

## **PROCEEDINGS**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Central and Eastern  
European Conference  
for  
Regional and International  
Cooperation  
on  
Safety in Biotechnology**

16-18 October 1996  
Smolenice, Slovakia

Vienna, 1997



Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning  
and the Environment, The Netherlands



The Slovak Academy of Science  
Institute of Ecobiology, Slovakia



Federal ministry of the Environment,  
Youth and Family Affairs, Austria

This conference has been financially supported by the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Slovak Ministry of the Environment, the Dutch Ministry of the Environment, the UNEP Regional Office for Europe, the Austrian Ministry of Health and Consumer Protection and the Austrian Ministry of the Environment.

The contributions by the authors to these Proceedings have been used unchanged. They represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of their governments and the editors.

## **Impressum**

Medieninhaber und Herausgeber: Umweltbundesamt (Federal Environment Agency)  
Spittelauer Lände 5, A-1090 Wien (Vienna), Austria

Druck: Riegelnik, 1080 Wien

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ISBN 3-85457-370-7

# **2nd CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR SAFETY IN BIOTECHNOLOGY**

## **CONFERENCE STATEMENT**

The 2nd Central and Eastern European Conference for Regional and International Cooperation on Safety in Biotechnology was held in Smolenice, Slovakia from October 16 - 18, 1996.

The Conference was attended by 39 experts from Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In addition 13 experts from Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, USA, UNEP, industry and the Biotechnology Advisory Commission attended the meeting. The participants of central and eastern Europe presented progress reports on the state of the art of biotechnology and biosafety in their countries. Case studies on risk assessment concerning GMO releases were discussed and views were exchanged on implementation of mechanisms for safety in biotechnology, thereby focusing on the role and contribution of the UNEP International Technical Guidelines on Safety in Biotechnology.

The conference showed considerable progress in the implementation of some aspects of safety in biotechnology in the region of Central and Eastern Europe in accordance with the recommendations of the first conference held in Keszthely, Hungary 1995. Several countries expressed their interest in taking the process further by offering to host future conferences.

With respect to the implementation of biosafety mechanisms the crucial role of UNEP in supporting the regional conferences and in finalising and making available the UNEP International Technical Guidelines on Biosafety was recognised and highly appreciated.

The participants recommended:

- to continue and strengthen regional cooperation on biosafety thereby endorsing the recommendations of the first conference in Keszthely, Hungary, 1995;
- to implement adequate and flexible biosafety mechanisms in the countries of the region as soon as possible in order to take full advantage from the potentials of biotechnology;
- that a 3rd Central and Eastern European conference on biosafety should focus on biosafety regulation, and welcomed the offer of Hungary to host that conference as a satellite meeting to the 8th European Congress on Biotechnology in Budapest in August 1997;
- that a 4th Conference would focus on issues such as harmonisation of regulation and public perception, and welcomed the offer of the Czech participants to host such a meeting in Prague in 1998;
- future conferences should take into account the necessary involvement of the nationally responsible government authorities.
- that UNEP should continue its valuable role in promoting implementation of biosafety mechanisms in Central and Eastern Europe using the UNEP Guidelines as a model and promoting capacity building as well.

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## **OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE**

*Jozef ZLOCHA, Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me allow to welcome all of you to this meeting. Slovak Republic has been pleased to take the opportunity to organize this conference important for the development of biotechnological safety in the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe.

While the First Conference held in Keszthely, Hungary, 1995, resulted in a basic analysis of biosafety in our region and the concrete steps of how to achieve this biosafety being outlined, the present conference should indicate the solutions in the areas where the problems have occurred.

Slovakia can pride with several successes in this field. For example, Slovak Republic ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1994, thus expressed its responsibility for the issues covered by the Convention. These problems rank among the main goals of the Strategy of the state environmental policy which was approved by both the National Council and the Government of the Slovak Republic in 1993.

Our Ministry has prepared appropriate conditions for the active joining the activities implemented in the Convention. To bridge all the related groups, projects and programs, the National Secretariat of the Convention was created. Since January 1995, the new Act on Nature and Landscape Protection has come into force that has introduced a total landscape protection. The Convention on Biological Diversity is accepted as a general obligation. The Slovak Republic took part in both conferences organized by the Convention on Biological Diversity and has become a member of its executive committee.

The Slovak Government has established the Slovak Commission of the Convention on Biological Diversity which will be responsible for the implementation of the Convention in Slovakia.

The Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic has granted research projects oriented to biosafety (e.g. "Biotechnologies and Biosafety - Present Status in Slovakia and Possible Trends"). In the frame of this project, several important activities have been done, such as (i) elaboration of the recent status of the basic and applied biotechnological research in Slovakia, (ii) monitoring of the biotechnological processes utilizing the microorganisms, (iii) evaluation of the contribution of biotechnology to the increase of plant resistance and plant production, and (iv) analysis of the development of classical as well as new environmental biotechnology. To judge the present status and trends in legislation covering biotechnology, biosafety and biological diversity was also involved in this project.

To name the Slovak institutes doing research in this field and achieving the results comparable with those of foreign institutes, the Institute of Cell Biology of the Comenius University (problems of mutagenicity and antimutagenicity) and the Institutes of Virology, of Chemistry, of Molecular Biology, and of Ecobiology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (interferon questions and virus vectors for vaccination, transgenic experiments) can be mentioned.

Slovakia is actively engaged also in the international collaboration in the biosafety. It has had its own experts in the Working Group on Biosafety, first meeting of which was held in Aarhus, Denmark, in July 1996. The work in the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (meeting in Montreal, Canada, in September 1996) is also considered to be very important. We as well as the scientific institutes have established close collaboration with our colleagues in the neighboring states such as Hungary and the Czech Republic, however, the cooperation with the Western Europe is also intensively developing.

In these terms, I would like to evaluate highly and to express our gratitude to the states of the European Union, mainly the Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany and Austria, as well as the international organization UNEP for supporting our attempts in the field of development of all aspects of biosafety in our region.

We have been very pleased that the representatives of the majority of states of the Central and Eastern Europe and the representatives of the other European countries met themselves here in Slovakia in order to go ahead towards the solutions connected with biosafety in biotechnology and the closer collaboration in the development of new trends in this discipline (e.g. production of proteins, pharmaceuticals and drugs, bioremediation, biometallurgy, genetically manipulated organisms, extremophilic microorganisms, etc.).

Let me allow to express my conviction that this meeting does contribute to our common interest to be involved in the global effort to make the conditions for the environmental safety, peace, development and a life on the Earth, as well as to realize the conclusions resulting from the documents of e.g. the U.N.O. Conference on the Environment and Development, the Convention of the European Union, and all multilateral and bilateral environmental conventions.

I wish you a productive working enthusiasm and much success to this important conference.

*Dezider TÓTH*

*Institute of Ecobiology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovak Republic*

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished participants,

It is my greatest pleasure to welcome you all here in Congress Centre of Slovak Academy of Sciences in the Smolenice Castle. I am very happy to welcome among us the scientific secretary of the Slovak Academy of Sciences Dr. Ján Knopp, DSc., Dr. Helmut Gaugitsch from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Environment, Dr. Piet van der Meer from the Netherlands Ministry of Environment, and Mr. Sipi Jaakkola from UNEP/ROE in Geneva. In the same time I announce a welcoming written address from Dr. Jozef Zlocha, Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic.

The Second Central and Eastern European Conference on Regional and International Cooperation for Safety in Biotechnology is organized by the Institute of Ecobiology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, by the Federal Environment Agency of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Environment, and the Netherlands Ministry of Environment with the collaboration of the Slovak Ministry of Environment, the Austrian Ministry of Health and Consumer Protection, and the UNEP Regional Office for Europe. On behalf of the organizers I would like to thank for all generous donations supporting our meeting.

I wish to our Conference the highest effectivity in approaching the aim of implementation and coordination of environmental safety in biotechnology in the CEE region.

Herewith I declare the 2nd CEE Conference on Regional and International Cooperation for Safety in Biotechnology for open.