

# 25 people ♦ 25 years

Personal reflections on the REC's first quarter of a century



REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER



As part of the celebrations to mark the REC's 25th anniversary, we interviewed 25 people who have played a significant role in the life of the organisation and made a valuable contribution to addressing environmental issues in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) over the past quarter of a century. The interviews offer a fascinating insight into the personalities and processes that have helped to shape attitudes to environmental challenges. Along with amusing anecdotes and pleasant memories, they contain profound reflections on what has been achieved and also give an idea of the tasks that still lie ahead of the organisation.

The series of interviews was also published on the website [25years.rec.org](http://25years.rec.org), along with summaries of 25 projects that highlight the REC's activities in the CEE region and beyond and illustrate how the organisation can continue to serve its beneficiaries in the future.

**Please join us in our efforts in the coming 25 years!**









# Foreword



## Dear Readers!

Change has swept through Central and Eastern Europe since the collapse of communism 25 years ago. Our region inherited challenging threats but also great opportunities to build a better society, to develop the economy and to preserve the unique natural environment. We now know that the road to sustainability is not easy and the goal cannot be reached alone — we need cooperation between individuals, countries and regions.

Transition in our region has been supported in many forms with the aim of accelerating positive solutions. The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe has been pursuing this goal through various projects and programmes in areas such as water management, climate change, local governance and education for sustainable development. As an international organisation it has facilitated actions to promote cooperation among stakeholders, and to support the free exchange of information and public participation in environmental decision making.

Behind the successful 25 years of the REC you can find the strong and committed cooperation of partners, donors, scientists, beneficiaries and civil society. This book provides the viewpoints of various stakeholders working in the region and beyond. It is not simply a summary of the past but reflects a solid asset for future activities.

Sincerely,

**Janos Ader**

**President of Hungary**





# George H.W. Bush



## A Salute to President George Bush — A REC Founding Father

In July 1989, U.S. President George Bush proposed the establishment of the REC at the then Karl Marx University of Economics in Budapest. Below are some brief excerpts from the former president's 40-minute address.

*Excerpts from the speech given by U.S. President George H. W. Bush at Aula Hall, Karl Marx University, Budapest, Hungary, on July 12, 1989*

Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister and Mrs. Nemeth, ladies and gentlemen, Dr. and Mrs. Csaki.\* It is a great pleasure for Barbara [Bush] and me to be back in Budapest, and I am very proud to be the first American president to visit Hungary. [...]

Three vital spheres stand out in our partnership: economics, the environment, and democratic and cultural exchange. [...]

And yet, economic progress cannot be at the expense of the air we breathe and the water we drink. Six weeks ago, in Mainz [Germany], I proposed cooperation between East and West on environmental issues. And that is why I will ask the United States Congress to appropriate five million dollars to establish an international environmental center for Central and Eastern Europe, to be based right here in Budapest, which will bring together private and government experts and organisations to address the ecological crisis.

After all, our shared heritage is the Earth. And the fate of the Earth transcends borders. It isn't just an East-West issue. Hungary has led Eastern and Central Europe in addressing the concerns of your citizens for cleaner air and water, and now you can do even more, working with the West, to build a bridge of technical and scientific cooperation.

Along these lines, I'm also pleased to announce that the United States has proposed an agreement between our two countries to establish scientific and technical cooperation in the basic sciences, and in specific areas including the environment, medicine and nuclear safety. It is my hope that this visit will also lead to a wider exchange between East and West so our scientists, our artists and our environmentalists can learn from one another, so that our soldiers and statesmen can discuss peace, and our students — God bless 'em — can discuss the future. [...]

\*Bruno Straub (president of Hungary's Presidential Council), Miklos Nemeth (Hungarian prime minister) and Csaba Csaki (rector of Karl Marx University).





**May 26, 2015**

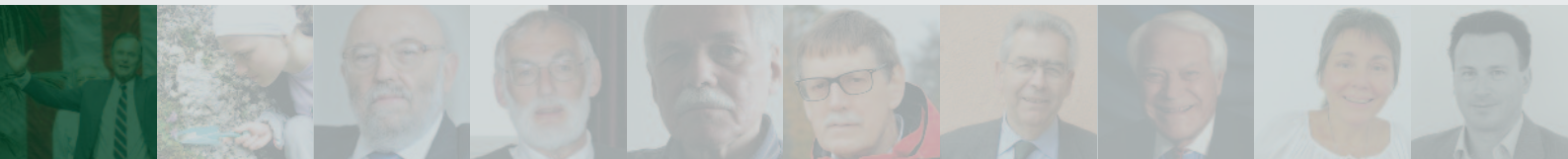
I send my warmest congratulations to everyone gathered in Hungary on the June 10 and 11 to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe. I remember fondly my visit to Budapest in the summer of 1989 and the warm welcome Barbara and I received. During that visit, I pledged America's support for promoting environmental stewardship to reverse decades of neglect of the magnificent forests, rivers, lakes, and pastures of Central and Eastern Europe.

I was proud to stand with a generation in Europe in 1990 seeking to realize their dreams of freedom and opportunity. I was equally proud to collaborate with our friends in Hungary and the European Union to establish the REC in Hungary. The mission of the REC is to bring officials, businesspeople, citizens, and advocates together to work effectively towards the common goal of protecting the environment and building a sustainable future. That goal is as important today as it was twenty-five years ago. I applaud the generation who helped build the REC, and I challenge this generation to fully realize the dream of a Europe whole, free, at peace, and in harmony with its environment.

Congratulations again, and best wishes for continued success.

Sincerely,

**George Bush**



# Ermelinda Mahmutaj



**Ermelinda Mahmutaj** joined Albania's Environmental Center for Development, Education and Networking (EDEN Center) in 2005 as part of the Nature Guide group. In September 2009 she became an EDEN staff member as project coordinator for best environmental management practices. She became the EDEN Center's executive director in February 2011. Prior to joining EDEN, which has enjoyed many years of close cooperation with REC Albania, she worked as an assistant researcher for the Botanical Gardens of the Faculty of Natural Sciences of Tirana University. Ermelinda has a degree in biology and a master's degree in botany from Tirana University.

## **Please can you tell us a little about the EDEN Center?**

EDEN was established in 2004. Drawing on its collective experience at the time, the organisation started its work in environmental education and capacity building. I joined in 2005 after completing my biology studies. In 2007, EDEN expanded its work to include public information and participation. Through a partnership with the CEE Bankwatch Network we were involved in watchdogging related to a special case study involving the Vlora Thermal Power Plant, which was a highly controversial project. Expanded watchdogging efforts and greater involvement in public information and participation earned us a place on the Aarhus Convention advisory board. Later on we became active in monitoring the implementation of environmental legislation in Albania.

## **How many people are involved in the organisation, and what are you working on now?**

We currently have five people on the staff, all full-time. There are an additional 16 trainers who, while not official staff, are experts from different fields. These people offer their assistance from time to time. Our team of trainers helps in our ongoing capacity-building efforts, which mainly target groups of local government personnel and other organisations. We also work with communities and educational systems, focusing primarily on environmental education [EE].

As part of our EE-related work we are coordinating a group of nature guides and an environmental education centre, which is situated at Tirana Zoo and serves as a lab for open classes. With financial support from GEF, it is now also an eco centre that works with solar panels and so forth.

Also coordinated within the EE sector is a group of 40 volunteers who work on a rotating basis. They can implement and test their project ideas within the organisation, but they also help EDEN with project implementation.

Another working sector of EDEN is environmental management practices, which focuses mainly on waste management issues such as urban waste, hospital waste, and the storage and disposal of used lead-acid batteries. Some of our main activities are national awareness campaigns and assisting local authorities in waste management plans, assessment studies and things like that.

## **Do you generally favour a bottom-up approach or a top-down one?**

We like taking a bottom-up approach, but you have to combine them both. It's from the bottom that you gain an understanding of what the real needs are. Once we have an understanding of how to best address these needs, we're then able to take advantage of our long experience and involvement with government authorities. Within the Green Agenda initiative in the Balkans, EDEN



started its work by providing implementation assistance to six local authorities in order to develop a local agenda action plan. We did our most immediate and important work with local authorities, and then worked to expand the network of relationships with other “communes”, a technical term we use in Albania for communities that are smaller than municipalities. It’s through this type of work that we were able to establish good relations and secure a good reputation for ourselves. And the fact that many of these communes have asked us for assistance with waste management-related problems is proof of our good reputation.

#### What do you think makes for an effective project proposal and a successful project?

My general ideas about project proposals are closely related to the types of situations that people face here in Albania. Environment is a really wide topic, and it’s also a cross-cutting sector, so you need to be careful from the outset to be clear and to address specific issues. While we make ongoing efforts to address general awareness, this takes a long time. Any specific short-term action, in order to be effective, needs to raise the type of awareness that really engages CSOs and other professionals with the public itself — that takes public opinion and perceptions of policy into deep consideration. This is how you can come up with good, long-term projects — ones that are carried out over two or three stages. But, again, you need to have a clear vision and be able to assess who you really are as an organisation. You can push civic activism all you want, but you can’t win anything concrete in the name of environmental protection if you don’t specifically ask for it.

There’s a current REC Albania programme that I like — SENIOR-A [Support for Environmental Civil Society Organisations in Albania], which is funded by Sida. What I like about this project is that it helps to assess needs, and then acts on those needs. Insofar as it’s based on actual needs, it’s able to bypass the more conventional donor-driven approach. Three years into the project, we’re still free to choose how to go on with our strategies and activities, based on needs assessment. I think it’s worth bearing in mind that civil society first needs public support in order to win financial sup-

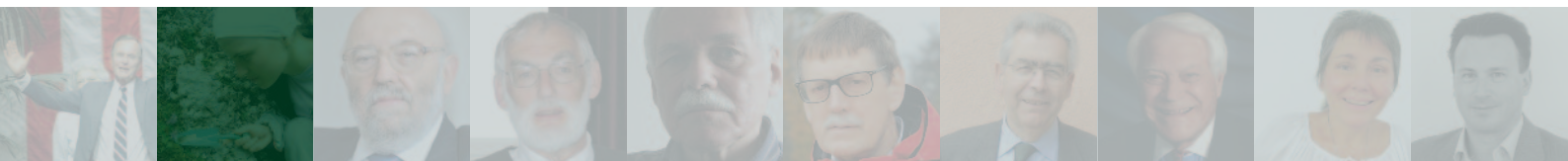
port for initiatives. If I’m working on a project proposal, I’m thinking in terms of what will be good for citizens, and not so much in terms of what kind of a project will be good for potential donors.

#### What comes to your mind when you hear the name “REC”?

For me, the REC is mostly related to REC Albania, which I associate in turn with sustainability, professionalism and enthusiastic support. REC Albania not only works as an international organisation, but serves as a model in this country for organisational issues, and its rules of management should apply more or less to all organisations, whether big or small. And because REC Albania enjoys a high profile within Albania itself, this raises the overall profile of civil society. I’m grateful that REC Albania over the years has proved very supportive, not only with money, but with advice and support — and not only where projects are concerned. They are friendly and easily approachable, and there’s a general philosophy that they bring to the table. As for the REC as a whole, it impresses me as one huge family, working year after year to achieve its goals and fulfil its mission.

#### What are the greatest environment-related challenges facing the CEE region today?

I think the most important challenge for the region in general is that EU rules and regulations need to be applied in non-EU countries. These latter countries are in a rush to transpose legislation and to carry out administrative changes, but on the other hand there are still policies in place that allow projects — energy projects related to coal, for example — that are environmentally harmful. When it comes to the EU investing in would-be member countries, they sometimes don’t follow their own rules, which isn’t fair because the target countries will be in a big mess following EU accession. The focus here is on decision makers, whether they represent member states or non-member states. While public awareness and community needs are always important, this particular issue is related at heart to policy implementation — so, again, the focus of concern is on government parties and decision makers.



# Andrzej Kassenberg



**Andrzej Kassenberg** is the co-founder and president of the Institute for Sustainable Development, and co-founder of the Polish Energy Efficiency Foundation. For many years he has been engaged in scientific activities as a sustainable development policy expert. Kassenberg was the initiator and first chair of the Environmental Impact Assessment Commission at the Ministry of Environment in Poland and served from 1991 to 1995 and again between 1999 and 2010 as a member of the Environmental and Social Council of the EBRD. He is currently chair of the Board of Directors of the REC. He is also involved in projects with a focus on climate change, energy and transport.

## **What has been the impact of NGO development in Poland over the past 25 years or so?**

Some developments have been very positive, but there are other, less progressive elements. The first thing is the professionalisation of the NGO movement. These organisations have developed quite well — they have their offices and employees, and they're able to create jobs. And this is important in that it helps to stabilise civil society; but viewed from the other side there is the problem of financing, which turns the focus to donors and what they think is important. If the donors are from the government, then they'll be interested in advancing government policies. But sometimes an NGO is forced to try to obtain financing from sources that go beyond what the government wants, or beyond what the donors want — or are sometimes against — in which case it's difficult to find the money.

Another important development is that society's interest in environmental issues is quite low right now — declining in fact. Right after the political changes of 25 years ago, there was a lot of information about pollution and how it affected human health. We spent a lot of our own money and the EU's money to publish this information. Now it appears that the environment is no longer such an urgent issue for most people. People want a more modern society and sometimes think that these "crazy environmentalists" want too much. So we need to come up with a new language and a new concept for communication, which is not easy.

Back in communist times it was somehow easier to find the spare time to be active about the environment. Today it's quite difficult because people have to work hard to have enough financial resources to live their lives — especially if they have a family and young children. It's difficult to be a volunteer. Most volunteers today are looking for experience to add to their CV. Emotion has been mostly replaced by pragmatism.

## **What has been the overall effect of NGO development on Poland's civil society?**

There are important differences with regard to local government and central government. For the latter, you need quite a strong NGO sector capable of making persuasive arguments and providing sound scientific analyses. But things are somewhat more difficult where local government is concerned because there are often several "hidden" relations — between local businesses, politicians and administration personnel — and this often creates situations that are quite difficult for small groups or young people to break through in their efforts to engage the public. And where environmental issues are concerned, we really need to change course. If you're working in youth education or with kindergarten-age children, that's fine, but if you want to take on something like the construction of a big shopping mall in a high-value area that's environmentally sensitive, then you run into real difficulties.



The mayor of my city once told me: “I’m all for having a sustainable city, but if I go too far and don’t pay enough attention to things like providing sidewalks or street lighting, the people won’t re-elect me.” People need to see the changes, especially if over ten years or so the city has been developed in such a way as to provide new opportunities. It can be very hard to put through long-term initiatives in the context of an election cycle and during short terms of being in power.

**What kinds of policies or measures are needed to support a more dialogue-based decision-making process on environmental issues?**

At European level there are plenty of channels for dialogue, but not a great deal of enthusiasm for dialogue that results in actual, real changes. Along these lines, just because there are plenty of reports on public participation it is no guarantee that public concerns or progressive businesses will find the space to be heard. It’s very difficult to find a solution to this problem, especially with the economic and political situations we have now.

It’s interesting that the issue of environment has less influence on Eastern European populations than earlier. It was perhaps easier to care more about it during communist times because people had just one enemy to blame for disregarding nature and polluting the environment. The situation now is completely different. In a consumption-driven society we have the freedom to buy, and the only problem is to have enough money.

**What special role do you see the REC playing in a Europe-wide or global context?**

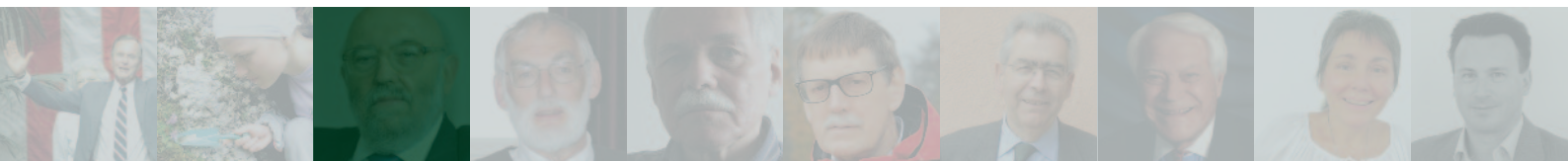
I agree with the SDGs and the COP process, but I think we need to think beyond Paris, as we don’t know what will happen there. The progress will probably be very limited, as many Central and Eastern European countries are not very happy about the really high emissions targets. But I think that the concept of circular economy is something very important, and the European Parliament seems to be pushing in this direction. Another area in which it’s important to see some improvement is resource efficiency.

**What pops into your mind when you hear the name “REC”?**

I was involved with the REC from the beginning and was at the first signatory meeting events. Something I remember very well from the 1990s was a celebration with the president of Hungary and many ministers from European countries, including the minister from Poland. This was very important and exciting because suddenly there were some regional institutions — not European, but regional — that were created to help us with difficult environmental problems and to share new ideas and new challenges; to generally help where things weren’t so well developed in Central and Eastern Europe just after the changes. And I still remember when I returned from Budapest and was at the airport — bear in mind that in communist times you always needed to wait in a long queue to have your passport checked — it was the first time in my life when the security guard said that people with a Polish passport could pass straight through. That was when I started to feel: “Now I am really in my country!”

**Do you have any other memorable REC experiences to share?**

Another early event comes to mind as well. It was a meeting of the Advisory Council of the EBRD or the General Assembly of the EBRD. Jacques Attali was president of the bank [from 1991 to 1993] and the event was at the Budapest Congress Centre — a huge event! Our meeting of the Environmental Council with the bank president was to be a very small one, as he was very busy. And I remember that the EBRD presented to us the energy policy that the bank had adopted. And we were very angry. “Why,” we asked, “as the Advisory Council, have we not been involved in the process?” We were only informed about the decision. So it was the then executive director of the REC Peter Hardi, Janos Varga of the Danube Circle, and me. And we stood up and were almost shouting about how unfair it was. The Italian guy was so afraid that for subsequent meetings we were sent all of the necessary materials well in advance! So the REC here was able to represent a common front against this unacceptable procedure.



# Dennis Meadows



**Dennis Meadows** holds degrees in both chemistry and management. Between 1970 and 2004 he was a professor in the faculties of business, engineering and the social sciences at three universities: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dartmouth College and the University of New Hampshire. He led major research projects and was director of policy institutes at each of the three universities. His ten books have been translated into more than 30 languages. He co-authored the first report to the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*. Written in 1972, the book sold 3 million copies, received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, and has been cited as one of the ten most influential environmental texts of the 20th century. Another of his books was judged to be the most important text on the future published in German in 2006. He speaks English and German, has lived in seven countries, and has lectured and consulted in over 40 nations.

Professor Meadows has received four honorary doctorates for his contributions to environmental education. He was appointed honorary professor at Moscow State University and at Corvinus University in Budapest, and he served as senior academic advisor to the international programme Leadership for Environment and Development, and to the United Nations University for Peace.

**What first pops into your mind when you hear the name “REC”?**

My answer will sound trite, but it is true and sincere. I think of all the dedicated, intelligent, informed young people I have met who represent the REC in its 18 affiliated nations. I got to know many of them during two workshops I conducted at the REC headquarters — first in the late 1990s and then in 2012. They give me optimism that partially offsets all the gloomy news we read these days about environmental problems.

**With the fresh emergence of new environmental issues and proposed solutions — SDGs, the**

**Paris COP etc. — what special roles do you see the Central and Eastern European region playing in a Europe-wide or global context?**

The unique location, membership and personnel of the REC qualify it to make many contributions. Of its avowed missions I would concentrate on capacity building, giving basic skills to people and strengthening environmental organisations. The pace of change is incredibly rapid now. Plus the political and economic conditions in the REC nations differ enormously. Thus it is impossible to develop and teach solutions that will be valid for very long or in many regions. But the REC does enormous good by strengthening capacity within



its affiliated nations, so they will be able better to deal with their own urgent environmental issues as they emerge.

**Can you share a memorable experience involving the REC or the CEE region?**

I still remember the excitement of meeting with others in the REC's first headquarters, the old silk factory building on the outskirts of Budapest. We had come from the donor nations as guests of Hungary. We sought to develop concrete goals and strategies for the regional environmental centre that was created after the first President George Bush pledged USD 5 million of support for it during his July 1989 visit to Budapest. There were momentous political and environmental changes under way in those days. We hoped we could work with our Hungarian hosts to create a new organisation that would be a constructive partner responding to those changes.

**You co-authored the pioneering *The Limits to Growth* in 1972, a book that has been updated twice over the years. What changes or observations have been necessary to add in the intervening four decades since the book's original publication?**

We redid the analysis twice, in 1992 and in 2004, and each time published a new report. Looking at global data since its publication, we found that our main conclusions remained valid. But the implications changed over time. We said in 1972 that it would in theory be possible to change pro-growth policies, avoid collapse, and achieve a global sustainable society at a relatively high level of welfare. But in practice that was not done. So now we believe a decline in the use of materials and energy is inevitable. The priority should shift from achieving sustainability to building resilience.

**What do you mean by "resilience" in this context?**

The dictionary defines "resilience" as the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. A resilient

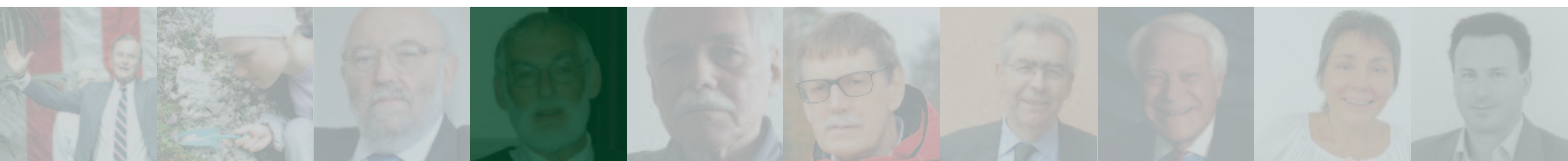
community can quickly regain the capacity to provide essential goods and services to its citizens after a shock, such as a natural disaster, conflict, or economic and political disruptions.

**You have developed many games and simulations over several years to teach key lessons in a variety of settings — Fish Banks being one of the most well known. What are some of the advantages of using these types of educational tools to communicate the information you're trying to put across?**

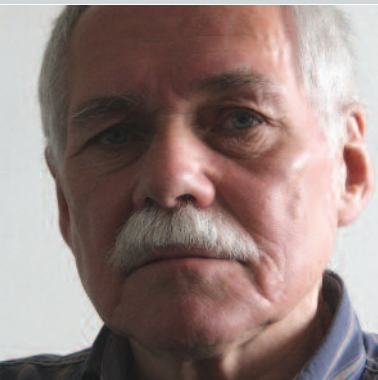
There is an ancient saying: "When I hear, I forget. When I see, I remember. When I do, I understand." Games provide the opportunity for learning by doing. They permit participants to bring their own perspectives, expertise and goals into an exercise, test their ideas and learn from their mistakes.

**You and your wife Donella founded the Balaton Group in 1982. Can you talk a little about the inspiration and purpose behind that, and what have been some notable outcomes of these meetings over the years?**

In 1981 we were encouraged and supported by Dr. Laszlo Kapolyi, then Hungarian minister of energy, to create an annual meeting in Hungary that would bring together from East and West the best systems scientists interested in sustainable development. The goal was to share research results, form professional friendships and develop ideas for new projects. A maximum of 50 people were invited each year from about 25 countries, and we organised the meetings in the countryside, in Csopak, a small village on the shore of Lake Balaton, to minimise distractions. We wanted participants to use their time mainly talking with each other. The group's 34th annual meeting will take place in September 2015. The group has been enormously productive. As one measure, over 125 books have been written all or in part by Balaton Group members since our first meeting.



# Bedrich Moldan



**Bedrich Moldan** is a Czech ecologist, publicist and politician. He is a professor of environmental science and is the founder and director of the Charles University Environment Center. From 1990 to 1991, Moldan was the first minister of environment of the Czech Republic, then part of Czechoslovakia. From 2001 to 2004 he was coordinating lead author of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA). He is a founding member of the Civic Democratic Party. In 2004 he was elected to the Senate of the Czech Republic. In 2010 he received the SCOPE-Zhongyu Environmental Lifetime Achievement Award from the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment and Zhongyu Environmental Technologies Corporation in China.

## What were the main findings of the MEA related to this region?

The assessment was mostly limited to the scientific establishment, and especially biologists and natural scientists. I don't think that the general public or government officials were involved to any reasonable degree. And from this point of the view the results were rather limited.

There were very few participants from this region, and this certainly translates into a certain delay in disseminating the results for this region. On the other hand, people do or did understand the main results of how the ecosystems were evaluated, so from this point of view, step by step and gradually, the knowledge and these ideas penetrated — but only very, very slowly.

## What are the biggest changes that have taken place in the years that followed 2004, when the MEA was concluded?

I think that we should start with what was the most significant milestone, which was the end of the communist regime. This is absolutely crucial, because for many other countries in this region the changes were so deep and profound — politically, socially, economically. But, of course, one of the most significant facts related to the outgoing regime was that the environment was very much damaged. And even if the information was sup-

pressed by the government — or, paradoxically, even because of this fact — people did realise that the situation was very bad. And they attributed the situation to the communist rulers. This was the case in many of these countries, not only in the Czech Republic, which is my country and certainly where I have the most experience.

Let's take Hungary as an example. In Hungary there was a very big fight over a proposed giant dam at Nagymaros. And it was widely thought that this was a "communist" proposal — not only environmentally bad but also politically motivated. These things were connected, and you can understand why the general public's resistance to such projects was very great. This translated into political action — namely that people from the environmental movement were made part of the early governments of most of these countries. This was particularly clear to see in Slovenia, where environmentalists were part of the government, and in Slovakia as well. This was very important.

And this was not a purely political issue: it translated into concrete action. The end result of all this was a very rapid and massive improvement of the environmental situation with some of the new regimes in the early 1990s. Then, at some point in the early 2000s, the improvements were so visible and so massive that the people became somehow satisfied and no longer thought it necessary to pay much attention to these issues.

They became a little bit complacent in the first half of the first decade of the new millennium. There was a turn away from environmental concerns to other concerns — economic, social and political ones. So the situation during those years was not so conducive to supporting further environmental improvements. People just thought things were okay and that it was now more important to build highways and other things, to try and become wealthy and so forth.

#### What are some new ways to strengthen environmental governance?

I think that the situation now — for the political elite, scientists and university teachers, and environmentalists in general — is much more difficult than it was before. We definitely have to find new ways to approach the public, and there are several ways of doing so. One is to rely more on the development of civil society, and certainly the REC is very important in this regard. And these civil society groups and institutions must find the most effective ways to reach the general public, which is very, very difficult. In my country, for example, the official attitude towards civil society groups is not very favourable. They are viewed with suspicion. Some are viewed as credible and reliable, but the governmental sectors rarely. The public generally feels that their goals and the government's goals are not aligned. They feel that these groups are holding back economic development or exploiting the NIMBY effect — “not in my backyard”. They also see that these groups are sometimes involved with ostensibly environmental projects that in reality have nothing at all to do with the environment, but have to do rather with land use or real estate concerns. This undermines credibility for sure.

A second thing that's needed is solid science and solid pedagogical work in schools. In many of these countries there is a lack of solid “boundary organisations” — that is, organisations that occupy the boundary between politics and science. There are different think-tanks that might, for example, work with scientific language to make it more understandable to policy makers and the general public. This means focusing on the interface between science and what becomes policy or

a political position on environmental issues. This is really an important task that we should focus on. Again, in this respect I think that REC involvement with high-ranking officials is notable — which I noticed during the last General Assembly meeting. And this is a strategy that I highly recommend and promote.

#### How do you see the organisation moving forward in both a regional and global context?

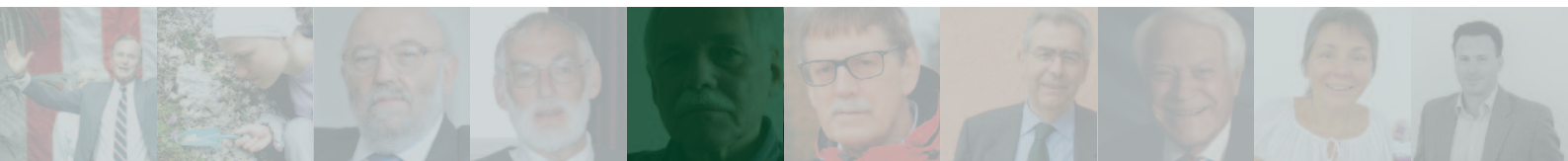
The role is certainly changing because the REC is now just one of many civil society institutions, whereas it was more unique at the beginning. So now it needs to find its specific niche amidst these other institutions, and this is no easy task. In fact it's a continuous challenge. One thing I think is very important is the REC's role in countries that are new EU members, like Bulgaria and Romania, as well as with non-EU members, particularly in the Western Balkans. The REC has lots of lessons to teach through working with older EU countries that have struggled for years in facing the same issues, such as Hungary and the Visegrad countries. This is very important, but also, on the other hand, the REC can bring its knowledge from working with these countries back to the region. This is another promising direction.

#### What first pops into your mind when you hear the name “REC”?

As a former chair of the board I have lots of experiences with the REC, but what really pops into my mind is the unique location of the current headquarters in Szentendre, with the Danube nearby and the whole natural surroundings. That's an important image for me.

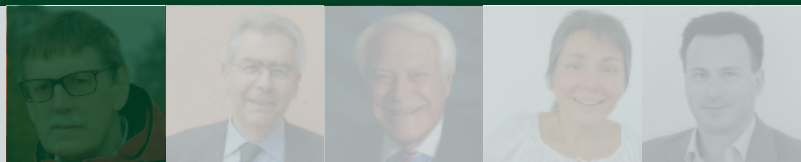
#### Can you share a REC-related anecdote?

I recall the old location of the REC in Budapest, on Miklos Square, and how the people there were struggling to get some more space. Even though it was difficult for people to get around there was some staff opposition when it was proposed to move to Szentendre. But there were some funny situations at the old location — it was so crowded that people were working in the corridors. That was a fun and interesting time.





# Adriaan Oudeman



**Adriaan Oudeman** trained as a chemist and chemical engineer at Delft University of Technology, gaining an MSc in 1973. He completed his graduate studies at the University of Calgary, specialising in organometallic chemistry and nuclear magnetic resonance measurements (PhD 1978). Oudeman joined the Netherlands Directorate-General for the Environment in 1979, where he became a specialist in toxic substances and pesticides registration. He set up a registration system for new chemical substances — a precursor of the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) Regulation — in the Netherlands. For this purpose he was stationed for several years at the Netherlands Institute for Health and Environment. In 1992 he joined the Directorate for International Affairs, with a focus on environmental cooperation in United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) countries and Eastern Europe. In this capacity Oudeman served two terms on the Board of Directors of the REC.

**What are some of your early impressions of the REC and its development over the years, and how did you become involved with the organisation?**

My experience with the REC covers a period of some 20 years, from roughly 1995 until today. This is a period during which I worked with the REC in different capacities as a representative of the Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment — now the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment. Thus I can offer a bird's-eye view over time — but not over space.

In 1992 I was up for a change of career within the ministry. Until that time I worked as an expert on chemical substances and pesticides control. In 1992 I entered the international environmental arena — as this is called — and the new thing there was establishing cooperation with Eastern Europe. Like many of my colleagues, I had never visited that region or worked with colleagues from that region. Also, 1992 was the year of the Rio Conference on Environment and Development. The Netherlands had apparently agreed to take

the lead in working out Principle 10 of the Rio 1992 Declaration, which spells out citizens' environmental rights and obligations [see note below\*--Ed.]. We organised a first meeting in Geneva with the help of the UNECE, and I met the REC during this process.

**What role did the REC play in the Aarhus Convention deliberations? And what is the convention's importance today?**

In the first instance our aim was to establish guidelines on Principle 10, but at the Sofia Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in 1995 the ambition was upgraded to strive for a full-fledged convention, which later became the Aarhus Convention. The initial success of such a thing would of course depend on the number of countries willing to sign at Aarhus, and a few months before the meeting it didn't seem to be heading for a landslide victory. National languages appeared to be the major obstacle. The text of the convention needed to be available in each country's national language — or languages

— well in advance of May 1998 for most ministers to obtain the mandate to sign. It was here that the REC proved invaluable: before we knew it, the organisation had translated the text and made it available to various administrations in Central and Eastern Europe for correction and approval. More than 40 European countries eventually signed the convention at Aarhus!

Now, has the Aarhus Convention made a difference? In my view it was an expression of changes already in the air. It was sown in fruitful earth, so to say, at that particular period in time. The UNECE was successful in bringing the convention to life by adding a protocol on pollution registers, amending the convention to include genetically modified organisms, and setting up an effective compliance regime. In the course of time the REC built up expertise and authority on the subject: it organised workshops, roundtables and conferences, and involved local governments and citizens groups in the region. Not being a legal expert I gradually lost sight of all the ins and outs of the Aarhus Convention. My feeling is that the convention is nowadays well established and recognised in most countries, but in less turbulent waters. It certainly helped focus debate on issues of transparency and citizens' right to access environmental information in times of change.

#### How has the REC changed over the years in response to the changes happening around it?

My impression is that the REC itself has moved along and is nowadays focusing more on the economics and even the financing of environmental protection. It has been able to establish good relations with a number of international companies that are also active in Central and South-Eastern Europe. In my view there is some scope for furthering relations with the banking sector in terms of administering green funds. I think the REC has valuable expertise for setting up projects of interest to these parties. Thinking, for instance, of opportunities for insulation and "zero-carbon" buildings, a lot of work remains to be done.

Over time the character of the REC has slowly changed, as we all do, and such changes are most clearly discernible in retrospect. When I came into closer contact with the REC it had already survived the diseases of infancy and was celebrating its fifth anniversary. In those early years the REC was able to attract the brightest young people from the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe, and often I had the feeling of being on a university campus — a very inspiring, innovative and informal atmosphere. Later, when the requirements for funding and project acquisition became more stringent, the REC changed into a hybrid of a multilateral organisation and a consultancy. It was once again able to play a quintessential role in helping introduce the environmental acquis to countries acceding to the European Union. Again, one of the strongest points was being able to speak the languages of the region.

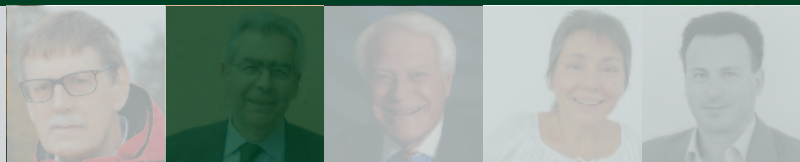
#### What role do you see for the REC in the coming years, either regionally or globally?

There is less momentum at present behind EU accession, and various crises are visible in Europe and its environs. Let us hope for a turn for the better and that the REC may continue to help improve the living environment in the region of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Of course, the REC's message and expertise are of value beyond the region, and some outreach may pay off. Over a longer period of time the REC might have to adapt itself again or reinvent itself. May it stay close to its mission and the region in which it was born.

\*Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development: "Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided."



# Ignazio Musu



**Ignazio Musu** is emeritus professor of economics at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where he also served as dean of the Department of Economics and as a member of the Academic Senate. He also served as dean of Venice International University, where he now chairs the Thematic Environmental Center for Sustainable Development. He is a member of the Council of the Bank of Italy and a fellow of Accademia dei Lincei. His research fields are economic growth, environmental economics and the Chinese economy.

## How did the REC-VIU partnership come about?

I was introduced to the REC in 2003. At that time I was serving as dean of Venice International University, an international network promoting the exchange of students, faculty members and researchers from other universities all around the world. The overall aim of the network was to foster interaction between teaching and research and to facilitate dialogue between various cultures.

One of our exchange topics focused on sustainable development and environmental management, and this was the main reason why the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS) asked us to cooperate with the REC on an advanced training project to help civil servants from Central and Eastern European countries, most of which were not yet members of the European Union. The primary goal of the training project was to improve participants' awareness of the complex problematics of sustainable development in the context of playing a more active role in the future of European environmental policy.

## What are some of the key strategic elements needed for sustainable development?

Cooperation with the REC was extremely important in helping participants to understand how to respond to the challenges of sustainable development. One crucial component for building a long-term strategy for sustainable development — which, unfortunately, is not recognised widely enough — is human capital.

It is very clear that sustainable development requires appropriate public policies and the involvement of the main actors operating on the market. It is also clear that social norms, public opinion and civil society play essential supporting roles.

But no step forward can be made without human capital that is oriented toward and competent in addressing environmental challenges. It also requires the technological opportunities to deal with them, as well as the appropriate institutional framework required for implementation.

## How does all of this come into play in an international context?

Interaction between countries brings together different histories and cultural attitudes concerning the relationship between economic growth and environmental protection, and it is absolutely necessary that these different perspectives are shared. And it is precisely this type of interaction the 10 years of cooperation between the REC and VIU has made possible.

This cooperation progressed through different areas of involvement than was the case with Central and Eastern European countries that would later join the European Union. It also involved countries from Central Asia, the Balkans, the Black Sea region, and the Middle East and North Africa.

Our experience confirms the necessity to educate and train civil servants about sustainable development — students and scholars as well — even if they're not directly engaged in environmental activities. Experience also confirms that the envi-



ronmental challenge involves all the world's nations and societies, and that sustainable development is a concept that applies to every sector of economic and human activity.

### How does the issue of climate change fit into the overall picture?

The issue of climate change offers the strongest confirmation of these claims. To deal successfully with climate change means building a low-carbon economy and society, which essentially means overturning the economic growth model that has prevailed since the dawn of the industrial era. This requires a new "green" technological revolution, which must free an economic and social system locked into an infrastructure based on energy from burning fossil fuels. Clearly, a change of such magnitude cannot come about solely through efficient environmental regulation. Each and every sector of the economy has to move in a low-carbon direction — not just industry, but the agricultural and service sectors as well. Lifestyle models and consumption habits must also change.

On the other hand, local systems demonstrate the need for an integrated ecological-social approach to sustainable development. Ecological systems are not separated by economic and social systems. On the contrary. They should be considered as integrated, ecological-social systems.

The resilience of ecological-social systems depends on a combination of institutions, economic and social mechanisms, and public policies. Economic decisions in particular are required to respond to challenges to ecological resilience. The ways that economic mechanisms and public policy react to such challenges plays a decisive role in re-establishing ecological resilience.

As a matter of fact, the resilience of an ecological-social system comes very near to the idea of sustainability. We can say that sustainability is a fundamental feature of the resilience of ecological-social systems. A strategy of sustainability considered in its three dimensions — ecological, economic and social — is almost always required to respond to the challenges of maintaining system resilience.

### What can Venice and its delicate ecosystem teach us about adaptive capacity?

Venice and its lagoon represent a typical example of challenges to both sustainability and resilience. The lagoon is a reference context for Venice as a city, and is also a reference term for any analysis of the environmental sustainability of its local development. In other words, the lagoon cannot be considered independently of the urban reality of Venice. Without this dynamic, developed over centuries, the lagoon would not be the kind of ecosystem that it is today. As has happened with many lagoons, were it not for human interaction, natural sedimentation would have caused the Venice lagoon to disappear. Not only has the existence of Venice saved the lagoon, but it has transformed the lagoon into a wetland that is unique in the world, precisely because it contains not only a natural heritage but also the cultural heritage of a living city.

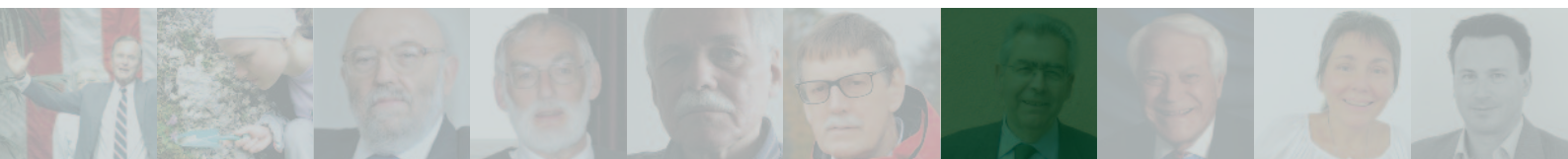
It is a specific objective of Venice's sustainable development strategy to safeguard this fragile equilibrium between the city's population, its urban structures and the natural environment. There has been and always will be an unstable and delicate balance.

Venice and its lagoon have proved an extremely useful example of drawing from complex problems to build resilient and sustainable social-ecological systems during training programme sessions that have taken place in Venice.

### How do you see cooperation moving forward?

The idea of creating the Sustainable Development Academy emerged as a result of recent cooperation between the REC and VIU. The plan was to organise training and education activities involving participants from different countries with the objective of preparing people to build a sustainable society.

My hope is that the REC will be able to develop this initiative with the involvement of civil servants, students, researchers and stakeholders. The peaceful environs of the beautiful island in the Venice lagoon will be always available in supporting this effort, and I hope that what has been built through our cooperation in the past years will not be lost.



# Bob Herbst



**Robert L. Herbst** has over 60 years of successful experience as a business, environmental and conservation executive. Herbst served as U.S. assistant secretary for fish, wildlife, and parks, and as acting secretary for the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Carter administration recognised him as one of the best subcabinet administrators in government. In 1998, the Clinton administration selected Herbst as U.S. member of the REC's Board of Directors, a position he held for seven years. He has received over 600 awards for his administrative, environmental and public service accomplishments. In 2003, he was inducted into the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame (Hayward, Wisconsin, U.S.) and was presented with the Outstanding Achievement Award from the University of Minnesota. The University of Minnesota also recognised Herbst as one of its 1,000 outstanding graduates.

## What were the circumstances that led to your being a founding member of the REC's Board of Directors?

For many years I served as a forester in the field. And I had a number of administrative jobs in the private, university, non-profit and government sectors in caring for our Earth. During these many years, I learned that the most successful projects are a result of cooperation between individuals, agencies and organisations.

During my career I had travelled to Europe a number of times — of course, my ancestors were from Germany. I developed a love for the region, its people, and its natural resources. And so, when the Soviet Union broke up, many countries became independent and turned toward democratic processes — and the REC was established. After serving for seven years of my life on the REC Board, I have enthusiastically continued to assist and promote the REC.

## What are some of the ways that you have supported and promoted the REC outside of Europe in the years following your direct involvement in the organisation?

My foundation, GETF, and the REC have worked together on projects. For example, we jointly carried out a USD 1 million grant to address water management in Europe and set up demonstration projects. I have encouraged trips by U.S. university groups to visit and learn from the REC. I have promoted the REC and its purpose, for example, in speeches, TV interviews, TV programmes — more than 20 half-hour shows — and radio programmes. Several of us are pursuing a possible REC organisation in Latin America.

I regularly distribute REC studies and reports in the U.S. I founded, organised and for ten years served as chair of the board of the U.S. Central and Eastern Europe Environmental Foundation. The foundation has raised funds for projects in Eu-

rope, served as a contact for the REC in the U.S., and promoted congressional appropriations to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the REC. The foundation is now assisting Moldova. I also worked with other University of Minnesota alumni in establishing a scholarship fund for forestry students. This fund has already assisted a number of natural resources management students.

**Could you explain your views on the values of education and its relationship to environmental stewardship?**

To me, it is essential to have a university education in resource management in order to be a successful professional in caring for our natural resources. For this reason, I believe strongly in environmental education at the university level. I also firmly believe in the incorporation of environmental education in curricula at all levels, from elementary teaching through high school. I was able to successfully obtain a grant to bring several REC staff to the U.S. to study methods of cooperation with corporations in setting up wildlife habitat projects.

**In the coming years, what special role do you see the REC playing in a regional or global context?**

I believe the special roles that the REC can play in future years will be to continue its leadership on global climate issues; to promote and demonstrate alternative sources of energy; and to assist other areas of the world in creating similar organisations to regionally cooperate on addressing environmental issues.

I also believe the REC must play a leadership role in the region, and globally, to provide advice and coordination to address the many water issues

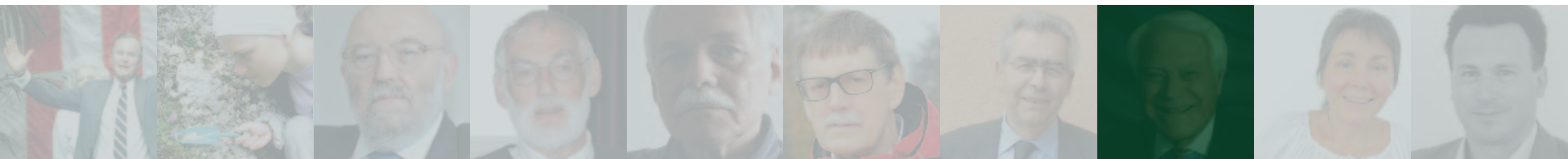
and conflicts that exist and will arise. Water is the most important natural resource on Earth, as it is "life itself" for all forms of life — from the tiniest of micro-organisms to human beings.

**What first pops into your mind when you hear the name "REC"?**

When I hear or read the name "REC", I think of the international success story that the REC is! And I treasure with pride my seven years as the U.S. board member! The success of the REC is due to its coordination of citizen involvement with environmental issues; the opportunities it provides for environmental professionals; its coordination of countries in addressing issues; and the mechanism it offers to address environmental problems that cross borders and are regional or global in nature. And, of course, its many successful studies and projects and funding projects to address environmental needs underline its leadership. The fact that so many government agencies, foundations and corporations have funded the REC over the years illustrates the high respect for its work.

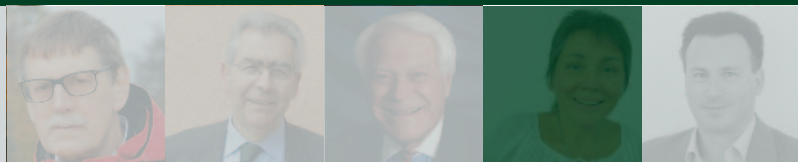
**Can you share a memorable experience involving the REC or the CEE region?**

One of my most memorable experiences at the REC was at the going-away party for Tom Garvey, who was the European Union board member. In his comments, Tom said he believed one of the best examples of cooperation between the European Union and the U.S. was the working relationship between himself and the U.S. board member — Bob Herbst. While this was an exaggeration, it made me feel very good. But, more importantly, it illustrated the good working relationship between the REC board and executive director and the bonding of its members.





# Marina Drndarski



**Marina Drndarski** teaches 10- to 15-year-olds in Belgrade, Serbia. She sums up her teaching philosophy as follows: “I have always tried my best to inspire and lead students to a better understanding of nature. I follow the motto ‘In order to love something you have to understand it first.’ Hard work, curiosity and an eagerness to learn are my major characteristics. I’m always willing to look for more than one solution to a problem, or for more than a single explanation of a situation. I’m happy that my teaching has had that same kind of influence on many of my pupils. Given their natural curiosity, there are no limits to what students can achieve with the right kind of leadership and motivation. The more that is offered to them, the more they will be ready to try new things, to experiment, and to be confident about their discoveries.”

## **Did you always want to be a teacher?**

Actually, from early childhood I wanted to be a field biologist.

## **How long have you been working in the classroom with the Green Pack? Did you have any previous background in environmental education, or was the Green Pack your first experience in teaching this kind of material?**

The first time I met with the Green Pack was in 2007 — using the English-language version. From that year I started using different parts of the Green Pack in my everyday teaching, especially when discussing topics connected with the environment, such as water, energy-efficient products, sustainable development, biodiversity and so on.

I do have a background in environmental education, but the Green Pack has the best methodology and the most accessible approach to environmental science, with lots of material for different ages of students. There are also lots of video materials to help start and connect topics, or to help start up a classroom discussion.

As a teacher, I recognise the great importance of education for sustainable development, so I try to convey my knowledge, creativity, enthusiasm and love of nature to my students. They are the ones who will be here after us.

## **Which parts of the Green Pack materials are your favourites to use in class? What do the students seem to enjoy the most?**

My students and I prefer the Global Challenges and Values sections, as we see these as the two most important challenges in the 21st century. The discussions among the students can last for hours, and these topics can always open up new information from the real, everyday world.

My fifth-grade students — 10- and 11-year-olds — always ask for the video clips to share and show to their friends and families, and they seem most effective. They tend to look for similar content on the Internet afterwards, and they ask a lot of questions, ranging from “Do smokers really get longer noses?” or “Will a baby seal really die every time I throw away a plastic bag?” to “Where can we buy a machine for recycling plastic?” They are very eager and willing, but our society is not yet aware of this potential and is not providing them with proper backup.

## **Which environmental concerns do you feel are most important to address where you live?**

The most important environmental concerns for me, as a citizen and teacher, are vulnerable and disappearing biodiversity in Serbia, and the excessive

and impractical use of water and energy. We also need to raise public awareness about pollution and about taking responsibility for the environment.

**What is being done, or could be done, in Serbia to address these problems?**

A lot of things can be done, at all levels. In general, people seem to be unaware of the long-term or even short-term effects of their actions. Proper waste disposal is a major issue, and we have very low levels of recycling. There is room for improvement anywhere we look. We have done a lot about recycling here at the school, starting with paper and moving on to aluminium, batteries and electronic waste. At the moment we are looking for a good way to deal with plastic waste. We are trying to set an example, not just for the kids to follow but the whole local community.

**Are your municipal, local and national governments providing other kinds of support for education for sustainable development and environmental education within the school curricula?**

Yes, but not enough. The new curricula currently being developed with funding from the EU ["Support Human Capital Development and Research: General Education and Human Capital Development"] will be introduced in September 2015. Sustainable development is one of the inter-subject competencies, and as such is inserted into respective national educational standards for different subjects, and for both elementary and secondary schools. I see this as a positive change. As a teacher, I believe that education for sustainable development is crucial for our future life on Earth.

**What has been the influence of the Green Pack on students in terms of life outside the classroom? In other words, are they sharing the messages with their family members and classmates?**

The students I teach are at an age when they are easily influenced and can easily contract the eco-

awareness "virus". And they are, as a rule, very anxious to spread it. They themselves sometimes think of specific assignments through which to spread their contagious enthusiasm. We usually start with small things, like energy and water efficiency at home, and then move on to how to take environmental action on certain issues like waste, light pollution and the like.

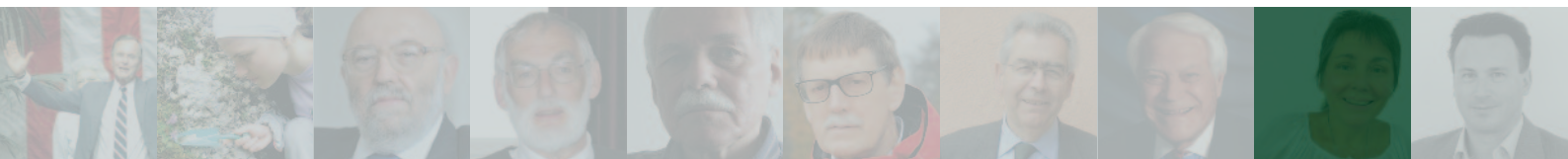
**In addition to the recycling initiative you mentioned, has your school implemented any other green measures in recent years, such as water efficiency and energy efficiency schemes, or car-sharing networks?**

Our school, Drinka Pavlovic, is one of the most environmentally aware and environment-friendly schools in Belgrade. We participate in national and international projects — such as WWF's "European Schools for a Living Planet", and "Green-wave", which is part of the EU Fibonacci Project — and our school was one of the first in Serbia to earn the Green Flag from the international Eco-Schools project. We observe all of the international environment days, and we collect old newspapers, cans and PET packaging.

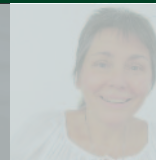
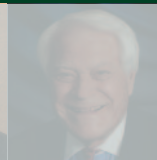
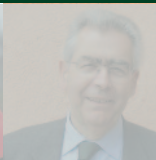
Right now our students and my colleagues are participating in a humanitarian effort to collect caps from PET bottles to help raise money to buy wheelchairs for handicapped children whose parents can't afford them. A few years ago we replaced the old windows to reduce heat loss, replaced old faucets with water-efficient ones and installed energy-efficient lighting. We also put some bird feeders outside in the schoolyard during the winter months.

**Do you have any suggestions about how future editions of the Green Pack might be improved, whether in general or specifically pertaining to your local version?**

My suggestion is to make the same interactive Green Pack educational game for the web, to make an application for mobile phones, and also to produce a classroom board game that can be played out of doors.



# Nick Mabey



**Nick Mabey** is chief executive and a founder-director of E3G (Third Generation Environmentalism), a non-profit European organisation dedicated to accelerating the transition to sustainable development. In addition to his management role, Mabey leads E3G's work on European climate change policy, climate diplomacy and foreign policy, and the security implications of climate change and resource scarcity. Mabey is also currently vice-chair of the European Alliance to Save Energy and sits on the steering group of Norstec (the industry-led alliance for offshore renewable energy) and the Global Stranded Assets Advisory Council. Among other appointments, Mabey has served on the Advisory Board of Infrastructure UK, the independent UK Green Investment Bank Commission and the Advisory Council of the European Technology Platform for Zero Emission Fossil Fuel Power.

## What first pops into your mind when someone mentions the REC?

Great hospitality is honestly the first thing that comes to my head. Also my exploration of the ruins of the Comecon-looking building near the REC offices after a flood. Not to mention a lot of shared experiences.

## How did you first become aware of and involved with the REC?

E3G and the REC have been cooperating for about the past 10 years, and the REC played a key role in the partnership at the very beginning. E3G's first major project was funded by Corrado Clini, who was also a big funder of the REC. We were building a series of pan-European and "beyond Europe" meetings, looking at the future of Europe and at Europe's place in the world. Senior politicians and policy makers and the REC were essentially the key support for us to build those conversations in Hungary and in Turkey, and also to draw on the REC staff's knowledge and input, which turned into a pamphlet called "Europe in the World" — sort of the foundational pamphlet

for E3G's work and also translated into multiple languages by the REC. This was about 2005 or 2006. It was a quite involved partnership that was instrumental in our becoming engaged with Central and Eastern Europe and Turkey.

Since then we've been mostly involved with the REC in relation to engagement with Turkey on a fairly wide range of issues. It was very valuable to have a partner that could get us out of the Western European "ghetto" and make sure that we had a view of the whole continent and beyond, rather than just a traditional "green capital" perspective.

## What were some of the dynamic differences you found between this region and your own?

There was obviously a focus on EU accession and the early implementation of European law. Our focus was to get the new member states to think about the Europe they wanted, as opposed to the Europe they were being asked to join. One of the keys during this period was looking forward and asking "What do you need from Europe?" "What do you need Europe to be good at over the next 20 years to help you meet the challenges your



country faces?" The first main challenge was trying to deal with European directives and it was sometimes hard to see very far forward, but in places like Turkey we were able to have really good conversations about what they thought about the club they had wanted to join, and about how they could envision themselves as full members, capable of influence rather than just taking on the DNA of previous members. And it took quite a lot of effort to take the conversation to a forward-looking place. It was the first time that people had asked their opinion, as opposed to telling them what the rules were. So, yes, this was challenging but very productive. And the REC was helpful in identifying the types of people that could adopt this forward-looking approach.

**What are you and E3G working on at the moment?**

About 50 percent of E3G's work is inside Europe, mainly focusing on energy policy — anti-carbonisation, European energy policy, European efficiency policy and finance for the all-round reform of economic, finance and energy markets to support a carbon-resilient future. We also focus on Europe's role in climate resource diplomacy, particularly around the Paris agreement but also more broadly. The rest of our work is basically in major developing countries — Peru, Columbia, Mexico, Chile, South Africa, China — mainly developing a financial strategy for low-carbon and green development. We're very much building on the work we've done on these issues in Europe, but also learning from these countries and reflecting that back. So that's the majority of our work at the moment. We hope to work more strongly in the European neighbourhood in the next few years in other areas like climate resilience, which we're working a lot on now.

**This work is related as well to some of the conclusions published in the New Climate Economy report, right?**

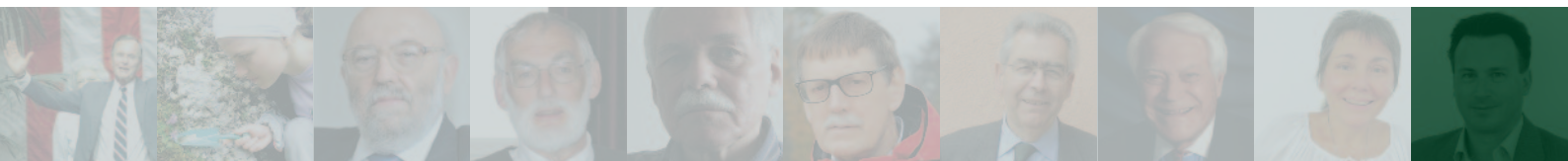
Yes. Again, these are things we've been working on for a long time, but the low-carbon economy initiatives do reflect the current focus on economic

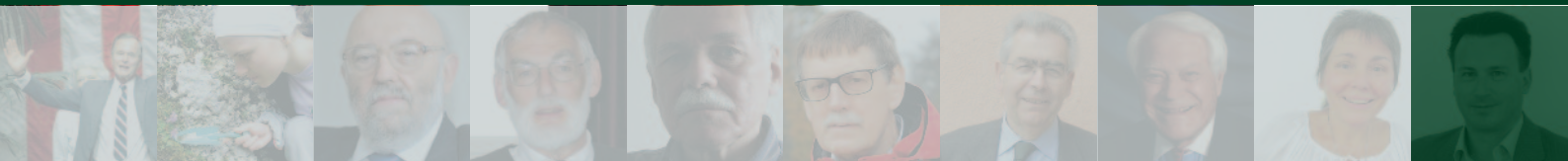
reform, which is essentially the core agenda of E3G and what the New Climate Economy was basically making a case for. It's all about mainstreaming this into good economic and political governance in mainstream sectors, not just a set of policies on the side of economic development, and that is essentially the focus of E3G's work.

**In a video interview in which you discuss the New Climate Economy report, you mentioned that the "time for action or inaction has passed", and that we've entered a period in which we will make "either an orderly or disorderly transition". What are some of the ways in which countries can assist in making an "orderly" transition in the near future?**

First of all, it's about having a conversation about the consequences. This involves accepting a mandate from the people who are going to suffer most from disorderly transition — and not just citizens, but city authorities, long-term investors, pension funds and large companies who have assets that are fixed in geographic areas that will suffer from climate change and bad resource management or poor decisions taken over infrastructure or stranded assets. These are key constituencies who currently are not in the debate. Their interests are very weakly represented. Companies and interests with highly mobile assets that aren't so fixed — such as oil and gas companies — are much more firmly engaged in the debate.

One of our responses to this is that we're advocating for national climate resilience assessment, which is about building a much more systematic approach towards looking at the risks but also engaging with communities and other key areas and embedding this in parliamentary processes — taking this out of the executive and making it much more into building a social contract around transition so that you get a much more active engagement of parliamentarians. It's also important to involve the judiciary as well because there are lots of issues like liability and who bears the risk and who has to protect. There needs to be a positive approach to transitioning where high-carbon industries are making sure that the regions where they're based have the opportunity to benefit





from the low-carbon transition through, for example, policies like “low-carbon zones”, which we have pioneered in China and which have lots of application, particularly for Central and Eastern Europe. It’s really about being able to take control of your own destiny, to say: “We’re moving in this direction, so let’s make sure we do it in a way that minimises the amount of stranded investments that we have.” So you have to send very strong signals to investors. It’s about managing the pains and maximising the opportunities of transition.

One of the things that we’ve found in Central and Eastern Europe is that because there’s been a bit of a denial — as if “If we go slower, it will be better” — they end up doing activity to cut carbon but failing to get the opportunity to address the issues of energy efficiency, air pollution or fuel poverty. One of the things we’ve done in the UK is to form a broad coalition of fuel poverty groups, children’s groups, owners’ groups, environmentalists and businesses to advocate for a mass retrofit of the whole country — every single house — over a 20-year period, which is GBP 150 billion worth of investment. In order to solve our cold winter crisis we’ve got to deal with the worst housing stock after Estonia in all of the EU. We have 26,000 premature deaths a year from cold. So there’s a broad coalition around several issues — health issues, children’s issues, old-age issues, environmental issues — trying to make big choices about how to invest. That’s the type of thing we need to do in making an orderly transition. We have to make those big choices — early — so we get all the benefits, rather than dragging our feet and

being saddled with a larger bill further down the line. Flexibility is not always the cheapest way.

The main message behind the New Climate Economy report is that if you do things right and early, then you’re pursuing really good economic policy. But you need to make the choice, and that choice is political and requires, in its own way, decisions on which type of infrastructure to build; on who makes the choice about which types of energy we have; and on how the general public, and which constituencies, are actually involved in these decisions — which mainly involve elites and special interests. It all raises core issues about who makes critical decisions about a country’s direction, and who bears the risks of making the wrong decision.

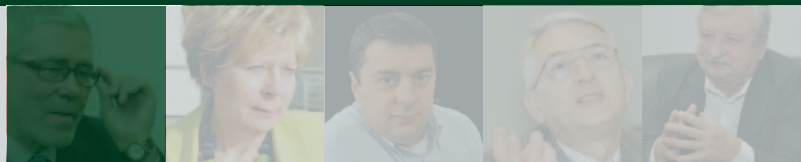
Certainly one of the areas we’ve decided to move into is the whole role of corruption, whether that’s political corruption in terms of people channelling money towards political supporters, or direct corruption. Because with political corruption, which adds 10 percent of the cost to a piece of infrastructure, people might go, “Well, that’s just the price of doing business.” But if political corruption means you’ve built the wrong infrastructure, and the whole of that infrastructure becomes stranded — like a new gas pipeline — then that’s a huge cost to the economy and the people to reverse that decision. And that’s where we are with climate change. That’s the difference between orderly and disorderly. It’s going to be a bumpy ride anyway, but we can at least try to minimise the bumps.







# Jaakko Henttonen



A native of Finland, **Jaakko Henttonen** is fund director for the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), in St. Petersburg, Russia, a position he has held since 2006. Henttonen holds an MSc in engineering from Helsinki Technical University, and an honorary doctorate from Kiev National University of Construction and Architecture. Henttonen served as president of the General Assembly of the REC from 2000 to 2009, and as chair of the REC Board of Directors from 2009 to 2012.

**How do international finance mechanisms go about identifying what sort of projects to invest in, and what levels and types of cooperation need to be in place between these mechanisms, government authorities and civil society for projects to be implemented as successfully as possible and with the greatest mutual benefits?**

With due respect, there are financing institutions other than the EBRD, but the EBRD is one of the leading ones in this part of the world — Central Europe, Russia and former Soviet countries. Specifically, one of the aims of the EBRD is to ensure two main things: one is transition, which involves other subsectors as well, including businesses and so forth; and the other pertains to environmental standards in whichever sector project development takes place. And for that sector, cooperation between government authorities and civil society is really fundamental. There have been, of course, hiccups throughout the years, but this involvement started only about 20 years ago when the geographic situation changed. Nevertheless, those are the aims, and at various levels they've been successful. However, we have a situation now in which Russia is kind of getting out of this sphere and we can only hope this trend would be reversed.

**What would you identify as the greatest ongoing needs of this region with regard to sustainable development and environmental protection?**

Well, there are serious challenges in the region

that we are facing most recently. Practices with which we have been working with the EBRD to bring sustainable development as part of national policies are not felt strongly enough by all partners. The harmonisation of regulations and practices regarding environmental issues and sustainable aims is not really proceeding at the desired speed. So when we think about climate change, and in general about environmental protection as part of sustainable development, a lot has to be done to gain common understanding in Russia — and also the countries of Central Asia. Generally speaking, actions there seem more directly aimed at speedy economic development and gains, with inadequate attention given to the consequences of investments. Policy dialogue should be continued at all levels to meet the challenges ahead and keep the processes at set targets jointly approved by international parties.

**Would you say that the difficulties there are more political or economic in nature? Or a mixture of both?**

Both. The political and economic issues are intertwined. It takes a lot of effort for the EBRD to promote sustainable development as a sound base for economic and social development. Notably, sustainable development covers several specific issues, such as gender equality, energy conservation, the proper use of resources etc., which are sectors that EBRD is promoting. We've been able to take things quite far at several instances, but still I think there's a bit of a reaction taking place



now that the economic projections in the short-term are bleaker than, at least in my experience, they were a few years back. International financing institutions will be required to emphasise these issues with their transactions in the countries of operation, taking carefully into account the specifics of each country.

**You mentioned five years ago that "the REC has played an important transformative role during a memorable period in history". What do you see as the REC's main future challenges and opportunities?**

There are quite comparative differences between REC member countries — say from Estonia to Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, which have become members of the European Union during this time. Therefore, I would say the main challenges for the REC now are in the Balkan region. It took a long time for the REC to develop the environmental legislation standards in the countries looking forward to closer association with the European Union — to bring this element to standards acceptable for joining the EU. This has been a huge challenge for quite a long time — really huge. Of course the number of client countries seeking membership in the EU are diminishing, but nevertheless the REC can continue to promote civil society as such. It can bring forward issues which are relevant for development from their point of view. This is something that the REC has really been able to promote in its regional operations and activities in the respective countries — that is, through a combined emphasis on environmental policy development and civil society involvement.

**What future role do you see the CEE region playing in a Europe-wide or global context?**

I come from Finland, which, along with many Western European countries, might be considered "old democracies". The CEE countries, on the other hand, have gained their full political independence only recently — so they are bringing a lot of fresh perspectives regarding the development of their society. I think the so-called older

democracies tend to feel pretty comfortable with themselves. The CEE area has added more content and more substance to the dialogue at European level, and that adds a fresh element for ourselves. Sometimes there are, of course, extremes, but there are nevertheless new ideas coming from the CEE region.

Globally speaking, when the CEE region joined Western Europe the continent became whole. It's no longer divided like it was earlier, and this has strengthened Europe's role globally. We're no longer so far apart on certain issues. If we take climate change — literally a burning issue at the moment — and we're preparing the next text under the UN process, there's a strength we are getting from taking joint action. It's no longer "Eastern Europe" and "Western Europe".

**What's one of the first things to pop into your mind when you hear the name "REC"?**

The REC is an innovative, friendly and professional group of people who are aiming for some really great goals agreed in the work plans. Not only dreaming about them, but implementing them. I find that part of it quite inspiring whenever I visit the REC.

**Please could you share a memorable or humorous experience involving the REC?**

At the time when I was with the REC Board of Directors, we decided to have meetings in our countries of operation once a year. Our Polish board member, Andrzej Kassenberg, invited us to Białowieża in northeast Poland, which is a European bison reserve and well-known scientific centre — a pleasant small town though. So when we arrived the first evening we had a get-together in a small restaurant, and Andrzej recommended: "Why don't we try some Zubrovka?" — which is a special vodka. We had a few shots and, uh — had a very nice evening. The following day, we thought: "Okay. That was such a nice restaurant, let's go there again." So we went to the restaurant, and when we decided it was time for some Zubrovka, the maitre d' just smiled apologetically: "You finished it all yesterday!"



# Magda Toth Nagy



**Magda Toth Nagy** is an internationally recognised expert on public participation, civil society and good governance and has 25 years of professional experience. Having joined the REC in September 1990 as senior executive associate to the first executive director, she was one of the five-member team that began to build up the organisation. Until July 2012 she was the REC's key expert on public communication, participation and stakeholder involvement. She was head of the Public Participation Programme between 1999 and 2008, and leader of the Participatory Governance Topic Area between 2008 and 2012. Since her retirement in July 2012 she has worked as a freelance expert and consultant and continues to support the REC with her expertise and experience.

**Given the changes that have taken place over the past several years in the CEE region what new roles can the REC play?**

While the CEE region is diverse, it has yet to find a united voice on pan-European issues. There have been attempts to make a joint environmental stand, and the REC could perhaps play a greater role in that. More importantly, if the REC aspires to become more of a think-tank institution, then it could get involved in more European and EU issues in an even stronger way to help CEE countries voice their concerns. However, the REC now operates more on a project basis than in the past, and this makes it more difficult to put more effort into such work. Some strategic issues require regular attention over many years, even decades. Some type of real investment will be needed for the REC to carry out some of its more "mission-driven" tasks.

Of course, I see the REC developing into more of a European institution, and not just limited to the CEE region. As the SDGs are just now being shaped, I see more opportunities opening up where climate change, green economy, and a more integrated approach to sustainability and participatory governance are concerned.

**Speaking of which, how would you assess the COP outcomes?**

From my perspective of working with civil society and public participation, the COP process has not been as open and participatory as, for example, European convention processes. It's usually the case that NGOs and other stakeholders have to do their negotiating outside of the main venue. The REC as an observer organisation is able to make a few statements, but this role is very limited. There is some discussion about doing things a bit differently at the upcoming COP event in Paris, but as of now it's really only governments and international organisations that participate directly. Civil society representation is extremely limited.

**What first brought you to the REC, and what has kept you here for so long?**

When the first director of the REC, Peter Hardi, invited me to come to the REC in 1990, it was a unique opportunity for me to try working in a new area. Up to that point I had worked in international and economic affairs at an international institute where we were already addressing some environmental problems. There was a feeling in 1989/90 that it was very important to build up a democratic society, and this particular mission of

the REC was something for me that reflected this goal. And it was exciting from a personal point of view too, because we were starting from zero.

The core activities for the first years were about strengthening civil society, providing support for civil society groups in the CEE region, and building up environmental democracy. Most of our activities were centred around ensuring free access to environmental information, and we were assisting with drafting environmental legislation in the region. Already in 1991 we had the Environmental Legislative Task Force, which was financed from the initial core funds from the EU (ECU 5 million) and the US (USD 5 million), which gave us the freedom to initiate some core activities. The task force involved the participation of not only parliamentarians, government representatives and NGOs from the region, but also Western European and US experts making a pro bono contribution. Here, the main focus was on environmental liability and privatisation, the financing of environmental activities through environmental funds and other types of instruments, and public participation.

In 1993 I became a member of the project staff and was able to develop the Public Participation Programme. Part of what kept me with the organisation for so long was that I had been involved from the very start. It was a very open, innovative, forward-looking and flexible organisation from the beginning, and we all got to contribute our own ideas. We always discussed our future activities in a team setting, and we involved our colleagues and key partners in the process — both inside and outside the organisation.

**Please say a little about the Aarhus Convention, a process in which you were deeply involved.**

The fact that part of the REC mission was dedicated to promoting free access to environmental information and public participation in decision making gave us an advantage. We were able to create our own initiatives that linked us with other European initiatives early on. The REC was able to participate from the very beginning in the “Environment for Europe” process, from the first conference in 1991 in Dobris, in what was then Czechoslovakia.

First guidelines were developed [Sofia Guidelines on Access to Environmental Information and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making] related to the “three pillars”, and after their endorsement in 1995 at the Sofia “Environment for Europe” conference, NGOs initiated the drafting of a convention that the REC strongly supported. There was also openness from most of the Western and CEE governments, but there was massive NGO mobilisation behind this as well. The REC already had experience with public participation from a project carried out in 1994–1995, which involved preparing a series of manuals and holding related workshops in 10 CEE countries.

As a REC representative I was one of eight experts invited to prepare the first draft text of the convention, and the REC played an active role in negotiations over two years — 1996 and 1998. The final convention text became a unique piece of environmental legislation and is still the only instrument — even globally — that includes legally binding requirements built around these three components. Former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan said at the time that it was the most ambitious venture in the area of environmental democracy.

The REC organised several public events about the drafting process, including a series of roundtables in 21 countries on the draft convention text, bringing together responsible officials and civil society to discuss the situation of national legislation. This gave NGOs an opportunity to make their positions heard at national level and influence the positions of environmental authorities. Of course, a piece of international legislation in itself is not impressive if it's not implemented. So it was really important to be involved afterwards in promoting Aarhus Convention ratification and implementation.

Over the decades we also assisted authorities and NGOs in EU, SEE and EECCA countries through many different projects to comply with Aarhus and align or approximate their own legislation with EU legislation, as well as in building an institutional framework and capacities to implement the requirements of the convention. What came later was how to implement Aarhus principles in specific environmental sectors. One of the chal-





allenges has been to try to open up a decision-making process on nuclear waste and energy issues, as these tend to be very sensitive and difficult. Nuclear officials and institutions are still not as open to transparency generally as the environmental authorities.

Lately it's interesting that Aarhus is taken not as a model but as an example around the globe. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has developed global guidelines for drafting legislation based on the Aarhus Convention's three pillars, which it is promoting in different regions. In the Latin American and Caribbean region there is an initiative to develop a regional instrument on Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration. We are now working with the REC on projects to share European and Aarhus experiences with people from this region and supporting them in negotiating their own instrument, which will hopefully be at least as strong as the Aarhus Convention.

#### What would you identify as some of the REC's landmark achievements?

Aarhus is obviously a significant one. I would also mention the REC's role in developing the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs), where we were very strongly present in both the negotiations and implementation. The grants programmes that the REC has been involved in over a quarter of a century have been a massive help to different civil society groups in different regions. Our grant mechanism is now confined to SEE, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, but there are other kinds of assistance, such as organisational viability support, capacity building, trainings and manuals, workshops and the Young Environmental Leaders programme.

The Junior Fellowship/Young Leaders Programme should also be considered among the REC's flagship projects. Many hundreds of junior fellows and young CSO leaders have benefited already, and we are lucky that the programme has continued under the recent SECTOR project [Supporting Environmental Civil Society Organisations in Belarus and Moldova].

The Green Pack, and now Green Steps, should also be mentioned, both as a programme and as an approach to educating young people about environmental issues and sustainable development — including participatory governance issues, too, which are incorporated in this context.

#### What pops into your mind when you hear the name "REC"?

The human factor — REC staff over the years. There have been so many excellent experts that have worked here. This is really important for an organisation. And it isn't just a question of nurturing these people within the organisation, but of being able to keep them with the organisation for some time. Many of these people, even having left, remain valuable contacts for the REC.

#### Please can you share one of your favourite REC anecdotes?

Something quite funny, even if a little sad, was the going-away party for former REC executive director Jernej Stritih in July 2001. Staff members had prepared a sort of mock trial as a goodbye present, and it was a collective exercise in writing and acting. We had a judge, a prosecutor and others who were testifying on different issues. This was our way of providing Jernej with an overview of the years we'd spent together and reflecting on his achievements — both positive and negative.

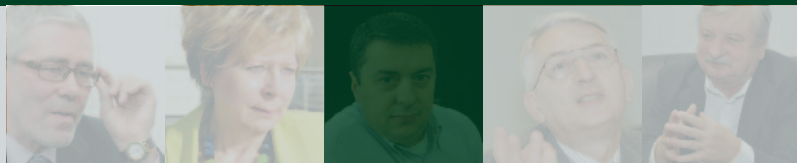
For example, the negative things included "crimes against fashion". He sometimes dressed in a green cardigan with a quite horrible purple tie decorated with Christmas trees. We also experienced a cash-flow problem for the first time, which meant the elimination of the 13th-month salary and of free coffee and milk for the staff. Another thing was the introduction of the RECTivity project management tool, which was jokingly referred to at the time as "subjecting staff to the bonds of automated slavery". On the positive side were the REC's presence at the Aarhus Environment for Europe conference, the REC's 10th anniversary, and the launch of the REReP programme, which brought numerous projects and success to the REC. In the end we reached a balanced verdict, and Jernej was not found "guilty". He bore it all with great humour.







# Mihallaq Qirjo



**Mihallaq Qirjo**, who holds a PhD in applied ecology, has been involved in the environmental field since 1990. He has participated in the design and implementation of more than 40 environmental programmes on a national and regional scale, focusing on environmental policies and institutions, capacity building, environmental education and awareness raising, and a multi-stakeholder approach to project management. Qirjo has been teaching a full course in ecology at Tirana University since 1990, while at the same time leading research on such topics as the dynamics of arthropod populations, the effects of pollution on soil fauna, and environmental education tools. He has served as director of REC Albania since 1994.

**With the emergence of new environmental issues and proposed solutions (such as the SDGs, Paris COP etc.), what special roles do you see the CEE region playing in a Europe-wide and/or global context?**

In the 1990s, countries in the CEE region began to focus specifically on democratic changes. While the dimensions of these changes included the environment, they were also much greater. Even so, environment-based concerns and solutions were used frequently to develop and facilitate dialogue between countries, stakeholders and the West. Now, 25 years later, it seems crucial and necessary for this region to continue making a contribution towards addressing both European and global environmental challenges. Effective solutions are based on processes and innovations, and the CEE region has the capacity to offer both. Our countries are helping to speed up the European integration process in the Western Balkan region by combining energy issues with democratic processes and reforms. Furthermore, this part of Europe has a historical legacy of conserving its natural wetlands, mountain habitats and rural areas — and also of preserving its cultural and historical traditions.

**What first pops into your mind when you hear the name “REC”?**

In my mind, the REC is linked to its unique corporate identity: the green colour, the logo and spines of the print publications. Then there's the series of “Who Will Remember Me?” animal drawings, which have appeared on items from t-shirts to coffee mugs. These images, in their beautiful, natural colours, make me feel how thousands and thousands of REC people and beneficiaries of REC programmes are working to preserve those threatened species.

**Please can you share a memorable experience involving the REC or the CEE region?**

The first transboundary project I was involved in with the REC, in 1999–2000, was “Sharing Common National Values of Shkodra/Skadar Lake”, which aimed to restore connections and communication between Albanian and Montenegrin experts, authorities and NGOs. We had to implement a transboundary project at a time when there was no border crossing point between the two countries, when each country applied a visa regime toward the other, and when formal communications had been non-existent

since the end of World War II. In order to bring together people that knew each other only from scientific papers published by universities, we organised the first meetings in Hungary at the REC head office, or in Italy. People living just 60 kilometres apart were travelling hundreds of kilometres to discuss, plan, pass the time, share jokes or sing common regional songs during the social events. Largely as a result of this project, the first memorandum of understanding between the two countries was signed in Podgorica in 2002. One travelling in the CEE region today could hardly imagine the hurdles that had to be overcome during the early days of working here!

**How did you come to hear about and be interested in the Young Environmental Leaders Programme?**

As soon as I graduated from university in 1991 I got involved in the first environmental group established in Albania — just after the democratic changes started in the country.

And I just happened to be part of the very first group of REC junior fellows. Early in 1993 the REC was extending its operations to the Western Balkan region, so my university asked me to accompany and translate for the first REC country mission in Albania, which was to be held in the spring. It was at that time that I was informed about a new programme that would start in September, and I was encouraged to apply. I didn't give it a second thought: here was an opportunity to be trained on some topics that were completely new.

**Please could you describe your participation in the programme and share something about what you learned and the people with whom you interacted during that time?**

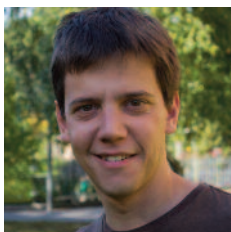
The six-week programme combined theoretical training with practical sessions. The course was held at the old REC premises in Budapest. This was not only a new experience for programme participants, but also for REC staff, which at the time was small in number. We were assigned to work with them on certain days. I still have the feeling that they knew at the time they had invented a great programme — one that represented a breakthrough in the environmental movement by supporting younger generations.

Apart from obtaining basic information on running an NGO, writing project proposals and organising campaigns, I learned how to type on a computer! I didn't have the chance to have one all to myself back at university, so that was part of the fun and learning experience, too.

**What have been the lasting impacts of your participation in the programme?**

It would be hard to find stronger evidence than the fact that I have continued to work for the REC since returning home from the programme. As we needed to increase the membership of the country's NGOs with young and fresh members, in 2000 the staff of REC Albania and I designed a one-week programme similar to YEL. We're still running it, one course each year. The most recent took place this year on February 2–7 and drew 20 young, energetic environmental leaders.





**Bela Kuslits** is a Hungarian interdisciplinary scientist working mainly on environmental issues. Currently working for a PhD in ecological economics, one of Kuslits's main fields of study is resilience, which has been his main connection over the years with the Sustainable Development Academy (SDA), the current incarnation of the original Junior Fellowship Programme. After participating in a number of SDA workshops, Kuslits applied for a Tom Garvey Fellowship and did an internship at the REC for half a year, during which he worked on capacity-building projects, including the Living Labs course in Venice. He later gave a simulation workshop to YEL participants.

**What have been the lasting impacts of your participation in the YEL/SDA?**

My first encounter with the international world of sustainability was definitely my experience with the REC. The culture, the players, the methods — basically everything was new. I learned a lot about the type of large-scale activism that the REC does.

**As a scientist, what role do you think the CEE region can play in addressing the world's environmental problems?**

To be honest, I am very sceptical about the global processes. There is always a "next meeting" that is supposed to make history, but they never actually do it. I tend to prefer local solutions. The CEE region has great biodiversity and strong economies compared to the global average, which is a highly advantageous situation to be in. The problem, however, is that environmental awareness is at very low levels in our societies,

which means that it's hard to put sustainability on the political agenda. Despite these problems, I think this is an area of the world where alternative ways of development could be implemented: the necessary resources are accessible and the issue of development is a central topic of local politics. Why not do it in a sustainable way?

**What first pops into your mind when you hear the name "REC"?**

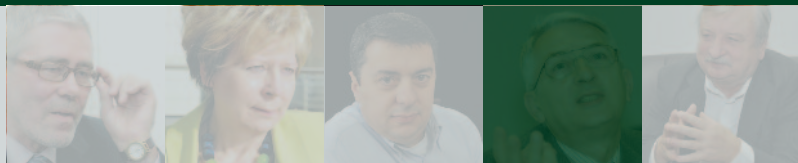
My first thoughts about the REC are memories about the great workshops in which I participated. This was the place where I met world-famous professors, where I first encountered the topic of resilience — which became an important aspect of my work later on — and where I had fruitful conversations with people from the CEE region. The REC is an important source of knowledge.







# Stanislaw Sitnicki



**Stanislaw Sitnicki** is an economist who lectured at Warsaw's School of Planning and Statistics (SGPiS, now the Warsaw School of Economics) until 1990, when he was appointed director at the Ministry of Environment responsible for foreign assistance to environmental protection and for the preparation of Poland's National Environmental Policy. He served as executive director of the REC from 1993 to 1996. Sitnicki has been active in supporting public participation in environmental decision making, and was deeply involved in establishing the EcoFund Foundation in Poland to administer the debt-for-environment swap programme (1992). He was named EcoFund deputy president in 1999 and served as president of the foundation from 2007 to 2010.

## What were some of the major challenges during the transition period of the early 1990s?

Communication in general was a problem for NGO groups in the region, both in terms of multiple languages and perceptions. From its inception in 1990 the REC has been a multilingual and multicultural organisation. Staff were recruited in several countries, including the U.S., with the majority coming from the CEE region. Team building was therefore a very real exercise.

Staff were provided with tailor-made training in team building and time management to develop the necessary skills and avoid conflicts on a daily basis. The ultimate goal was to shift the REC's responsibilities for programming and day-to-day operations to the CEE staff members — who were supported and advised, but not replaced, by U.S. and EC colleagues. Volunteers also played a huge role. Young volunteers, eager to better understand both the environmental problems and cultures of CEE countries, were a core group of trouble-shooters that were called on to offer encouragement or repair flaws in a particular area of REC activity.

## Which accomplishments during your tenure as REC executive director were the most significant and rewarding for the organisation?

In the early 1990s the REC's activities in CEE countries were supported by a U.S. donation of USD 10 million. Four major initiatives were funded from the donation between 1990 and 1996: a grants programme for NGOs; public participation; REC initiatives; and an information clearinghouse.

The local offices network became crucial for making contact with potential grantees, but also for sharing environmental information and identifying problems to be researched and discussed on a country-by-country basis. The local offices network offered the REC access to local environmental experts, allowed it to overcome language barriers, reached local environmental groups with grant support, and upgraded project development and implementation skills. In reaching out to its member countries, the REC has become better known among CEE environmental leaders.

Equally important was the achievement of a better understanding of responses to environmental challenges in the region. In 1994, the report "Strategic Environmental Issues in CEE" was developed in the framework of REC initiatives. More than 100 environmental leaders were interviewed in 10 REC member countries, and this survey was used to paint a general picture of the environmental needs and expectations shared by citizens, businesses and governments in the CEE region.

### How can REC experience and expertise best be put to use, both now and in the near future?

“Environment” was chosen as the area where problems inherited from the communist past were the most identifiable and widespread. The first five years of REC activities in the CEE region were combined with the economic and social reconstruction of communities, and with conceptual and cultural catching up with Western economies. There were voices at the time indicating the need for foreign assistance to first address economic hardship and deteriorating living conditions, rather than environment, education and training. Also, the lack of an NGO network in the CEE region made things difficult for the REC at the beginning. There was even a time when the name “REC” was replaced by its opponents in the West with “WREC”, which betrayed mistrust and a lack of confidence. Fortunately, the Hungarian Government took a decision to establish the REC, with financial support from the U.S., the EU and other member countries — and this turned out to be a great success.

My hope is that the REC will continue the work it has carried out in previous years focusing on strengthening civil society, public participation, information sharing and training. I would also advocate for wider engagement with new ideas that combine values, stewardship and responsibilities among the younger generations for the future of our planet. Reaching out to post-Soviet countries to work together towards peace and a better environment would also be useful for Europe’s environmental future as a whole.

The REC has already decided its role in the emerging Europe. As with many other reputable NGOs, the REC has positioned itself as a think-tank, eager and able to be a part of any important initiative that can have an impact on the environment or resource use and resource efficiency. This is, to a great extent, because the REC is a project-driven organisation that is dependent on generating funds to deliver its “opinion” on a particular issue. While specialising in selected environmental problems, the REC has to follow processes within which financial means are available to run projects. Among other consulting organisations,

both public and private, it competes by offering a better price, or better quality of work, or a better level of understanding of the CEE region’s environmental problems. To play this role in a Europe-wide context, the REC needs more freedom and stabilisation, which can only be based — at a minimum — on financial independence. Therefore, it would be advisable for the REC to turn to its initial founders and business partners and to consider establishing a capital fund, which could allow the REC to undertake more independent studies in environmental protection and ecosystem management, as well as to be more proactive while offering expert advice and training.

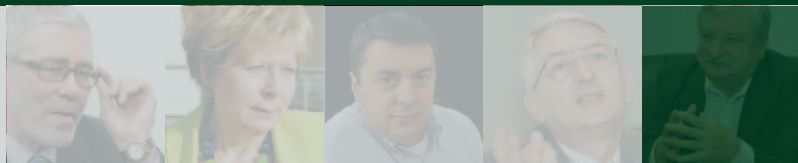
### Please can you share a memorable experience involving the REC or the CEE region?

Even with English as the working language of the REC staff, there were several languages spoken and heard each day in the original REC headquarters. This mixture of regional languages and cultures made the REC an attractive place to work for Westerners, and the Hungarian language was the most evident. To communicate efficiently, staff members developed a type of “Hunglish” slang that could only be understood at the REC.

Due to a shortage of working space at the original Obuda headquarters, small group discussions took place nearby, where folk music was usually being played quite loudly — so there was this mixture of serious debate and gypsy music. The atmosphere of the old Obuda district was a valuable inspiration for young REC staff members in which to imagine and plan their work together on new and challenging projects. Discussions were carried on long into the night, and the next day some new concept might begin to take shape, depending on the REC’s existing human, financial and organisational potential. Some ideas won out and were brilliant — the Junior Fellowship Programme for instance, which the REC started in 1994. Young environmental leaders from CEE countries and former Soviet republics, including Russia, were invited to Budapest for a two-month period and provided with a tailor-made training programme on how to run a successful NGO campaign or project.



# Laszlo Miklos



**Laszlo Miklos** is head of the UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Development and Ecological Awareness at the Technical University of Zvolen, Slovakia, and senior scientist at the Institute of Landscape Ecology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava. A researcher in landscape ecology, landscape planning, ecological networks, physical and regional geography, environmental policy and sustainable development, Miklos served as Slovak minister of environment from 1998 to 2006, and as a member of parliament from 2006 to 2010. He was also a member of the first REC Board of Trustees.

**What are some of the key challenges that the CEE region faces in terms of nature conservation?**

Since most of the nature conservation areas, national parks and protected landscape areas are also the most attractive territories for recreation, nature conservation efforts are engaged in constant struggle with developers. This is most apparent in the case of high mountains, where ski resorts pose significant threats to protected areas. Another challenge is that foresters and nature conservationists take different approaches to forest management.

**How might cross-border cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe be strengthened on a regional scale?**

Without any doubt, what we need are real cross-border projects. By “real” I mean working together according to common methods on cross-border territories, with participants fully dependent on all the others to achieve results — not just the formal creation of consortia, not just projects in which each participant works in its own way.

There was, for example, a Hungarian–Slovak project on monitoring microclimatic conditions to better predict vineyard diseases. The Hungarian partner developed the measuring devices and the data interpretation model; the Slovak partner developed the interpretation of micro-morphometric indices of the terrain, enabling the interpolation of the monitored data over broader territory to include vineyards in both countries.

The most significant obstacles for each interna-

tional project are bureaucratic in nature. All too often, more time is devoted to administration than to project substance. The ruling bodies devote more attention to bookkeeping and public procurement than to any efforts to achieve real project results. All of this makes any serious researcher disinclined to work on cross-border projects.

**What special roles do you see the CEE region playing in a Europe-wide or global context?**

Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Europe in particular, is a true crossroads of the continent’s major natural regions, characterised by intersecting biogeographical regions such as Beschidicum, Hercynicum, Carpathicum, Pannonicum — as the central region — and Noricum, Ponticum and Illyricum. These conditions basically determine answers to questions concerning human influences on the natural environment.

One fundamental problem is the increasing unification of institutional environmental tools — in particular EU legislation — that are being applied towards these diverse natural conditions. This approach resulted in real problems during the implementation of Natura 2000 and the Water Framework Directive, and also with GMO-related issues. It’s a seemingly simple solution: “Just modify the tools according to the natural conditions.” It is much more complex, however, because administration and bureaucracy have a much stronger voice than nature, so we force nature to adapt to human rules. Anyway, the opposite direction, regional and local strategies, is the inevitable road to success.



From a geopolitical perspective, CEE stands at the crossroads of very different political, economic and societal experiences. The region, therefore, serves as a testing ground for different types of environmental policies. The experiences of different states in this region in how they react to global environmental issues and related politics can serve as textbook examples for teaching different societies how to deal with environment issues.

### What first pops into your mind when you hear the name "REC"?

As a member of the first Board of Trustees, the REC was where I first entered into international environmental high politics. I was quite experienced in professional environmental issues, including international cooperation and domestic politics, but the political discussions between East and West in 1990 really brought new and unexpected — and not always positive — surprises.

### Can you share a memorable experience involving the REC or the CEE region?

I have an anecdote from back when the REC started. It might be more sarcastic than humorous, but it derives from the situation at the time. We were CEE citizens who had grown accustomed to a certain mode of life, but the political situation was now new, and the REC a totally new body on the scene.

After the REC country offices had been established and the heads of the offices were hired, the task of the Board of Trustees was to agree on salaries for those persons. One of the basic criteria was that the salary should be "competitive". Of course, the main voice belonged to the REC founders, and the first figure that was suggested, I think, stuck in the craw of all of the members from the CEE countries — but nobody reacted immediately. But after a few minutes, the representative from Romania — at that time the minister of environment and a respected old scientist — dared to speak up: "Okay, competitive, but this figure is x-times more (I won't reveal the precise figure, but it was notably high) than a ministerial salary." To be frank, it was similar with all the CEE

country members. Nevertheless we agreed, and the result considerably increased the authority of REC offices.

A second story illustrates the differences in understanding between the "West" and CEE. The REC, from the very beginning, devoted a lot of finance to projects involved in collecting information on the environment. At that time I was vice-minister for environment, also responsible for, among other things, environmental information. Since I'd worked professionally in the environment before entering the ministry, I was well aware of Slovakia's state-of-the-art environmental information system. I was very pleased that our informatics attracted such considerable finances, but the money went to different, generally small projects, and was aimed at particular problems. My dream was to obtain financing for building up a complex, GIS-based state environmental information system, which the state budget at that time could afford.

I repeatedly raised the idea that the REC should help to build up such systems in all CEE states, unfortunately without success. Once, when I again addressed the issue after a formal session, one of the REC directors told me that my efforts were in vain because the REC was established to help civil society and NGOs, not governments. That was exactly a key point of misunderstanding of the situation in CEE in the early 1990s. NGOs often had much better information on the environment than the ministries of environment, but they were not responsible for decisions, which was a strange situation.

At the same time — say 1990 and 1991 — ministries of environment were quite strongly opposed by other ministries and were in fact closer to environmental organisations — that is, civil society. I, as the vice-minister, still worked in the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and I felt much more a scientist than a governmental officer. So, the ministries of environment were, at that time, not in any sense adversaries of NGOs. But in any case, as we later came to understand the situation in Western countries, the REC was decisively involved during this period in gathering environmental information in the CEE region.



# Pavel Antonov



**Pavel Antonov (PhD)** is the executive editor and co-founder of BlueLink.net, Bulgaria's pioneering civil society e-network, and the former editor of *Green Horizon*, the REC's quarterly magazine. An affiliate of OpenSpace (UK), his research covers post-socialist societies' loss of "voice" over environment, climate change, human and minority rights, and the changes in the field of journalism under economic pressure.

## When you hear the word "REC", what pops into your head?

A nice garden on the bank of the Danube. A place full of good people, sometimes talking, sometimes arguing, sometimes playing football.

## Describe your personal and professional development during your years at the REC?

The REC has been part of my life for the last 20 years. I first came as a trainee, as a member of the Junior Fellowship Programme in 1996. Back then I was a reporter for Nova, Bulgaria's first private TV station in Sofia, and I was covering foreign affairs. In my free time I was a member of the young environmental group EkoClub 2000, which was when I applied for the REC programme. We were the first group to visit the REC's new premises and the garden. Looking back on that one month, it was the most intensely spent time — workwise, but also in terms of meeting new people and opening up to new things. That was also when I met the REC staff for the first time, and I really liked the REC.

This led to me coming to CEU [Central European University] the next year and doing an environmental science degree — something that had never occurred to me before. After my CEU time, with my environmental science and policy degree, I went to Bulgaria and created BlueLink, which is a social and information network of environmental NGOs in Bulgaria. And two years later I came to the REC to edit *The Bulletin*.

*The Bulletin* was there from the very beginning of the REC. It came out quarterly and it always had different editors. As a junior fellow I had met one of them, Wendy Muzzy; and as a CEU student the

second supervisor of my research on media coverage of nuclear power in Bulgaria was Paul Csagoly, who was then the editor of *The Bulletin*. And when I arrived I came with a project proposal, which was to upgrade the publication from an organisational bulletin to a quarterly magazine that would be of much more general interest and with more journalistic content. And that took two and a half years to come to, when we launched *Green Horizon* as a magazine in 2004. The "bulletin" was still part of it, but we had far more material from journalists in different countries, we had interviews. Basically, we turned it into a product that would be of interest and appeal to a much broader audience. And it was beautifully designed by Sylvia Magyar [head of the REC Publishing Department].

## What were the main challenges in getting *Green Horizon* published?

It's very difficult, because a big organisation like the REC is always sensitive about the way it communicates and is perceived. Even so, they had been dwelling on this idea before I arrived. Surprisingly, one of the stumbling blocks was the title, and they had come up with some brilliant ones, but there was always something. Either it was too informal, or there was another publication out there with the same name. But I reached the point where I was willing to go with just about anything, and I said that if we didn't come up with anything else we would call it 'Environment Central and Eastern Europe', which the editorial board generally agreed was far too boring.

But by then the REC already had a big history of developing products for journalists from CEE, as well as services and support. One of these products was a bi-weekly newsletter called *Green Horizon*,

which was produced at the time by Tom Popper. And in desperation I finally wondered: “Why don’t we just use the title of something we have and that is our own product?” And they liked it. But we still had trouble when we launched the Turkish version, because our colleagues there told us that everyone there would think it was a religious magazine. So they came up with *Yesil Ufuklar*, which means something more like “Green Space”.

Of course there were other issues, like funding. How do you bring in money for such a thing? Every project wants its own publicity and messages. What we had to do was convince the team that it was in their interest to let us do our job professionally as journalists — not to just publish a project description.

We managed to separate the journalistic content from the organisational content in different sections of *Green Horizon*, and the sections were designed differently to make it easy for readers to see the difference. And I have to say that this was a pretty bold step for Marta [REC executive director Marta Szigeti Bonifert] to take, and one that previous directors would never have taken.

#### What are some of your most memorable experiences from your time at the REC?

I’ll share one story that is a favourite among some REC colleagues. In 2007 I was invited to a symposium on religion, science and environment in Greenland, which I wrote about in *Green Horizon*. This symposium was hosted by an Orthodox Christian patriarch, but there were Catholics, Buddhists, Muslims — all sorts of religious denominations on board. And they had this difficulty about what to do, because if they prayed together, everyone would want to speak differently. So they came up with this brilliant idea to have a silent prayer. This was a memorable moment and I remember thinking how people can actually achieve much more when they keep their mouths shut.

#### What are the biggest changes that are taking in the journalistic profession — especially where environmental coverage is concerned?

This is the question that led me to do four years

of research. It was something I kept asking myself while working on *Green Horizon*, and even earlier. There were these stories, and there were journalists handling them professionally to one extent or another — but there was this sense that there was still something beyond our reach that prevents us from telling these stories in a proper way, and prevents editors from prioritising these stories.

In doing my PhD work I explored the set of economic and political pressures that stand in the way of these stories, and how the communicating of these stories goes against the business interests of big powerful industries, which have influence on governments, on media outlets and advertising and so on. And it was then that I realised the importance of having an “old-school” set of rules and professional norms that journalists are supposed to be bound to in their work. And since then I’ve been trying to take these rules and introduce them to journalists from different countries and getting them to see them as something vital — something that protects and empowers them.

This is an interesting development, because one of the findings of my research was that the word “freedom” is widely abused these days, especially by media proprietors or traditional media outlets, whereby they use it in ways that create limitations. Young journalists are told: “You have the freedom to do things however you like.” So these young people don’t get a set of limitations and rules, and they think this is freedom, when in fact they have nothing to lean on. Having a set of rules to work with allows you to say ‘no’ to an editor or a publisher when professional standards are violated. Young journalists today are deprived of this possibility, so they are very vulnerable.

But the possibility that I see is related to the Internet. Fifteen or so years ago it was unthinkable that you would have this unlimited medium of communication. If a story is good enough, with social networking possibilities, you can easily reach thousands of readers that you wouldn’t be able to reach otherwise because of financial or geographical limitations. What’s really important, however, is not to take this as an easy way out. You can use the Internet as a medium, but you need to stick to your professional norms and ethical requirements.





# John Hontelez



**John Hontelez** is chief advocacy officer of Forest Stewardship International. Between 1996 and 2011 he was secretary-general of the European Environmental Bureau, before which had been chair of Friends of the Earth International for a decade. He is co-founder of Milieukontakt International, a Dutch organisation that has given practical support to environmental organisations in Central and Eastern Europe since 1987. Hontelez is a Dutch citizen who was already active at secondary school (1970) in local and national environmental and anti-nuclear organisations. He lives in Brussels.

**As chair of Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) from 1986 to 1996, what was it like to be involved in the process of engaging NGOs in the pan-European movement, especially regarding talks on EU membership for CEE countries?**

In 1986, FoEI had one member from CEE, Polski Klub Ekologiczny (PKE). They had what we called a provisional membership, and the Executive Committee asked me to find out more about this organisation because it was the first one from Eastern Europe. So I went to Krakow in 1987 to attend PKE's third General Assembly. Launched in 1980, PKE had come up together with Solidarnosc and somehow managed to remain a legal entity throughout the 1980s in Poland. In 1981 there was a military coup led by General Jaruzelski, during which Solidarnosc was banned, but PKE had a very clever strategy for remaining legal and yet independent. I was really impressed by my visit to Krakow and I thought this organisation would be an asset to FoEI. An anti-nuclear campaign had been launched by PKE because Chernobyl had just happened, so I started organising exchanges between Dutch and Polish NGOs. Very soon afterwards this led to the setting up of Milieukontakt Netherlands-Poland, which after one year became Milieukontakt Eastern Europe. Now it's called Milieukontakt International.

Milieukontakt became the main vehicle for me to get engaged with organisations in Eastern Europe. In 1987 I went to Hungary to understand better how Hungarian NGOs were working, and we

started to work with that country as well, and we added East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Milieukontakt soon became an organisation that was active all over — also in initially more complex countries like Romania.

Between 1987 and 1991 a lot of groups became members of FoEI: Ecoglasnost from Bulgaria; the green movement in Estonia; the National Society of Nature Conservationists in Hungary, Hnutí Duha in the Czech Republic; SZOPK in the Slovak part; VAKS in Latvia; and Zelenyi Svit in Ukraine. Through FoEI we became more and more acquainted with political issues, and this was quite exciting because FoEI also has a very strong membership in Latin America, where the organisations tend to be rather leftist and anti-capitalist, so we had some very interesting clashes, especially between people from Eastern Europe who were so surprised that, in their view, the Latin Americans wanted to go towards the system that the Europeans were only too happy to leave.

In 1989, FoEI organised what was called the Pan-European Environmental Meeting in Naples, which proved a real game changer. There was impressive participation from NGOs — a lot of people from the Soviet Union and from Eastern Europe. On the first day of the conference, the Berlin Wall fell. And on the second day, Zhivkov, the political leader in Bulgaria, resigned. So you can imagine that our normal programme didn't go according to plan. We just had our plenary discussions about what all this meant for Europe.

### Which events have had the biggest influence on Europe's environmental policy trajectory?

The period of accession negotiations was very interesting because the initial optimism in the new democracies had disappeared. At some point the environmental agenda became, in the view of many politicians and media people, something imposed by the EU. So it was very important during that difficult period to keep the environmental movement well informed and motivated.

In Western Europe at the time there was also some concern that as soon as accession countries joined the EU everything would freeze because the new member states didn't want new legislation. This created a kind of urgency in Western Europe, but it had some good results. I was always very much fighting against the idea that Eastern European countries would just be a barrier to further innovation. Also because what I learned in Eastern Europe is that you can't just group the countries together, as they so often were during the Cold War period under Soviet domination. When accession happened in 2004 it did turn out that the new member states were, by and large, less enthusiastic about leading a charge in the EU for innovative and ambitious environmental policies. Of course, taking on 12 countries — 10 in 2004, two in 2007 — is a big challenge in any sense — plus many of them had gone through a major industrial crisis, were poorer anyway, and employment and growth had become key priorities.

A couple of other things happened in the meantime. First of all there was Kyoto, which in Europe has been a real success. The other thing was the implosion of the old economies themselves. This was a terrible thing at the time, as it created a lot of unemployment and poverty, while undermining former social structures like schooling, education and pensions. Then, after that, you got the new industries that were basically run by Western companies. There were attempts by the European Commission to make voluntary agreements with those companies to apply the same technologies and environmental standards that they used in Western countries. The EC couldn't oblige them to do this in EU non-member states, so this didn't really work, but at least some of the bigger compa-

nies were doing that anyway. In any case, the westernisation of industry in those countries brought some environmental benefits.

### What are the greatest challenges that CEE countries have had to overcome in recent years?

Going back to what I said earlier, you can't just lump all of the countries together. They are different, and they have different histories. Also, civil society has developed differently. I haven't been following the region as closely as I once did, and I have to be careful about making sweeping statements — but I am concerned about the way that democracy is "developing" in some of those countries. In 1989, starting with the conference in Naples and later, I often had this kind of discussion with activists in Eastern Europe: "What is the determining difference between East and West?" And many of them thought that the key difference was capitalism versus communism as a determining system, that communism was leading to a wasteful society, and that capitalism and market forces were more geared towards efficiency and innovation. And I always disagreed with that. For me, the determining difference was democracy and freedom of speech and organisation versus repression. That's why I found the Aarhus Convention was so important.

I'm really concerned that in some Eastern countries these kinds of things are at risk. I have always emphasised the essential importance of building up domestic support, and of building membership organisations. Many countries in Eastern Europe lack large membership organisations or a strong network of volunteers. For me, Hungary has always been the most positive example of self-organisation — that is, the Danube Circle, the National Society of Nature Conservationists. The Hungarian NGOs started, in 1990 I believe and with Milieucontact support in the first years, an annual national gathering of Hungarian NGOs — originally mainly to try to overcome their differences, rooted in the past. But gradually they focused on how to work together and how to organise representation. The situation in Hungary is not easy today, and I'm not following the NGOs as I was, but it remains an example to follow: only a strong and united movement can make a difference.



# Goran Svilanovic



**Goran Svilanovic** took office as secretary general of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) on January 1, 2013. A Serbian diplomat and politician, he had previously served as coordinator of economic and environmental activities for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2008–2012). In November 2004, he was appointed chair of Working Table I (democratisation and human rights) of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, where he served until the end of 2007. He was a member of the Senior Review Group of the Stability Pact, which proposed the transformation of the Stability Pact into the Regional Cooperation Council.

He has worked with a number of organisations and committees, including the Centre for Antiwar Action (1995–1999), the International Commission on the Balkans (2004–2006) and the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (2007–2008).

**As secretary general of the RCC, what opportunities for cooperation do you see between your organisation and the REC over the next five to 10 years?**

The RCC is the hub for regional cooperation in South Eastern Europe (SEE). This cooperation is important because it can enhance the potential of every individual economy in the region and enable them to perform better on major international markets. I see the REC as a regional leader in bringing SEE countries closer in order to address common challenges: improved environmental governance; combating climate change; the effective management of shared natural resources such as international rivers and lakes; promoting the food-water-energy nexus; enhancing forestation; increasing the volume of irrigated arable land; removing roadblocks for the enhanced participation of the private sector in financing water and other infrastructure projects; enhancing competitiveness; issues related to the energy and transport sectors — all these are and will remain the main areas of RCC–REC cooperation.

The REC is one of the regional dimension coordinators for the Environment dimension under the SEE 2020 Strategy, and it has been instrumental in

drafting the regional action plan for the environmental sector. Under the auspices of the RCC, the REC assisted the SEE governments in establishing the Regional Working Group on Environment — a much-needed political mechanism to pave the way for future multi-country actions in this region.

**What notable challenges do the recently adopted SDGs pose for the SEE/CEE region? What avenues of cooperation are available in tackling these challenges?**

I believe that the potential for regional cooperation in SEE is much greater than what we can currently see. We have to admit that the process of reconciliation, a process that is crucial for genuine and effective regional cooperation, has reached its halfway point. On the economic front the SEE region has lost over 800,000 jobs since 2008, dragging over 2 million people dangerously close to the poverty line. Building strong and sustainable economies, addressing inequality, finding solutions to the impacts of climate change and building peaceful societies and strong institutions are, in my opinion, some of the main priorities for cooperation in SEE when it comes to the post-2015 agenda.



**With the emergence of new environmental issues and proposed solutions — SDGs, Paris COP etc. — what special role do you see the SEE region playing in a Europe-wide or global context?**

On the long and winding road towards the European Union, the countries of SEE have promised their citizens an improved standard of living, economic reforms and infrastructural development. These are objectives in their own right, but they are also meant to ensure that EU citizens one day see people from SEE countries as equal partners and not as a threat to their way of life or values in general. This boils down to signing up to the core European values: principles of the rule of law, human rights, fighting against corruption, freedom of expression and, most importantly, the freedom to make democratic choices. And, just as importantly, the implementation of all of this. I hope that in the future we will all see this region as a place that exports stability to other regions and countries, providing valuable lessons learned from the process of EU accession and playing an

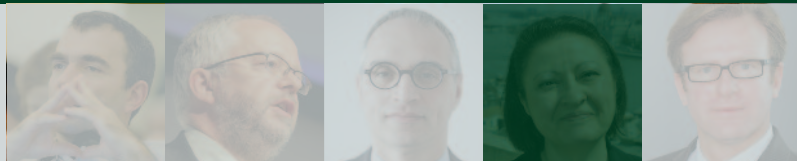
important role in supporting the principles of the EU's neighbourhood policy.

**What first pops into your mind when you hear the name "REC"?**

Hmmm... maybe "REC" is close to the word "recreation" which one can translate as "to form, build, conjure...yet again and anew". A constant of the REC's existence and its defining trait over its 25-year history is the capacity to use experiences and strengths and turn them into innovative and far-reaching processes. These processes have had a huge impact on environmental performance and the development of governance systems. A great example is the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme (ReREP), established under the Stability Pact in the 1990s. Another bold example of what the REC is capable of "re-creating" are its new initiatives in the Eastern Partnership and Middle East and North Africa regions.



# Maria Assunta Accili



**Maria Assunta Accili** obtained a degree in political science from the University of Rome in 1979 and a post-graduate degree in public organisations management from the College of Europe, Belgium, in 1980. She entered the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1980 to serve in the diplomatic corps and worked for the ministry's Cooperation and Development Department in the office for Latin America and Asia until 1983. She subsequently held senior posts in the Italian embassies in Morocco, China and Pakistan, was first counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Italy to the OECD in Paris, and headed the Special Delegation of Italy in Taiwan. She became Italy's ambassador to Hungary in 2012.

Through its technical and financial support for the REC, Italy has aimed to assist Central and Eastern European countries in promoting social awareness and in designing appropriate policies in all areas related to green governance.

The Italian Trust Fund, established in 2001, has made a major contribution to the implementation of several programmes related to sustainable development, environmental innovation and renewable energies, with a special focus on education, institutional capacity building and transnational cooperation. The activities carried out thanks to the Italian Trust Fund were instrumental to the EU enlargement strategy and provided assistance to candidate countries by means of technical consultancy, advice in policy planning, and involvement in international partnerships such as the "Environment for Europe" process, as well as the Carpathian and Aarhus conventions.

Among the various initiatives funded by the Italian Trust Fund, it is worth mentioning, on the one hand, the extensive training platform for civil servants, administrators and technical staff that led to the creation of the Sustainable Development Academy in 2008, and, on the other hand, the SEARCH programme on children's health and the school environment. The strong support of the

Italian Government is clearly shown in the restructured REC Conference Center, a zero-emission building that constitutes a unique example of energy efficiency with low environmental impact.

Italy also values the expansion of REC activities in a wider area that includes the Black Sea and Turkey, Russia and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, with a view to involving as many partners as possible. Environment is definitely the most global of all issues and a global effort is needed to face problems like climate change, waste and water management, food safety and agricultural production, the evaluation of environmental risk, and industrial pollution control.

The results of the activities carried out by the REC during the past 25 years appear very positive. The REC has worked satisfactorily with public and private stakeholders to broaden the understanding of the environmental challenge and to encourage positive action through dialogue, education and research.

Green economy is the answer to the wellbeing and to the prosperity of humankind. The REC has consistently contributed to disseminating this message, and Italy commends its role in advancing cooperation among governments, NGOs and international bodies.







# Haki Abazi



**Haki Abazi** is programme director for the Western Balkans area of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund's Pivotal Place programme. Prior to joining the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) in 2007, Abazi served as director of the Kosovo\* office of the East-West Management Institute. Abazi developed and implemented a wide range of programmes addressing critical issues in Kosovo\* during the transition period. He has also played an important role in the development of civil society in the region. Abazi has over nine years of experience in designing and managing development programmes in Kosovo\*, Serbia, Montenegro, Afghanistan and Indonesia. These programmes were designed to support overall development and increase the level of participation of citizens in decision-making processes. He also chairs the Steering Committee of the Grantmakers East Forum and serves on the boards of several international organisations.

## Which factors came into play when deciding to offer long-term financial support for REC projects and activities?

In our case, this refers both to the Green Pack and developing tools for sustainable development. One of the major themes of our work is sustainable development achieved through democratic practice and peace building. What the REC has developed is an expertise that is pretty unique, but it also has the ability to reach out to the region where [the RBF] works in the Western Balkans. And our priority is to support changes in social behaviour, as well as the approaches of both government and civil society, in terms of resources and the environment. So things kind of came together in one place, and it was, so to speak, a natural marriage between the REC and the RBF. Things just fell into sync in terms of working together. I also think that the REC has developed an excellent relationship with both civil society and government in the countries where we work, which is an additional aspect of why the REC is a natural partner for what we do.

## What are your main interests in working in the CEE region?

Viewed in a broader framework, Central and Eastern Europe — including the Western Balkans — has been challenged historically in terms of being geographically a part of Europe but never fully part of the political map of Europe. So, backing the European integration process — which is not just a process involving technicalities, but one involving real reforms — means providing real support to people and countries to go through the reform process successfully so that these populations can enjoy the full range of rights and benefits of the European Union political system. And some of the membership criteria are related to changes and reforms connected to the environment, energy, resources and the way that planning is done and so forth.

The idea for this particular project was, instead of trying to change the older generations — who have gone through a lot of difficulties in the past — we thought, along with the REC, that it would be a much safer investment to get into the

schools, ministries of education and other relevant ministries and to begin a process of reforming and amending educational curricula in the region. But to do this you have to provide enough skills and good information to teachers and students to get them to think differently about the environment and to think differently about environmental policies that countries put in place, which is obviously interlinked with every other subject and field of work — but mainly in terms of economic development and law. In a way, having an underdeveloped region is an advantage because we don't have to repeat the mistakes of other regions in order to realise just how valuable the environment and natural resources are — not only for the current generation but future generations as well.

**Do you generally prefer to have direct involvement in funded programmes, or do you prefer taking a hands-off approach?**

It really depends. Our work is characterised by partnership relationships, rather than a typical donor-grantee relationship. It's not that we just sign off on the check and then say "See you in two years", whatever the project. It's more about how we utilise the best other grants and networks and partners that we have within the same project, because I think at the end of the day we talk about

the same group of people and the same group of institutions. There are local organisations that work with different approaches on the ground, and then you have the REC that takes a more regional approach, so we're able to take advantage and utilise different aspects of work — and other donors do this as well so we're not alone in the region. And the REC has many other donors as well. So I think having this spirit of partnership and being able to exchange information as the project goes on has proved to be a lot more useful, not only because the understanding is better but also no matter how much we invest in predicting the whole time span of a project, there are needs for recalibrations depending on a change of government or something that for one reason or other doesn't go well — and I think the partnership relationship allows that.

**What pops into your mind when you hear the name "REC"?**

What pops into my mind is an organisation that is fully committed and has unique expertise to address environmental issues in the region.

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



# Junichi Kosuge



**Junichi Kosuge** was born in 1952. He studied law at the University of Tokyo and took up work at the Foreign Ministry in 1976. After serving both at the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo and being stationed overseas, in 2004 he became Consul General of Japan to Germany in Frankfurt am Main. In 2006 he was accredited Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Afghanistan. From 2008 he served as Consul General of Japan at Munich. In 2011 he was accredited to Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In 2014 he assumed duties as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Hungary.

**With the fresh emergence of new environmental issues and proposed solutions — SDGs, Paris COP etc. — what special role do you see the CEE region playing in a Europe-wide or global context?**

During the past 25 years, since the change of political regimes in 1989, the CEE region has achieved its transition to a democratic society and market economy. Hungary, where REC headquarters were established, and other Visegrad countries joined the EU in 2004. The V4 countries, first as recipients and later as donors, have been playing a leading role amongst other former Eastern European states during their transition period. The CEE countries have compiled through their own experiences a knowledge in various areas, such as what kind of environmental problems might arise during the transition period and how they should encounter with them in order to achieve satisfactory outcomes.

With this background, I believe that the special role to be played by the CEE region is to share and transfer the expertise compiled and the lessons learnt, as well as the technology in the area of environment, to the benefit of the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries and future EU member states.

When we consider how to deal with the climate change issue on a global basis, the aforemen-

tioned expertise of the CEE countries will surely provide a useful input for the international community when it intends to act towards a common goal.

**What first pops into your mind when you hear the name “REC”?**

The name is self-explanatory, as REC refers to Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe. This name gives me an image that the REC is the regional centre that assists the CEE region in tackling various environmental challenges during its transition period towards democratisation and a market economy.

I understand that the REC has functioned as an implementing organisation to provide the V4 countries and other states in the CEE region with concrete forms of assistance in the area of environment. With the accession of the V4 and other countries to the EU, a certain level of environmental protection was achieved, and the REC has been expanding the geographical scope of its activities to the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries. The scope of REC's activities has also become more diversified, not only limited to environmental protection but expanded to responding to climate change, capacity building, and environmental education etc.

I also recognise that the REC has established an



effective network among governments, regional offices of international organisations, academic institutes and environmental groups in the CEE region, which can be characterised as an important asset of the REC.

It is my expectation that the REC will continue to undertake activities for the benefit of the CEE region while setting its priority on the needs and problems of the region, as a regional centre deeply rooted in the area.

**Please can you share some general remarks regarding the REC or the CEE region?**

Prior to answering to this question, let me first draw your attention to Japan's engagement with the REC since 1990. Japan is one of the original Signatories of the 1990 REC Charter. The reason for that is that Japan recognised the importance of the REC in its role to assist the CEE region in tackling various environmental problems across the state boundaries during the time of transition. The Government of Japan has assisted the activities of the REC through the Japan Special Fund from 1993 until 2012, and through various project-based contributions since 2013. Some significant examples of the projects will be touched upon later.

Special attention should also be given to the generous donations made by Japanese private companies such as Sumitomo Chemical Ltd. and TOYOTA. The total donation by Sumitomo Chemical Ltd., amounting to JPY 21 million between 2010 and 2015, enabled the REC to engage in various activities in the field of climate change. Sumitomo Chemical's financial contribution has also facilitated internship programmes at the REC. At the 20th anniversary event of the Japan Trust Fund held in 2013 during the REC General Assembly, three Japanese internship students made presentations about their experience at the REC. This had an effective impact on transferring the outcomes of the REC's activities to the next generations.

As it is well known, the Green Pack is an educational material of the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) developed by the REC through the kind contribution of TOYOTA. The Green Pack

has been translated into 20 languages in 18 countries, in both the CEE region and Central Asia. Forty thousand teachers and more than four million students have been using the Green Pack. It has also been recognised as a "good ESD material" by UNESCO. During the UNESCO World Conference on ESD held in Nagoya, Aichi in Japan in November 2014, Mrs. Marta Szigeti Bonifert, executive director of the REC, and Professor Ryo Fujikura, a member of the REC's Board of Directors from Japan, organised a side event. A representative from TOYOTA kindly attended the event and delivered a speech. The side event was a good opportunity for the Green Pack to be introduced as one of the most successful ESD materials in the world as well as for the REC to gain extensive international recognition.

It is thus very noteworthy and I am glad to witness that the REC has been receiving generous contributions not only from governmental and public authorities, but also from Japanese private companies. It is greatly expected that the REC will become more widely recognised in other parts of the world and receive assistance from a variety of donors in the future.

**What spurred the Government of Japan to promote impactful capacity-building and awareness-raising programmes related to environmental issues and challenges across this region and beyond?**

As mentioned above, the Government of Japan established the Japan Special Fund in 1993 at the REC for the purpose of assisting REC's activities. Until 2012 the Japanese Government has supported the REC through contribution to the fund. Since 2013 we have been cooperating with the REC in its activities on a project basis. Whenever we developed projects in collaboration with the REC, we duly took into consideration the priority area and tried to make the best use of the limited resources to the maximum extent. Some notable examples are as follows: during the REC's very first years, we concentrated on environmental protection, such as combating river and land pollution. In 1993 we undertook a contamination assessment and identification of prevention





measures for the Sajo Valley in Hungary. In the following years, we focused on assisting the development of environmental law. In 1999, we worked jointly with the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the REC to facilitate the codification of the environmental laws and regulations of Bosnia and Herzegovina. From 2000 to 2001, Japan assisted the drafting process of a national programme and strategy for waste management in Serbia and Montenegro through the REC. Afterwards we started focusing on capacity building in the field of climate change. Through our project with the REC we invited government officials from CEE countries in 2009 to the REC headquarters and provided them with a capacity-building programme which related to the implementation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

As the geographical scope of the REC's activities have been expanded to Eastern Partnership countries in recent years, we collaborated with the REC in convening seminars for the promotion of green economy in GUAM countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) jointly with the GUAM Secretariat in 2013 and 2014. The seminar in 2014 was especially well attended by experts from GUAM countries. It is my Government's strong desire that these capacity-building seminars will be dedicated to encouraging the private investment necessary to introduce renewable energy technologies in GUAM countries.

I would like to mention that we are trying to meet the needs of the recipients in an appropriate

manner, when we consider the size and type of a project. In this regards, in addition to a close cooperation with REC experts, we intend to consult closely with the relevant government officials and groups of the recipient states. It is also to be noted that Japan, a country in Asia, has been able to undertake projects effectively and efficiently in the CEE region because the REC facilitates a constructive relationship with us.

**Which of the REC's programmes or projects that Japan has promoted do you consider the most successful in the region?**

It is my understanding that all of the projects undertaken by Japan with the REC were completed successfully and brought about the expected outcomes. This was reaffirmed on the occasion of the 20th anniversary event of the establishment of the Japan Special Fund held during the REC General Assembly in 2013. Since 2014, successful outcomes have been also observed upon completion of each project.

Such success is largely due to the REC, which maintains a human and organisational network deeply rooted in the CEE region. The REC has compiled highly qualified ability for effective implementation of projects in the past 25 years. Let me take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation of the REC. Japan intends to continue to undertake more constructive projects in cooperation with the REC as it is equipped with an excellent knowledge of the region in many ways.







# William K. Reilly



**William K. Reilly** worked as the Sixth Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under President George H. W. Bush (1989–93). At EPA his best-remembered initiative is the Clean Air Act of 1990, which among other contributions created a system of trading for sulphur dioxide, an innovation which has been highly cost-effective and much copied around the world. He initiated a programme of assistance to former communist countries of Eastern Europe as they established new environmental laws and institutions after the fall of the Soviet Union and persuaded President Bush to propose and fund a Center for the Environment of Central and Eastern Europe in Budapest, Hungary, which became the REC.

Reilly earned a BA degree from Yale, a law degree from Harvard, and an MSc in Urban Planning from Columbia. He has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Reilly is currently chairman emeritus of the board of the World Wildlife Fund, co-chairman of the Global Water Challenge, and chairman emeritus of the board of ClimateWorks Foundation.

**What were some of the top environmental priorities in Central and Eastern Europe immediately after the Berlin Wall came down?**

The United States Environmental Protection Agency was heavily involved in the assessment of environmental needs, and design of responses, following the liberation of Eastern European countries. As Administrator I engaged collaborative initiatives with US Agency for International Development, the World Bank, with the Government of Poland and others. Projects included ecosystem protection and restoration in Poland, along with suppression of SO<sub>2</sub> in Krakow. What to do about wastes accumulated by Soviet military bases, much of it hazardous, was a common problem.

**Explain how the first Bush administration introduced and developed the concept of what would eventually become the REC.**

Given the similarity of challenges confronting all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it occurred to me that a region-wide approach could be a basis for exchanging information on best practice for waste management, air and water pollution, and policies for dam construction, among others. There was also a strong desire in the George H. W. Bush Administration to be helpful to the new governments just forming in the wake of freedom. I consulted with Mark Palmer, then the US Ambassador to Hungary, about providing assistance to the region, and after consulting with environmentalists in the area he identified the need for a regional environmental policy centre. The concept was to create an institution that would bring environmental and other officials together from all the countries of the region, and frankly also to help encourage the habit of collaboration among public officials with limited experience of governing. As in so many coun-

tries, environment provided a unifying and non-controversial opportunity to consider common problems.

I fleshed out the concept and presented it at a meeting of the President's Cabinet. Both President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker were immediately supportive and we emerged from the meeting with a decision. We began consulting with other governments to join the US in making a financial commitment.

**You attended the opening ceremony of REC. What can you tell us about that day?**

I represented President Bush at the opening ceremony of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe at a historic building provided by the Hungarian government for the REC's first office. It was a beautifully warm and sunny September day in Budapest, and the ceremony was outdoors. I noted in my remarks that many of the officials representing countries of the region at the inauguration of the REC had only recently been released from prison. I observed to the assembled officials that, in fact, the experience of prison was not unknown among American public officials; the only difference was that in America the tendency for those who went to jail was to reverse the order, to hold public office first and only later to go to prison.

**What were some of the biggest challenges in terms of addressing environmental issues in the CEE region on a regional scale?**

Several of the newly independent nations of the region wished that the REC might have been located in their country, and they made clear their interest in having the REC establish satellites that would address the problems peculiar to their countries. This occasioned some early concern that the REC would not fully command the attention and support of all the countries of the region. It was clear that to be fully accepted and effective the REC would have to provide an early demonstration of inclusiveness.

The experience of engaging environmental problems on a regional scale comported well with the

issues countries confronted in the early 1990s. Enacting new laws, setting new standards for air and water pollution, finding repositories for hazardous waste, beginning to listen to non-governmental groups and lobbies, creating forums for consulting citizens affected by infrastructure—all of these were novel in the immediate post-Soviet era, and every democratically elected government had to learn how to implement them. When I spoke as head of the US Delegation to the Earth Summit in Rio in June 1992, I chose to make the environmental commitments and achievements of the countries of Eastern Europe my principal theme. It was frankly the most significant and promising environmental success story of the decade. And the REC played an important unifying part in that story.

**With the huge political and economic transformations taking place in the CEE region, how difficult was it to maintain focus on the environment as a leading priority?**

There was nothing simple or inevitable about the environmental commitments made and implemented among countries trying to find their footing economically. Leaders had to believe the environment was important and that environmental standards and laws would not impede economic growth. Many in wealthier counties did not accept that a high priority for one was compatible with the other. Many today continue to make the case that the environment can wait until economic growth is secure and can be afforded. Experience here and in my own country proves them wrong: in the US more than a doubling of population and automobiles, and a 300 percent increase in GDP, have been accompanied by vast improvements in air quality of cities, in abundant recovery of fish populations in rivers and lakes, and safe drinking water for all.

None of the problems faced in the early 1990s have disappeared, but they have been managed and the environment is indisputably superior by all metrics. But each generation must commit anew, must renew and reinforce the strategies to ensure continued success, and reaffirm the rationale for conducting environmental programmes, including





setting priorities together with neighbouring countries. The political and environmental landscape of the region today does not display the same euphoria we felt in 1990, with the significant exception that what you did worked! Now we confront a problem which more than any other demands international collaboration: the changing climate. Mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, and adapting to the now inevitable transformation of weather patterns, these cannot be undertaken or successfully addressed on a national scale. And just as the experience of engaging with similarly challenged officials from neighbouring countries was a REC objective, so today it remains important. The context of divisive politics and ideologies, of new radical movements and causes, of Russia's incursion into Ukraine—these dramatize the need to cooperate, to stick together.

**Are you optimistic that countries today can put aside various differences and work together to solve urgent environment and climate-related problems?**

I served in the White House in the early 1970s. During some of the tensest periods of the Cold War, US and Soviet environmental officials conducted joint research projects on the environment, shared experiences with similarly threatened resources like Lake Baikal and Lake Tahoe, and convened regular scientific exchanges focusing on the environment. Attending to the environment can often proceed despite conflicts in other sectors, and it can also enhance the experience of solving common problems apart from ideology while it fosters the habit of just getting along. The REC has realised the hopes and aspirations of its founders and benefactors who are justly proud of its achievements and celebrate its 25th anniversary.







# Laszlo Solyom



**Laszlo Solyom** served as president of the Republic of Hungary from 2005 to 2010. He obtained a law degree at the University of Pecs in 1965 before earning a doctorate at the University of Jena, Germany, in 1969. He worked as a research fellow at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from 1969 to 1982, and then as professor of law at ELTE University in Budapest (1982–2000).

In the 1980s, Solyom worked as a legal advisor to environmental movements and groups, and became a member of the Democratic Forum delegation to the regime-changing roundtable negotiations in 1989. He was president of the Hungarian Constitutional Court from 1990 to 1998.

**What special roles do you see the CEE region playing in a Europe-wide or global context in the coming years?**

Two possible areas of concern for the region are the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the future of nuclear energy in the context of alternative and renewable energy sources. I don't know whether the REC will have a voice on these issues, but they should at least be talked about.

**What first pops into your mind when you hear the name "REC"?**

My immediate association of ideas with the REC is "independence". An institution that does not depend on domestic politics — which is, at best, indifferent to environmental issues — the REC establishes its own ends and has the means to implement them, and in a wider geographical context.

The second thought is more visual — or, rather, in the imagination — the genius loci of Szentendre. This embraces not so much the old town but the Szentendre arm of the Danube, which is for me more human, domesticised, or simply kind, than the rather strange, huge main arm. The REC breathes the air of that riverside.

**Can you share a memorable anecdote about the REC or the CEE region?**

I was deeply impressed by the then just-completed conversion of the REC Conference Center into a zero-energy building. But I must admit that I felt equally cold inside during both winter and summer — and was quite hot outside during my summer visit. There was enough light in the room for working, but not enough real sunlight. I had a strong desire to be sweating and blinded by the sun.

I am familiar with some REC programmes in the Balkans and have kept them in mind while visiting Montenegro, [the former Yugoslav Republic of] Macedonia and Albania. For instance, the REC facilitated cooperation with people from villages at Lake Ohrid in the interest of peace and economic well-being, which broke through prejudices and contributed much to my understanding of the region.

**You spent the pivotal years of 1990 to 1998 as president of the Constitutional Court of Hungary. What were Hungary's greatest environmental challenges at that time, and what was needed in order to address them from the legal and political points of view?**

Only the happy few know that the most influential legal instrument for building constitutional

democracy in Hungary in the '90s — the *actio popularis*, which preceded the Constitutional Court — had its origins in environmental law. Before the democratic change I had already proposed to introduce the possibility of a lawsuit on behalf of the environment without showing personal damage. In the given circumstances, the opportunity presented itself to transform this idea to an unlimited access to the Constitutional Court. The *actio popularis* demonstrated that political power and legislation itself have limits.

The most important ruling of the Constitutional Court in environmental matters, the declaration of the non-derogation principle, was also delivered on a popular footing. The Court opined that the State could not reduce the degree of nature protection as guaranteed under law unless it was necessary to realise other constitutional rights — and even then only in proportion to the set goal. The burning practical question behind the case was that protected forests were privatised, which led to dismemberment of those areas — and, furthermore, the maintenance level of protection was not guaranteed. The Court obliged the State to repurchase those forests.

Another topical question reached the Court already in its first year, in 1990 — namely, the environmental damages caused by the Soviet Army, on which a mixed commission had the last say. The Constitutional Court opened recourse to the ordinary courts in such cases.

**One of your three pillars of government as president of the Republic of Hungary (2005–2010) was: “Calling the Hungarian and the international public’s attention to environmental and ecological issues, such as the importance of biodiversity or the risks of climate change.” How would you assess, up to now, Hungary’s political and public response to this particular calling?**

Perhaps a five-year period provides enough scope for evaluation of my three presidential priorities. Surely the fate of these efforts has been directed by events, which were partly unexpected, but surely independent from the once-hoped-for durability and energy invested into them. I think

it is senseless to go into mourning for the decline of the rule of law, the current lack of neighbourhood and minority policy making, or the systemic pushing of environmental and sustainability issues into the background. These aims had to have the desired effect in their time — and if they had it then, one may have some hope in resilience.

The most eye-catching undertaking was the plan to establish a network of “green” presidents. Apart from two “presidential panels” at the World Science Forum — with only two neighbouring presidents — it, alas, remained a slogan. The presidents of the Visegrad countries and the colleagues in the Arraiolos Group — non-executive EU heads of state — showed no affinity for environmental issues, and I tried in vain to raise the question of nuclear energy with them. Their negative answers were as under-informed as they are today in the Hungarian Parliament. Speeches in the UNO, at academic conferences, or even on the Climate Thinkers blog are nice — but no Hungarian president should think that their work is complete through such abstract acts.

Concrete actions are needed, and I joined in civil protest actions. We succeeded in preventing the building of a NATO radar station on the Zengo (a strongly protected area), an international airport at the Balaton with a landing strip over the lake (Szentkirályszabadja), and an electricity plant fired by straw that would have been collected and transported through the Tokaj area. I was lobbying internationally to remain GMO free in the EU, and against another power plant — an incinerator on the Hungarian-Austrian border (Szentgotthard).

My warmest memories, however, are of my three-day visits to Hungary’s 10 national parks. I was enriched not only by seeing the natural treasures, but also by the uncounted personal encounters with park workers and people living on or from the park territories — or, in some cases, restricted by protective regulations. In turn, the self-standing Orseg National Park has been restored, and the number of visitors to the parks increased.

Finally, as head of state I called for well-informed nationwide debate on the use of nuclear energy and a public environmental impact assessment before taking any decision on the Paks Nuclear Plant.





# Janez Potocnik



**Janez Potocnik** graduated from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, earning a PhD in 1993. He began his career in 1989 as a researcher at the Institute for Economic Research in Slovenia, and in 1994 he became director of the Institute for Macroeconomic Analysis and Development. He was appointed head of the negotiating team for the accession of Slovenia to the European Union in 1998. He was director of the Government Office for European Affairs (2000), minister councillor at the Office of the Prime Minister (2001) and minister responsible for European affairs (2002). In 2004 he joined the European Commission, first as "shadow" European commissioner for enlargement and then as commissioner responsible for science and research. Between 2010 and 2014, Potocnik served as European commissioner for environment. He now co-chairs the United Nations Environment Programme's International Resource Panel.

**Please can you say a few words about the challenges and strategies related to the circular economy?**

Resource issues are at the core of sustainable development. Future growth, prosperity, human development and the eradication of poverty will be determined by our ability to deal with resource constraints. For this we need an economic growth model that enables the rich economies to improve their sustainability whilst continuing to maintain — or indeed improve — living standards; and that enables emerging economies to grow while decoupling human development from natural resources use and environmental impacts.

The circular economy recognises that while there is much scope for major improvements in resource efficiency in the prevailing linear system — where we extract, produce, consume and throw away — there are even greater rewards in gaining added value from the materials in those products after they are thrown away, by collecting and processing them and putting them back to productive use.

By 2050, the global population is expected to reach nine billion, and within one generation

three billion people will achieve "middle-class" consumption patterns, leading to resource extraction more than doubling over this period. This is an unsustainable burden on the planet that will affect both economic growth and the environment. Technological innovation will provide some solutions, but we will also need to change the way we produce and consume. We will need to develop markets for secondary raw materials and increase resource efficiency. This goes beyond recycling waste: we also need waste prevention and product re-use, refurbishing and re-manufacturing, including developing products that are more durable, upgradable and repairable.

There is a perception among many businesses and policy makers that the circular economy is an "environmental policy" and that it will therefore limit business, economic growth and job creation. In fact it is a pro-growth industrial and innovation policy, with potential advantages for business, such as reduced costs and new markets.

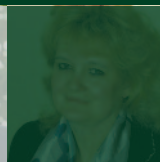
Policy makers should provide a predictable policy and legal framework for businesses to invest and remain competitive, remove regulatory obstacles, plan long-term scenarios, and provide incentives

for businesses and consumers. Policy areas to focus on include using taxes and subsidies to alter production and consumption; developing sustainable food systems covering production, distribution and food waste; setting aspirational targets for resource efficiency based on material productivity (with additional indicators measuring water and land efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions); and setting achievable goals for resource productivity. For example, it is estimated that a 30 percent increase in resource productivity by 2030 would increase European Union GDP by up to 3 percent and create around 2 million more jobs than under the 15 percent baseline scenario. Such a fundamental shift in approach to economic policy making will not be easy, particularly as there are many "lock-ins" to the prevailing sys-

tem — in infrastructure, in financial systems and in behaviour. But such a change will become inevitable as the global pressures on resources increase. Credible and accurate analyses and prognoses of the effects of these resource pressures are therefore essential to help policy makers act in the right ways and in good time. That is why the work of the United Nations Environment Programme's International Resource Panel — the organisation that I co-chair — and others such as the Ellen McArthur Foundation and McKinsey is so important in providing the research and evidence base to help policy makers and business leaders develop policy responses. The REC will play an ever more important role in this transition over its next 25 years.



# Marta Szigeti Bonifert



Marta Szigeti Bonifert has spent more than 12 years working for the environment at organisations such as the Environment Institute and the Environment Ministry in Hungary. Before joining the REC she spent 10 years in business working for multinational companies in various senior roles. She was the first managing director of the Environmental Management and Law Association (EMLA). She is scientific advisor to Agroinnova/Turin University Scientific Committee; head of the Environmental Committee of the Hungarian Business Leaders Forum; president of the ROMASTER Foundation; a member of the EBRD's Environmental and Social Advisory Council; and a member of the Board of Trustees of the CEU Business School Foundation. She is a trained presenter of Al Gore's Climate Project and a member of the Global Energy Prize jury and of the jury of the European Business Awards for Environment. She has chaired the Europe-China Clean Energy Centre (EC2) management board as well as the management board of the Environment and Security Initiative. She became executive director of the REC in May 2003.

**How has the REC adjusted itself over the years as an organisation, as old goals and mandates have been fulfilled and replaced with new sets of challenges and expectations?**

The REC is a cooperative mechanism that combines people for the good cause of sustainable development, both nationally and regionally, and provides inputs to global agendas. We were formerly a transitional tool and we are now a transformational tool. The transition from a command economy to a market economy, and from one political structure to a multi-political structure, has happened. But the experience that enables us to make changes, to be ready to make changes for the benefit of our constituency, to involve everybody who is affected by these changes into meaningful discussions, and to work together for a better environment is as important as before.

But what else has happened during these 25 years? We have adopted very unsustainable

lifestyles and are unable to curb some of the bad habits that have developed and evolved over these years. The question, with the economic crisis and the added crises of climate change and lack of resources, all these new challenges — or megatrends — is: How are we able to use our transitional experience to develop transformational pathways for the future?

What has really changed in the meantime is the content of our work and the way we do it. In terms of content, we have emerged from a traditional engagement with pollution issues and environmental policy to engaging in cross-sectoral issues such as health and environment, climate change and transport — and now we are entering the green economy debate.

**Considering the CEE region as a whole, which environmental challenges have been addressed most successfully in the past quarter of a cen-**



**tury? What are some of the most important issues that need to be addressed, either now or in the very near future?**

One of the important elements for the REC is that we have to be adaptive to the realities of today, while at the same time building up our competences and centres of excellence to face the challenges of tomorrow. I believe that one of the REC's most important contributions for the future is our work in education for sustainable development. Because we work for stakeholders from children to municipalities, from politicians to business leaders and all levels of decision makers, we have enormous outreach. We use techniques that we have helped to develop, in areas such as public participation and access to information, and this accelerates commitment to the new agenda and to making a contribution for the future. This is how the REC is able to transfer best practices to interested parties, whether we're talking about the transfer of lessons learned to Latin America or the Mediterranean region or Eastern Partnership countries. And we are very good at that. Why? Because we are working with two very important assets: our staff — with people representing more than 30 different nationalities; and our professional networks of people and partnerships, because we never do things alone. We always do things in cooperation with the best option for a particular agenda. And this is what is unique about the way we work.

We have to continue to support policy implementation and to lend a helping hand wherever we can — and with all stakeholders. Like vitamin C, we are an enabler!

To expand on this as an example, transport is not detached from energy policy. Energy policy is not detached from climate policy. This is why there is an extreme need for inter-sectoral approaches. And the sooner people realise that all this can be done in a very positive way — whether we call it “green economy” or “sustainable growth” — the sooner they will come to understand that an investment in the environment is not a net cost. On the contrary: it brings economic benefits and social cohesion, to say nothing of a better physical environment to live in.

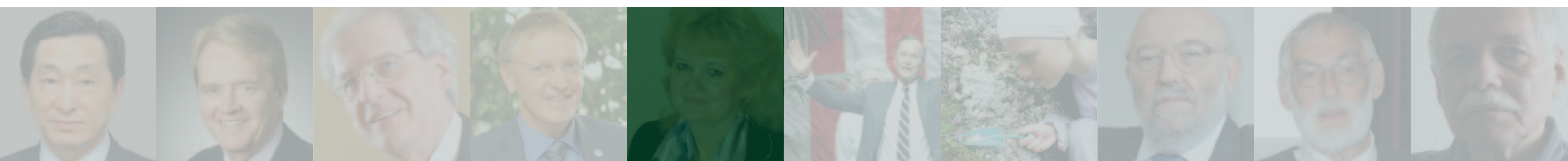
**What do you view as the REC's greatest strengths and assets? And, looking back over your term as REC executive director, which organisational accomplishments mean the most to you?**

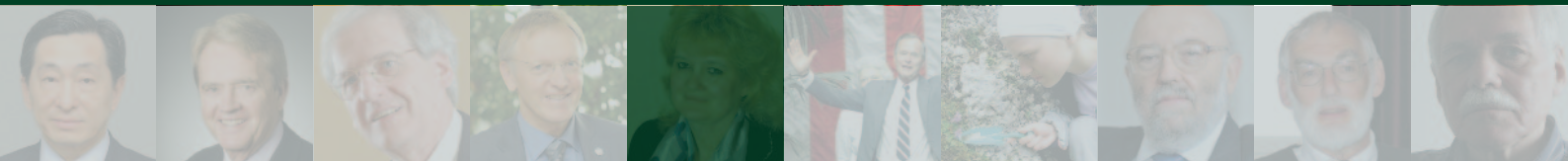
One of our strengths is the fact that we are independent. Another is that we act in the middle — between the short term and the long term, between researchers and citizens, between one political party and another in a non-partisan role. The fact that we have the ability to run and manage projects gives us the ability to work with communities, with schools and across borders — at both regional and European level. We like to think of the REC as a “glocal” organisation, and as a “think-to-do-tank”.

Something that makes us very proud is when we see our former colleagues sitting in national and international organisations, working with us as partners in global processes. Our important contributions are what we do within our region, what we do out of our region, and what we do with other stakeholders and networks — as an enabler and as an honest broker. Our now globalised world will require interdisciplinary approaches. There will be a need for policies and funds, but also a need for implementing agencies and partners at local and regional level. We will have success if we take a harmonised approach and use the best of our opportunities. The REC has always been at the forefront of using new kinds of technologies and innovations for better outreach and communication. This connects with our flexibility and adaptive capacity.

As far as personal accomplishment is concerned, I take great pride in our work in education for sustainable development. I was constantly advocating for ESD. I think the vast number of interested parties really shows the strength of the REC and truly represents our interdisciplinary approach, as well as all of the values we are talking about.

Our flagship product Green Pack, adapted for 18 countries in 20 languages, has many spinoffs by now: Green Steps, which addresses families; or the Blue Pack, which addresses climate change. And this extends to so many levels — teachers, wider communities. The Sustainable Development Academy has been able to reach out to decision makers





and local authorities, and across borders, to form networks. I'm very happy that I was able to participate and contribute to the development of what I would call a "centre of excellence for education for sustainable development". With all of its product lines, Green Pack has become a very important contribution for the future.

**In what ways is the REC becoming more involved with parts of the world beyond the CEE region?**

We do two things in this regard. We work a lot on good governance — and we draw here a lot from our past work. The second thing is the security dimension. I would never say that we are a "security" organisation, but we do enable communities to work on growth, on peace, and on consolidated approaches for the future, including risk prevention.

If we take the Balkans as an example, we started to work in areas that involved post-war conflicts. We addressed these conflicts in ways that helped people to build a better future. We're now using the exact same technique in Ukraine.

How do you rebuild trust in a community? How do you build good governance? And how do you build hope for the future? It's partly by enabling colleagues to do their work in a much better way.

Regarding the sharing of experience, there's no need to re-invent the wheel. Things don't happen straight away. We simply find our local partners and we share our experiences and best practices with them. This is a solid REC methodology that will always be relevant in the future.

**How do you see the REC moving forward as an organisation in the years to come?**

The REC is at a very interesting crossroads. We are two types of organisation. From the past, we are a foundation, and in the present and for the future we are an international organisation. The REC Charter serves as an umbrella for these different ways of operating, and we are encouraged to work in this way, even if it's not an easy way to work!

What is interesting about our future is that we are now ISO certified and working to be widely accepted as an international organisation and thus find our way into various funding streams and mechanisms. Of course, we constantly have to be innovative and efficient because of the need to provide quick responses. Flexibility is one of our traditional strengths that everyone appreciates.

Our 25th anniversary meetings provide a unique opportunity to build on our achievements for the future. The REC has a role to play as a regional platform for promoting, facilitating and enabling the implementation of the post-2015 agenda, which is connected to SDGs in this region.

We want to remain the "green bridge" that we have been for so many years. There are still too many people who see the addressing of environmental issues as a cost and not an opportunity. To address this paradigm shift is extremely important. I'm always saying that it's much more expensive to repair a disaster than it is to prevent one.









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