

CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALTIC STATES

Bulgaria
Hungary
Romania

Czech Republic
Latvia
Slovakia

Cyprus
Lithuania
Slovenia

Estonia
Poland
Turkey

Recent Developments

In December 1999, the Helsinki European Council, marking the end of the Finnish Presidency of the European Union, opened the process of negotiations for EU-accession to Bulgaria, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as Malta. These countries joined Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, which have been negotiating their accession since 1998. Accession Partnerships, which are the main instrument of the pre-accession strategy, stipulate short and medium-term priority measures to be taken by candidate states in a wide range of sectors. One of the most difficult areas may prove to be justice and home affairs (including immigration and asylum policy), in view of EU states' concerns that enlargement could allow a flood of illegal immigrants into the EU via its future eastern and south-eastern borders. In view of this process and similarities with some of the problems experienced in Central Europe, the UNHCR programme in Cyprus has been included in Central European operations. For a description of activities in Turkey, see the separate country chapter.

Strategic Objectives: Progress and Constraints

As described in the 2000 Global Appeal, UNHCR's overall objectives in Central Europe and the Baltic States are essentially the same as in Western Europe: to collaborate with governments in the development of policies, the setting of standards and the solving of problems; and to ensure that collective efforts respond to the protection needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection.

During the first weeks of 2000, the Bureau for Europe engaged in a major strategic planning exercise, involving all officer in Europe as well as relevant Departments and Divisions at Headquarters. This exercise resulted in the issuance of the public domain document *Strategic Directions 2000-2005*, which outlines the Bureau's vision, goals and objectives, and discusses the added value of UNHCR's role in a changing regional context. With particular reference to Central Europe and the Baltic States, strategic directions are provided in respect of three main themes or areas of priority concern, namely: quality asylum in a uniting Europe; statelessness; and support for refugees and UNHCR world-wide.

Cooperation with, and Advice to, Governments

The bulk of UNHCR's activities in the sub-region supported the consolidation of national asylum systems, by providing advice on legislation and implementing regulations, monitoring compliance, and strengthening the capacity of relevant state institutions. The EU-funded PHARE horizontal programme, co-managed by UNHCR, provided the framework for many of these efforts.

The protracted detention of asylum-seekers by several states remained a serious concern, calling for repeated UNHCR interventions.

In **Hungary** and **Slovenia**, the government of offices dealing with asylum-seekers and refugees have been re-organised for better co-ordination and greater efficiency. Progress is much slower in **Cyprus**. Though legislation governing refugee status was promulgated in January 2000, UNHCR continued to process refugee status



applications pending the staffing of the competent national administration. UNHCR continued to provide country-of-origin information through various means, including direct contacts between refugee status determination officers and refugees and/or UNHCR field staff with expertise on certain specific groups. UNHCR's capacity-building efforts focussed increasingly on second-instance (appeal) bodies in asylum procedures, both nationally and through a sub-regional network of judges.

The training of police staff and border guards was gradually mainstreamed into the regular curricula of national training institutes, with particularly promising results in **Bulgaria** and **Poland**.

Promotion and Advocacy

Throughout the region UNHCR promoted accession to the conventions on statelessness and gave advice on legislation (or implementation thereof) concerning nationality and citizenship. In December 1999, the Parliament of the **Slovak Republic** ratified accession to both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. **Lithuania** ac-

ceded to the 1954 Convention in February 2000.

Within the context of the commemoration of UNHCR's 50th anniversary, offices in the region stepped up efforts to encourage states to become donors. Efforts were also made to raise funds from the general public, such as the initiative in **Hungary** to open a separate bank account for contributions to the Refugee Education Fund.

UNHCR worked closely with the UN Association for **Bulgaria** to teach schoolchildren about human rights, peace and tolerance, notably through the Association's youth clubs. In Poland, a teaching guide for secondary schools on refugees and tolerance was prepared following consultations with authors on a wide range of subjects. UNHCR also launched a web page including some basic information on refugees and UNHCR, as well as information that is more of local interest, such as education materials available in Polish through UNHCR.

In connection with the problems of Roma, the UNHCR office in the **Czech Republic** started developing elements of prevention through a small programme of confidence-building be-

tween the majority of the population and the Roma minority. UNHCR conducted surveys and collected information on the problems of Roma in other countries as well, with a view to discussing remedial action with the authorities and various groups involved with human rights and minority issues.

Partnerships and Networking

With the need to prioritise and reduce budgets, UNHCR offices in the region renewed efforts to find donors to fund or co-fund training and capacity-building activities. It is hoped that funding received by a local NGO in Lithuania from the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights will serve as a precedent for others. As UNHCR inputs are phased out, more emphasis will be placed on developing community self-help and encouraging hand-over of certain recurring costs to the responsible ministries. In connection with the former, a group of refugee women in **Romania** have formed an NGO.

Regional support (from the UNHCR office in Vienna) facilitated the development of the refugee law clinics initiative through regional meetings in November 1999 and May 2000. Standards for clinic curriculum and management were agreed and networking was promoted. To ensure the expertise acquired by students in legal clinics in Poland is not lost, the statutes of a new NGO (staffed by legal clinic graduates) have been finalised and funding is being sought. The May regional meeting included participants from Belarus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Russia and Slovakia.

The PHARE horizontal programme has contributed to forging strong partnerships between EU member states and candidate countries, through joint planning, training, study visits, etc. Local teams have been strengthened in the course of the programme and the co-operation established is expected to continue beyond the completion of the programme at the end of 2000. Local EU delegations have learned more about progress made in the region on asylum issues and are now in a better position

to recommend future support. Another important aspect of the PHARE process has been NGO participation in workshops and round tables, which has enhanced their role as partners in the development of asylum in the region.

Through a regional pilot project with the Austrian Center for Country of Origin Information, Research and Documentation (ACCORD), co-operation was strengthened and better access to country of origin information was ensured. Internships of government and NGO counterparts at ACCORD are being negotiated.

The governments of Nordic states supported an agreement among the Migration Departments of the Baltic countries with a view to exchanging information and training interpreters. With support from Nordic governments and NGOs, training programmes in the Baltics have included country-of-origin information; detention; interviewing techniques; study visits to detention facilities in Norway and Sweden; training for border guards, lawyers and law students in legal clinics; as well as networking amongst lawyers.

Solutions

UNHCR continued to advocate integration for refugees throughout the region, which is still affected by the transit of those who move westward before their status is determined. There has, however, been more evidence in several countries of asylum-seekers seeing the region as one of final destination. Some of the countries in the region have begun to grant humanitarian status to asylum-seekers following, or in anticipation of, new amendments to their legislation.

Following the adoption of a Law on Regularisation of Former Yugoslav citizens without status in Slovenia in the fall of 1999, the Ministry of Interior received some 13,000 applications for regularisation. UNHCR is a strong advocate of this process and monitored the granting of permanent residence to over 7,000 of these appli-

cants in the first half of 2000. UNHCR, in close co-operation with the OSCE, also monitored progress made on the reduction of statelessness in the Baltics.

The majority of the Kosovars in the region opted to repatriate following the establishment of a United Nations Mission in Kosovars (UNMIK). Throughout the region there was a humane approach to their problems, avoiding mass or forced repatriation. UNHCR is working to ensure that those who opted not to return are given access to asylum procedures.

Resettlement is not promoted in the region, with the exception of Cyprus where, for the first time, a backlog of cases is being processed. Some 4,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, staying in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, have been resettled, primarily through Timisoara, in Romania, since September 1999. The Romanian authorities have generously agreed to extend this arrangement and the programme has shown how vital a part local authorities can play in such an operation, with the local population welcoming the refugees in transit.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region and countries within the region, opening balance and adjustments.

**Cyprus and Turkey were included under Western Europe in the 2000 Global Appeal.

***Covers promotion of refugee law in countries in Central Europe and the Baltic States.

	Initial Budget		Revised Budget		Total Funds Available*		Total Funds Obligated	
	AB and TF	SP	AB and TF	SP	AB and TF	SP	AB and TF	SP
Countries								
Baltic States	498'000	0	498'000	0	557'200	0	135'200	0
Bulgaria	902'478	0	930'708	0	383'600	0	383'600	0
Cyprus **	339'168	0	367'641	0	147'900	0	147'900	0
Czech Republic	733'431	0	747'068	0	340'900	0	340'900	0
Hungary	1'387'429	0	1'512'327	0	450'900	0	450'900	0
Latvia	323'989	0	299'986	0	146'800	0	146'800	0
Poland	811'071	0	823'974	0	292'800	0	292'800	0
Romania	1'187'421	0	1'234'293	0	554'776	0	551'700	0
Slovakia	742'713	0	768'556	0	308'900	0	308'900	0
Slovenia	1'460'974	0	1'461'686	0	565'400	0	565'400	0
Turkey **	4'573'978	0	5'034'329	0	2'472'504	0	2'422'300	0
Regional Projects ***	800'000	0	800'000	0	180'500	0	180'500	0
Sub-total	13'760'652	0	14'478'568	0	6'402'180	0	5'926'900	0
Bureau at Headquarters	473'800	0	493'223	0	203'091	0	203'091	0
TOTAL	14'234'452	0	14'971'791	0	6'605'271	0	6'129'991	0