black Sea ecosystem.” Cleanup efforts have also been hampered because, according to the ministry, the Russian military has prohibited the employment of skimmer and containment booms and barred environmental authorities from site access.

Responding to a journalist from Capital, a Sofia-based weekly, Russia’s ambassador to NATO Dmitrii Rogozin warned that high amounts of sulphur chloride lying beneath the Black Sea surface could spell environmental doom in the event of armed conflict.

“This is why we are warning NATO to stop flexing its muscles in the Black Sea,” Rogozin warned. “They say that they are supplying Georgia with humanitarian aid, but why on military ships? We want the Romanians, Bulgarians, and all countries around the Black Sea to be very careful what they are doing and what they allow to be done in their waters. The Black Sea should be used for trade and tourism, not for military purposes.”

In addition to protecting the Black Sea and its coastal environment, action is needed urgently to address regional threats to biodiversity and landscape heritage. Among the region’s worst environmental problems is eutrophication, the natural result of increased organic content, but which is accelerated in the Black Sea by an influx of fertilisers from large rivers emptying into it. Some of the sea’s other environmental burdens are pollution, the introduction of exotic species, and overexploitation of marine resources.

In the early 1990s, problems like these mobilised the six coastal countries to sign the Bucharest Convention. This was a particularly strong example of forming partnerships in times of conflict, as Russia and Ukraine were involved at the time in a dispute over ownership of the Black Sea Naval Fleet. The recent military conflict in Georgia, however, has brought some uncertainty into the proceedings with the emergence of a new international subject on the Black Sea coast: The Republic of Abkhazia, which is thus far recognized only by Russia and a dozen or so other countries around the world. Unlike Russia and Georgia, Abkhazia is not party to any international conventions or legal norms aimed at protecting the environment and fostering sustainable development.

**Growth and decay**

Inhabitants of the Black Sea region have traditionally taken advantage of a wealth of rich natural resources, and continue to do so. Goods and services provided by natural resources range from natural gas and energy to transportation routes. In short, development tends to be closely linked to the natural environment. A general rule of thumb is that the more that an economic activity relies on natural resources, the higher the level of environmental degradation and more irreversible the damage—which of course has a severely negative impact on economic activity deriving from a natural resource base.

Fishing in the Black Sea and tourism in the Mediterranean are oft-cited examples of how certain economic activities relying on a natural resource base are environmentally destructive; they are also clear illustrations of why sustainable development strategies need to be implemented.

Yuksel Ustun from the Turkey-based Society of Peace with Nature warns that “production at any cost, regardless of the consequences” for the Black Sea is finally giving way to new concepts like ‘sustainable environment,’ ‘efficient use of natural resources’ and ‘sustainable consumption.’ Healthy change, he argues, will involve sustainable and efficient use of natural resources, allocation of investments within the context of cost-benefit frameworks, selecting paths of technological improvement and making necessary institutional adjustments.
The Black Sea’s environmental degradation has become particularly evident in the fall-off of marine life. As recently as the 1960s, the Black Sea was home to nearly 170 fish species, while approximately 25 species were fished commercially. Within three decades the number of commercially fished species plummeted to just five. And of those species which remain commercially viable, some are netted in smaller amounts.

“The average catch of European anchovy from 1999 to 2004 was 345,000 tonnes per year. This dropped drastically to 235,000 tonnes in 2005,” says Murat Bilecenoglu, a fisheries expert at the Biology Department of Adnan Menderes University.

One reason for this decrease is that there are simply more commercial fishing vessels. According to a report from the Black Sea Environmental Program (BSEP), the number grew from 3,000 in 1980 to 4,500 in 1994. Conversely, the amount of fish caught during the same period fell from 850,000 tonnes per year to 410,000. Nearly 8,000 commercial fishing vessels currently operate on the Black Sea, according to estimates.

Another contributor to falling fish populations, according to Levent Bat, a professor at the Fisheries Faculty of Ondokuz Mayis University in Turkey, is the harvesting of fish that have yet to reach reproductive age.

The Black Sea coastal region is also suffering the effects of another modern problem: population growth. A salient feature of population growth is that one type of regional and environmental use (e.g. fishing) comes into conflict with another type (e.g. tourism). Not only does each activity become thus compromised; the combined environmental damage is also much greater.

Taking the long view

It is possible that incorporating cost-benefit analyses of environmental improvements will better enable cost-recovery mechanisms for national and local governments. The use of cleaner technologies and wider acceptance and use of ‘polluter pays’ and ‘user pays’ principles will be instrumental in moving the region along a path toward sustainability. Encouraging eco-tourism is another possible avenue that, ideally, would create job opportunities for local inhabitants.

The Black Sea region, an expanding market with a growing economy, clearly stands to benefit from some of today’s challenges and opportunities so long as long-term peace and stability can be secured. Government transparency, accountability and active stakeholder participation in decision making are all pieces of the same puzzle. The region’s rich natural resource base, meanwhile, provides special opportunities, though manmade environmental hazards pose serious obstacles.

Each of the Black Sea region’s most prevalent economic sectors depends on natural resources, and tourism is one of the most important sectors for many coastal areas. The Black Sea coast was a major tourist attraction during the Soviet era for five of the six Black Sea states—the exception being Turkey. However, Black Sea tourism has not flourished as once expected, while competing sectors such as shipping and transportation have fared more successfully. One unfortunate result of competition for space between coastal populations and various economic sectors is a rise in unplanned urban sprawl. One such example is the profusion of unplanned urban settlements along Turkey’s Black Sea coast. The situation has been made even worse with the construction of an environmentally destructive coastal ring highway.

One of the lead institutions in the ring highway construction project is the Istanbul-based Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). Murat Sungur, first deputy secretary general of the BSEC, claims that the highway will both develop the tourism sector and catalyse commercial activities in the region, both of which are hampered due to inadequate transportation infrastructure. The BSEC, through its Black Sea Ring Highway and Motorways of the Sea Project, is also attempting to revitalise marine transportation between Black Sea ports. Gas and oil transit routes across the Black sea are also a subject of investor interest, particularly in the context of the EU’s declared priority of diversifying energy supply routes.

The ring highway project has already gone ahead in the face of strong opposition from both the public and environmental NGOs. Greenpeace’s Mediterranean office has likened the highway project to a bulldozer flattening the coastal ecosystem, while charging that the raw materials used in construction are uniquely destructive.

“The recent boom of economic activity along Bulgaria’s Black Sea coast is an example of the difficulties in achieving development while preserving nature’s values in a transitional economy,” says Gerassim Gerassimov, head of the REC office in Bulgaria. According to Gerassimov, even projects that appear environmentally friendly at the outset can prove otherwise. Two such examples in Bulgaria are some recently built wind-power generators and so-called eco-tourism activity along the Black Sea coast—both of which involve altering the landscape and harming the environment.

Gerassimov believes that other countries can learn from Bulgarian experience how best to achieve a balance between short-term economic gains and long-term development schemes which factor in the interests of local communities. “Indeed, each Black Sea country and community can and must find unique solutions to this dilemma, but cooperation and an exchange of good and not-so-good practices is definitely a catalyst for achieving a more sustainable future,” Gerassimov concludes.

Getting in sync

The 2002 Johannesburg plan stresses urgency and greater commitment to attaining sustainable development goals through government ‘ownership’ of commitments and regional partnerships. While regional cooperation is now widely recognised as essential, it is extremely critical to regional success that governments share propriety at national and local levels with the general public and private sector.

Along with the individual coastal states, the BSEC, Black Sea Commission and European Union are the region’s key actors. Two Black Sea states, Bulgaria and Romania, joined the EU in January 2007, and the European Commission acknowledges that their entry makes the Black Sea a ‘European’ sea as far as the EC and its programmes are concerned. Moreover, Turkey is engaged in the EU accession process.

Meanwhile, the Black Sea region has become eligible for EU Regional Policy funding, through which Bulgaria and Romania will likely improve the region’s sustainable development indicators. There will also be cross-border cooperation programmes between Bulgaria and Romania, and between Bulgaria and Turkey. EU funding will make additional funds available on top of those already provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other national programmes.

The BSEC has 12 member countries, while the EU currently has observer status. Two of the six coastal countries, Russia and Turkey, are founding members. The GEF’s Black Sea Environmental Programme (BSEP) was launched in 1992 to support implementation and protocols of the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution, which was signed by each of the six Black Sea coastal states. The Black Sea states are parties to other important international agree-
objective here was to establish a major coastal states agreed to in 1996. The Black Sea (1996 BS-SAP), which all for the Rehabilitation and Protection of such as the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for establishing marine areas.

The Black Sea Strategic Action Plan (BS-SAP).

Nilufer Oral, a law professor at Istanbul’s Bilgi University, claims that the foundation for promoting sustainable protection and preservation of the Black Sea marine and coastal environment lies in creating a solid legal framework. She adds, however, that the existing legal framework is inadequate, and that the Black Sea lacks a regional legal framework for establishing marine areas.

Oral says that the Mediterranean, on the other hand, has its Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Interest (SPAMI) protocol, which establishes marine protected areas in a transboundary context and on the high seas. She notes that Mediterranean countries are developing a legal mechanism to promote implementation and compliance of existing legal obligations at the regional level. This is extremely important, she says, as there has to be a system to ensure that countries will implement their legal obligations to the marine environment. Unfortunately, the Black Sea does not currently benefit from such a mechanism, and this should be made a top priority, she concludes.

Other efforts are underway, however, such as the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for the Rehabilitation and Protection of the Black Sea (1996 BS-SAP), which all coastal states agreed to in 1996. The objective here was to establish a major framework for joint action against degradation of the Black Sea ecosystem and unsustainable use of resources. The 1996 BS-SAP was amended in 2002 to extend deadlines, but specific policy measures were not addressed, and there remains a lack of consensus concerning the course of action.

**Stakes and stakeholders**

According to Kenan Kuri of the Black Sea Environmentalists, the Bucharest Convention (signed in 1992), the Odessa Declaration (signed in 1993) and the 1996 BS-SAP need to be implemented with increased ownership at the national level. Moreover, energy projects should be undertaken after thorough environmental impact assessments and social impact assessments have been carried out. He also stresses the importance of civil society in the critical role of NGOs.

The most ambitious water-related project carried out under the GEF was the Strategic Partnership for Nutrient Reduction in the Danube/Black Sea Basin (2001–07). The Danube Black Sea Task Force’s current mission is to develop financing mechanisms for implementing investment for projects to reduce pollution and rehabilitate the ecosystem throughout the greater Black Sea region. The Black Sea Ecosystem Recovery Project, also supported by the GEF, is a project linked to the Danube/Black Sea Strategic Partnership, Danube Regional Project and the World Bank’s Black Sea Nutrient Reduction Facility.

Political commitment is the key to ensuring the success of regional initiatives, and is sometimes demonstrated through higher financial commitment. For example, national governments could increase financial support to the Black Sea Commission Secretariat, as the latter was created through strong regional cooperation between coastal countries. The secretariat could then be made more effective and thus send a signal of greater political support.

Sedat Karaoglu, deputy undersecretary of Turkey’s Ministry of Environment and Forestry, emphasises the importance of national ownership and regional cooperation. He explains that the Black Sea functions in a way similar to a large drain, as Europe’s second, third and fourth largest rivers flow into it—nearly one-third of the continent’s volume of river water. This is precisely why he stresses the importance of regional cooperation not only by the six coastal states, but all 17 countries responsible for the Black Sea’s environmental deterioration. He believes accordingly in a basin-wide approach and ownership by all stakeholders, including the private sector, in order to achieve the goal of sustainable development in the region.

The Black Sea is of obvious economic and strategic importance not just for the region itself, but also for its EU neighbours. With good governance, an absence of armed conflict, and solid, long-term sustainable development strategies, the region could begin to reach previously unknown levels of economic prosperity; and environmental degradation might one day be brought to a halt—and maybe even reversed.

**Sibel Sezer Eráp** is Regional Director for Turkey and the Black Sea.
Celebrating a decade of history, the Aarhus Convention has a fresh agenda

Happy together

By Pavel Antonov

The outcome of the Third Meeting of Parties to the Aarhus Convention, which took place in Riga, Latvia in June, was cause for most participants to celebrate. NGO coalition European ECO Forum claimed that it had successfully helped steer the UNECE’s Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in a “strong future direction.” ECO Forum was referring to the convention’s new strategic plan for 2009–14, which includes elements to enhance public participation and access to justice, and to recognise and rally support for civil society groups wishing to exercise their rights. Parties to the convention agreed in the plan that “serious environmental, social and economic challenges faced by societies worldwide cannot be addressed by public authorities alone without the involvement and support of a wide range of stakeholders, including individual citizens and civil society organisations.”

Ten years after being signed, Aarhus is in force across Europe and Central Asia, and widely viewed as the foremost legally binding instrument protecting the public’s environmental rights. Addressing a high-level contingent of the meeting, UNECE Executive Secretary Marek Belka said that the core principles of Aarhus “empower ordinary members of the public to hold governments accountable and to play a greater role in promoting more sustainable forms of development.” This is an important function for a legal instrument, and valid in countries with accountable governance, but not necessarily the usual state of affairs.

Some scepticism lingers, mostly concerning Europe’s ability and willingness to grant more rights to its citizens. The EU vetoed a proposal by Norway to improve citizens’ rights of access to information from private companies. Willem Kakebeeke, who chaired the Aarhus Convention negotiations, brought attention to another disturbing trend: the fact that EU member states have to “coordinate” in closed-door sessions that often block progress on key issues.

It was promised at the meeting to establish a task force to oversee the second pillar of the convention on public participation—an area of implementation that is historically weak, according to ECO Forum. “We NGOs have been insisting all along that the Aarhus Convention needs to address the weaknesses in the convention’s pillar on public participation,” said John Hontelez, secretary general of the European Environmental Bureau and head of the Public Participation Campaign.

The meeting of parties also resulted in a decision on how to interpret amendments to the convention entering into force. This will have significant impact on when and how the GMO amendment, adopted in Almaty three years ago, will enter into force. “Despite the declarations of all parties to ensure rapid entry of the GMO amendment, this week the EU in fact practically brought the future of the amendment into doubt,” ECO Forum legal expert Serhey Vychyryst.

The Riga Declaration, adopted at the meeting, recognises that implementation presents the main challenge for Aarhus. Thirty-five national reports and a synthesis report on implementation showed whether and how convention goals are being applied in practice. Alternative reports produced by civil society in several countries were much more critical of how Aarhus is actually being implemented, while others were formally asked to comply with convention principles and take greater steps toward implementation. Conditional cautions were issued at the meeting to Turkmenistan and Ukraine, both of whom had been found to be in non-compliance at the previous meeting of parties.

Riga delegates agreed to renew the task force’s mandate on access to justice, having identified this convention pillar as the one continuing to pose the greatest challenges. However, it remains to be seen whether the task force will be able to accomplish more than just exchanges of experience and capacity building. Although third-pillar implementation will be difficult, EU countries are resisting agreement on a stronger task force mandate.

In a special statement, the parties called for ratification of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in order to bring it into force by 2009.

The REC has been an active player ever since the drafting and adoption of the Aarhus Convention, and has contributed to many of the strategic documents adopted by the Riga meeting of parties, including the synthesis report, strategy, work programme and mandates for different task forces and working groups. The REC and the Aarhus Convention have grown up together, and the convention has become one of the main mechanisms serving the REC in carrying out its mission.
Completion of the first phase of the Green Pack project, after three years of work by the REC and its partners in Turkey, resulted in some important achievements. By the end of 2007, 2,000 kits of the Turkish version of the Green Pack had been produced, and 101 teacher instructors and 1,600 teachers had been trained. The Green Pack has now been introduced to nearly 200,000 students in 39 different cities all over Turkey.

A new phase of the Green Pack project is currently underway, thanks to an agreement to extend cooperation, signed by the Turkish Ministry of Education, Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry, and the REC. In 2008–09, in order to ensure effective use of the reproduced material, a series of trainings for teachers is being organised for 2008–09, not only in Turkey but in all countries involved in the Green Pack project.

Unlike the previous phase, these training workshops will be conducted in two ways: one in which instruction will take place in typical venues, the other in which the teaching venue will be somewhat unusual—namely, a railway coach, or ‘wagon.’ The ‘Green Railway Wagon,’ provided by the Turkish State Railways Authority is equipped with all the amenities necessary for high-quality training, and has already visited four cities in Eastern Anatolia. It stayed in each city for one week, whilst training was provided for groups of up to 20 teachers.

It is hoped that this novel, innovative outreach programme will find more educators and students than conventional methods. The Green Wagon will make another journey in April 2009, hosting educators from Central Anatolia and Eastern Mediterranean provinces. By combining mobile and regular training venues, 5,600 teachers will be trained by the end of 2009.

The Turkish Green Pack project, sponsored by Bosch Home Appliances during 2008 and 2009, aims to organise 12 teacher training workshops, reproduce 6,000 kits, and reach approximately 600,000 pupils within the sponsorship period. Also, an online assistance service for teachers through the existing web page <www.yesilkutu.net> will ensure sustainability. Finally, a web page for students will be developed to enable support for environmental education activities.

---

**Five SEE CSOs awarded regional grants through SECTOR**

In order to promote urban sustainability in South Eastern Europe (SEE), the REC, with financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), recently awarded EUR 174,000 in regional grants to five civil society organisations operating in the region. The awards for grant proposals are provided within the framework of the REC’s SECTOR project.

The five projects, expected to run from June 2008 through 2009 will cover: sustainable reduction of air pollution from motor traffic; protection of urban forests and green areas; establishment and support of a green lobby group; improving urban transport; and promoting production and consumption of organic food. The respective grant-winning CSOs are: ECAT Tirana (Environmental Centre for Administration and Technology), academic association NGO Eco-Logic, 4x4x4 Balkan Bridges Skopje, Zelena Akcija (Green Action), and local development agency Struga.

“SECTOR grants provide a good opportunity for CSOs in the region not just to raise public awareness about urban development impacts on the environment, but to encourage participation and contributions in ways that benefit entire communities,” says Entela Pinguli, senior grants manager of the REC’s NGO Support Programme. “Some of the supported initiatives are aimed at policy makers and present challenges to existing legislation through policy debates, which has a democratising effect on these societies. Others are promoting changes in behaviour—encouraging energy saving, reduced consumption, recycling and so forth. The grants also enable practical community efforts such as greening parts of a city, cleaning dumpsites and rehabilitating landfills.”

The grant-selection process took place from November 2007 to August 2008. An independent evaluation committee coordinated the REC-reviewed proposals and made decisions based on criteria detailed in the grants announcement. Sida has approved the selection results.

The regional grants scheme runs parallel to national grant schemes in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Details of the grant announcements are available at the project website: <www.rec.org/sector/support/index.html>.
Opening of new conference centre sets regional precedent

The REC’s newly constructed zero CO₂ emissions conference centre was unveiled on June 27 during an opening ceremony at the organisation’s head office in Szentendre, Hungary. Funded primarily by the Italian Ministry of Environment, the centre received considerable additional support from Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway. Local businesses also contributed towards the project, offering significant discounts for many of the specialist building materials and technologies required. The EUR 2 million construction cost is expected to be recouped in energy savings in just 20 years.

Designed by Italian architects Architettura Sostenibili, the new centre’s ambitious eco-targets were realised with a combination of specific design techniques and energy systems. Electricity for the building is supplied by 140 rooftop solar panels, although a two-way exchange link to the national grid can manage both periods of power surplus and shortage. Along with effective insulation, 12 geothermal heat pumps increase the efficiency of the building’s heating and cooling systems year round. Taking advantage of the thermal difference potential created by relatively constant underground temperatures to drive air circulation, they automatically adjust the building’s internal climate according to the number of people inside at any given time. Natural lighting is maximised throughout with a reflective shelf positioned below a ceiling-height window strip on each floor. As well as directing sunlight inward, adjustable fixtures convert the shelf into a shading mechanism during the summer months.

In addition, ambient light sensors continuously adjust artificial illumination levels.

In addition to serving as a venue for REC and partner-organised conferences, the new centre will also be made available to other organisations and companies with green credentials. As part of efforts to promote eco-architecture locally, school groups, engineering students and other interested professionals will be able to take advantage of guided tours of the facility. The building’s two main halls (80 and 120-person capacity) will also be used for information campaigns and climate change-related demonstrations.

The new centre provides a much-needed hub from which the REC can coordinate its efforts to ensure that ongoing rapid social and economic change in the CEE region is on solid environmental footing.
A place at the table
Climate change talks could help to raise the international profile of SEE countries

According to the Fourth Assessment Report of the International Panel on Climate Change (2007), the countries of South Eastern Europe (SEE) are vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In fact, countries across the region are already starting to suffer the ecological and economic consequences of rising global temperatures and decreasing precipitation, but they have also recently joined international efforts to mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects.

Between 2004 and 2008, Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia all ratified the Kyoto Protocol. Having embraced Kyoto, and having pledged support for legislation to encourage the development of green technologies, it is clear that the region's countries are prepared to take on their fair share in combating excessive greenhouse gas emissions.

When it comes to other international topics, however, SEE countries are typically under-represented and at a severe disadvantage when at the negotiating table. A scarcity of human and financial resources—a hangover of postwar economic hardship—has thus far limited representative numbers among negotiating groups, in most cases, to just two or three people per SEE country. This inability to fully participate is significantly hampering the region's long-term prospects, and it remains a key challenge to somehow ensure that these countries can eventually benefit from the international climate-change process to which they have so readily subscribed. Related topics of concern such as technology transfer, capacity building, the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism and National Communications from non-Annex I Parties, are already on the provisional agenda for the next round of negotiations in Poznan, Poland in December this year.

One possible solution to the problem of under-representation is regional leverage, the model for which is the G-77 plus China (1964), a coalition of developing countries formed to articulate mutual economic interests and boost negotiating capacity on the global stage. Pooled resources and personnel enable G-77 delegates to represent the interests not only of their respective countries, but of the group as a whole.

The Kyoto Protocol's Adaptation Fund could prove another means of assistance to countries in South Eastern Europe struggling with the effects of climate change, though the fund's regulating principles have yet to be fully developed. The fund board's inaugural meeting in March 2008 was an important step toward providing funding to developing countries, but it remains to be seen as to whether the SEE region will be eligible for benefits.

The process of regional cooperation in South East Europe is taking place at all levels. For instance, the Belgrade Initiative on Climate Change has been launched and received the full support of the UNECE Sixth Ministerial 'Environment for Europe' Conference in October 2007. The SEE Climate Change Framework Action Programme, now being developed under the Belgrade Initiative, should contribute to practical solutions to existing problems.
Smoothing the way for free bikes
Regional cities need to build infrastructure before copying Paris

Thanks to a wildly successful first year, Velib, Paris’ free bike-share system, has inspired cities the world over—including those in Central and Eastern Europe—to try to follow its example. Cities in the CEE region having started or about to start such systems include Bucharest (see <www.eltis.com>); Prague; Koprivnica, Croatia; and Wroclaw and Krakow in Poland. Belgrade officials are thinking about launching a system for the Universiade games in 2009, and Budapest is also studying the idea.

Free bike-hire systems, which date at least as far back as the famous “White Bike” experiment in Amsterdam in the 1960s, offer a convenient, environmentally sound way of travelling in congested centres. Visitors from outlying districts can come downtown by car or public transport and have a bike at their disposal without the hassle or worry of bringing their own bikes.

The first free-bike experiments foundered because of theft, but European systems in the last decade or so have mitigated this problem by requiring users to put up collateral via credit or debit cards. The Parisian system, closely modelled after a successful trial in Lyon, has made a big splash with its unprecedented scale. When fully implemented, Velib will offer more than 20,000 bicycles parked at 1,500 stations.

Velib, launched on July 15, 2007, has been very effective at promoting bicycling as transport. According to the French capital’s bicycling affairs coordinator Didier Couval, the number of Paris cycling journeys in the second half of the year was 45 percent higher than during the same period of 2006.

Taxpayers also like Velib, as it relies on a clever form of financing: Rather than cutting into the city budget, the system is operated by an outside vendor in exchange for the use of municipally-controlled outdoor advertising space.

Clearly, there’s a lot about Velib to like, but CEE cities wishing to emulate its success might, for now, be putting the cart before the horse.

One point that gets lost in the “Velorution” hubbub is that Velib was no overnight success. The groundwork started more than a decade before its launch with the implementation of former mayor Jean Tiberi’s “Plan Velo” in 1995. Since then, the city has built more than 370 kilometres of bike paths and bike lanes, installed thousands of street-side bike racks, and established several under-30kph zones to reduce risks to cyclists.

No city in this region has made such preparations. In Budapest, for instance, the Mayor’s Office boasts of having created 170 kilometres of cycling infrastructure. But this is a disconnected collection of routes, most of which are merely painted lines on pavements.

Recently, Hungary’s transport ministry launched a programme that offers EU Structural Funds to support local-level cycling projects. Budapest City Hall is looking at the prospect of tapping this fund to create a bike-share system, but in the meanwhile it has bungled funding applications for basic infrastructure.

Studies show that the main deterrent to utility cycling in urban areas is the lack of safe and convenient bike routes. Free bike rentals are a great idea, but only if there are places where people want to ride them.

Greg Spencer, a member of the REC’s Sustainable Transport Topic Area, writes about utility cycling at <cyclingsolution.blogspot.com>.
Defeating the environment
Nature, an oft-unsung casualty of war, needs legal protection against its aggressors

In fact, there are several instances throughout history of wars in which attempts have been made to defeat the enemy by damaging the environment. During the Vietnam War, for example, the United States military sprayed 70 million litres of defoliants to destroy jungle areas and deny cover to their opponents. Now, decades after the end of the war, Vietnam still suffers the environmental consequences of these tactics. More recently, deliberately released crude oil and uranium-tipped weapons have been employed by forces in the Persian Gulf with severe impacts on public health and the environment.

This type of military destruction has alarmed the international community and sparked fresh enquiries into rules and principles of international humanitarian law, as well as laws to protect the environment during times of war. Some provisions of the 1907 Hague Convention, Nuremberg Tribunal (1945) and Geneva Convention (1949) forbid destructive acts against the environment during times of war, though only indirectly; hence the adoption of international legal instruments to directly protect the environment, two of which are the Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Techniques (ENMOD) and Protocol One of the Geneva Convention.

The ENMOD convention, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1976, entered into force in 1978. The convention is an instrument of international disarmament law intended to protect the environment when war breaks out. It specifically forbids hostile use of the environment as a means of warfare, and prohibits the deliberate manipulation of natural processes that could produce phenomena such as floods, drought, hurricanes, tidal waves or other changes in climate.

While ENMOD outlaws geophysical warfare, Protocol One to the 1949 Geneva Convention, adopted in 1977, targets ecological war through two key provisions. Article 35 states that it is prohibited to employ methods or means of warfare which are intended or may be expected to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment. Alongside this is Article 55, which requires combatants to protect the natural environment from the same types of damage.

This pair of multilateral agreements is essentially complementary, though their scope is limited and the issues involved are addressed mostly in a theoretical sense. One could be tempted to call for the adoption of additional and more comprehensive legal instruments, but efforts should first be made toward the practical implementation and enforcement of existing rules.

---

**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
An email discussion this summer among REC staff members about composting practices resulted, for me at least, in the discovery of a website truly worth bragging about. But before I get to that particular cyber-source I’d like to introduce a few of the slew of websites I’ve been tipped about in recent months.

Climate-Policy-Map.com is an interactive site that offers quick international comparisons of key climate-related statistics and policies for the world’s leading industrialised nations plus the EU. Users create downloadable maps on climate policy by combining multifaceted information (e.g. Kyoto Protocol progress) with data on energy supplies (e.g. biofuel production) and socio-economic factors (e.g. GDP). Visitors can also download country fact sheets, while the site’s ‘Legal Basis’ feature gives national legislation and climate protection policy programmes for the same countries.

Another mine of information is Eco-Finance.org, a directory of eco-finance institutions and mechanisms operating chiefly in the western Balkans. Built by former REC staffer Jurg Klarer, the site offers a set of country pages listing domestic, former REC staffers and others, and supports the free exchange of information and public participation in environmental decision making.

This subscription fee comprises a donation for the work of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), a non-partisan, not-for-profit international organisation that works to solve environmental problems in this region. The REC promotes cooperation among non-governmental organisations, governments, businesses and others, and supports the free exchange of information and public participation in environmental decision making.

One year’s subscription (four issues): EUR 18

In line with its mission, the REC offers complimentary subscriptions of Green Horizon to selected environmental stakeholders from Central and Eastern Europe. Eligibility is open to non-profit organisations, local and national authorities, businesses, academic institutions and journalists who cannot afford the subscription donation. To request your complimentary subscription, send this form along with a brief explanation of your circumstances, and tick here.

Send this form by e-mail: subscribe@greenhorizon.rec.org • Fax: (36-26) 311-294
Post: Green Horizon, Ady Endre ut 9-11, 2000 Szentendre, Hungary
Are we there yet?
A Canadian author addresses some of the questions we ask ourselves every day

A Short History of Progress, by Ronald Wright

English-born Canadian author Ronald Wright’s weeklong series of Massey Lectures in 2004 comprise the basis for A Short History of Progress, a well-written work of 130 pages, an additional 50 pages of endnotes, and ten pages of bibliography.

Wright’s book begins with an examination of Paul Gauguin’s art: “Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?” These are questions that pundits, philosophers, worried parents and millions of drunken college students around campfires late at night have considered through the ages. Surely, each of us have asked ourselves these very questions this at least once while watching the evening news, passing the 100th beggar that day, or choking on smog. A Short History of Progress asks us to do what we have been advised to do for centuries—learn from the past, and ensure a better future by not repeating the same mistakes. Personally, I despair daily that so few have taken this advice to heart. Ancient ruins that dot every corner of our world are “shipwrecks that mark the shoals of progress,” and the patterns of decline are alarmingly similar.

Wright does touch on different measures of progress (technological, material, moral) but only manages to skim the surface. Perhaps he could have posed the question asked each election year by pollsters: “Are you better off now than you were a year ago?” The book fails to examine how we can better address solutions to ensure that we have a roof over our head, enough food, clean drinking water, peace, and a good education for our kids. Instead, Wright focuses on “the runaway progression of change” and the “collapsing of time”—and the fact that the world we enter at birth is vastly different than the one we leave.

According to Wright, all the big changes since humans left caves have been cultural, not physical. We are “running 21st-century software on hardware last upgraded 50,000 years ago. Most people, throughout most of time, have lived on the edge of hunger—and much of the world still does.” Annually, the US and the EU each spend over USD 1 billion paying farmers not to grow crops, and another billion dollars each year buying up ‘surplus’ crops in order to keep prices artificially high. Now, multinational companies are copyrighting staple crops.

G.K. Chesterton observed: “Man is an exception, whatever else he is […] If it is not true that a divine being fell, then we can only say that one of the animals went entirely off its head.” Progress has not been made in distribution, infrastructure, transport—or in political will. Regardless of ‘progress’ in irrigation, hybrid crops and other technological ‘fixes,’ humans still can’t feed themselves and continue to fall into ‘progress traps.’ For example, when the ancients in the Fertile Crescent discovered irrigation, they then fell into the salination trap and their lands lay barren for centuries. If we want to reduce our environmental impact and not go the way of the Sumerian, Roman and Maya empires, we must reform society.

Unlike the grim Wright, I believe we can say no to GMOs and nuclear power, and that we can re-embrace renewable energy sources, reusable bottles and organic farming.

Calling all CEE environmental journalists!

Green Horizon magazine is looking to expand its network of investigative environmental freelance journalists living or working in Central, Southern or Eastern Europe.

We want to publish English-language, local-perspective, environment-related stories by investigative journalists that live or work in the following countries:

Albania • Bosnia and Herzegovina • Bulgaria • Croatia • Czech Republic • Estonia • Hungary • Latvia • Lithuania • Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia • Montenegro • Poland • Romania • Serbia • Slovakia • Slovenia • Turkey

Send in your story proposals, along with an example of your previous English-language work, and raise awareness of the environmental issues that matter to you.

submissions@greenhorizon.rec.org

Calling all CEE environmental journalists!
Your information on sustainability in the CEE region

Read by over 20,000 international professionals, Green Horizon magazine is the home of Central and Eastern European environmental news and insight, keeping you up to date on the region’s latest progress toward sustainability.

policy developments • in-depth local issues • technological innovations
business information • opinions that matter • key interviews

Advertise or sponsor our print or online editions by inquiring at <advertise@greenhorizon.rec.org>.
Visit us at <gh.rec.org>.
The new REC conference centre: sustainability in action

Conferences • Training • Demonstrations • Events

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe’s new purpose-built sustainable conference venue is now open for use, following its successful launch in June 2008.

Thanks to a construction strategy focused on minimising energy demands and making use of local energy resources, the new centre meets the REC’s tough sustainability criteria whilst fulfilling the most demanding practical, functional and aesthetic requirements. Solar panels provide the electricity, geothermal heat pumps regulate the temperature, and numerous eco-design features maximise energy efficiency throughout.

Fast gaining renown as a landmark example of green architecture in the region, and already one of Central and Eastern Europe’s leading eco-venues, the new zero-emission REC conference centre in Szentendre, Hungary offers a unique opportunity to experience sustainability in action.

Support from the Italian Ministry for the Environment Land and Sea, the governments of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Financial Mechanism, and several leading building technology companies, has helped turned this ambitious project into a working model of energy efficient construction.

Come and visit us online at <www.rec.org/REC/zero_emission_conf_center.html> or Contact: (36) 26 504 000