Twinning as Aen Through the Eyes of an Old Member State

Ulrike Stärk

1. Introduction

The Austrian Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt GmbH) has a long-standing Twinning experience. Since the introduction of the Commission’s programme in 1998, Umweltbundesamt has been an actively engaged twinning partner, since Austria is sharing many borders and regional concerns with the accession countries/New Member States.

2. The Austrian Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt GmbH)

The Austrian Federal Environment Agency - Umweltbundesamt GmbH - was founded in 1985 by the “Federal Act on Environmental Control” as a national Government Agency attached to the Federal Ministry for the Environment. In 1999, an amendment of the Act redefined its statute as a Government-owned limited liability company which acts as the National Environment Agency for Austria. The objective of this reform was to clearly define the expert services of the Agency for the Austrian administration, while introducing modern management approaches and improving the possibility to implement externally financed projects in the public interest.

Due to its geographical position in Central Europe, and as neighbour of four new EU Member States and former accession countries, Austria for many years has been a key country to assist and cooperate with its Eastern and South-Eastern neighbours. In the area of institution-building for the Environment sector, the Austrian Federal Environment Agency has been successfully participating in Twinning Projects for nearly all New Member States and Accession Countries.

More than half of the Agency’s around 400 employees are experts with academic degrees from nearly all disciplines related to protection of the environment. They are thus able to cope with the problems of environmental protection in an interdisciplinary manner, providing expertise on the condition of the environment and its developments, as well as on measures to avoid or reduce environmental pollution, and to promote environmentally compatible and sustainable use of resources.

The Federal Environment Agency is the only Austrian specialist institution which deals with all areas of environmental protection on a nation-wide basis and whose single task it is to protect the environment. Since 1985, the Federal Environment Agency has been providing specialist support in the preparation of all laws issued by the Minister for the Environment, and drafts the national State-of-the-Environment reports submitted by the Environment Minister to Austrian Parliament.

Umweltbundesamt is the link between science and administration. The interdisciplinary and multiple approach allows quick and competent elaboration of comprehensive expertise for current issues in national and international environmental policy.

1 Umweltbundesamt, Spittelauer Lände 5, 1090 Wien, Austria. E-mail: ulrike.staerk@umweltbundesamt.at, staerk@sazp.sk. Internet: http://www.umweltbundesamt.at. Currently Resident Twinning Advisor for Twinning SK03/IB/EN/01, Institutional and Capacity Building in the Environmental Sector, in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia.
The integration of international, Europe-wide and national environmental information and data is the basis for the function as THE hub for environmental information.

At national level, the Agency co-ordinates environmental monitoring and reporting in cooperation with the nine Provincial Authorities, and operates the related national environmental registers and databases on hazardous chemicals, wastes, contaminated sites, air, water and soil quality etc.

At international level, one of the key legal functions of the Austrian Federal Environment Agency is to assure national cooperation with the European Environment Agency via the Austrian National Focal Point and the National Reference Centres for all thematic areas, which includes the Austrian contribution for building up the Reportnet infrastructure for European environmental reporting.

2.1 Accredited testing laboratory for environmental and GMO analysis

The chemical-analytical laboratories of the Federal Environment Agency, established in 1986, perform sampling and organic and inorganic trace analyses in all environmental media. The monitoring of environmental pollutants is needed to support political decision-making and to study emerging environmental issues. Various organic and inorganic pollutants, such as pesticides, PAH, VOC, hormones, pharmaceuticals, dioxins, heavy metals in water, soil, waste, sludge, compost, manure, air, PM10, products and other media are part of these monitoring programmes.

Since 1997 the Federal Environment Agency runs a molecular biological laboratory as well, focussing on qualitative and quantitative PCR-analysis of genetically modified organisms (GMO) in feed, food and environmental specimen using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Both laboratories maintain a quality management system in compliance with the international standard ISO/IEC 17025. Since December 2001 these two laboratories have been accredited as one “testing laboratory for environmental analysis and GMO-analysis”.

3. Practical application of experience in project work

For many years now, Umweltbundesamt has shared its extensive national and international experience, expertise and knowledge about emerging legislation and passed it on directly to project partners.

For example, the Groundwater and the Surface Water Units of the Umweltbundesamt have extensive experience in the design, establishment and management of monitoring networks for both rivers and groundwater, data management and national and international reporting obligations.

Internationally, the staff of the water units undertakes work for the European Commission, particularly within the context of the EU Water Framework Directive and the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. They have represented Austria in several EC WFD CIS Working Groups and the Umweltbundesamt was leader of CIS WG 2.8. Groundwater. In addition experts of the unit have been involved in water-related EU Twinning Projects under the PHARE Programme in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia. Furthermore, they carry out consultant work for EUROSTAT within the Multi-beneficiary programme for statistical cooperation with the Candidate Countries and for the International Convention for the Protection of the River Danube (ICPDR).

The Umweltbundesamt has been one of the partners of the European Topic Centre on Inland Waters since 1994, providing information and reports to the European Environment Agency (EEA). Within the European Topic Centre/Water it has been responsible for the development of Eurowaternet groundwater including the development of guidelines, the collection of groundwater quality data and the development and maintenance of the working database groundwater which is held at the Umweltbundesamt. It has also contributed to the development of the reference WATERBASE of the EEA.
Furthermore Umweltbundesamt for years has been a partner in the ETC the European Topic Centres (ETCs) for Air and Climate Change, Water, Terrestrial Environment, as well as Resource and Waste Management.


Sectoral expertise is backed up by a GIS competence centre and the Agency’s IT and Application Development Departments.

The project activities of Umweltbundesamt are, among others, within the framework of the PHARE Programme (both Technical Assistance and Twinning), the 6th Framework Programme, bilateral cooperation projects.

As mentioned above, Umweltbundesamt in line with its statutes carries out projects in the public interest, which naturally include international institution building projects on European environmental data exchange and reporting.

These included bilateral cooperation projects with Bulgaria (2001-2003; assistance to the Executive Environmental Agency to improve Priority Dataflow Reporting to the EEA and to set up a system for reporting to the European Commission), Serbia (support in starting operative reporting to EEA; complementary to EEA support project for Serbia/Montenegro), series of Twinning projects in Slovenia, a Twinning in Malta, with Umweltbundesamt as junior partner of NICO, Ireland, and a current Twinning in Slovakia with the Slovak Environmental Agency (SEA) as the main beneficiary.

All the mentioned projects had/have one thing in common, and that is a Priority Dataflow Workshop, organised and implemented jointly with EEA. The aim of these workshops was to improve the respective country performances on priority dataflow reporting as a practical, tangible and easily measurable goal.

4. Twinning

4.1 Definition of the term

Twinning is an initiative of the European Commission that was launched in 1998 in the context of the preparation for enlargement of the European Union. It was conceived as an instrument for targeted administrative co-operation to assist Candidate Countries to strengthen their administrative and judicial capacity to implement Community legislation as future Member States of the European Union.

Since 1998 more than 850 Twinning projects have been implemented in the 13 Candidate Countries and financed under PHARE or other pre-accession instruments. Twinning will continue to play a vital role in the context of Institution Building in the new Member States under the Transition Facility.

4.2 Reasons why Umweltbundesamt does Twinning projects

- Twinning projects are in line with the statutory sphere of work of Umweltbundesamt (“in the public interest”)
- Twinning has proved to be a good instrument for institution building (including information systems)
- are beneficial to both MS and New MS/accession country in terms of information exchange, sharing of experience and conceiving a new ideas to address (common) environmental issues
- can be the starting point for long-term cooperation activities (including joint application for projects).

4.3 Experience with Twinning Projects

Umweltbundesamt has been “twinning” since 1998 with 15 Beneficiary Countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey). So far, 23 projects have been completed, completed, 19 are ongoing.

Umweltbundesamt has been both lead and junior partner in both Twinning and Twinning Light Projects.

Twinnings with focus on environmental data reporting: Slovenia (Twinning and Twinning Light), Malta, Bulgaria (in bilateral follow-up), Latvia (Data reporting on acidification, eutrophication and integrated pollution), Morocco (Junior Partner, in preparation) and Slovakia (for further details see below).

Recognition of twinning projects as efficient institution building tool is increasing.

4.4 Twinning SK03/IB/EN/01 as an example for successful cooperation to improve reporting to the EU/European Environment Agency

The currently ongoing Institution Building Twinning project SK03/IB/EN/01 in Slovakia focuses on strengthening the administrative, monitoring and enforcement capacity in the environmental sector and on improving standardisation and reporting in the fields of air, water, waste and nature.

The guaranteed results of the project include the correct implementation of environmental legislation in the Slovak Republic in the identified areas, as well as a measurable improvement in the organization and results of national environmental data reporting from Slovakia to European institutions, in particular the European Environment Agency (EEA).

From an old Member State point of view it is particularly interesting to see a New Member State’s approach to dealing with the manifold reporting obligations to the European Commission (for Slovakia about 120).

Uninhibited by a complex traditional system of reporting obligations being allocated to different actors in the field of the environment, as it is the case in Austria, Slovakia has chosen a much more streamlined approach: the Ministry of Environment has delegated the responsibility for fulfilling Slovakia’s environmental reporting obligations to the Slovak Environmental Agency (SEA). Together with Twinning partner Austria, SEA is currently building an information system, which will help them to execute this demanding task involving many different institutions collecting and holding environmental data. To the author’s knowledge this “national Reporting Obligations Database” is unique in Europe, although other MS such as Germany, Italy are working on implementing the same idea.

At some point in the future, nearly all EEA member countries will have national elements linked to the European Reportnet, because it is conceived as an integrated system.

As mentioned before, one objective of the project is to improve Slovakia’s performance in priority data-flow reporting to the European Environment Agency (EEA).

The Priority Data Flows are national environmental data reporting obligations towards the European Environment Agency, which are of special importance for implementation of environmental legislation and policy-planning. They focus on agreed, stable and well-defined data collection areas, in order to allow countries to focus their resources to put regular data reporting procedures in place.
At present the **key thematic areas** covered are air pollutant emissions, air and water quality data as well as data on protected areas. These are used for the annual country scoring established by the European Environment Agency. All data collected in the priority areas are used in EEA's regular indicator-based reporting.

So far, Slovakia has made constant progress in field of Priority Dataflow Reporting, as depicted in the following slide:

In 2004 Slovakia had achieved a total score of 72% (of possible data set deliveries) in the overall performance of the EEA member countries, corresponding to 15th place in EEA ranking (of the 32 member countries).

Since the beginning of the Twinning project in July 2004, constant progress has been made in PDF-reporting. Now, one year later, i.e. in 2005 (relating to 2004 data) progress was again assessed in 12 priority areas.

As can be seen from the table, between 2004 and 2005 Slovakia managed to **continue its upward trend**, and with a total score of 78% (of possible data set deliveries, i.e. plus 6% compared to 2004) now occupies the **10th place** (i.e. up five notches) in **EEA ranking**:

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<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>63%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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The **improvement is due to**:
- International (Austrian) expertise with PDF reporting – Austria occupies rank one – was directly passed on to the Slovak experts, including hands-on training with different Reportnet tools.
- Increased awareness of reporting tasks among Slovak institutions as a result of a workshop and systematic follow-up on Priority Dataflows
- Streamlining of dataflows, better communication between institutions involved in PDF reporting

5. Outlook

Since its beginning in 1998 Twinning has become a successful and well-established tool for institution building. It is likely that this success story will continue - for the New Member States in the framework of the so-called Transition Facility, and that at least until 2006. The ten New Member States are welcome, potential new Twinning partners, adding their recent accession experience to the long-term (Twinning) know-how of "old" Member States, to the mutual benefit of all parties involved.