



On the Record: Civil Society in Kosovo – Rebuilding After the War

Issue 6: Earth Day Special, April 20, 2000

Contents

- **From the AP Editorial Desk**
- **Profile: Guri Shkodra, Young Ecologist**
 - **Dirt, Dirt and More Dirt**
 - **The International Community Messes Up**
 - **Poster Child for Reconstruction**
 - **Model Campaign**
 - **Branching Out for the Environment (and Other Campaigning Ideas)**
 - **Mapping Out the Garbage**
- **Remains of War**
- **The Environment in Guri's Words - "Plant Trees and Save your Life!"**
- **Visit the Website**
- **Earth Day Contacts**
- **Voices that Matter**

From the AP Editorial Desk by Iain Guest

This weekend (April 22, 2000) hundreds of thousands of environmental activists around the world will celebrate Earth Day. They will include 14-year-old Guri Shkodra and his group of Young Ecologists from Kosovo.

Guri lives in one of the world's most polluted countries. This is partly due to many years of neglect by the Serbian government and partly to last year's war, which reduced thousands of houses to rubble and littered the place with unexploded mines and bombs. Three weeks ago, ten youngsters were seriously injured in the village of Resnik while playing with a live grenade.

Piles of garbage, ruined buildings, clogged traffic, and uncontrolled air pollution -- this has been Prishtina's daily fare for month after dreary month.

Just this week came word of a new public health threat in the form of tularemia, a rare infectious disease that is carried by animals and thrives on contaminated food and water. The outbreak has spurred the U.N. Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) to launch an emergency clean-up of garbage.

Guri Shkodra decided it was time to act last summer, after returning from exile in Macedonia. Together with two friends, he started the Young Ecologists of Kosova. Their aim is to lobby on behalf of the environment.

Guri's group is one of the most determined new nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to emerge under UNMIK, and Guri has proved adept at exploiting the opportunities offered by the large international presence. But he also despairs at the inability of the international agencies to clean up his city, and this is one of the issues driving his campaign.

Like any advocate, Guri's main aim is to garner attention for the environment, inside and outside Kosovo. He has been staging events for the past nine months, and his group will be marking Earth Day this coming Saturday, by cleaning up one of the dirtiest primary schools in Prishtina and one of the city's few open spaces. He is also planning events for June 5, 2000 (World Environment Day).

Guri is hungry for contacts abroad and also for ideas. He feels that people in Europe and North America are only reading about ethnic hatred in Kosovo, and that they need to know more about the social and economic challenge of reconstruction. They also need to know that some Kosovars are trying to make a difference.

The Internet plays an important role in their campaign, although regular communications between Kosovo and the outside world can be difficult. In February, Guri apologized for being out of contact with us for several days. He explained that the sports center that housed the Internet café had burned to the ground.

We at the Advocacy Project are keen to help Guri. One of our associates, 15-year-old Andrew Siegel from Washington, DC, has designed a web site for Guri. The site is being launched this weekend, on the occasion of Earth Day. Readers will find references to relevant pages throughout this issue. The site plays a significant role in the Young Ecologists outreach to the international community and will be updated regularly.

Guri likes the idea of foreign students like Andrew joining his crusade, and he has asked for ideas in launching a poster competition for students in North America and Europe. He and his friends have designed a 'garbage map' of Prishtina, which locates all the uncollected piles of garbage in Prishtina and grades them according to size and smell. Guri wonders whether American school children can help him turn this map into a poster. The winning designer could visit him in Kosovo. We have promised to seek the advice of teachers, and let him know whether this is practical. There may be other ways to link Guri up with schools abroad.

We have also put Guri in touch with the organizers of **Earth Day**, which has special significance this year because it opens the new millennium. Earth Day is a marvelous catalyst for activists like Guri. His group's activities are being featured in Earth Day promotional material.

Finally, friends of The Advocacy Project in Germany have contacted Joschka Fischer, Germany's Foreign Minister and head of the German Greens, and asked him to send Guri a message of support. Mr. Fischer has replied, and his message will be posted on the Young Ecologists' web site. Guri has invited him to a conference they are planning on World Environment Day.

Guri is an energetic young advocate, who is shaking up the U.N. administrators of Kosovo and

putting Kosovo's squabbling political leaders to shame. Once they form a government in Kosovo he plans to give them a lot of heat for their indifference to the environment.

The Advocacy Project will continue to help Guri get his message out as widely as possible. Readers will find a list of those contacted in the second part of this issue. Please help us with your ideas. The goal is simple -- help Guri and his friends to clean up his country.

Profile: Guri Shkodra, Young Ecologist

'You can tell the air is bad because when you blow your nose what comes out is black'

On December 1, 1999 -- International AIDS Day -- Guri Shkodra and 40 other Young Ecologists of Kosovo dressed up as condoms, gave out a thousand examples of the real thing, and stopped the traffic on Prishtina's main street.

It was not the first time that Guri had ended up with his photo in the papers. But what, I asked, did AIDS have to do with ecology? 'Oh,' he said, without missing a beat, 'ecologists care about people.'

At fourteen, Guri is wise beyond his years. He navigates international agencies and garbage with equal skill. When the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) decided to hold an exhibition by young Kosovar artists last December, his group was one of the four sponsors. The Young Ecologists painted 40 pictures for the exhibition.

Guri's English -- self-taught -- is so good that he was asked to make the introductions. He got into a bit of a muddle when asked to translate from English into Albanian and Albanian into English all at the same time. But otherwise he carried it off without missing a beat. Public speaking seems to come naturally. His written English needs more work, as he himself admits. But he communicates his message, as readers will see below.

At one U.N. conference in Prishtina on 'NGO capacity-building,' Guri could be seen helping other participants to draft project proposals during the break. Most of the participants were more than twice his age. Later, during the same meeting, he apologized for having to leave and go back to school -- but not before formally handing over his seat to one of his colleagues. It was deftly done and also noticed by the organizers. Guri has his finger on Kosovo's pulse, dirty as it may be. Here is one young Kosovar who has found the perfect foil for his drive and ambition in the international agencies

Despite his furrowed brow and serious demeanor, Guri is also having fun amidst the bustling ruins of his capital. When I asked him to pose for a photo, he hopped on to a large pile of garbage next to a market while the tradesmen grinned. They were all oblivious to the health hazard it posed, but they understood a 'Kodak Moment'.

Dirt, Dirt, and More Dirt

Guri has made a prudent choice in targeting the environment, because pollution is one of

Kosovo's few growth industries. It's all around -- in the air, in the streets, in the ground, in the mind.

Some of this comes from misguided policies that were in place long before the war. For example, Kosovo's electricity comes from two huge and dirty coal-fired power plants that squat on the skyline above Prishtina and spread a thin film of carbon over the city's only elegant suburb. Before the war, they used the same high-sulphur coal that has destroyed forests throughout Eastern Europe.

This sort of neglect added the first layer of grime to Prishtina. Then came the war. Then the invasion of international aid agencies, starting in June last year. Prishtina's narrow streets were built for small cars. Now they are clogged with huge U.N. landcruisers and BMWs belonging to Albanian racketeers who can barely drive. By December, car accidents had overtaken landmines as the most serious threat to life in Kosovo.

Added to which, Kosovars have been pouring into the capital. Guri himself describes it as follows: 'Before the war there were 200,000 citizens in Prishtina. Now it is more than 500,000, including thousands of internationals. This high number of citizens is an enemy of a good and healthy environment. People came to live in Prishtina, because things are very difficult in the villages and smaller towns. They are not used to the environment rules and laws of cities. They have transformed Prishtina into a garbage dump.'

It would be hard not to agree. Prishtina is dotted with piles of stinking trash that turn into an evil-smelling soup whenever it rains. Occasionally a garbage truck will roll to a halt, and a disposal team will make a stab at scooping up the mess. But their scoopers are in a sorry state. Perhaps they too should be dumped.

Most of Prishtina's inhabitants have put up with non-existent services for years. They shrug their shoulders and continue to drop litter. But not Guri. He remembers when Prishtina was easy to live in. It breaks his heart to look at it today:

'Ten years ago the City Park was the best part of our city. It was full of trees, resting chairs, and it was so clean and healthy. But now it is destroyed. There is a small number of trees, there are no resting chairs (people took them in their homes). It is full of garbage, and there are no garbage baskets. Half of the trees are cut down. They have even built houses in the middle of the City Park (even though that it is illegal). It is terrible....'

Guri and his Young Ecologists have compiled a 'top ten list' of environmental horrors in Kosovo. Here are four, again in his own words:

'GARBAGE! There is no effective way to deal with it. Burning garbage piles in town. No recycling! You cannot breath from the smoke. What little open spaces exist are covered in garbage.

'AIR POLLUTION! There are no scrubbers on the power plants. Snow turns black. Vegetables grown near Obilic (the two power stations) are tainted. Cabbage has black soot within the folds

of the leaves. You can tell in the market which farmers grew their veggies near Obilic although they try to hide it. You can tell when you are running around at school for physical education that the air is bad. There is no gym at the school. The children all run outside. You can tell the air is bad because when you blow your nose after being outside what comes out is black.

'WATER POLLUTION! High incidences of lead, since the pipes are old. Waterways are used as places to dump old cars and just about anything else.

'NO GREEN AREAS! The only park in Prishtina is home to a pack of wild dogs.

The International Community Messes Up

Unlike Kosovars, international officials growl with anger when they see litter being dropped. Yet waste disposal has -- until recently -- been one of the United Nations' more spectacular failures. Here is the way it has been described to *On the Record*.

Before the war, waste disposal was managed mainly by Serbs (like other utilities such as water, electricity, telecommunications, etc.). Most Albanian neighborhoods and communities were left to clean up their own streets and dispose of garbage. This was done mainly by volunteers, under the coordination of an 'environment council.' (This was one of the bodies established by the 'parallel society.')

When KFOR first entered Prishtina in June, the city was littered with debris. Britain's KFOR contingent had been allocated Prishtina, and it was decided that waste disposal would be taken over by the British Army's Royal Engineers -- but as a stopgap measure only. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) set up a water and sanitation unit, but this too was only supposed to be an interim measure.

Several engineers went with a representative from Hygiene Technica, the public utility in charge of garbage collection, to inspect the city's landfill. They found that it had been crammed with ammunition, RPG grenades, rockets, Serbian uniforms, dead animals, and even stacks of Yugoslav currency.

Local workers had not been paid for several months, and the British government's aid agency (DFID) agreed to provide a one-off payment of 70 DM per worker to get the work started. Within two weeks, 147 Hygiene Technica employees were at work, picking up garbage and trucking it to the landfill.

They were handicapped by the fact that the Serbian forces had stolen the garbage trucks and equipment when they pulled out. In July, UNHCR provided five trucks, which had been used in the refugee camps in Albania. But most of the trash was collected by the Kosovars, using their own private vehicles. KFOR and Hygiene Technica divided up the city. KFOR's British engineers took the six largest and most strategic piles of garbage in the city (including the market and a bridge), while the local fleet took the rest.

This system operated for the next few weeks. The problem was that UNMIK did not have the

funds to pay regular stipends to service workers or professionals (doctors, teachers, etc.). In September, the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) provided another one-off grant of 150,000 DM. Most of this was allocated to machinery; the rest to salaries.

By September, KFOR was trying to shed civilian tasks. Its British engineers-turned-garbage-disposal experts were rotated out of Kosovo, and KFOR handed the landfill over to UNMIK. UNMIK could not handle it, so it was passed back to KFOR who then passed it to a new contingent of British engineers, who still have it.

KFOR remains actively involved in the garbage business, particularly when it comes to working with community groups. Just recently, French KFOR began Operation 'Clean City' in the northern town of Mitrovica, where 2,000 children were recently involved in a 'clean environment day.' In Prishtina, KFOR soldiers are working alongside former Kosova Liberation Army (KLA) guerrillas organized in the Kosova Protection Corps (KPC) and community groups to clean up neighborhoods.

Within the UNMIK structure, we understand that garbage disposal falls under the broad category of civil administration, which is headed by Tom Koenings, who has a long and distinguished record as an environmentalist in Germany. The United Nations has allocated 4.3 million DM for waste disposal in the UN's consolidated budget for the year, with 1,383 workers employed throughout Kosovo.

In spite of this, it has to be said that to most Kosovars the U.N. strategy for the environment remains as murky as the pollution that hangs over the city. Guri puts it bluntly: 'In Prishtina exists a garbage company called 'Hygiene Technica,' and they don't seem to care about cleaning this city of garbage. UNMIK also doesn't seem to care about cleaning this garbage which is killing the people's life.'

That seems unfair. When we saw Hygiene Technica workers removing garbage last December in biting cold, they were doing it with a broad smile and obvious dedication to the task. The problem was their equipment, which was clearly on its last legs. Hygiene Technica needs investment badly. This is one of the many tasks that should fall to the European Union.

There is, of course, a risk in putting too much emphasis on garbage. Like any hardened activist, Guri would be the first to agree that there is more to the environment than litter and waste. It's just that this is what people see and smell.

Poster Child for Reconstruction

Guri's interest in ecology began before the war, when (at the age of 12) he attended a workshop in Prishtina organized by the Open Society Institute. The Institute supported a club that organized events and outings. One was to the Germia mountain, near Prishtina.

To this day, it stands out among Guri's childhood memories: 'Germia is a mountain, 6 kilometers near Prishtina. This is the only place in Prishtina where people go to have a rest. This mountain is full of different kinds of trees and animals. Here you can find one of the most dangerous

snakes in Europe. It is full of fresh air. Some doctors say that Germia was used to treat many diseases. In Germia there is also a pool, the only pool in Prishtina. It has lots of stadiums (basket one, football, volleyball, tennis).'

Guri and his friends took photographs of the trip. They then held an exhibition and published some of the pictures. Early on, they were aware of the importance of outreach and education. They made a 'perfect garden' and held discussions on pollution.

Guri's transformation to activist came during his exile in Macedonia, where he stayed with an uncle. With time on his hands Guri began to plan ahead and try to figure out a role for himself in his country's reconstruction. He realized that wars are messy. It had to be the environment.

After the war, he returned to Prishtina and sought advice from a teacher, who told him to open an office. This did not seem like a good idea. What use is an office without a cause, he wondered? Instead, he joined up two other classmates, Dren Ukmata and Arber Istrefi. Together, they decided to form the Young Ecologists of Prishtina.

Their first activities were aimed at young children. Guri tried out the message on his five-year-old brother to see how much he understood about the environment. Quite a lot, it turned out.

Armed with advice from the youngster, Guri and four other Young Ecologists toured all of the kindergartens of Prishtina between January 16 and January 28 and talked about ecology to kids between the ages of five and seven. They also handed out coloring books -- at the suggestion of Guri's brother. The money for this came from UNICEF.

It is more difficult to get through to the older kids of Kosovo, partly because parents set such a shocking example. But they do seem open to learning when the message comes from their own peers. In addition to which Prishtina's schools are littered with debris.

When we met, Guri and his group were trying to put an end to a disgusting game in which children capture birds (which they find on the roofs) and cut their wings. The Young Ecologists get the attention of their young audience when they mention the birds. They explain that the practice endangers the lives of the birds, which in turn devalues the environment in which the children live.

After one meeting, they decided to make a birdhouse, which they now use as a model in discussions. 'First, you must find a safe place for the birds -- one that can be seen by them all. Then you make a house. Then you must put some bread and water in the top. The house can be built by you and it could save the birds lives, which are in danger.'

On another occasion a group of Young Ecologists were out walking when they saw a large piece of broken glass. One of them, Kujtim, had the idea. They hired a taxi and took the glass to the office of the Open Society Club. Then they called a glassmaker. Using money from the Open Society, they made an aquarium. Many fish were soon swimming in their new home.

Guri has received small grants from a large number of the international agencies present in

Prishtina. It's easy to see why. He is the perfect 'local partner' for the UN peace mission. He represents youth (one of the United Nations' most favored categories). He is brimming with initiative, instead of fatalism. His goals are irreproachable (in contrast to the Albanian kidnappers, killers, and mafia who always seem to be hogging the headlines).

The young man is proof positive that Kosovars care and that their country has a future. No wonder he became a poster child for reconstruction last year.

Model Campaign

The group's activities show an instinctive sense of what the agencies need. Last September, the Young Ecologists took a part in a festival called 'Freedom, I won't let you down.'

'We did ecological things,' says Guri. 'First we cleaned all the places where the festival would be held. Then we built a small city from recycled materials opposite of the National Theatre in the center of Prishtina. With that we tried to tell to people that we can use garbage for many things.'

They also cleaned up and painted an old abandoned Volkswagen. Within a day, the street was just as filthy and the wreck had been towed away. This was too bad. It was far from being the worst eyesore in Prishtina. But at least, as Guri observed, something was getting removed. And they had managed to capture their creation on video.

They produced a poster urging Kosovars to 'save their environment' and then took it to UNICEF, which printed 60 copies. They persuaded the Open Society Institute to donate 60 DM for a new 24-page magazine (Ecologija) and ran off 200 copies for distribution in schools. The next edition of Ecologija, they say, will have a print run of 2,000. Guri tells us that 80 percent of the articles are 'ecological' and the rest are for 'youth amusement.' Some of it is reprinted and can be found on Guri's website.

Last Christmas, they put up a tree in the UNMIK garden (measuring just under eight meters, as Guri tells us), gave a small concert, and handed out presents to kids. Two Young Ecologists dressed up as clowns and five more as Santa Claus. After the parade, children from the Elena Gjika primary school sang some songs, and the Young Ecologists handed out 800 presents.

More recently, they protested the war in Chechnya with the theme: 'Rockets pollute the environment.' They know when to be politically correct. Branching Out for the Environment

Guri and his two co-founders, Dren and Arber, have taken great care in building their organization.

When we talked last December, the Young Ecologists had 20 members in Prishtina, and another ten in the towns of Gjilan and Gjakova/Djakova. (They understood the importance of establishing a presence outside the capital). The organization has four sections: eco-art, eco-health, eco-school, and eco-press. Seven members sit on the board, each with responsibility for a different section.

Guri and his two co-founders serve as directors, but the three have decided that they do not need an executive director. This shows more maturity than many more established NGOs, which are deeply committed to hierarchy.

Nor is it easy to share power in an NGO. Guri provides the vision, but he also takes care to preserve the appearance of a triumvirate and not upstage his two co-founders. The more they see themselves as equals, the more inclined they will be to act on Guri's ideas.

It made me chuckle to see the three of them together. Dren and Arber are more relaxed, more like teenagers. They seem ready for some horseplay but are subtly kept in line by Guri. Physically, the three are very different. Guri is the smallest, with sharp, intense features. He is always thinking ahead to the next move. His frown seems to say that whichever way he goes, it will not be easy.

When asked to describe their movement, the three friends compared it to 'a tree whose branches spread out into smaller branches.' I liked that description. Community campaigns are a bit like trees, in that they derive their nutrition from their extremities.

Earlier this year they applied for registration as an NGO under UNMIK. They had to sign on in their mothers' names, because they are all under the age of 18.

Mapping Out the Garbage (and Other Campaigning Ideas)

The Young Ecologists are fizzing and brimming with plans, hopes, schemes, and dreams.

They've decided (rather sensibly) that their magazine is a good product around which to organize, and they want to publish articles from the World Bank and the U.N. Environment Program. They are also looking for an office, computers and the 'many other things that are needed for publishing of one magazine.'

They're always on the look-out for a newsworthy event. They would like to plant some trees with the demobilized KLA soldiers who are now the Kosova Protection Corps and are looking for good public places. They love the idea of mounting an action around World Environment Day on June 5.

One of the three, Arber, is trying to involve his mum. She is a doctor, and Arber has asked her and some friends to accompany them to villages and do health education. The kids will take the opportunity to do a presentation about the environment. This will hopefully happen in the spring. Later in the year, they hope to make a second visit and clean up the villages.

When I left, Guri was designing a 'garbage map' of Prishtina's black spots. He emailed us with the plan:

'UNMIK and Hygiene Technica say that they don't know where these places full with garbage are. So we'll tell them! We have decided to create a garbage map of Prishtina, a map that tells where are those places that transforms city of Prishtina into 'garbage city.'

'First we will search for these dirty places. Then we will take a map of the city and place an icon on it for each garbage site we found. Then we will send hundred copies to UNMIK, OSCE, and Hygiene Technica. The other maps that are left we will send to some shops. These maps will be distributed by our members. We hope that by showing the magnitude of the problem so publicly the administration will be forced to act.'

Guri was true to his word. It took him about a week to find a map, locate the garbage, and mark them on a street map of Prishtina. Scanning their location, I remembered some of the worst piles quite well. They could soon be tourist sites, if not removed.

After Sabit Rrahmani, the Ashkali, Guri was the most natural politician I met in Kosovo. Is it all just a little too perfect? A little too calculating? A little too politically correct?

Probably. But it's certainly much easier to take than those Kosovars who cry freedom and then go out and beat up aging Serbs. My feeling was that if Guri can rise to the top in such chaos, more power to him. And if Kosovo's long-suffering environment can benefit at the same time, so much the better.

Remains of War

When two adversaries are locked in combat, the environment gets caught in the middle. What is more, the damage usually lasts longer than the fighting.

Nothing is nastier than landmines and unexploded ordnance (bombs, shells, bullets). When the Yugoslav army retreated from Kosovo last June, it left behind 425 minefields in Kosovo. NATO's own figures show that NATO dropped 289,000 cluster bombs on Kosovo, and that as many as 30% may have failed to explode. Cluster bombs resemble tennis balls, which makes them interesting to curious children. Although maps of minefields were readily available, it took several months before NATO would declassify the location of cluster bombs.

Landmines and unexploded ordnance took a heavy toll when the refugees started to pour back to Kosovo early in June. A recent report by the **United Nations** found that there had been 424 accidents since June, 92 of which were fatal (S/2000/177, March 3, 2000). Three weeks ago, on April 4, six ten year-old children were seriously injured in the village of Resnik, while playing with a grenade.

There has been controversy over the use of 30 mm armor-piercing bullets by NATO 'Warthog' planes. These bullets have tips made from depleted uranium, which helps them penetrate thick armor or underground bunkers. The risk from radiation was dismissed during the actual war, but when Western de-mining teams sought guidance on how to handle the spent bullets after the war, they were told to 'exercise caution' and warned not to inhale dust.

The bullets are proving hazardous to relations between the United Nations and NATO. The United Nations set up an environmental task force under a former Finnish Environment Minister, Pekka Haavisto. On March 21, according to Reuters, Haavisto said that NATO had sent a letter to the UN confirming that 31,000 rounds had been fired during 100 missions over Kosovo during

last year's war. But, he said, NATO had not provided information about Serbia and Montenegro, and had generally obstructed his group's efforts to find out more about the extent of pollution caused by such weapons.

During the war, many Western newspapers reported that NATO's bombing damaged the environment outside Kosovo. On May 27, the Romanian government reported the fires from NATO bombing were causing acid rain in Romania, and could even be hurting the flora and fauna in the Black Sea region. The Romanian government estimated that in one three-day period in April, the level of zinc in the river Danube (which provides drinking water for 10 million people) rose up to 55 times above the safe level.

During the 78 days of bombing, NATO also attacked oil refineries and chemical plants that were considered strategically important for the Serbian war machine. One fierce attack on a petrochemical factory at Pancevo was said by one report to have released tons of carcinogens into the air and toxins into the ground. These included ammonia, mercury, and dioxin. Given the long-term effects of such pollution, all of these incidents need follow-up monitoring by Haavisto's group and others.

From the Diary

It was just a matter of time before Guri Shkodra and his friends decided to go global and turn to the Internet in their quest for a cleaner world. The world wide web is the perfect tool for this sophisticated man-child.

So they settled in for an afternoon at the office of the **Internet Project Kosovo**, which at the time allowed free access to the Internet for ordinary Kosovars, and sent out some messages explaining what they were up to.

Here is what they wrote:

'We have done many projects -- e.g., we took part in 'festival for Children's and youth.' First we cleaned the main road of Prishtina, and then we made small city from recycled materials. We have done some small posters with ecological advisers. We have our magazine Ecologija (ecology) We would like to be in contact with you. Sincerely, youth NGO 'Group of Young Ecologists.'

This took an hour to draft, and it was sent first to Joschka Fischer, leader of the German Greens and Germany's Foreign Minister. It was a measure of Guri's confidence.

Unfortunately, there was no reply. Guri was shocked. He had expected the German Foreign Minister to reply immediately. In a way, I was quietly relieved to finally see a sign of naivete from this 14-year-old. It was not for me to suggest that politicians have other priorities than Kosovo -- even those like Mr. Fischer, who are committed to the environment.

I was curious how Guri had found the Minister's email address, within only two days of working the Internet. Guri gave me a look of scorn: 'We're professionals!' he said. Ask a silly question....

By the time I left Kosovo in December, they had still not heard from the minister. That, happily, has now changed. The full text of Mr. Fischer's reply will be posted on the Young Ecologists' website.

The Environment in Guri's Words - "Plant Trees and Save your Life!"

The following extract from the first newsletter of the Young Ecologists was translated for On the Record by Guri and his classmates. It took a lot of effort on their part and had to be done after classes. Guri apologized for his poor English. We told him that it was just fine. It has only been slightly edited.

1. What is Ecology?

Ecology is about the relationship between people and vegetable, people and animals. It's a tree that has very long branches.

If you can't know what ecology is, ask yourself the following questions. What happens with garbage? What happens with trees? What happens with animals? All this is ecology.

2. The Environment and Me

If we do something for the environment, environment will do something for us.

People live together with other living beings. We help each other. We both need the things without which there will be no life - like water, sun and air.

We must take action and fight against ecological and environmental problems, which are destroying our environment, which are destroying our life.

So, don't forget! If we do something for the environment in the same way environment will do something for us.

3. Water

Water is one of the things that we need to live. Nearly 80% of earth's surface is water. But 97% of that water is ocean, which is not for drinking. 2% of water is ice and we don't use this kind for drinking.

That leaves only 1% of water for drinking. This will fall to zero if we don't stop using water like we're using it now. If you want to help the world, stop using water too much!

4. Energy and Environment

Everyone needs energy - for heating, for light, transport and other things. We get that energy by ways which destroy our environment. Especially the environment in Kosova, where industries don't have filters.

We don't want to say to you "don't use energy." Instead, we want to say - "use energy for better things than you are using now!"

You could start helping the world by not using energy for everything. You could start in your home. For example, when no one is in the room, put your lights off and close your window properly. Help your parents to insulate your house (All these things would save 20% of energy).

5. Protect Nature

Many animals and vegetables today are at risk. Industry and people are destroying the environment. Many vegetables are despairing, some of them are despairing from polluted air. In order to get the good life - the leather jackets and the fancy furniture - millions of animal lives are killed every year.

Some of the animals are transported into zoos. Some are sold. Some are used for different medical purposes. So many animals are at risk and many of them are despaired. Many organizations, like World Wildlife Found (WWF), fight against killing animals.

6. How Can we Use Garbage?

We can use garbage for many things:

Broken glasses - can be used for putting a flower in it;

Papers and newsletter - can be used again;

Broken glasses - we can build an aquarium. (Young Ecologists made one)

7. Trees are Useful

Trees are very useful to the earth and environment. They have many functions, like:

Productive: Look around and see the many things obtained from trees - chairs, desks, pencils etc. Trees are used to treat diseases. Many trees and vegetables can be eaten;

Protection: Trees are homes for many animals. They protect us from loud noise etc.

Cleaning: Trees and vegetables take in CO₂ and produce O₂, making the air fresher.

Creative: Trees inspire many artists, drawers, singers, writers, they provide a place where we can have a rest and fresh air...

As you can see the trees are very useful. But people destroy trees because they do not know how useful they are. Plant trees, protect the old trees, save your life.

8. Pollution

Why is pollution so bad for us? How do we pollute the air, water or earth?

- Air pollution. Many times we can see or feel polluted air, which comes from industries, houses, from different cars or garbage. But there are many other kinds of pollution that we can't see, like: CO, CO₂, NO₂, CFC, etc. What does polluted air do to us? It destroys our life. From polluted air we get many breathing diseases, which can cost us a life. Save yourself - don't pollute the air...

- Water pollution. Polluted water can damage vegetables, animals and people health. Polluted water comes from industries, from garbage (thrown in oceans). But, we can also pollute the water in our homes too, by using bad detergents that contains some dangerous chemicals. We must always take a care not to buy detergents that contains those kinds of chemical elements.

- Noise pollution. Loud noise in big cities is very bad for human beings. Loud noise comes from different industries, cars, different electrical things etc. It can destroy our ears, and it doesn't let us to read and learn. Many scientists say that workers who work in loud noise cannot hear well after ten years. Some cities have a rule that bans loud noises in parks, in places where people live.

Visit the Website!

The website of the Young Ecologists of Kosovo is now ready for visitors.

It has been designed by 15 year old Andrew Siegel from St. Albans School, Washington DC, who runs his own web design company. Andrew's server is currently down, but once it is up and running readers can see some of his other designs. They include the first website for his primary school in northwest Washington (Blessed Sacrament).

The Advocacy Project put Andrew in touch with Guri Shkodra in Kosovo, but had nothing to do with the design and content of the site. In fact, we saw it for the first time this morning. Both Andrew and Guri were determined to get the site posted in time for Earth Day, which they strongly support. Andrew will be visiting the events on the Mall in Washington Saturday, while Guri is cleaning up a primary school in Prishtina.

It needs to be stressed that the web site is a work in progress. Guri will shortly post the text of a message of support that he recently received from Joschka Fischer, head of the German Greens and Germany's Foreign Minister. He will also post new photographs of his campaigns and the text of new issues of the Young Ecologists magazine 'Ecologija' (in English and Albanian).

If, as he hopes, Guri is able to organise a meeting for World Environment Day (June 5) he will keep his readers informed through the website.

Guri and Andrew have shown that the internet can provide an important boost to advocates, and campaigns. As we noted in part One of this issue, however, the email connection between

Kosovo and the outside world is still very unpredictable. This underscores the importance of providing regular access to the internet for Kosovar civil society. This will be the subject of a forthcoming issue of this series of On the Record, which will look at the Internet Project Kosovo (IPKO).

This issue, on the environment, is being sent to the following organizations, all of which are engaged in working for the environment in Kosovo or otherwise. This list is a cross-section of the campaigning environmental groups that can be found through the internet. It is not comprehensive.

Earth Day Contacts

4500 groups in 181 countries have now joined the Earth Day 2000 campaign.

15 countries in Eastern and Central Europe will be marking Earth Day with events. According to Earth Day organisers, "many communities are calling for stronger initiatives on renewable energy and energy efficiency to help combat air and water pollution." Major Earth Day events will be taking place in Warsaw, Zagreb, Vilnius, Bucharest, and Prague.

For more information on Earth Day in Kosovo and follow-up, contact Melita Ivanova in Kosovo. Email: mivanova@rec.org. For information on Earth Day European events, contact Frana Milan. Email: fmilan@earthday.net. For more general information, check out the **Earth Day website**.

Email the Earth Day 2000 team at: worldwide@earthday.net. website: The Regional Organizer for Europe, is (Earth Day Network, 91 Marion St. Seattle, WA 98104 USA. Tel: + 1.206.876.2000, Fax: + 1.206.682.1184).

Zelena Akcija: according to Earth Day, a "top notch" environment group that is based in Croatia and works throughout the Balkans. Frana Milan from Earth Day will put the Kosovo Young Ecologists in contact with Zelena Akcija. Adress: OzaLJSKA 93/11, 1001 Zagreb. Croatia. Tel/fax: 385 1 3631 362. Email: zelena-akcija@zg.tel.hr.

Balkan Sunflowers: a group of volunteers that began working in Croatia during the mid 1990s, during the war. Balkan Sunflowers currently run projects in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo, where they are working to clean up the towns of Peja and Djakova with other NGOs. (Email: balkansunflowers@mir.org.)

Sacred Earth Network: helps environment groups in the fourteen republics of Northern Eurasia to use information technology in their work.

NATO's Kosovo Force: is taking the lead of much of the clean-up work in cities around Kosovo. (Email: kforpic@main.kfor.nato.int)

Voices That Matter

- International Rivers Network: environmental group based in Berkeley, California, which campaigns on behalf of people affected by dams, and to protect the world's natural waterways. Each year, IRN organises a poetry and art competition for schoolchildren around the theme of watersheds. (These are defined as "an area of land that catches rain and snow, which drains into a marsh, stream, river or lake.") This year's 8 national (US) winners, and one international winner will win a trip to Washington DC in two weeks time (April 29), when they will be honored at an Award Ceremony at the Library of Congress, tour the White House and go on a canoe trip. There will also be regional winners. An excellent competition which spreads the word on the environment to schools. For more information, contact Pam and Shannon at IRN. Email: pamelam@irn.org; shannon@irn.org.
- **Center for Environmental Citizenship**: works with students on college campuses, mobilizing around environment campaigns and help student environment groups to network.
- **Environmental Defense Fund** (Washington, DC) has an active section for children interested in knowing more about the environment, or getting involved in a campaign. Contact Jennifer Coleman. (Email - members@edf.org.)
- **Kids for a Clean Environment** (Kids FACE) (Email kidsface@mindspring.com)
- **Kids for Saving Earth** (KSE) (Email: kseww@aol.com)
- **Arbor Day Kids** (Email hostmaster@arborday.net)
- **Earth Force**: (Email: earthforce@earthforce.org)
- Student Environmental Action Coalition (Email: seach@seac.org)
- Student Conservation Association Earthwork (Email: earthwork@sca-inc.org)