



FINAL REPORT **ON CAPACITY-BUILDING AND ADVOCACY SEMINAR**

SOFIA, BULGARIA, 1 – 2 DECEMBER 2005

I. Introduction

As part of its work programme for 2005-2006, the EPHA Environment Network aims to help develop the capacity of Eastern and Central European NGOs and other not-for-profit organisations to participate in EU environment and health policy-making. For this purpose, it held a capacity-building and advocacy seminar in Sofia, Bulgaria on 1-2 December 2005. The event was open to Bulgarian and Romanian NGOs and community groups working on health and environment issues or active in the implementation of the environmental *acquis communautaire* in view of EU accession. The workshop was organised in partnership with **Sustainable World Foundation** (Bulgaria) and local members of **Women in Europe for a Common Future**.

The choice of Bulgaria as a pre-accession country was not accidental. The country is adopting environmental legislation in order to incorporate the EU *acquis*. This is a unique opportunity for the local civil society stakeholders to exercise their influence and bring about shifts in environmental assessment to better protect public health, in particular the health of vulnerable groups such as children.

The EPHA Environment Network secretariat collected preliminary information on the participants' organisations through questionnaires about their activities, knowledge of EU institutions and environment and health issues, and their needs for advocacy and media resources. The objective was to better tailor the presentations and interventions to the participants' needs, and thus maximise the impact of the seminar.

EEN provided technical expertise on networking skills and on EU and WHO main policies. It also facilitated two specialised workshops on chemicals/REACH and on public participation and environmental justice through the Aarhus Convention. Hands-on training was provided on developing more fruitful and efficient communications and relations with the media. Four journalists from leading Bulgarian national newspapers and from the national radio attended the media workshop, and gave their practical advice. Another radio

journalist who could not attend sent in her written input (Zornitsa Guyrova, DARIK Radio). Please read the media recommendations below.

The event brought together 30 participants primarily from Bulgaria and Romania but also from Macedonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Latvia. The EPHA Environment Network secretariat worked closely with local partners and stakeholders in order to ensure that local experience and ideas were included and valorised in the programme.

II. Expectations

At the beginning of the event, participants were asked to write down their expectations for the two days. Most of them expected to have the possibility of networking, developing common positions and activities at the national level, sharing experiences and establishing future partnerships. In terms of content, participants were hoping to learn useful information, get training on how to plan advocacy and media campaigns, learn more about media interests and constraints as well as to liaise with journalists and decision-makers. The issues they expected to be covered by the workshop were mainly related to environment and health in general, but also to water, mercury, and waste as well as EU funding opportunities.

III. Questionnaires

While preparing the seminar, EEN wanted to learn more about the participants' activities, their knowledge of EU institutions and environment and health issues, as well as their individual needs for advocacy and media resources. It sent out questionnaires to all the registered participants. The objective of collecting this information was to enable the organisers to better tailor the presentations to the participants' profile.

In total, approximately half of the participants (15) responded to the questionnaires. Nine of the participating organisations rated their knowledge of EU institutions and EU environment and health policies as fair to excellent, while the remaining six had basic understanding. Ten organisations had already worked on EU-funded projects and had followed the accession negotiations between their government and the EC in relation to the environmental chapter. All of the organisations were involved in environmental and health issues such as chemicals, mercury, water, urban environment, air quality, children's health, environmental justice, etc. Regarding their advocacy capacity, the great majority of the organisations responded that they had a fair to excellent level of experience in running advocacy campaigns for the purpose of influencing national or EU decision-makers on health and environment legislation. All fifteen organisations claim that they have never been consulted by their government on the EU accession process.

In terms of media capacity, half of the organisations answered that they did have a communications plan while the vast majority had a press list, frequently received inquiries from journalists and regularly wrote press releases.

IV. Presentations

1. Dr Hristina Mileva, Ministry of Health of R. Bulgaria (MoH),

Dr Mileva spoke about Bulgaria's administrative mechanisms for implementing the National Environmental Health Action Plan (NEHAP, 1997) following the 4th Ministerial Conference

on Environment Health in Budapest, 2004 and the priorities of the EU Strategy on Environment and Health. Alongside NEHAP, Bulgaria is developing a National Children's Health and Environment Action Plan as a chapter of NEHAP; establishing a National Environmental Health Information System and strengthening research on environment and health. The government has set up a National Inter-ministerial Committee (NIC, 1998) to manage NEHAP implementation, chaired by the ministers of health and environment with their sectoral deputies as members. Two representatives of local NGOs sit on the committee: Sunny Day and National Movement of Ekoglasnost. The main areas of intervention are drinking water quality, ambient air, noise pollution, waste, food safety, ionising radiation. The MoH allocates funds from its annual budget for NEHAP implementation mainly for epidemiological studies and information campaigns.

A first draft of the National Children's Health and Environment Action Plan is almost ready, prepared by NIC and the working group for development of CEHAP (2005), which included some NGOs. NGOs could play a very important role:

- By their formal representatives in NIC and the working group for CEHAP development
- By implementing some of the activities included in the CEHAP
- By pushing governmental sectors and industries to implement CEHAP

She enumerated the projects Bulgaria is implementing such as a WHO project on Health Impact Assessment in the framework of the EU Public Health Programme, an EU-funded international study on air pollution and children's respiratory health, a project study on the health of youth and air pollution funded by EU's 5th framework programme and several epidemiological studies within the NEHAP framework on ambient air pollution, drinking water quality, soil pollution, food contamination and assessment of the population exposure in the most polluted areas in Bulgaria.



Dr Mileva presented the mandate and composition of the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC), the environment and health Focal Points in the ministries of health and of environment in the 52 countries following the implementation of the Budapest Conference commitments, and the CEHAPE Task Force. Dr Mileva is one of the 10 country members who sits on the EEHC.

2. Mr Fernando Ponz, Head of Political Affairs Section, EU Delegation, Sofia

Mr Ponz remarked on the recent shift from environmental protection from man's invasion to man's protection by protecting the environment. This shift is indicative of the detrimental effects of the quality of the environment on human health, indelibly linking the two sectors. He noted that involving NGOs in the decision-making processes permeates all EU policies. Some NGOs took part in the accession process launched in 1993 by contributing to the definition of the accession criteria. Presently, monitoring compliance with the established criteria is done on a regular basis through Comprehensive Monitoring Reports. The last

report is issued and available at:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_2005/pdf/SEC1352_CM_MASTER_BG%20COLLEGE.pdf

Bulgaria is meeting the requirements for air quality, noise and protection of nature. However, efforts are needed in waste management - a key priority - water quality, industrial pollution, risk management, GMOs, chemicals, nuclear safety and radiation protection. The administrative capacity of the regional and local authorities must be reinforced through consultations and information exchange with the member-states in the country. Bulgaria has made good progress in adopting the legislation but its implementation is lagging behind.

His closing remarks highlighted the growing recognition and importance placed on the link between environmental policy and people's health status within the EU policy context. Eurobarometers showed that 90% of European citizens were concerned about environmental health issues. Policy makers were also recognising that not enough was known about the health effects of pollutants found accumulating in people's bodies.

Mr Ponz welcomed the fact that a coordinating platform like EPHA Environment Network existed to bring forward the concerns and solutions of NGOs on policy issues and encouraged Bulgarian NGOs to join forces in presenting a coordinated view in their respective areas of activity.

3. *Diana Iskрева, "Earth Forever" NGO, Stara Zagora - Bulgaria, "Water and Sanitation"*

Ms Iskрева presented a case study on water availability and accessibility performed by her organisation. Currently, Bulgarian legislation fully reflects the requirements of the EU Water directive and the framework directives. protection with sanitary belts; the implementation and enforcement such as nitrate levels, where half of the monitoring samples showed levels above the maximum limit. Another problem was ensuring that requirements to provide sufficient protection zones between water sources and waste treatment were being respected. There are contradictions between the goals of the National Plan and the capacities available to reach them.

To increase public awareness and encourage action from public policy makers around the issue of poor sanitation services in public toilets and schools, "Earth Forever" surveyed 89 schools in 31 settlements covering half the regions of Bulgaria. The results indicated a low ratio between numbers of school toilets per 100 children (sometimes as many as 400 children per toilet); frequent lack of separate facilities for boys and girls; tap or hose flushes in half of the schools; some were without locks or doors; upon average, one sink for 100 children; irregular supply of toilet paper; the majority lack soap and hot water. This data leads to the conclusion that the sanitation infrastructure in Bulgarian public schools is deteriorating for lack of maintenance, and that financial resources needed for traditional solutions such as flush toilets were not available in the short to medium term. Alternative solutions such as rain water harvesting and eco toilets could improve the situation. Society and decision-makers are reluctant to openly address the issue, while students, teachers and headmasters do not know how to approach it. Education on hygiene is not provided even in primary school.

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As a result of the survey, “Earth Forever” undertook activities towards improving this situation such as information campaigns to raise awareness and mobilise resources for renovation of the facilities disseminated materials in the schools promoting basic hygiene habits. They are now fund-raising to supply soap to a number of schools on a pilot basis in order to calculate the actual costs. Finally, Ms Iskreva reiterated their commitment to the CEHAPE Regional Priority Goal I on reducing children’s morbidity and mortality from gastrointestinal disorders by access to safe and affordable water and adequate sanitation. The CEHAPE framework could provide further political momentum to countries to work together and share experience and resources, particularly when the CEHAPE Task Force meets in the autumn of 2006 to review progress made by countries in addressing this issue.

4. Ms Antoaneta Yoveva, Sustainable World Foundation - Bulgaria, “Accidents and Habitat and Urban Environment Strategy”

Ms Yoveva’s presentation focused on the EU Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment, the objectives of Road Safety Action Plan 2002-10 and the CEHAPE Regional Priority Goal II on preventing accidents and injuries and increasing physical exercise for children. She outlined the stages of the process leading to the Thematic Strategy and elaborated on its four principal areas: sustainable construction methods and techniques, urban design, sustainable urban management and transport in terms of their objectives and means of achieving them. In early 2006, the European Commission will present its Thematic Strategy on Urban Environment, which will provide an opportunity for NGOs and other civil society stakeholders to comment on policy options. Progress made by individual countries in addressing the CEHAPE Regional Priority Goal II will be discussed at the CEHAPE Task Force meeting (March 30-31, 2006) and the EEHC meeting (May 15-16, 2006). She presented a pilot project of her organisation that allowed the marking of bike lanes on the sidewalks of certain districts of Sofia.

5. Mr Ivailo Hlebarov, Environmental Association “Za Zemiayata” – Bulgaria “POPS in Environment and in Human Bodies”

Mr Hlebarov’s presentation dealt with a case study on eggs from free-range chicken performed through a hot spot check in the polluted areas of several countries. He clarified the term of POPS (Persistent Organic Pollutants) and explained the main concerns for CEE countries. He explained the reasons behind the study – a push for real data, more transparency and better health for the local people. The measured levels in the Stara Zagora region significantly exceeded the limits set for POPS identifying it as the most polluted region ranking second highest among 18 countries. Mr Hlebarov also made an overview of the National Implementation Plan for POPS covering the general conclusions in its regard and the recommendations that his organisation makes.

6. Dr Tamara Steger, Center for Environmental Policy and Law, Hungary and Monica Guarinoni, EEN, “Environmental justice and tools for new member and accession countries”

The workshop focused on the concept of environmental justice and how it relates to the Aarhus Convention. It aimed at providing participants with ideas and tools on how to use the provisions of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in projects and activities at national and European levels. Participants shared their experience and knowledge on these issues, in

particular at local and national levels.

Monica Guarinoni introduced the main features of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR), the institutional and geographical context and the main implications for NGOs. She focused on the role NGOs had played (e.g. at the second Meeting of the Parties in Almaty) to make the Convention a key instrument for environment and health protection. She explained how NGOs were fighting a difficult battle in Brussels to ensure that the application of the Aarhus principles to the EU institutions respect the spirit and the meaning of the Convention.

Dr Tamara Steger added concrete examples and case studies on how NGOs had already used the Aarhus provisions in their working relations with public authorities. In particular, she mentioned the case of a Bulgarian organisation, the 'Access to Information Program', which monitors the development of legislation and practice of access to information and justice in Bulgaria, and assists NGOs in making requests for information (e.g. by providing a template letter). The organisation also gives legal advice on court appeals.

She compared different types of PRTRs (EPER, EU-PRTR and the US Toxic Release Inventory) and highlighted how NGOs could become involved in the planning and implementation process of PRTRs and in the monitoring process to make sure that the Protocol is transposed into their national legislation. Finally, she outlined the main elements of environmental justice defined as the "fair treatment of people of all races, cultures and income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, programs, and policies".

IV. Recommendations from EPHA Environment Network

▪ *Issues raised during the discussions*

- Local NGOs need to be more widely consulted by the government or by the local authorities;
- More public debate on environmental problems and issues, environmental legislation and policy is needed;
- Public participation should be significantly strengthened; it is perhaps the weakest point of the environmental decision-making process despite the fact that the represented countries are all signatories of the Aarhus Convention;
- Need for apparent mechanisms ensuring that public demands are integrated in decision and law-making;
- The public's knowledge and awareness about current environmental issues that have a significant impact on human health needs to be improved;
- Laws and legislative amendments concerning the environment, and therefore the wider public, are being adopted "in the dark";

- More and specific information on Bulgaria's accession commitments in the field of environment needs to be openly circulated and debated (e.g. how were transition periods fixed and who was consulted?)
- Past modes of thinking in governmental operations need to be overcome in order to encourage participatory models of decision-making and law-making;
- The medias' interest towards the environment and health issues needs to be expanded beyond its main emphasis on sensational events;
- NGOs need to develop and promote a more positive reputation by: 1) educating the public about their mission and objectives (especially to overcome misinformation); 2) working with each other and the media to overcome stereotypes such as "protesters" and "slogan raisers"; facilitating governmental proactive relationships and partnerships.

▪ ***Recommendations***

- Uniting in common platform networks might help local NGOs to put up a stronger front to government institutions and to have greater political weight;
- Cooperation and collaborative efforts with the proliferating citizens' organisations might help to avoid dispersive efforts on both sides;
- Awareness-raising among the general public on what NGOs are, their role as an advocate for the greater public and not-for-profit mission might help disperse negative stereotypes in their regard;
- Attracting young people for voluntary NGO work might contribute to greater youth participation through a multiplier effect, and popularise environmental health issues;
- Awareness-raising campaigns and activities promotion among the general public and young NGOs stressing the participatory model of democracy as an integral part of transparent decision-making and law-enacting;
- Initiating a systematic dialogue with the authorities at all state levels through periodic monitoring meetings with the network might help local NGOs ;
- By joining European level NGO networks, local NGOs would be more open to the current advocacy trends and would be in closer touch with EU level initiatives;
- Local NGOs can act as watchdogs and insist on integrating environmental impact assessments in all policy areas and monitor for the strict implementation of all EU environmental directives.

IV. Media Training

▪ *Recommendations*

1. The “news” element must always be present to ensure coverage, i.e. facts and objectivity are needed when NGOs present their material rather than commentary on what the government should or should not do;
2. Facts must be presented in an exhaustive yet concise, structured and interesting way expressing clear-cut ideas to quickly capture readers’ attention;
3. NGO representatives must not demonstrate any political affinities;
4. Three kinds of facts have potential to attract coverage: (1) sensational happenings; (2) motivation and strategy of the organisation conveyed by telling a human story; and (3) interesting ideas, for example related to innovative ways of solving a problem.
5. NGOs should resort to issuing press releases, however without overloading the mail boxes of the journalists. They must be selective as to what is worthy of the media’s and the readers’ attention.
6. Because of its very nature, electronic media has the possibility to offer more perspectives and points of view in the same emission. However, materials should not be overcharged with information;
7. Organised campaigns on certain issues have better chances of getting coverage in the electronic media;
8. Good news are also of interest but must be integrated into a human story if it is to stand a chance to be printed;
9. Regional events and problems can spill out of the regional press into the national one depending on their scale and relevance to the nation;
10. Chances for coverage are low for long-standing problems that are not linked to any particular recent event. For these subjects, NGOs should explore the analytical electronic media programmes and specialised editions.
11. The link between environment and health must be emphasized in the NGOs’ materials because health issues always make news and get covered;
12. NGOs can access the media by writing synthesised e-mails and following them up with a telephone call including reasoning, further information on the topic, contact information for additional questions.
13. NGOs must realise that journalists cannot guarantee that their news will appear in the media as the final word belongs to the editors and owners of the media.



14. Establishing and maintaining personal contacts with media representatives is very important as a way of becoming a trusted source for the journalist;
15. When inviting journalists to specific events, NGOs must bear in mind that journalists cannot dedicate an entire day to one event unless they can find a story there or people that they could interview;
16. When an NGO is Bulgarian environmental NGOs need to overcome the heritage of a post-socialist country. Environmental protection requires a lot of funds that Bulgaria cannot afford. Acute environmental issues have been pushed back on the accession agenda with lengthy transition periods before they are tackled.
17. When an NGO is organising a press conference, it is advisable to check what else is taking place (news, public events) in order to avoid the media skipping their event in favour of another more significant one;

IV. Evaluation

Participants returned 12 evaluation forms. Most of them (7 out of 12) rated the workshop as excellent, the others as good. What was highly appreciated was the possibility to get information on various issues (environment and health in general, but also children's environmental health, air pollution, persistent toxic substances, water, urban development, healthy schools), including the EU accession process, and to get hands-on advocacy and media training. One participant wrote that "*the workshop was concrete, interactive, full of examples and useful as it gave ideas for further work*". Overall, the balance between presentations and discussion and the length of the workshop were considered right (7 out of 12). However, participants would have liked more interaction and practical exercise. Also, one participant felt that presentations were too much focused on Bulgaria.

Almost all participants (11/12) gained ideas on how to run an effective campaign and considered that participation to the workshop opened up new possibilities for networking.

Most of them would be willing to attend other EEN training events.

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The latest **Comprehensive Monitoring Report for Bulgaria** issued by the European Commission I available for downloading at:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_2005/pdf/SEC1352_CM_MASTER_BG%20COLLEGE.pdf

- * Please note that though these speakers did not attend the seminar/media session, they had expressed their interest and wish to participate. They may prove to be useful contacts for future work and relations. Contact No 7 under “Media Training” sent us her written recommendations to the participants in the seminar. You can find the translated version on our website.

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