



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
**WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460**

THE ADMINISTRATOR

**Remarks by**

**WILLIAM K. REILLY**

**Administrator**

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

**OPENING CEREMONIES**

**REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER**

**Budapest, Hungary**  
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Thank you, Peter (Hardi), for that kind introduction.

This could not be a more joyful, exciting, or promising occasion -- for me personally, for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or for my colleagues in the U.S. government; especially the U.S. Peace Corps, the Agency for International Development, the U.S. Information Agency, and the Department of State.

We are, with this event, celebrating both the joy and excitement of freedom; and the vibrant promise of a cleaner, healthier, better way of life for the people of Eastern and Central Europe.

When President Bush announced in July of last year that he would be asking the U.S. Congress to support the establishment of this Center, he noted that "our shared heritage is the earth, and the fate of the earth transcends borders." Securing that heritage for future generations will require creative, cooperative efforts among nations to promote harmony, stability and sustainable, environmentally sound economic development.

This Regional Environmental Center is one such effort. We at the Environmental Protection Agency are extremely pleased and proud to have had a role in the President's outreach to Eastern Europe; and I am delighted to see so many prominent and environmentally concerned people from throughout the world here today to help inaugurate this Center.

Clearly the environmental restoration of Eastern and Central Europe is a monumental, and monumentally important, challenge. The environmental problems of this part of the world are enormous; in some places, they are catastrophic.

All around us are cities blackened by thick dust; rivers heavily contaminated by chemicals. Nearly two-thirds of the length of the Vistula, Poland's principal river, is unfit for even industrial use. The Oder River, which forms much of Poland's border with East Germany, is useless over 80 percent of its length.

Rain in the mountains of southwestern Poland has been found with a pH of as low as 3.0 -- approximately the same as vinegar. Less than half of the population of Hungary is served by adequate sewage systems; the water in nearly 800 towns and villages is believed to be unfit for human consumption.

The splendor of this city, Budapest, is nearly obscured at times by the exhaust from cars and buses. In Czechoslovakia, an average of 25 tons a year of sulfur dioxide is deposited on every square kilometer; over half of the forests are dying or damaged. Some 75 percent of the hazardous waste generated in Czechoslovakia is inadequately and unsafely stored.

Eastern and Central Europe are plagued by premature deaths, high infant mortality rates, chronic lung disorders and other disabling illness, and worker absenteeism. Infant mortality in Poland is 20 per 1,000; across the Baltic, in Sweden, it is just six per 1,000. Average life expectancy in Poland is some ten years less than in Sweden.

And the economic drain from these environmental burdens, in terms of lost productivity, disability benefits and health care, are enormous. Czechoslovak officials, for example, estimate that economic losses from environmental degradation now equal seven percent of the country's Gross National Product.

Let those who believe that pollution control is too expensive come to Eastern Europe to see what policies based on that premise have wrought.

Let those who say that some nations cannot afford environmental protection look at the economic drag of ravaged environments and wrecked lives.

Let those who believe that productivity and pollution control are in conflict come and see places where river waters are too corrosive even to

cool machinery; where economic growth is hobbled by sick workers and dying forests; where contaminated environments have relieved huge areas of their productivity and their usefulness.

In places where some of the basic resources of life are not protected -- the soils and the trees, the rivers, lakes and the air -- economies founder and growth cannot occur.

As I see it, our success in meeting the enormous environmental challenges ahead will rest on three key developments.

The first will be the consolidation of freedom and the creation of sound, stable democratic institutions in Eastern and Central Europe.

The opening of this Center today is only the latest in a remarkable series of events that history will record as the "Revolution of 1989." This largely peaceful revolution has profoundly changed the lives and destinies of millions of people.

I recall serving in the 1960s as an Army officer in Germany, with responsibilities for providing intelligence and security along the border between East and West Germany. In just four weeks, on October 3, that border will no longer exist!

Lenin once called liberty a "bourgeois dream." The brave and determined people of Eastern and Central Europe have dared to dream the dream of liberty -- and to turn that dream into reality.

But achieving freedom, thrilling and uplifting as it is, is only the beginning. The hard work now begins of building the stable social and political institutions that will both secure the blessings of liberty and insure that the will of the people is heard and heeded.

I recall asking one minister from an Eastern European country early last year: Why the sudden new priority to the environment on the part of

governments long insensitive to the issue? He replied, "We've never really had to pay any attention to the people before. Now that we do we find they are deeply angry about pollution."

(That minister, incidentally, as well as his government, is now gone.)

Genuine democracy will be the best guarantor of a sound environment. Where people have a voice they raise it on behalf of clear skies and clean water. And market economies will prove a far more effective and efficient means to protect environmental values and to generate the wealth to pay for cleanup than centrally planned systems, whose failures here are so shocking.

This Regional Center can help. It can help by assembling the knowledge and experience -- both good and bad -- of other nations, while serving as a catalyst in the development of creative new approaches to environmental management.

The economic, social and political changes now under way offer a unique opportunity to weave environmental protection and stewardship into the very fabric of the region's new social, political and economic institutions. Working with other nations and international organizations, the Center can provide information, expertise and technical assistance both to correct the environmental abuses of the past, and to insure that new industries are able to take advantage of the cleanest, most efficient technologies available.

The Center will focus its attention on three major issues: energy conservation -- an area of heightened urgency because of the current Mideast crisis -- the protection of the public health, and the prevention of pollution before it is created in the first place.

So that is the first requirement: freedom and an openness to new ideas about both the economy and the environment.

The second key element in the environmental restoration of Eastern and Central Europe will be the successful transition from socialism to healthy, growing market economies.

The lifting of the Iron Curtain has revealed to the world that authoritarian, centrally planned societies are much greater threats to the environment than capitalist democracies. The same policies which ravaged the environment -- the pursuit of all-out, no-holds-barred economic development, without regard for either human or natural resources -- also wrecked the economy.

There is a good reason that no economic benefits have been identified from all the pollution control costs the nations of Eastern Europe have avoided: healthy natural systems are the foundation for all human activity, including economic activity.

To overcome the bitter legacy of decades of environmental neglect, the new democracies of Eastern and Central Europe must encourage environmental investment in their new free economies. Here as elsewhere, economic growth must be the engine of environmental improvement; it must pay for the technologies of protection and cleanup.

But it must be environmentally sound, sustainable economic growth; growth consistent with the needs and constraints of nature.

And the third essential factor in the region's environmental renewal will be individual action.

Environmental protection is as much an individual duty as it is a responsibility of government and industry. People everywhere, in developed and developing nations alike, must embrace a new ethic of conservation and stewardship of nature. And they must apply this vision in their daily lives -- in home and workplace, during leisure time, as family members, as community residents, as producers, as consumers.

I look to the private conservation and environmental groups to play a leading role in fostering this ethic of environmental stewardship throughout society. Many courageous members of these organizations are here today, from Hungary and other countries; you have been in the vanguard not only of environmental action but of basic political reform.

I have been struck by the critical role environmental groups played in promoting democracy in the face of authoritarian oppression. Environmental protests by groups like the Danube Circle here in Hungary, Ecoglasnost in Bulgaria, and the Polish Ecology Club helped to galvanize public demands for the transformation of the old order.

And now, many of the leaders of environmental organizations hold elected or appointed positions in government. These private organizations are part of the new democratic structures now being erected; they will continue to train the leaders of the future. And they will nurture the environmental concerns that already have taken root, and foster sustainable democracies as well as sustainable economic growth.

The Regional Environmental Center can help to bring these groups together to work on issues of common concern, and it can provide information and assistance whenever they are needed.

To those who fear that nongovernmental organizations may be excessively idealistic or insensitive to economic realities, I suggest you engage them genuinely in the collaborative job of solving problems.

Groups invited to participate within the councils of decision tend to share the disciplines of governance and to be a source of creative proposals. Kept out, such groups can become hostile and extremist. That is a lesson hard learned in some countries, and Eastern and Central Europe can enjoy the advantage of their experience.

I must also stress the importance of regional cooperation to address the many shared environmental problems and common environmental concerns of Eastern and Central Europe.

Every country in the region shares at least one major environmental problem with its neighbors: transboundary air and water pollution affect many countries simultaneously. For several countries of Europe, more than half of all air pollution comes from beyond their own borders; what a powerful incentive to work together!

The Regional Environmental Center will be well positioned to provide information and assistance in dealing with all of these issues. It will also be available to serve as a neutral forum for discussion of difficult transboundary problems. And it will provide a contact point for working with such international organizations as the International Labor Organization, the World Health Organization, the International Energy Agency, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

I want to conclude by expressing my deep appreciation to all of the individuals and organizations whose commitment and efforts have made today's opening possible. And to our partners in this endeavor, let me say how privileged we feel to join you in this historic enterprise.

I also want to express my confidence in Peter Hardi, Steve Wassersug, and the Center's trustees; under their able leadership, this Center should prosper.

I once ran an environmental organization; each year it fell to me and our staff to design a program and projects and then to try to raise money to support them. I never had the luxury of being given funds and then being entrusted to design a program to spend them. So I envy you in the Center who have a blank tablet, a universe of important problems, and an invitation to write a critical chapter in the history of this region,



to play a leading role in the long-awaited and desperately important reconciliation of people and nature.

Henry David Thoreau, the spiritual and intellectual prophet of the American environmental movement, once defined independence this way: "To breathe after your own fashion; to live after your own nature."

That is the promise of this Regional Environmental Center, and of the democratic revolution that made it possible: the promise of living in freedom, and breathing freely. We in the United States look forward to working with all of you to make this promise a reality.

Thank you.