



From Conflict to Sustainable Development

Assessment and Clean-up
in Serbia and Montenegro

United Nations Environment Programme

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Foreword

As the smoke and dust settled and peace was re-established in what was then the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the summer of 1999, it was evident that not only had people been through untold pain and suffering but that the environment had suffered as well. However, the extent and nature of the conflict-related damage to the environment and the threats these might pose were unknown.

In response to widely voiced concerns, the United Nations Environment Programme established a task force (the Balkans Task Force) with a mandate to assess objectively and scientifically immediate threats to human health and the environment arising from the conflict. This was the first time that environmental issues had been recognized and integrated as a central part of the immediate United Nations post-conflict humanitarian effort.

In October 1999 UNEP presented its findings in the report entitled *The Kosovo Conflict – Consequences for the Environment and Human Settlements*. This drew a number of important conclusions on the post-conflict situation in the region and – in particular – singled out four heavily polluted environmental ‘hot spots’ (Pancevo, Kragujevac, Novi Sad and Bor), for immediate humanitarian assistance.

Early in 2000, in response to encouraging reactions from several governments, the European Union and international organizations, UNEP carried out a detailed feasibility study, to define the exact scientific and financial requirements for urgent clean-up projects at the four hot spots. In March 2000, clean-up measures for the four hot spots were included in the list of priority projects at the funding conference organized under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. By the late summer of 2000, following positive initial responses from many governments, and pledges from several European countries to support additional activities, UNEP was in charge of a major environmental clean-up project in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

This report documents in detail how, during a period of four-and-a-half years (mid-1999 to December 2003) UNEP went about assessing the environmental consequences of the war and implementing a pioneering clean-up project to address serious conflict-related environmental damage.

These efforts have helped to secure fresh drinking water for tens of thousands people, remediated contaminated soil and groundwater, removed and transported for final treatment hundreds of tons of hazardous waste, rehabilitated wastewater treatment capacities at industrial sites, installed water and air quality monitoring stations and strengthened na-

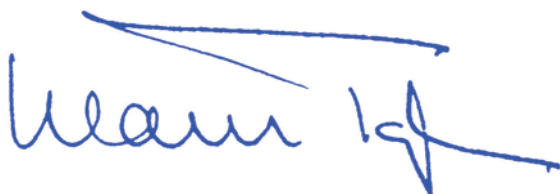
tional and local environmental management capacities in several important areas. This publication signals the completion of UNEP's post-conflict activities in Serbia and Montenegro and the handover of the clean-up programme to the national authorities.

UNEP was able to rise to the challenges of this task thanks to close cooperation with the environmental authorities of Serbia and Montenegro. In addition, the relevant municipalities, factory and site owners at the environmental hot spots, and universities and environmental institutes within the region provided valuable advice and support. The European Commission and its European Agency for Reconstruction was a supportive and strong partner throughout this process. Moreover, the activities were supported by all our UN partners based in Belgrade. In particular, I would like to single out the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which acted efficiently as our implementing agency.

I am especially grateful to the governments of Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland for having provided generous financial support for the environmental clean-up project, and to all the environmental experts, both local and international, that made the environmental clean-up in Serbia and Montenegro a success. This proven model – for post-conflict assessment followed by concrete actions on the ground – has since been initiated by UNEP in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and most recently in Liberia. The environment is now an established component of all United Nations post-conflict activities.

Of course, whenever possible the United Nations' first priority is to prevent conflict from happening in the first place and to promote the conditions under which peace and stability can flourish. However, if and when conflict does break out, there is a clear duty to provide urgent assistance. Environmental conditions – from the air that people breathe and the water they drink, to the ecosystems that support forestry, farming and fishing – have a crucial influence on the success of efforts to rebuild shattered communities and livelihoods. Only by ensuring environmental security can the wider goals of post-conflict reconstruction and human development be sustained.

The closure of UNEP's post-conflict activities in the Balkans is a positive signal. It demonstrates that, overall, South Eastern Europe is progressing from conflict to peace. I am pleased that UNEP has been a part of this process. In keeping with the rest of Europe, our Regional Office will now coordinate UNEP's activities in the region.



Klaus Töpfer
United Nations Under-Secretary General
Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

Introduction

1.1 The Kosovo conflict

The 1999 armed conflict in the Balkans was triggered by the collapse of efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the Kosovo crisis. The Rambouillet peace negotiations failed and NATO initiated air strikes on targets within the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) a few days later, on 24 March 1999. Although the conflict was relatively short-lived, with NATO suspending its campaign on 10 June 1999, severe damage was inflicted on strategic infrastructure in the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro. The civilian population endured fear and hardship, while the displacement of thousands of families precipitated an additional humanitarian crisis affecting the whole region. In the wake of the conflict, it was clear to all parties that meeting urgent humanitarian needs had to be the paramount concern.

► Map 1. The Balkan Region and the Danube Basin



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