

**Independent Assessment with regard to the Implementation of UN/ECE
Guidelines on Access to Environmental Information and Public
Participation in Environmental Decision-Making**

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This brochure is printed on recycled paper.

Sofia ,1998

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Snap-Shot Survey was carried out jointly by Borrowed Nature (Bulgaria), Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Defensa Ambiental .CODA (Spain), Green Action (Croatia), Green Balkans (Bulgaria), Green Circle (the Czech Republic), Estonian Green Women's Union (Estonia), the Interdisciplinary Institute for Environmental Research . INTER (Greece), Lychnidos (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Russian Socio-Ecological Union .SEU (Russian Federation).

The survey is a pan-European project within the activities of the "Environment for Europe" process organised by the European Eco-Forum and was funded by the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe and the Danish Environment Protection Agency.

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SNAP SHOT SURVEY

THE RIGHT-TO-KNOW

The right of public access to environmental information is one of the most powerful tools in protecting the environment. Nevertheless, its significance may not be immediately recognised and appreciated, since its impact on society is not as obvious as that of conducting a public action or making an important decision. And in most cases, information is already available to institutions delegated to act and make decisions on behalf of the public.

However, by achieving an open exchange of information between the public and the institutions holding information, any public action undertaken by decision-makers is regulated by public scrutiny and considerations for social safety and well-being.

Providing access to information is not a simple procedure. Various institutions and organisations hold information (e.g. ministries, enterprises, municipalities). And others have need of it (citizens, NGOs, Parliament, other governmental bodies). Exchange of information between the different sectors of society in a certain country is normally regulated by its constitution and a group of legal acts and rulings.

However, it is important to distinguish between the ACTIVE obligation of public bodies to disseminate information and keep the public informed of environmentally relevant developments, policies, programmes etc., and their PASSIVE obligation to respond to specific requests for information from the public.

EXPERIENCES WITH RIGHT-TO-KNOW LEGISLATION

While the right-to-know is a relatively new concept in some parts of the world and virtually unknown in other parts, it has a long traditions in certain countries (Sweden, USA, Denmark, the Netherlands).

Legislation in countries with long-standing traditions in democracy guarantees to a greater or lesser extent people's right to be informed on environmental issues. This right is known and used by people in these countries to various degrees. The differences existing in European countries in this area can be attributed to the differences in mentality, social structure, democratic traditions, as well as the importance paid to environmental problems in the respective country. Even where legislation is reasonably strong, there is not always an adequate level of compliance. Time-limits for supplying information are often ignored, and overcharging is common.

Legislation in the countries in transition from totalitarian regimes and centralised planning to democracy and market economy defends to a various extent the public right to information concerning the status of the environment. In some countries, such legal regulations are barely included, while in others, although existing, these regulations are not well-known, not used fully by the public and/or are not respected sufficiently by the official institutions.



GUIDELINES ON ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION-MAKING

At the **Third** Ministerial Conference 'Environment for Europe', held in **Sofia, Bulgaria, in October 1995**, Environmental Ministers from all over Europe, the US, Canada, and the Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union formally endorsed a set of Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Guidelines on Access to Environmental Information and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making. In this respect, the chapter on Public Participation of the Ministerial Declaration says:

Para 41. *We believe it is essential that, in accordance with Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, States should give the public the opportunity to participate at all levels in decision-making processes relating to the environment, and we recognise that much remains to be done in this respect. We call upon all countries in the region to ensure that they have a legal framework and effective and appropriate mechanisms to secure public access to environmental information...*

Para 42. *We endorse the ECE Guidelines on Access to Environmental Information and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making and invite the ECE to review their implementation in 1997 and to report at the next Conference.*

During their Parallel Conference, European NGOs from the UN/ECE region stated their position and presented their programmes for future work on the issues of Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making in an NGO Declaration and a separate Position Paper on Public Participation.

The ECE Guidelines are nonetheless a potentially useful instrument for promoting public participation and transparency in the 55 countries which belong to the UN Economic Commission for Europe. This document, intended to trace the way to a future Convention, outlines the regional and global dimensions of the development of environmental legislation regarding issues of public participation in environmental decision-making and provision of free access to environmental information. The implementation and enforcement of this important document in the legislative practice of UN/ECE countries, and particularly in the transition countries, is a difficult, time-consuming and complex process. Basically, this can be attributed to the lack of comparability between the approaches and criteria applied by different countries in the treatment of these issues.

In this context, People's Right-to-Know on the environment varies significantly within the different countries in its legislative framework, as well as level of awareness and utilisation by citizens and NGOs. A comparative and objective description and assessment of the current status of public access to environmental information in various countries has not been conducted so far. Assumptions and claims that access to environmental information in a certain country is freer as compared to other countries, though presumably true, are based primarily on subjective assessment and do not stem from systematic and profound analysis and comparison.

THE CHALLENGE

NGOs from 8 European countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Russia and Spain undertook an independent assessment (Snap Shot Survey) of the people's access to environmental information in their countries in the framework of the activities organised by the European Eco-Forum for the Fourth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe".

The main goals of the Snap Shot Survey were:

- to raise public awareness of the ECE Guidelines;
- to conduct, on a comparative basis, an Independent Pan-European Assessment of Public Access to Environmental Information in a number of representative European countries with different geographical, historical, social and cultural traditions and features;
- to analyse and compare the process of releasing environmental information within the context of a given country's legislation, and within the context of ECE Guidelines;
- to publicise and report the results obtained at different for a as a specific NGO input in the process of evaluating the implementation of the ECE;
- to utilise the recommendations made for the implementation of the UN/ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (expected to be adopted in Aarhus in June 1998).



METHODOLOGY

An International NGO Task Force was founded consisting of representatives of the main project partners: Borrowed Nature (Bulgaria), Green Action (Croatia), Green Balkans (Bulgaria), Green Circle (the Czech Republic), Estonian Green Women's Union (Estonia), Interdisciplinary Institute for Environmental Research INTER (Greece), Lychnidos (Macedonia), Russian Socio-Ecological Union (Russia) and the Coordinating Federation for Protection of the Environment CODA (Spain).

In their countries, the main partners organised National Working Groups comprising representatives

of other NGOs and experts.

Key documents, such as: ECE Guidelines, NGO Position Paper on Public Participation and Access to Environmental Information, Draft text of the Aarhus Convention on Public Participation and others were discussed and disseminated.

The NGO Task Force formulated a number of questions clustered in 9 main groups:

- pollution
- quality of drinking water and food
 - waste
- issuing of environmental permits
- environmental impact assessment
- environmental financing
- genetic engineering
- nuclear safety, and
- other questions of national importance.



The project participants were advised to choose at least 2-3 questions from each group on the basis of the national needs.

The National Working Groups addressed the questions to different institutions at national, regional or local level. In some countries, the questions were addressed to businesses from the public and private sectors. Some questions were sent on behalf of organisations as well as on behalf of citizens.

The survey results were analysed by experts and NGOs.

The National Working Groups organised round-table discussions with the participation of other NGOs, officials and mass media during which the results of the Survey were discussed. These round-tables were also used to present other case studies and practices collected by the National Working Groups. Each Working Group published a national report from their round-table.

An international workshop was organised in Sofia with the participation of the national coordinators and NGO experts. National reports were presented, discussed and the following were analysed:

- response to information requests
- response time
- responses by subject
- responses by Government department
- responses by level of government: national, regional or local
- responses by country.

Conclusions and recommendations were summarised and presented in a comprehensive report.

A brochure presenting the main achievements is being disseminated among official institutions, NGOs and mass media.

CONCLUSIONS

This section looks at the responses that NGOs received to their information requests. It examines which authorities . environmental, health, agriculture . and at what level . national, regional or local . actually answered requests for information and within what time frame. The quality of the replies received is assessed both by country and by subject matter.

Some of the national co-ordinators, e.g. in Bulgaria, also looked at whether the replies varied depending on who had requested the information . NGOs, citizens, professionals or students. Others, such as Croatia and Bulgaria requested information also from companies.

1. Response to Information Requests

Many of the requests for information received no response at all! This was particularly true of Spain where only some 50% of information requests addressed to national and regional authorities received any reply. Spanish municipalities performed even worse in the Survey, replying to just 30% of the questions addressed to them. The only exception was the Basque Government (regional government) which responded with a lot of information. It seems that Spain's federal system creates confusion among the authorities with respect to competencies, and it is common for them to refer information requests to NGOs!

In Bulgaria, only half of the information requests received a reply, the best response being from the environmental authorities at national and regional levels and the poorest from local environmental departments.

In Greece, the project partner mainly used his personal contacts to obtain information, because it was

deemed that the use of official channels would prove fruitless, especially given the tight time frame of the Survey. However, the disadvantages of using personal contacts is that it binds the person receiving

the information not to misuse it, and not to 'expose' the source. Where an attempt was made to use the Greek access to information, only the environment and development ministries replied, but provided no factual information.

In this respect, the CEE countries in the Survey did somewhat better than EU ones: In Estonia, 90% of the information requests met with a reply (but relatively few requests were made). In Russia, where letters quoted the relevant right to know (RTK) laws, they were more likely to be answered. In the Czech Republic, national and regional (provincial) governments were the best at responding to letters, and the local ones were the worst. However, even at the regional level, of 71 letters addressed to local governments 79% replied, albeit with incomplete answers.

In Macedonia, some 50-60% of information requests received a response. In Croatia, most questions put to national and local authorities were answered. However, of those sent to companies with ISO certification or using eco-labels, only a third responded. The Bulgarian experience of addressing questions directly to industry varied. Companies with PR departments, such as the nuclear power station, answered immediately, others, such as chemical or non-ferrous metal plants, ignored the information requests.

2. Response Time

The term 'in time' in this text means within the time specified by the national access to information laws. It varies between 2 weeks and 2 months in the countries involved in the survey.

In Bulgaria, letters to local authorities, regional hygiene inspectorates and the Ministry of Health were answered within one month. The fastest reply came from the Environment Ministry between three and 15 days. The worst took five months from the Ministry of Finance, to inform the NGO that their information request had been forwarded to the tax authority. In Estonia, all the information requests were responded to in time, and in the Czech Republic when institutions responded, they responded on time (around 70%). In Spain, half the letters sent had not been answered by the end of May, well over the two months provided in Spanish law. In Russia, most information requests from national institutions were answered promptly, but only about half received replies from regional and local institutions within the specified time. In Macedonia, State institutions, such as the ministries of environment, agriculture and transport, as well as the environmental inspectorate, responded within 2-3 weeks. In Croatia, most of institutions did not answer in time. Indeed, it is alarming that so crucial an institution as the State Directorate for the Protection of Nature and the Environment responded only after 3 months.



3. Responses by Subject

General questions were more likely to be answered than specific ones. The questions which received the most complete information were those on ozone depleting substances (ODS). The reason for this, is probably the obligations made by governments under the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol which has forced them to collect information on the production and import of ODS.

Many countries, including Macedonia, Czech Republic, Estonia and Bulgaria received satisfactory answers to questions on drinking water, food and environmental impact assessments (EIAs).

The questions which received the poorest answers were those relating to issues such as waste, dioxin emissions from incineration, nuclear power, environmental financing and genetic engineering. Information about emissions from waste incinerators in Spain and the Czech Republic was not provided on waste generation was inaccurate and the waste problem under-rated.

In Croatia, questions directed to the waste agencies received no replies, nor was information provided on radioactive waste.

In Estonia, the reverse was true. The questions on hazardous waste management were those most thoroughly answered.

Similarly, questions about nuclear facilities in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece and Russia received very poor answers. In fact, in Bulgaria, the question about nuclear facilities, i.e. the nuclear power station, was answered but the questions about nuclear safety addressed to the local government "Civil

Defense” departments were totally ignored.

In the case of incinerator emissions, the absence of information is probably due to the lack of legislation requiring emissions to be monitored and the expense of dioxin sampling.

In the case of nuclear power, the reluctance to provide information is due in part to concerns for national security, but also other reasons, including the absence of a clear definition of environmental information, the lack of competence of official authorities regarding commercial secrets and the personal attitude of officials with respect to information disclosure.



On the subject of genetic engineering, only in Greece was a complete answer provided with respect to both domestic genetic experiments and imports of genetically engineered (GE) foodstuffs. Both Greece and Spain, as EU members have had to translate EU Directives 90/219 (on 'contained use' of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and 90/220 (on 'deliberate release' of GMOs) into national legislation. In CEE and MS countries, where there is no legislation to control GE activities and imports, some of the replies mentioned that laws were being drafted, as in Estonia, Russia and Croatia. However, the authorities could provide no information because there is no requirement that they oversee GE activities and collect this information.

4. Responses by Government Department

Of all the government departments, the Environment Ministries or departments responded the fastest to requests and provided the most complete information in all countries of the Survey, with the exception of Spain. In this country, the Environment Ministry did not respond to any question. The Agriculture Ministries also performed well in most countries, except Bulgaria. The Health Ministries in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic also scored well in the survey, but not so in Russia.

The poorest respondents were the Development and Defence Ministries in Greece, the Ministries of Finance in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Russia and the municipal environment departments in Bulgaria. In Macedonia, poor responses were also received from the Ministries of Health and Defence, as well as from public health and other scientific institutes.

5. Responses by Level of Government

In general, the most complete information was provided by the national authorities, and in the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Estonia also by the regional authorities. In Russia, national institutions were better at responding to information requests, than the oblast (provincial) ones, where many letters received no answer. The exception was Spain, where the best response was from regional authorities.

The poorest information came from the local authorities in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Macedonia and Spain. The reasons for the poor responses, particularly at the local level, is that the authorities lack competence, experience and information. Many of the Survey participants mentioned the lack of procedures for providing information and the absence of electronic communications at the local level.

6. Responses by Country

In Greece, although the EU Directive on Access to Information has been translated into Greek law, neither the public nor the public authorities perceive this as a fundamental right. The most obvious reasons for failing to provide information is poor organisation, with no clear procedures for who should provide what information, which information is public and who is responsible for misuse of information disclosed. Similarly, in Spain, the public administration does not recognise the right of public access to information, even when that right is invoked by environmental organisations.

Likewise, in Bulgaria and Estonia, there are no procedures for responding to information requests other than the requirement of replying in one month. One of the biggest obstacles to accessing information, mentioned by Estonia and Russia, is the lack of manpower to respond to information requests. Many public authorities still have no electronic databases, which would facilitate the provision of information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Education

Education and awareness raising needs to be undertaken for both citizens and the public administration; for citizens to understand their right to information and procedures for accessing information, and for officials on their duty to provide citizens with information.

Every school curriculum needs to include as a compulsory subject: Constitutional Studies, so children understand how their country is managed, how responsibilities are divided between different authorities and how the public can influence decision-making. Only when young people are taught their democratic rights, and how to use them, can society hope to move towards a more participatory democracy.

Secondary school curricula must include Current Affairs, so that students can start to grasp how the world works and how what happens in their own country is increasingly determined by outside unelected powers, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) through globalisation.

2. Procedures for Enabling Access to Information

Although most countries in the Survey have legislation to provide the public with environmental information, in many cases, the laws are not implemented. Procedures need to be put in place for requesting information and for providing it and for ensuring that permits, draft legislation and other information that should be in the public domain, are easily accessible. More efforts should be made to use electronic information technologies, such as the Internet.

3. Tools to Promote Access to Information

The UN ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, could provide an important stimulus to greater transparency. Governments should sign the Aarhus Convention in June and ratify it immediately. Clearly, where Governments are bound by an international convention, they are more likely to introduce and implement new laws, as witnessed by the complete information provided on ozone depleting substances in the survey (controlled by the Montreal Protocol under the Vienna Convention).

The Aarhus Convention must ensure that environmental information held by authorities other than environmental ones, such as health departments, should also be publicly available. The Convention needs to be translated into national languages for wider dissemination to NGOs and citizens, who will be the 'engine' that will push authorities to implement the Convention.

Other tools to ensure better access to information are Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs), an improved system of eco-labelling that can be verified and that also includes energy use, and the better use by the public of environmental impact assessments.

4. Institutional Capacity Building

The lack of capacity in institutions to respond to information requests, namely people, computers etc. needs to be addressed. Technical support is necessary to ensure that electronic databases of environmental information are established that can be easily accessible via the Internet. To improve access to information at the local level, Municipal Environmental Advisory Councils should be established, with representation of NGOs.

5. Continuous Pressure by NGOs

By exerting continuous pressure on the authorities to provide information, NGOs can make officials become more accountable to their constituents. Also, the use of the courts to enforce existing access to information provisions should be used by NGOs and citizens to ensure that their rights are respected.

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BULGARIA

Four NGOs participated in the survey: Green Balkans - Plovdiv; Green Balkans - Stara Zagora; OIKO - Stara Zagora; BOOK - Stara Zagora, and 19 citizens from different backgrounds. In this survey, 94 letters were sent to 19 institutions and businesses, 45 replies were received.

National and Regional level: The Ministry of the Environment and Water and its Regional Inspectorates responded quickly. The Ministry of Health and its Regional Hygienic Inspectorates replied within 1 month.

Local level: The responses from municipal environmental departments, councils and utilities providing services, such as household waste and drinking water supply, varied according to personal attitudes regarding willingness to answer and the environmental awareness of the staff. Most replies were received within 1 month, but only very few of the questions asked were answered.

Industries: The responses varied according to what type of industry was approached. Those companies with **PR** departments, such as the Nuclear Station with well-trained staff, answered immediately. Other companies in sectors, such as non-ferrous metallurgy and chemicals, completely ignored the questions, even though they are equally polluting.

The Directorates of Forests and State Vet Control also responded within a period 15 days - 1 month.

Most of the answers received from the Ministry of Environment and Water and its Regional Inspectorates contain relevant information and appear to have been written specifically to answer the information request. Institutions, such as the Regional Hygiene Inspectorates, municipal departments and Councils have no computers and the procedure of answering is time-consuming. Institutions, like the State water and sewage utility respond with 'standard' letters that provide some information on those questions the institution is most often asked.

Research institutes, like laboratories and university departments generally do not answer.

The institutes are well aware of the citizens' right to receive information. Questions are usually answered or forwarded to other "better informed" institutions.

National level: The Environment and Health Ministries and their regional structures are prompt in answering questions within their competence. Other Ministries, as a rule, do not answer environmental questions and do not forward information requests to more competent institutions. The municipalities **and Councils** respond in one of two ways: some of their departments answer all the questions and others do not respond at all.

Companies respond only to reassure citizens that they should not be concerned about environmental problems, that everything is under control and not hazardous to human health or the environment.

Not all of the questions received answers. The only institution which responded to questions about nuclear safety was the Nuclear Power Station. Questions about environmental contamination by non-ferrous metals and highly toxic chemicals were ignored.

There were a couple of completely irrelevant answers, probably because the officials lack competence, experience, knowledge.



NATIONAL ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION

Participants in the National Round-Table Discussion included experts and volunteers from the most active Bulgarian environmental NGOs - all aware of their right to know about the environment. The participants themselves have acquired a lot of experience in trying to access environmental information. One of the NGOs represented, "For the Earth", has initiated a legal proceeding against the Nuclear Power Station for not providing the true information about radioactive contamination.

Most of the participants were aware about the Sofia Guidelines, because they had taken part in the Parallel NGO Meeting in Sofia '95, when the document was being prepared.

Many of the participants took part in workshops in several regions of the country to discuss the draft of the Convention on Public Participation (PP) and were aware that the results of the Survey are to be disseminated at the parallel NGO meeting, in Aarhus in June.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- About 50% of the requests for environmental information were answered;
- Only a few institutions answered within the legal timeframe of two weeks;
- Most institutions answered within 1 month;
- The institutions that are not directly “environmental” usually do not provide environmental information even though it is in their competence to do so;
- There is no clarified procedure for asking and answering requests for environmental information;
- There is no experience in using modern information technologies (e.g. Internet) for asking and providing environmental information.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Convention on PP should be translated into national languages and published as quickly as possible. It needs to be disseminated to institutions responsible for its implementation, as well as to national and local NGOs and citizens. The latter should be regarded as the “engine” that will push the authorities to implement the Convention.
- Public participation in Environmental Impact Assessment procedures could be an efficient tool for involving citizens in environmental decision-making.
- Another tool for enhancing public participation at local level could be the establishment of Municipal Environmental (Advisory) Councils. A crucial role could be played by environmental NGOs, whose financial support could be the Municipal Environmental Funds.

Diana Iskrev
Green Balkans

Keeping NGOs in the Dark in the Czech Republic

During the Czech roundtable discussions on right to know, participants provided an array of stories about their experiences of refusals to provide information.

In 1996, when the editors of EkoList, an NGO newsletter, tried to find out their Government’s response to a questionnaire sent by the EU, they were refused on the grounds that it allegedly contains information which could be commercially misused.

Another excuse used to deny information, was that the material is an internal matter, and not for public consumption. This concerned the Duha Movement’s request, in September 1997, to obtain the Government’s transport policy!

Yet another example of refusals to supply information, was in 1995, when several NGOs tried to obtain the text of the draft law on waste. The Director of the Waste department in the Environment Ministry replied that he has no time to answer letters.

THE CZECH REPUBLIC



The Green Circle and three other NGOs: Children of the Earth, South Bohemian Mothers and Prague Mothers took part in the Survey. Over 20 questions were addressed to different institutions, including the ministries of environment, agriculture and health, provincial and local governments, municipalities and the state environmental inspectorate. Most of the questions were answered in written form and some by phone.

The questions concerning incinerators and dioxin emissions were sent by Children of the Earth to 103 institutions, including environmental inspectorates, provincial governments and municipalities. No response was received from 21,1% of the 71 district governments that were contacted; 70.5 % provided incomplete answers and only 4 answers were fully answered. No response was received from 8 out of the 19 municipalities that were contacted; of the answers received, 9 were incomplete and only 2 complete.

The questions concerning the provision of community waste segregation services and how people are encouraged to participate were sent to 10 municipal governments. The municipalities of large towns provided more complete answers than the local governments of smaller towns and villages.

The results of the Survey indicate that institutions reply more readily to general questions than to specific or problematic ones, like dioxin emissions or documentation from the Temelin nuclear power plant. Provincial governments hold more environmental information, e.g. on waste and air pollution, than the municipalities and also provide more complete answers. State environmental inspectorates hold the most information, but it is not freely accessible to the public.

It was felt that in many of the replies received, the officials said only what NGOs wanted to hear, namely that the authorities are acting in accordance with the current legislation. In one case where an NGO wanted to see documentation, the status of their organization had first to be certified by the Ministry of the Interior.

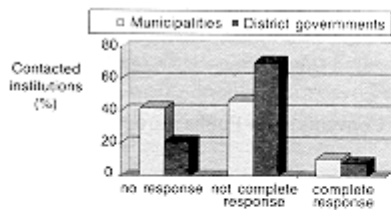


Fig. 1: No response came from 21% of the 71 district governments that were contacted; 70.5% received incomplete answers and only 8.4% of answers were complete. There was no response from 42% of the 19 municipalities contacted, 47% of the answers were incomplete and only 11% complete.

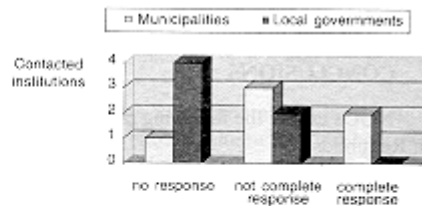


Fig. 2: The municipalities of large towns provided more complete answers (no response-1, not complete response-3, complete response-2) than the local governments of smaller towns and villages (no response -4, incomplete response-2, complete response-0)

NATIONAL ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION

Access to Environmental Information was an issue that was widely discussed in the Czech Republic last year because of the new act on access to environmental information, prepared by the Ministry of Environment . NGO representatives were actively involved in formulating the new legislation.

The national round-table discussion took place at a time, when a draft of a bill on access to environmental information was being discussed in Parliament. The following conclusions can be drawn:

1. NGOs support the passage of a law on access to environmental information (passed by Parliament in May 98)
2. By the end of 1997, the experience of NGOs was that access to environmental information in the Czech republic was by no means a matter of course and legislation must be adopted to secure this public right.
3. NGOs collected some case studies where information requests were denied. The most interesting cases are:
 - The Decree of the state government, dated 16 October 1996 (no. 528) on the expansion of the highway building programme up to the year 2005. In October 1996, the editor of EkoList magazine tried to obtain this information from the Government Office, but was refused on the grounds that this document was internal!
 - A draft law on waste. During 1995, members of several organizations tried to secure the text of the draft waste law from the waste department of the Ministry of Environment and were repeatedly refused. Once excuse used by the Director of the department for withholding this document was that “he has no time to answer letters”.
 - The 1995 decree of the Council of Representatives of the City of Prague (no. 959) on the Autonomous underground service communications Prikopy. One member of the civic association, Prague Mothers asked the Council for this document, but was refused on the grounds that Council meetings are closed to the public.
 - Final statement of the International Agency for Atomic Energy on the nuclear safety of the JETE. CEZ promised in January 1996 to make these conclusions public, but nothing happened, despite repeated reminders from the South Bohemian Mothers.
 - Information regarding the discharges of specific industrial companies into the Elbe river. In February 1997, Greenpeace Czech Republic asked the provincial authorities in ‘hstu nad Labem, Litomerice, Pardubice and MilnHk to provide water management assessments, including the texts of administrative proceedings containing data on discharges to water. Every provincial authority contacted refused to provide these materials, pointing to legal uncertainties and the fact that Greenpeace had not proved a “justified interest” to see the documents. Greenpeace then conducted tests of the waste water on its own and discovered vast amounts of toxic and hazardous substances.
 - Data on dioxin emissions from incineration of hospital waste at “Na Slovanech” in Pilsen. Members of Children of the Earth tried in vain on two occasions to obtain this information from the department of environment in Pilsen, in 1993 and 1996.

CONCLUSIONS

NGOs expect the following practical impacts of the Convention on Public Participation in the Czech Republic:

- a Unified Information System on the Environment to be established, that is freely accessible for the public and integrates environmental data from all the monitored environmental media (water, air and soil);
- the use of the Internet as a tool for spreading environmental information
- a system of ecolabelling to be developed;
- energy labeling, in addition to promoting the “Environmentally friendly product” label.
- establishing PRTRs (Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers) freely accessible to the public.

CROATIA

Nine Croatian NGOs participated in the Survey.

Green Action, Zagreb chose 27 questions from the first 8 groups and 16 additional questions of specific importance to Croatia. The questions were addressed to 5 national and 21 regional institutions and municipalities. Specific questions on ISO 14000 and ISO 9000 were addressed to companies.

Most of the letters sent were not answered in time. Some of the answers received were incomplete. Institutions the Special Waste Agency, Municipal Waste Management Enterprise, several municipal authorities from different counties, as well as some companies,



which were most reluctant to provide information included

RESULTS FROM NATIONAL ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION

The roundtable meeting on the future Convention on Public Participation (PP) was organised by the Croatian Law Centre, on the initiative of the Regional Environmental Center for CEE, in Zagreb in January 1998.

Most participants of the round-table meeting were aware of their right to know about the environment and informed about the Sofia Guidelines. The State Directorate for the Protection of Nature and Environment has published the Sofia Guidelines together with the Bled NGOs' declaration in their bulletin "Environment", which is highly regarded by all the participants. Information about the Convention has been disseminated via the the bulletin "Environment" and the Green Action questionnaire.

During the National round-table discussion, participants presented several case studies of refusals to provide environmental information.

CONCLUSIONS

Governmental institutions regard the provisions for access to environmental information in Croatia as good. Other participants in the survey, including municipalities, NGOs and companies agree that access is weak legally guaranteed but hardly feasible.

Participants in the Survey agreed that to improve access to environmental information it is necessary to stimulate the public interest, but it is not clear who should initiate this and how. Another measure to improve access is the establishing of databases.

Government institutions assess public participation (PP) in environmental decision-making in Croatia as good. Others, including municipalities, NGOs and companies believe that PP is weak. Municipalities and NGOs consider NGOs to have been the main actors in promoting PP in environmental protection. Government institutions claim that the State Directorate for the Protection of Nature and Environment played the greatest role in promoting PP through their publishing of the bulletin "Environment".

All the round-table participants, with the exception of governmental bodies, believe that the State Directorate for the Protection of Nature and Environment informs the public insufficiently regarding environmental problems and measures undertaken.

All the participants agreed that the Republic of Croatia should sign the Convention on PP in Aarhus.

Snjezana Mihinica
Green Action

ESTONIA

Forty questions were addressed to 10 national, 5 regional and 2 other institutions. Fourteen NGOs were invited to join the project implementation.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

The discussion took place in May at the office of the Tallinn Green Movement, among a small group of participants.

Estonian NGOs are well aware of the right to know about the environment, about the Sofia Guidelines and the draft Convention on PI~ thanks to several projects on the topic organised by REC. In late 1997 there was a earlier round-table discussion on the Convention and all NGOs having e-mail received regular materials on this topic. Several cases studies, both positive and negative, were presented and analysed. The Chairperson of the Estonian Green Women's Union described her current problems with officials from the Environmental Fund concerning a cleanup project at the Imavere Lake which has turned into a long lasting quarrel. Other cases where the public was not adequately informed included a big felling of trees last spring and the building of a small cafe in the centre of the green square in Tallinn.



CONCLUSIONS

All the questions asked were answered in time and fully, with the exception of two questions: one on environmental financing and the second concerning the import of genetically engineered products. The authorities reacted according to the requirements of Estonian law which stipulates a period of one month for response. The Ministry of the Environment gave the impression that it was well aware of the ongoing experiment since their answers were all the minimum of 2 pages and very immediate.

Each NGO asked one question on behalf of an NGO and another as a "private person". There was no difference in the way answers were received by NGOs or by private persons.

The Ministry of the Environment issued the most thorough and longest answers, but town and county authorities also gave satisfactory answers.

The most poorly answered questions were those relating to spending of public funds and the import of genetically modified products.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A large number of recommendations, totalling 34 activities, were included in the National Environmental Action Plan for improving public awareness, where in addition to 14 educational recommendations, activities concerning access to information and public participation were added.

In Estonia, the most urgent legislative tasks include the of drafting regulations to provide procedures for asking and receiving information, and publishing the applications for permits as well as draft legislation.

Much can be done in the area of making information available on the Internet, compiling address lists of NGOs interested in certain materials or draft regulations and laws, and educating the public through newspaper articles, TV and radio performances.

Environmental NGOs need to be supported in various ways. Although the Ministries of Social Affairs and Economic Affairs already have advisory boards involving NGOs for making suggestions on legislation in the field of consumer protection and healthcare, the Ministry of the Environment has yet to establish one.

Before the public is able to practice accessing information and participating in environmental decision-making effectively, the biggest and most time consuming preparatory work should be done by various educational institutions.

Taking into consideration the passive character of Estonians, the greatest emphasis should be placed on the active provision of information on the Internet, through libraries, radio and TV.

Maret Merisaar / Estonian Green Women's Union

GREECE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Greece has delayed the transfer of the EU Directive on Freedom of Access to Environmental Information into a national law by almost three years. The Common Ministerial Decision was adopted only in 1995.

The right of access to makes no distinction between natural and legal persons. However, only the big environmental NGOs with international links are aware of the citizen's right to know and even these organisations have made only limited use of this right.

The Law obligates public authorities to make available all legitimate information within 60 days. If the competent authority does not reply within the legal time period, the Law grants financial compensation to the applicant, ranging from 5.000 to 20.000 drachmas (US\$ 16-64). However, there is no known case where this law has been applied.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION HOW TO DO IT

In practice it does not mean that environmental information is not available and that it does not circulate (almost) freely. Only the channels of access to this information are not necessarily the official ones.

People in the ministries are very co-operative when personally addressed. This is more so, if the contact is arranged by someone having personal connections and acquaintances within the institution. Information, as far as it exists, is then readily made available.

For example: You want to get information about the levels of water pollution in the rivers of northern Greece but you happen to know only an expert on ozone monitoring in the Department for Air Pollution in the Ministry of Environment. The easiest thing to do is to contact this person and explain your problem. Usually, you get a swift response (either your contact person knows who is an expert in water pollution in the ministry, or he finds out using his personal network within the bureaucracy) The next thing you have to do is to visit your expert, armed with the references of your original contact. You are then sure to get, after a pleasant chat and an obligatory coffee, all information you need, plus a lot more on topics you never imagined before like, an insider view on the impacts of the next government reshuffling. If your expert happens to ignore the problem, he might advise you to contact Mr X in the University or private consultancy where the genuine experts on the matter hold all the information you seek.

It is sometimes the case, that there is a climate of mistrust right from the beginning. This only means you had bad luck and that you have to look for other information channels using the method described above.

It is almost hopeless, though, to try to get information by using the official procedures or by referring to the right of the citizens to know. There are many reasons for this. One could accuse the authoritarian and centralised tradition of the Greek administration and its inability to understand citizens' rights. But all evidence shows that the authoritarian secretiveness thaws away if one uses personal contacts.

The most apparent reason for the failure of official information procedures is bad organisation. Addressing a government service officially for data demands additional effort and initiative on the part of the bureaucracy that the latter is unwilling to undertake.



THE WINDS OF CHANGE

The Ministry of the Environment is making an effort to modernise data compilation and dissemination. For example, it has created a fully computerised office for a National Environmental Network linked to the European Environment Agency. For the time being, however, this Office is in a process of self-organisation and is occupied with data compilation and management issues. For this reason, the office is not yet fully operational and does not offer access to information to the general public.

The questions from the Snap Shot Survey were answered by contacting governmental and regional authorities directly by personal visits and by collecting the experience of the main environmental NGOs that have been already involved in these issues. This methodology was adopted because it was judged that demanding information following the official procedure would prove fruitless.

There was only one attempt to make use of the right of access to information guaranteed by Directive 92/31 3/EEC and the corresponding national legislation and this proved fruitless. Only the Environment and Development and Culture Ministries sent formal replies, void of any practical factual information.

Demos Tsantiis
Interdisciplinary Institute for Environmental Research

No Access to Data to Participate in Decision-Making in Greece

The diversion of the river Acheloos is one of the most controversial irrigation and hydropower projects ever undertaken in Greece. The project was agreed in 1983 and the first building works started in 1985. However, the environmental impact assessment (EIA) was not prepared until 1989!!!

In 1994, following complaints by NGOs, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that construction must be stopped, until a comprehensive ELA had been completed. Despite this court ruling, construction continued.

A hastily prepared EIA was finally completed in 1995, within a record time of three months. However, its quality was very poor, with many irrelevant details and unfounded assumptions.

The absence of information proved a serious handicap for participation of NGOs in public consultations. In 1994, NGOs demanded hydrological data from the Ministry for Development, but access was denied. In the same year, following NGO complaints, the Council of State ruled that the Ministry must provide this information. Despite the Council's decision, hydrological data on the Acheloos river remains locked up within the Ministry for Development.

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA



The Snap Shot Survey conducted in Macedonia involved 15 representatives from NGOs, citizens, politicians, private business sector and scientific institutions. They addressed about 400 to 26 national and local institutions.

Summarising the results from the Survey, it can be concluded that 50-60 % of the institutions addressed responded by providing information.

The most responsible governmental institutions and _____ authorities replied well in time, within 2-3 weeks. They submitted fairly accurate and comprehensive information. Among these were the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Ministry of Urbanisation, Construction and Environmental Protection, Ministry of Agriculture, Inspectorate for Environmental Protection, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Transport and Meteorological Institute of FYRM.

At the national level, the weakest responses came from the Ministries of Finance, Defence, the State Institute for Health Protection and some others.

At the local level, correct and satisfactory information was provided by one third of the institutions addressed.

The analysis shows that the most satisfactory responses were provided to questions from the following groups:

- Quality of drinking water and food;
- Collection, transportation, treatment and storage of waste;
- Environmental Impact Assessment.

Fairly satisfactory answers were provided to questions about:

- Information on pollution;
- Issuing of permits for new construction, production or commercial activity;
- Nuclear safety;
- Specific national questions.

Unsatisfactory information was provided for questions on genetic engineering; and no response was provided for those on environmental financing.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

This gathering was attended by the Survey participants. It also attracted representatives of NGOs, citizens, private business sector, politicians, scientists, as well as representatives of some competent institutions. These included representatives from the Ministry of Environment, the Environmental Inspectorate, an expert on environmental law and public participation, some NGOs who were not involved in the survey (about 20 people) and representatives of the media.

The constructive and fruitful discussion among the participants provoked an exchange of experience on Public Participation and the Right to Know in Macedonia. It was confirmed that the results from the Survey reflect mostly the real situation concerning Public Participation in Macedonia. Some of the people present were sceptical because their previous experience in obtaining information had not been successful.

It was found that the Sofia Guidelines have not been publicised sufficiently~ so the public are not informed about their rights to access environmental information and participate in environmental decision-making. This lack of awareness is also due to the financial crisis facing Macedonia, whereby people give

greater priority to economic problems.

Recently, the Regional Environmental Center organised a Round Table Discussion on Public Participation and the Convention on PP with about 20 NGO representatives and some experts in the field. Through the media the public was informed about the event, but there was not much reaction from that side.

CONCLUSIONS

The Ministry of Urbanisation, Construction and Environmental Protection is the main source of environmental information. They are not particularly open to the public, nor always to interested parties. Small distant communities do not have access to the Ministry.

There are no clear and strict basic rules which oblige other governmental bodies and institutions to release environmental information.

Electronic communication technology (Internet, Web-site, E-mail) is insufficiently developed and too expensive to improve information dissemination.

There are no regulations for public participation in the decision-making process.

Implementing regulations have to be introduced under the Environmental Protection Law to enable its enforcement.

Macedonian NGOs share the conviction that the Convention on PP will establish legal rights to information, participation and justice, and to a healthy environment. It will contribute to the improvement of environmental protection and development of democracy which is especially important for the countries in the CEE Region.

Maridea Petrova
Lychnidos

RUSSIA

The questions from the Snap Shot Survey were addressed to 4 institutions at the federal (national level), 9 at the regional level and 4 at the local level in 24 cities of Bryansk Oblast. Seven other NGOs were involved in the project implementation: Bryansk Regional NGO “Viola”; Public Movement “Let’s help the Volga River”; Komsomolsk-on-Amur regional department of RSEU Regional NGO “Ecologia”, Novgorod; Ecojuris Institute (Moscow); Karelian Animal Protection Society, Petrozavodsk; Association of green, Karelia.



ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION

15 NGO representatives participated in the National Round-Table Discussion and 3 state officials.

In general, people are well aware of their right to access information. This is true not only for environmental organizations and their members, but also for ordinary citizens, especially from towns.

Representatives from Bryansk, Leningrad oblast, Saratov, Ufa, Lipetsk, Novokuznetsk shared their experience on access to environmental information.

The most interesting cases were:

Ufa (Bashkortstan Republic). There was an agreement on collaboration signed between Republican Ministry of the Environment and several environmental NGOs. It enables NGOs to receive information easily.

In Saratov, there is a library open to the public in the Oblast Committee of the Environment. It provides an opportunity for NGOs and citizens to access information without written requests. But, receiving information from other state bodies is difficult even for the Environmental Committee. Another problem is that although information is collected by environmental bodies, it is not analysed.

A specific situation exists in Sosnovy Bor, a town in the Leningrad Oblast, where there are a lot of nuclear facilities. Environmental information is rather inaccessible. The easiest way of getting this information is to ask foreign colleagues to apply for it, because this information is of great importance for the whole Baltic region.

Participants in the Round Table were, in general, aware of the Sofia Guidelines, but most of the NGO representatives had not read them. The Sofia Guidelines were distributed before and during the Round Table.

People who are not involved in the Environment for Europe process, and especially people from distant regions, have only a general idea about the negotiations on the Convention on PP. Most of NGO representatives know that something is going on, but they have not seen the text of the Convention, and do not know what it is about.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- In general, letters of requests for information are answered by state institutions in time
- Regional institutions are more accurate and provide more complete answers than federal bodies.
- Letters from NGOs receive fuller responses than letters from citizens.
- Reference to the specific right to know laws in the letter requesting information increases the chances of a response being received.
- State institutions often try to avoid many of the questions, providing general instead of complete answers.
- Excuses used by the state authorities when information is not provided include work overload due to letters from citizens, questions being too broad and insufficient time and money to answer all the letters.

- Build links between state bodies and NGOs to use the capacities of both parties for collecting and distributing information;
- Undertake seminars and workshops and prepare publications for citizens explaining their rights to receive information and procedures for getting it, and reminding state officials about their duties to respect citizens' rights.
- Develop a state system for distributing the most important information to the public;
- Use litigation (courts) to enforce public rights to information.

The Russian legislation that guarantees citizens the right to receive environmental information is a rather progressive. So the main problem is not in the adoption of the Convention on Public Participation that could even restrict the present rights, but in implementing the existing legislation.

Ekaterina Khmeleva
Russian Socio-Ecological Union

SPAIN

The Spanish Constitution recognises the right of access to information which is regulated by Law 30/1992. However, the European Commission considered Law 30/92 to be insufficient to transpose Directive 90/313/EEC (on access to environmental information), so after infringement proceedings against Spain, a new Law 38/1995 was introduced nearly three years after the deadline stated by art. 9 (1) of the Directive.

Fifty percent of the letters have not been answered to date, even though the Spanish Law 38/95 states that administration must answer in no more than two months.

The answers provided were very general and incomplete. Only in one case was the answer complete. The responses to questions on waste addressed to the Town Council were incomplete and neglected to mention incineration, probably because citizens are very concerned about incinerator emissions and oppose incineration.

All the institutions contacted are reluctant to provide environmental information. Even the Environment Ministry failed to answer any of the questions posed.

National level: 75% of the letters addressed to the Health and Industry Ministries were not answered. The remaining 25% responses contained little information

Regional governments: 50% of the letters sent were not answered. One exception was the Basque government which sent very explicit answers. Although the Regional governments all received the same questions from different NGOs, their answers differed. In some cases, the same letter was sent by several NGOs, but only one NGO received any reply.

The Town Council: 70% of the questions asked were not answered. In general, the answers contain very limited information.

The quality of the answers seems to be inversely related to the size of the town. So, the bigger the town, the poorer the answers. The relationship between the person who sends the letter and the person who receives it also seems to influence the quality of the response.

NATIONAL ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION:

20 representatives from NGOs participated in the round-table, but no public officials.

The participants invited to the Round Table were informed about the Sofia Guidelines on Access to Environmental Information and Public Participation. People have insufficient information about the negotiations on the Convention on Public Participation (to be adopted in Aarhus, Denmark in June 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

- In general, the quality of the answers provided was low;
- In Spain, the officials do not usually respect citizens' right to access a public document, even when that right is invoked by environmental associations. Only in a very few cases does the administrations help citizens resolve their problems and there are cases where officials ask NGOs for the environmental information they need!
- In the best case, requests for environmental information were answered with a considerable delay, and then only partially.
- Spain is a country with 17 different regional governments. Some environmental responsibilities have been



transferred from Central Government to the Regions. This situation creates difficulties in finding the responsible institution and even within an institution, problems arise in finding out which department is competent to answer a specific question.

- If citizens and organisations want to influence environment policy, it is essential that they have access to the necessary information at the beginning of the process.

• *During the last few years, citizens and NGOs have gained substantial experience in:*

- Writing requests for environmental information to the institutions. Now it is the usual practice NGOs;
- Today all members of organisations are familiar with the Registers of the Public Administrations;
- Citizens have learnt to wait a long time for the replies. In Spain, after two months of waiting for an answer, it is assumed that the institution is reluctant to provide the information;
- Citizens often need the support of organisations to obtain environmental information. NGOs need the services of a professional team of lawyers on a daily basis, to exercise their right of access to environmental information;
- In most cases, after the statutory two months has passed without receiving any answers, the citizens do not take further steps to obtain the environmental information they need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- National authorities must be made aware of the legislation on the right to access environmental information.
- European and Spanish legislation needs to be more helpful towards citizens and not be used to protect the Public Administration from the people;
- Better implementation of the Spanish legislation;
- Legislation must be enforced to ensure that questions are answered in time.
- Where citizens receive no response after the statutory two months, procedures for taking further steps need to be simplified.

Esperanza Lopez de Uralde
 Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Defensa Ambiental (CODA)

LIST OF QUESTIONS:

INFORMATION ON POLLUTION:

1. What quantities (or volumes) of Ozone Depleting Substances (CFC, Halons, etc. used in cooling systems, refrigerators, isolation materials) are produced, used and imported by your country each year?
2. Does your country have any specific air emission standards for Volatile Organic Compounds (e.g. benzene, toluene and other hydrocarbons)? What are the standards and whose recommendations are they based on (e.g. EU, World Trade Organisation)?
3. How many officials enforce pesticide legislation at national (regional, local) level?
4. Which pesticides permitted for use in your country are banned in the EU? Please provide the list of the pesticides permitted for use.
5. How many and which pesticides have in the last 6 years been added to the list of the permitted pesticides?
6. Provide brief information on how the Government is implementing the decisions made in Rio on the reduction of air pollutants which contribute to the greenhouse effect and acidification. What specific decisions have been taken or regulations passed that contribute to meet the commitments signed in Rio?

QUALITY OF DRINKING WATER AND FOOD:

7. What levels of agrochemicals (pesticides, artificial fertilisers) are permitted in drinking water and food?
8. How often is testing done on drinking water to determine levels of heavy metals, pesticides?
9. How often is testing done on food products to determine levels of heavy metals, pesticides?

COLLECTION, TRANSPORTATION, TREATMENT AND STORAGE OF WASTES (DOMESTIC, INDUSTRIAL and HAZARDOUS):

10. Is there any classification of hazardous wastes in your country?
11. What are the regulatory disposal requirements (permits) for hazardous waste and the practices of the authorities and waste generating facilities?
12. What is the policy regarding the disposal of waste?
13. What is the policy regarding the disposal of hazardous waste?
14. Which disposal option is the favoured one: prevention, recycling, incineration or landfilling? If prevention: How is this being addressed?
15. What is the Government policy with respect to the import of waste both for disposal and recycling?
16. What is the Government policy with respect to the import and transit of imported waste? What are the procedures and practices to enforce this policy?
17. What are the procedures and practices to control the movement of hazardous waste within the country?
18. What should households do with the toxic waste that they generate: used batteries, expired drugs, domestic white goods containing CFCs, luminescent and fluorescent light bulbs? Who is responsible for collecting this household waste?

ISSUING OF PERMISSIONS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION, PRODUCTION OR COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY:

19. How are water permits issued with respect to environmental protection and by whom?
20. How and by whom are permits issued for hunting, fishing, logging and collecting animals and plants, with respect to the protection of national bio-resources? Who monitors these procedures?

21. How and by whom are permits issued for exploitation of ores and mineral resources, with respect to the environment protection?

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

22. How does the relevant National (Regional or Municipal) institution appoint the consultant firms (organisations) carrying out the environmental impact assessment?
23. Does an ELA have to be undertaken when a state-owned enterprise is privatised?
24. What are the measures taken by the relevant institution (at national, regional or local level) if a construction starts without Environmental Impact Assessment?

ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCING:

25. What is the amount of money foreseen by the Ministry of the Environment (other national institution or national environmental fund) in the beginning of 1997 to assist some NGO activities? What has been in reality spent by the end of the year?
26. Are there any criteria approved to evaluate NGO initiatives and project proposals applying for state support?
27. Is there any reduction of VAT for environmental investments?
28. Are there any environmentally related income tax exemptions and allowances, e.g. donations for environmental initiatives, for NGOs, etc.?
29. What is the ration of income:expenditure of the National (Regional/Municipal) fund and how was the money spent in 1997? I.e. What types of environmental investments received a subsidy?

GENETIC ENGINEERING:

30. Does your country have legal regulations (e.g. instructions regarding occupational safety, standards for research laboratories) concerning genetic engineering (GE) research?
31. Is there any state control of institutions undertaking GE research?
32. Which body in your country regulates the activities of foreign firms are permits (licenses) granted for GE experiments?
33. Are any new regulations being prepared concerning GE, environmental liability for damages caused by the production of GE? What happens to genetically engineered plants that are harvested from field trials?
34. Has your country imported soy bean or corn(maize) from USA since December 1997? Are there any controls (inspection, notification, labelling requirements) on imports of genetically engineered soy bean and corn(maize) from the USA?

NUCLEAR SAFETY:

35. What are the regulations regarding nuclear safety and how are they enforced?
36. What monitoring is undertaken to determine radiation levels in the environment and in food?

OTHERS: Questions of national importance.

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NATIONAL PARTNERS

• **Green Balkans** is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation whose main objective is the preservation of the biodiversity of Bulgaria and the Balkans as a whole. To this end, the organisation's activities are oriented to raising public awareness and involving the public in the solution of environmental problems. Through its information and correspondence units, Green Balkans registers the cases of violation of environmental legislation and takes efficient actions against such violations. It prepares scientifically substantiated proposals to bodies having legislative responsibilities for new environmental legislation. The organisation has six departments of which the best developed are bird protection, environmental legislation and protection of the rainforests.

Address: Green Balkans, 74, Hristo Botev, vh.A, ap. 6, 6002 Stara Zagora, Bulgaria
phone/fax: +35942 600359 e-mail: diana@czeda.bg

• **Green Action, Zagreb** is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation registered in 1990. in Zagreb, Green Action is actively involved in environmental issues of local, national and international significance. The goal of the organisation is to promote environmentally sound and sustainable development. The key priorities are to encourage and facilitate public participation in all decision-making processes relevant to the environment and improvement of quality of life in Croatia. Green Action catalyses change through projects, campaigns and non-violent, direct actions. The organisation also provides expertise, advice and information on a wide range of environmental issues to individuals, communities, schools and other NGOs in Croatia.

Address: Green Action, Radnicka cesta 22, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia
phone/fax: (+385) 1 6110 951, e-mail: zelena_akcfja@zg.:el.hrBased

• **Green Circle** is an independent and public association which sets out to support and promote non-governmental organizations whose activity is focused upon protecting nature, natural resources, a healthy environment and the sustainable life of society. The association was founded in 1989 to engage in cooperation and coordinate joint actions undertaken by NGOs, to protect the common interest and requirements of its members and of other bodies with similar interests, to facilitate exchanges of information, to train, educate and inform the public with regard to environmental matters. The Green Circle office provides services and activities which respond to the needs of the members or bring benefits to the field of protection of nature and the environment.

Address: Green Circle, Lublanska 18, 120 00 Praha 2, the Czech Republic phone: (+42) 02298448, fax: (+42) 02296048, e-mail: zk@ecn.cz

• **The Estonian Green Women's Union** was founded in 1996 to unify the social workers in the country and the students of the Department of Social Work of Tallinn Pedagogical University and to direct their activities into the environmental field. Some of the actions and projects implemented so far, are: Clean up days around the artificial Lake Eistvere, Green working camp on the River Prandy, several seminars, building study pathways and others.

Address: Estonian Green Women's Union, Narvh road 25-307, EE0001 Tallinn, Estonia
phone: (+372) 6413402, fax: (+372) 6413281; e-mail: ccbest@teleport.ee

• **The Interdisciplinary Institute for Environmental Research (INIER)** was created in 1992 and has the status of a non profit organisation, dealing with the conservation of natural and man-made environment, the management of natural resources, the rational use of energy and the elaboration of techniques, methodologies and policies on sustainable development issues. One of its main activities has been the publication in Greek of the Worldwatch Institute's "THE STATE OF THE WORLD", acting at the same time as the antenna of the above organisation in the area. It also produces other research publications and organizes the "Ecological Summer School" in different places in Greece. Activists, researchers, writers and academic people are involved in the activities and campaigns of the INIER. A number of its projects have been financed by the EU while, at present, it is attempting to extend its activities to the international arena. Its main contributors have been publishing for many years the NEA ECOLOGIA monthly review, and some have been working for Greenpeace Greece.

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• **Lychnidos** is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, founded in 1995 whose aims are environmental protection and the sustainable development of the Ohrid region. The organization is building constructive dialogue and collaboration with national and local authorities, with institutions responsible for protection of the cultural and natural heritage in Macedonia and developing good relations with many national and international NGOs. Lychnidos are specially interested in developing international collaboration through the exchange of expertise, participation in comparative studies, conferences and organising similar activities in Ohrid, to disseminate and implement global methods and standards of environmental protection in Macedonia.

Address: Lychnidos, Kej M. Tito 3, 96000 Ohrid, Macedonia
phone/fax: (+ 389) 96 263 710

• **The Russian Socio-Ecological Union (SEU)** is an umbrella organization for over 250 NGOs and was founded in 1989. The activities of the SEU are agreed at Annual General Meetings (AGM) and the Board. The most recent 4th AGM of the SEU was held in September 1997. The AGM adopted the main programmes, which are the following: Environmental Settlement of XXI century, Chemical Safety, Public EIA, Environmental Education, Nuclear and Atomic Safety, SEU's International Policy and Mass Media programs. SEU participates in the 'Environment for Europe' process and in the NGO coalition's, the ECO Forum, activities in all fields.

Address: Russian Socio-Ecological Union (SEU), PO.Box 211, 121019 Moscow, Russia
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• **Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Defensa Ambiental (The Coordinating Federation for the Protection of the Environment) CODA** is a national non-political organization, comprised of most of the groups and societies concerned with environment, nature conservation and ecology in Spain. CODA consists of the General Assembly, in which each organisation is represented by one delegate, and of an Executive Board, elected by the Assembly. CODA's objectives are to co-ordinate, strengthen and encourage all the work done to protect environment and to conserve nature in Spain, and to promote active and friendly co-operation and mutual understanding between its members and between all entities and individuals, national and foreign, concerned with the protection of the environment.

Address: Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Defensa Ambiental, Pza. Sta. Ma Soledad T Acosta, 1-3° A, 28004 Madrid, Spain
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ANPED

The Northern Alliance for Sustainability

(formerly known as the Northern Alliance for Environment and Development)

ANPED, The Northern Alliance for Sustainability, is a network of NGOs based in the northern hemisphere. It strives to change unsustainable consumption and production patterns with an emphasis on the North. ANPED's role is to build sustainable societies by empowering grassroots organisations through sharing knowledge and skills, common campaigns, publications, and participation in and lobbying at international governmental conferences. ANPED networks groups working on Local Agenda 21, Corporate Accountability, Clean Production and Genetic Engineering.

ANPED is a democratic network of NGOs and voluntary organisations. Membership is open to any such organisation sharing our aims.

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