Croatia and Turkey join sustainability debate

By Michelle French

The opening of EU accession negotiations with Turkey and Croatia in October has given new impetus to inter-sectoral policy issues like sustainable development. As all parties prepare for the screening of environmental legislation and the opening of talks on environmental issues in the spring of 2006, both countries plan to boost their commitment to the sustainable development agenda.

According to European Union progress reports on the two countries released in November, both face significant challenges. Turkey, for instance, is preparing to launch a three-year project aimed at integrating sustainable development into other sectoral policies through the preparation of a National Strategy for Sustainable Development and a National Sustainable Development Commission. A grants programme will award more than 20 organisations with funding for sustainable development projects. The EU has earmarked EUR 3 million for the project — with additional technical assistance coming from the United Nations’ Development Programme (UNDP).

The project — due to begin in January 2006 — follows on the heels of Turkey’s National Report on Sustainable Development, released in 2002 in the lead-up to the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development.

While Croatia was spurred by similar international initiatives to put sustainable development on the national agenda, the government’s 2003 announcement to create an inter-ministerial council on sustainable development stalled after a change in government. Since then, sustainable development has taken a backseat to waste management, the latter of which has brought Croatia considerable EU funds and praise. However, the country plans to draft a sustainable development strategy and introduce a new environmental protection act in 2006 — efforts which could institutionalise environmental assessment procedures and give new life to sustainable development goals.

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In both Croatia and Turkey, the intersectoral element of sustainable development poses difficulties. Progress reports on the two countries highlight administrative coordination as an area in need of significant attention if accession negotiations are to proceed smoothly.

For Croatia, the need to increase administrative coherence has become a sticking point for negotiations. If the country cannot make improvements in this area over the next year, their accession process could stall. The problem stems partly from the small size of the relevant ministries and the attendant lack of training and resources, said Mirna Vlasic, the secretary of the Coordinating Committee for the Accession Negotiations of Croatia to the EU. But she hopes that modest boosts in staffing, combined with progress on EU integration will get the ball rolling. “We understand that we need to do something about [sustainable development]. The pressure is really strong now,” Vlasic said, referring to the opening of Croatia-EU negotiations on the environment next April.

The EU progress report on Turkey also warns of administrative difficulties, particularly “weaknesses in the implementation and enforcement of [the] environmental acquis.” However, Gurdogar Sarigul, the environment and sustainable development sector manager of the European Commission Delegation to Turkey, is quite optimistic about his country’s ability to implement sustainable development projects. “Nation-wide planning is centralised right now,” he explained, referring to the State Planning Organisation which oversees many sectoral interests. While sustainable development planning ideally comes from the bottom up, an umbrella organisation with a lot of power helps to marshal other ministries whose interests tend to be more insular, Sarigul said. “[The State Planning Organisation] will have much more interest and participation in the development of a national sustainable development strategy,” he said.

Agreements require action

While there is no specific EU law on sustainable development in the field of the environment, the principle is included in the EC treaties, and has worked its way in different forms into the accession partnership agreements of both countries. Turkey, for instance, is expected to “integrate environmental requirements into other sectoral policies” in a few years, and “sustainable development principles into the definition and implementation of sectoral policies” in three to five years. Croatia must develop horizontal legislation on environmental impact assessments and public participation in the next few years, and ensure the “integration of environmental protection requirements into the definition and implementation of other sectoral policies” in three to five years. Both accession partnerships were politically approved in the December meeting of the European Council.

Bulgaria targets wastewater

In 2005, Bulgaria began work on the design and construction of three wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs), according to Course for Sustainability alumnus Kiril Gyoshev of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (pictured). The WWTPs will be located in the Maritsa River basin, which flows into the Aegean Sea and affects the cities of Stara Zagora, Dimitrovgrad and Haskovo. The project’s budget is EUR 37 million, with financing from ISPA (the EU’s pre-accession funding programme), the European Investment Bank, and the Bulgarian government. Cleaning up the basin should also benefit neighbouring Turkey and Greece.

Turks boost renewables

Turkey ratified a law on the Utilisation of Renewable Energy Resources for the Purpose of Generating Electrical Energy, according to Course for Sustainability alumnus Hayati Cetin of the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources. The law will expand the utilisation of renewable energy resources for electricity production and require the tracking of waste in the power generation process. The government hopes the law will help manufacturers meet environmental goals such as the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions while allowing businesses and the country in general to benefit from the use of these resources in a secure but controlled manner.
Training touts systems thinking

By Michelle French

The red and white stuffed creature goes up, then comes down and the whole class — largely comprised of Central and Eastern European civil servants — watches and chuckles. It’s part of a group exercise in understanding systems thinking, or how relationships can produce positive or negative responses, depending on stimuli.

“It’s a lifelong commitment,” said Andrea Deri, director of capacity development for Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD) International, the educational organisation behind the presentation. LEAD facilitates a global network that uses systems thinking to understand the root causes of unsustainable behaviour. Deri led the demonstration during a training at the third Course for Sustainability in October in Szentendre.

In the demonstration, several classmates line up and lock hands, while one volunteer on the end holds up a stuffed creature. The objective — to bring the creature, representing anything from greenhouse gases to water pollutants, down. Whether or not this happens depends on whether classmates along the chain raise or lower their hand, and the hand of the next classmate in the line, in response to the raised or lowered hand of the classmate before them.

Like feedback loops

This mirrors real world scenarios in which supporting and opposing feedback shapes the outcomes of the actions we take, often in cyclical loops. Mehmet Emin Birpinar of the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry of Turkey, had read about systems thinking, but never thought to apply it before attending Deri’s training. “It was very fascinating and interesting for us. We are going to apply what we have learned today,” he said.

Deri says systems thinking is particularly relevant for civil servants. “They will see the implications of their decisions,” she said. “If you understand the system you can better design intervention points.”

Slawomir Gurtowski, who works in the Ministry of the Environment in Poland, likes the idea of systems thinking but was anxious to apply it to more complex archetypes. “I think if we [move] from simple examples to much more complicated ones, this could be very useful,” he said, adding that he already uses systems thinking informally in his everyday work.

“When we talk about sustainability, we always talk about social, economic, and environmental spheres,” Deri says. “It is not very easy to think in that way, but with systems thinking you see how different aspects of these three pillars manifest themselves and how they can actually influence each other,” she says.

Theory posits a limit to inequality

By Todd Schenk

The Kuznets Curve, a theory devised by economist Simon Smith Kuznets, suggests that there is a relationship between inequality and wealth that can be illustrated using a curve resembling an upside-down U. The central assertion is that as a nation becomes wealthier inequality increases, but that once the nation reaches a certain level of wealth inequality starts to decrease again.

Some cite this theory while arguing that economic growth is important for the well-being of all. Others have applied Kuznets Curve to the environment, pointed out Ignazio Musu during his lecture on globalisation and sustainable development. Indicators such as water and air pollution are used to illustrate how the environment worsens in the early stages of industrialisation, but then starts to improve again when society meets its basic needs and begins to be concerned about the environment. Sceptics of Kuznets Curve argue that it does not apply to all indicators, nor in all cases. Resource use seems to continue to increase indefinitely; poverty and environmental harm simply shift to less developed countries; and many advanced economies show signs of widening gaps between rich and poor and an overall deterioration of environmental quality.
According to Lindita Sakira Atanasova, you don’t need a political education to be a leader. The State Secretary for the Ministry of the Environment and Physical Planning climbed the ladder the old-fashioned way — through a combination of municipal governance and using her education in engineering to work for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. “Lots of leaders in the world are engineers. You just have to think politically,” she explains.

Atanasova, 35, has managed to view environmental issues through the lens of engineering — serving on physical planning and water supply boards and committees at the municipal, civil, and party levels. Environmental policy issues have always been on her agenda, especially now that the country draws closer to EU integration. After having applied for membership to the EU in March 2004, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia secured a formal invitation for accession talks in December.

“I’m very optimistic,” says Atanasova, noting that the country has adopted laws for waste, is preparing a law for noise with the assistance of international experts, and has made progress on water legislation. The country also has 21 stations for monitoring air and water pollution, and has just produced its second national ecological action plan. However, in a series of reports released in November, the European Commission noted a need for “significant” financial investment and commitment to solve environmental issues. Challenges include strengthening administrative capacities, formulating adequate strategic and investment plans, and improving the implementation of environmental legislation and monitoring. In the next three to five years, the Commission recommends that the country integrate environmental protection requirements into other sectoral policies through environmental impact assessments, and improve environmental infrastructure in water treatment, air pollution, and waste management.

Atanasova admits that much work remains. “We have to solve problems with polluters in the country,” she says, adding that cross-border water protection is also a priority.

Anita Pokovac Patekar
Anita Pokovac Patekar has been promoted to head of the Section for International Co-operation within the recently established Directorate for Inspection of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction of Croatia. According to Patekar, international co-operation has been strengthening environmental inspection in Croatia. Patekar has been working on a PHARE (2005) project entitled “Enhanced environmental inspection for enforcement of new environmental legislation.”

Teodora Petrova
Teodora Petrova has been appointed as the chief expert in the Ministry of Transport of Bulgaria and also as the secretary of the Sectoral Operational Programme on Transport for the period 2007-2013.

Adam Gosztonyi
Adam Gosztonyi has been promoted to the head of the Department of Law and Public Administration of the Ministry of Environment and Water of Hungary.