



Belgrade – 2007

“Environment for Europe”  
Conference

Thursday, 11 October



# NEWSLETTER

Pan-European Coalition of Environmental Citizens Organisations

*We never miss the water till the well runs dry*

## HALTING BIODIVERSITY LOSS – ONLY BEATING AROUND THE BUSH?



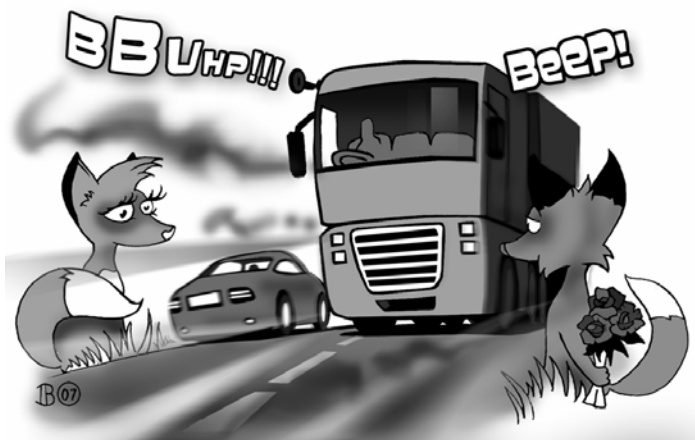
*By Klara Hajdu, CEEWEB/Coordinator of the Biodiversity Roundtable on behalf of European ECO-Forum*

The Biodiversity Multistakeholders' Roundtable jointly organized by ECO Forum and PEBLDS has its own special story at the Belgrade Conference. After making a uniquely strong commitment at the last Ministerial Conference in Kyiv to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, we have seen great difficulties to have biodiversity even on the agenda in Belgrade. It took several months of negotiations, strong lobbying from some committed countries and PEBLDS, as well as a protest letter from NGOs to achieve a compromise on having it as a 'special session'. This name at least perfectly reflects that it is a special issue indeed. It is unnecessary to reiterate here the role of biodiversity and ecosystems in contributing to human well being, which was also frequently mentioned by the speakers at the roundtable.

Despite Pan-European commitments, biodiversity loss has not been halted and the direct drivers for this failure have been pointed out by roundtable participants both from the East and the West. Intensive land use, urban sprawl, ecosystem fragmentation and climate change are identified as the direct causes of biodiversity loss. However, biodiversity loss is only a symptom of the unsustainable functioning of society and economy. All this is part of the unsustainable production and consumption patterns, which are more and more spreading in the whole pan-European region. We are greatly disappointed that no real commitment was made at this Conference for a pan-European framework towards sustainable production and consumption. We are also disappointed because we are fearing for biodiversity.

At the same time there is another important underlying cause of biodiversity loss, which was not sufficiently recognized in the discussion, namely the current institutional framework. It does not only include the legislative and financial frameworks, but also the fragmented institutional structure, which is still not tackled by the countries.

Governments have been calling for giving a price for biodiversity and valuing the economic benefits from biodiversity and ecosystem services. NGOs are rather concerned whether it is at all possible to express all the various features and benefits of a given ecosystem in one single number. The functioning of ecosystems is so complex and the



benefits we gain from them are subjective, so it shall be approached with special caution. However, consideration of ecosystem services shall be integrated into decisions about development plans and projects. This is an important issue for the future, where governmental efforts have not been rather weak so far, if at all.

Of course the institutional framework and the production and consumption patterns are also determined by other factors. Current values as the root cause of biodiversity loss were very correctly mentioned by some speakers, also from governments. Without political will we cannot achieve the necessary substantial changes. But then it comes to how we define well being and development. And countries have not gone so far. That is why we will continue to fail in halting biodiversity loss as long as we do not gather the courage to ask if we have set the right aims for the society and our economy. We need to redefine the notions of well being and development, which is, however, not on the table of ministers of environment.

There is a strong message on the need of pan-European cooperation both from governments and NGOs. Our countries are part of a globalised world, and cannot achieve substantial changes if the rest of the world remains the same. We all need to act together in the whole region, because as NGOs also pointed out in the discussion, supporting nature conservation activities in other regions does not substitute actions in our own backyard.

## ARE THE NEW RECs STILL TOO INFANT?

*It is too early to consider the new RECs as efficient entities with a sufficient capacity to replace the EAP Task Force in the region*

*In the preparatory process to Belgrade-2007, governments, international organizations and NGOs had an active discussion about the possible transfer of the functions from the EAP Task Force to the New Regional Environmental Centers. The European ECO-Forum's position stated in Brussels Declaration says that is premature to consider new RECs as effective institutions with sufficient capacity to replace the EAP Task Force. **Olga Ponizova** from Eco-Accord, Russia, Coordinator of ECO-Forum's EAP Issue Group answers our questions.*

**Newsletter:** *Why is there a general mistrust of new RECs among EECCA NGOs?*

**Olga:** There are different views among NGOs with regard to the efficiency of particular new RECs. However, you are right saying that there is a general mistrust. Our main concern is that the new RECs deviated from their initially planned format in terms of their missions and organisational types. The Memorandum on Establishment of New RECs (1995) specified that their main mission includes support of public participation and development of environmental co-operation in the NIS region. Later on, in documents of the Aarhus Conference (1998) and in some other documents new RECs were called to strengthen intersectoral co-operation. New RECs used these recommendations for substantial diversification of their activities, and - in essence - for a radical deviation from their initial mandate.

**Newsletter:** *Is there a feeling that the new RECs have tried to substitute for NGOs rather than help them?*

**Olga:** Initially the new RECs were designed as neutral "service" organisations. They were expected to support activities in some priority spheres, but in reality the new RECs transformed into entities that implemented their own projects. In the course of their activities, the new RECs periodically fulfilled functions of NGOs, governments or international organisations. Since they did this without any legitimacy, they naturally generated conflicts.

**Newsletter:** *This is about legitimacy, but what about the capacity to replace the EAP Task Force?*

**Olga:** It is too early to consider the new RECs as efficient entities with a sufficient capacity to replace the EAP Task Force in the region and to fulfil their functions. Nor do they enjoy adequate publicity and authority in the region. The most serious obstacle is the fact that the new RECs do not operate as an integral regional network - actually they use different formats of activities and follow different principles.

**Newsletter:** *What could be done to improve the new RECs? And do we need them at all?*

**Olga:** It is necessary to define the role of EECCA RECs clearly and to define their status *vis a vis* other participants in the process. The founders of the new RECs should reaffirm their initial function (i.e. to promote development of the system of public participation and co-operation in the EECCA region) and monitor fulfilment of this function. As for the need for new RECs... ECO-Forum believes that the EECCA region needs one or several resource centres to provide information, methodological and organisational

support to activities of the environmental community in the framework of EfE process. Precisely for this reason, NGOs at the Sofia Conference actively promoted the idea of establishing the new RECs, and this problem still remains relevant in the EECCA region.

**Newsletter:** *What decisions on new RECs activities are expected to be taken in Belgrade?*

**Olga:** New RECs intended to take on the EAP Task Force Secretariat mission to coordinate activities related to capacity building on environmental policy reforms in EECCA countries. However, according to the texts agreed by the inter-governmental drafting group. New RECs will get only some of these functions, related to regional and national projects – and this decision fits into the European Eco-Forum position. Also, it looks like EU countries are beginning to better understand NGOs position on new RECs. EU countries promised to support wide multi-stakeholder discussions on new RECs effectiveness.

## WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL IN THE PAN-EUROPEAN REGION



*by Anna Tsvietkova, MAMA-86, ECO-Forum Water Issue Group*

It is well known that improving access to safe water and sanitation is a good social investment. According to OECD calculations, the benefits of safe water and sanitation exceed by 13 times the costs of providing these services. Now, in the pan-

European region nearly 100 million people still have no access to safe drinking water and no proper sanitation; more than 13,000 children under age of 14, mostly from the EECCA region, die every year. It is a shame that at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in our region so many people still live in such indignity. To improve the situation, the cooperation of all stakeholders at every level is needed.

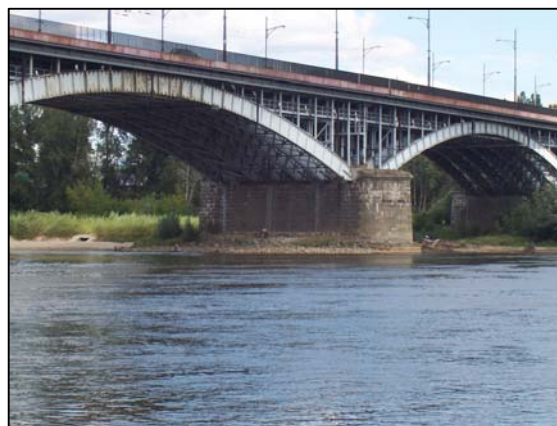
In 2002, in support of the efforts to achieve MDGs in the EECCA region on water and sanitation, the EU Water Initiative was launched in Johannesburg. The EECCA Component of EU Water Initiative was endorsed at the Kiev EfE 2003 Conference and welcomed by the NGOs. At the beginning, many stakeholder expectations in the EECCA region were raised by the “building blocks” (BB) call. NGOs presented a substantial number of BB proposals, none of which were implemented in the framework of the EU Water Initiative (EUWI). That is why the EUWI almost lost the interest and sense of ownership of stakeholders in the region, including governments.

Since 2005, under the European Commission's chairmanship, the EECCA component has been re-oriented towards National Policy Dialogues (NPD). Two countries, Moldova and Armenia, have already started these national dialogues with the support of the EUWI. Taking into account that in some countries similar dialogues have started already, with the support of the Global Water

Partnership and other organizations, these NPDs could be supported by EfE process within the framework of EUWI.

However, simply launching NPDs in 2-3 countries will not be enough or effective to achieve visible and needed results on improving the situation by 2015 at local level. NPDs should be combined with practical steps taking into account that access to safe water and sanitation is a human right and an everyday basic need. Short and long terms solutions have to be implemented in parallel at all levels.

Today, NGOs working on water supply and sanitation problems in the EECCA and SEE regions demonstrate practical results and make a real contribution to improving access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation locally. Broad public awareness-raising activities on water, sanitation and hygiene, the introduction of sustainable solutions can be a good example of local action. Today, thousands of dry toilets are built in the Fergana valley by NGOs with support from the Central Asia Water Alliance. With the co-operation of women NGOs, the dry urine diverting toilets and plant-soil filters were introduced in rural areas of Romania, Ukraine, Armenia, Bulgaria and Uzbekistan. Now women NGOs will multiply





but for co-operation with NGOs from all EU member states.

Experienced NGOs should be involved in mediation and facilitation of the EUWI at national and regional levels. They are the main advocates of an integrated environmentally friendly approach in land planning, IRBM as well as to the financial and tariff reforms in WSS. NGOs can help in

development and implementation of sustainable financial instruments in WSS.

NGO support could be useful for collecting reliable data and to monitor public tenders in the WSS sector to prevent corruption. Involvement of business and consumer associations in the dialogues and in water-related structures (such as basin councils) would be important.

## THE CHALLENGES OF THE SEA INITIATIVE

*The ministers discuss today the Initiative on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), proposed by the Governments of Armenia, Belarus and Moldova. It is the first initiative in the EfE process originating entirely from the EECCA region. What are the challenges before this initiative?*

**Andriy Andrusevych, Resource & Analysis Center "Society and Environment", Ukraine:**

The SEA initiative builds upon the recent efforts by REC-CEE and UNDP to lay the ground for SEA implementation in EECCA region. However, it does not directly address the critical issue of Protocol's ratification by countries of the UNECE region. A regional initiative to support national ratifications (including by EECCA countries) is needed. The present initiative can support ratifications if properly focused and implemented.

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## IS NATURE TO BE LOST?



*By Tamas Marghescu,  
Regional Director,  
IUCN Europe*

We have heard at this conference, that biodiversity is not important. Probably this is the reason for dropping it from the Ministerial Declaration after the attempts to not have it on the agenda at all had failed. The latter I do not want to comment.

But I agree that we needed this "Special Session" on biodiversity. I do think biodiversity conservation is most important – it is the foundation of life itself.

And yet, biodiversity is declining day by day, even while we commit ourselves to moving towards a "sustainable" Europe. So where is this process going wrong? What is going wrong in the process we are following?

We need to change our perception of the model of sustainability. The new paradigm of sustainability has nature and environment as a foundation.

Al Gore has done a tremendous job in raising awareness but unfortunately he did not offer a fully comprehensive vision on what to do. The new paradigm of sustainability would lead to an increased perception of the values of nature and natural resources. And this would contribute to the development that nature – that is, the ecosystem services – would finally receive a price. This will bring us closer to a "green economy". In the "green economy", we can not just optimize our consumption through good environmental design. We can not afford not to change. Since the times of the industrial revolution we are optimizing, we are looking for ever increased efficiency – but still, biodiversity continues to suffer. We need to change and offer small and practical steps for everything and everyone to be part of in the effort. It is not politicians who will lead us out of our dilemma. It is a social movement. We need to fundamentally change to approach sustainability.

# !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! N G O s in the F I E L D !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

## THE RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT: WOMEN AS THE VOICE FOR THE RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

By Anke Stock, WECF

The idea to apply a rights-based approach to confront global environmental devastation is not new. The Stockholm Conference and the Rio Declaration provided a basis for the discussion about the right to a healthy environment. Many international and European conventions, declarations and resolutions provide different norms aiming at the protection of specific human rights, such as the right to life and the right to a standard of living adequate to health and well-being. These specific human rights always contain a component that is linked to the right to a healthy environment. Furthermore, these rights are actionable giving them more force.

The links between human rights, including women's rights, and the environment are the main issues at the WAVE ("Women as the Voice of the Environment") events on 10 and 13 October 2007, co-ordinated by Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF). These events are a follow-up to the UNEP Global Women's Assembly on Environment, which took place in Nairobi, October 2004.

In the upcoming WAVE conference, we want to promote the broad use of existing human rights in the context of environmental protection and the protection of human health and the establishment of a right to a healthy environment itself. In addition, we call for the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of gender, race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws. For more information go to [www.wecf.eu](http://www.wecf.eu)

## SAVING BIODIVERSITY OF THE BALTIC SEA

By Olga Senova, Friends of the Baltic, Russia

The North-West Russian Network of Environmental NGOs developed a new initiative aimed at saving biodiversity of the Baltic Sea. The initiative involves establishing a new nature reserve in the Russian part of the Gulf of Finland.

In 1998, the Biological Institute of the St. Petersburg State University developed a project to create a reserve, "Ingermanland", in the islands of the Gulf of Finland (17,000 ha., including 16,000 ha. of water). The project was supported by the regional government of Leningrad oblast.



The prospective reserve area is located close to the border between Russia and Finland. Due to specific management of the frontier zone, population pressure on this territory has been relatively weak over the last 60 years. That is why it became an area rich in wildlife: for example, spawning grounds of commercial fish, bird colonies and seal habitats.

"Ingermanland" Nature Reserve could become a key element in the system of Russian-Estonian-Finnish collaboration in wildlife protection, contributing to the fulfillment of Russia's obligations concerning environmental management of the Baltic Sea.

Currently, the Baltic countries are discussing the conditions for approving the route for a North European gas pipeline. Although the pipeline would not pass directly through the reserve, such approval could be contingent upon Russia's agreement to create the reserve.

The North-West Russian Network of Environmental NGOs appeals to the UNECE Environment Ministers, in particular the Ministers of the Baltic Countries, to support the initiative to organize this new reserve.

# WATER RESOURCES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE ROLE OF THE EfE

By Rafiq Verdiyev, Azerbaijan



Water resource problems in the South Caucasus are connected with scarcity, pollution and management issues. Watershed degradation, increased demand for freshwater, inadequate treatment of wastewater, and climate change are contributing to new levels of concern for the region's water security. The Kura is the main river in the region. Its source is in Turkey, and the river and its tributaries flow through Georgia, Armenia, Iran and Azerbaijan before discharging into the Caspian Sea. As a downstream country, Azerbaijan is poor in terms of available water resources and the Kura river basin covers 80% of its territory. The general absence of waste-water treatment in the river basin, with a population of 11 million people, and economic activities result in very low water quality. There are insufficient water resources in Azerbaijan to meet the demand for drinking water or the needs of agriculture.

Azerbaijan is a Party to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Rivers and International Lakes. However, since other neighbouring states are not Parties to the Convention, the solution of the problem becomes more complicated.

Several water related programmes are supported by USAID, UNDP, EU TACIS, etc. USAID support for the South Caucasus Regional Water Management Program (SCWP) is a principal component in this sphere. Under this programme, for the first time since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, countries in the region started to put their water resource data on the web and are creating a Geo-referenced water cadastre information system. One of the most important activities is assisting countries to develop Environment Management Systems.

Unfortunately, these initiatives are not enough to provide full scale monitoring of water resources or data exchange to address pollution or to use an ecosystem approach. The EfE process can be an important tool to address efficiency and sustainable management of water resources in the region. In the framework of EfE, Kura Basin countries could use the best experience (based on the EU Water Framework Directive, GWP tools, the Water Convention, etc.) to develop relevant legal and institutional frameworks for water management reform. This process can also be an important instrument for reform of the Water and Sanitation sector and for developing 'Payment for Ecosystem' mechanisms, etc.

## TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

By Janis Brizga, Green Liberty, ANPED



Many organizations around the world are now working to stimulate sustainable production and consumption patterns. To evaluate what is done and not done by governments and NGOS, ANPED - the Northern Alliance for Sustainability implemented a survey in 11 countries of the UNECE region.

The survey compares different approaches and achievements in the countries. Except for the Czech Republic, none of the countries covered in this report actually has a national consultation process towards an SCP policy. However, all countries have other types of national

governmental activity that appear to be part of a programme towards SCP. In the US, there also has been a national consultation addressing consumption and population, as part of a larger national consultation on sustainable development. Only Belgium, Romania, the Czech Republic and Norway report on structured governmental SCP activities.

In the US and Belgium, SCP issues are covered by national discussion on sustainable development. However, in Belgium and Hungary, no specific policy goals for SCP have been defined. In Bulgaria, only organizational goals, including the establishment of a Bulgarian Sustainable Consumption Council, were identified. Most of the countries have specific SCP related policy goals and targets identified. The study shows that NGOs in these countries are actually focusing more on SCP than the

governments. Governments tend to focus (not always with positive results) on issues of information and public participation and ecological fiscal reform. And, in the future, focus is foreseen on issues related to clean and eco-effective

production and corporate responsibility. The main NGO demands are mostly to integrate SCP explicitly into the National SD Strategies and establish a coherent policy framework. The study is available at [www.anped.org](http://www.anped.org)

## LOCAL REFERENDUM FOR THE BAY OF VLORA

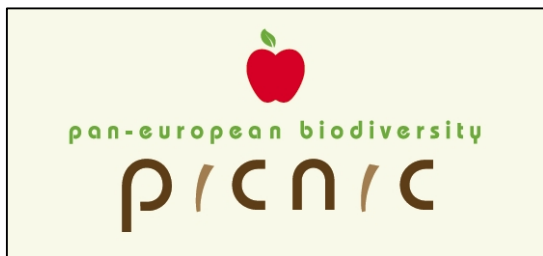
By Laudosh Ferunaj, CAPVB, Albania

Two days ago, Albanian environmentalists applauded the decision of the Council of Vlora municipality in favour of a local referendum on the issue of developing the oil industry in the Bay of Vlora.



The Civic Alliance for the Protection of Vlora Bay (CAPVB) has been fighting for 3 years to stop the development of oil power plants, oil reservoirs and a oil pipeline terminal. Dozens of protest actions have been organized. A local referendum was requested by 14,000 signatories. Complaints have been filed with the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee, the Inspection Panel of the World Bank, EBRD, EIB and the national authorities. As a result of strong and persistent opposition from citizens, led by CAPVB, the local Council decided as a last resort to hold the referendum.

The national government, which has encouraged the development of the oil industry, has now had to suspend this oil-based project and await the will of community. This is a lesson in democracy for the Albanian government.



The **“Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic”** is a multi-stakeholder initiative launched at the Biodiversity Stakeholders’ Roundtable, which aims to contribute to raising awareness of biodiversity and strengthening commitment to its conservation through regular national events every year on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, International Biodiversity Day.

The “Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic” intends to bring together representatives of the society for a national picnic in nature, shall they represent the government and parliament, political parties, trade unions, business, farmers, social and environmental groups or academic institutions.

In addition to some seasonal fruits from extensive, organic orchards what else is needed for making the Picnic a success in your country?

- Commitment from an institution or organisation, which can mobilise stakeholders and devote some capacities for the organisational tasks
- High-level representatives of various stakeholders, who are attracted to the Picnic both by the importance of the issue and the content of the picnic basket
- A nice place in nature, which can be a scenic place for a friendly gathering
- Preferably nice weather

*Join the Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic and help saving biodiversity and ecosystem services, the presents of nature for the future!*

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