

Republic of Croatia
Exchange of Country Experiences
in Preparing National Reports

Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning
Division of General Environmental Policy
Sectorial Analysis and Strategic Planning Department

a) The role of national focal point in your country

The Republic of Croatia, being a participant in the Rio process, joined the course of reviewing implementation of Agenda 21 at the end of 1996. The Croatian Government has nominated a Working Group for the elaboration of the *Report on the Implementation of Agenda 21 in the Republic of Croatia*. The Working Group consisted of representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Development and Reconstruction, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the State Directorate for Water. The Working Group Co-ordinator was the State Directorate for Environment. Outside the Working Group, there were other contributors to the report: WHO Liaison Office Croatia, Regional Environmental Centre Croatia (REC), the Ministry of Physical Planning, Building and Housing, Ericsson –Nikola Tesla Co. and the Special Waste Management Agency (APO). The Report on the Implementation of Agenda 21 in the Republic of Croatia was accepted by the Croatian Government, after which it was forwarded to the Commission on Sustainable Development in April 1997.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning was established in 2000 by merging of the State Directorate for Environment and the Ministry of Physical Planning, Building and Housing, and has as such assumed a more active role in preparing the national reports. It serves as the contact body, while the national focal point is not only preparing the report but also co-ordinating among bodies and institutions, that are involved in this process.

b) Inter-ministerial co-ordination in preparing national reports

Apart from different departments of this Ministry that participated in preparing the report, other Ministries have been included as well: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction (former Ministry of Development and Reconstruction), Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the State Directorate for Waters. The co-ordination of different activities related to preparation of the reports was best achieved in the cases when it was possible to continue co-operation with the same contact persons at the designated ministries. However, due to restructuring of the state administration that has been initiated since the change of Government of 3 January 2000, this has proved to be difficult. Sometimes, documents that are forwarded outside the Ministry are lost in the processing thus valuable time is lost in submitting the report. Therefore, maintaining the continuity within the administrative structures still remains a weak point in Croatia.

The newly established Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning as a co-ordinating body has not yet resolved some competence issues with other state bodies, which contributes to reporting problems (sometimes other bodies do not see reporting as their own obligation, but as the exclusive obligation of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning). The role of the Ministry must be strengthened in this regard, as well as the role of other stakeholders that are not, unfortunately, widely recognised as important in this process (such as NGOs and various interest groups).

c) How your country has reconciled reporting requirements from different UN system bodies including mandatory reporting for conventions

This issue is often considered problematic and although Croatia is aware of the problems encountered in streamlining of national reporting (mandatory vs. voluntary nature of reporting, mandated requests for information vary in timing, periodicity and scope, to name just the few), this problem has become more acute due to requirements for the EU integration. Namely, the Republic of Croatia has expressed its desire to become a part of the EU. With regard to that, signing of the Agreement on Stabilisation and Association between the RC and the EU is expected in autumn of 2001. The Agreement will stipulate many obligations for Croatia, including the requirements for harmonisation with the EU legislation (the *Acquis Communautaire*). This will impose additional burden on the already weak and rather ineffective administrative bodies.

Additionally, the Ministry has initiated contacts with the European Environment Agency and thus will have to harmonise its reporting requirements with that of the Agency as well, the scope and volume of which are still unknown and are currently being assessed through the project *National Environmental Data Gathering*. Therefore, the standardisation and simplification of methodology would mean that Croatia would be in a position to use the accumulated and stored data in a more comprehensible and useful manner in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, Croatia is under obligation to regularly report to the UN Convention Secretariats on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Combating Desertification on the implementation of the aforementioned Conventions. The development of environmental network for storing the data and reports would facilitate this process and enable saving the valuable time.

The uniform manner of reporting would also be less time-consuming as the Ministry has insufficient human resources.

d) What capacity and resources issues do you have in preparing your national report

The Ministry itself is in process of restructuring also due to the EU association requirements. Additionally, due to budgetary restrictions there is a prohibition on the employment of new civil servants, which is a limiting factor also with regard to preparing national reports for the UN CSD. There is still a need to develop methodological guidelines that would facilitate preparing of national reports.

e) Other issues including difficulties/obstacles encountered in national reporting

Although national reporting is seen as an useful exercise, particularly in enhancing consultation and co-operation among different stakeholders, the lack of personnel, the slowness of state bodies and their inflexibility all cause delays in submitting of reports. Additionally, the reports received at the Ministry sometimes need translation and editing, which additionally complicates and delays the submitting of reports.

Furthermore, *Country Profile* forms need further simplification or at least a detailed explanation as to what a particular point refers to. Our experience has shown that due to various interpretations of these points, the forms are often un-uniformed and un-standardised.

Obviously the much needed efficiency and expedience in preparing and submitting of national reports is more easily achieved when this issue is raised to the Government level, through the establishment of a Working Group that is responsible for preparing the reports (as it was done in 1996). However, time constraints are often such that this is impossible. Thus, timely forwarding of standard forms with clearly identified problems and objectives to be achieved would make the preparation of reports easier.

However, positive developments need to be pointed out as well. The Government of the Republic of Croatia has established a Council for Physical Planning and Environmental Protection in spring of 2001. Additionally, two projects: an *Earth Council Project* and a *Capacity 21 Project* are aimed at facilitating preparation of national reviews/assessment, raising awareness and mobilising stakeholders at the national and local levels and preparing a country report including a set of recommendations on how to continue with the Agenda 21 implementation after WSSD.

Furthermore, the Ministry has, with the assistance of the World Bank and in co-operation with numerous stakeholders prepared the draft National Environmental Strategy and Action Plan that will be submitted to the Croatian Parliament in autumn of 2001. The principles of sustainable development have been incorporated in this document thus recognising the importance of an integrated approach to protection of the environment.