

# Sailing to Barcelona – Saving the Planet?

## A Mediterranean odyssey to WCC 2008

A mid-voyage report from Cagliari, Sardinia by Richard Clarke, Director of the Center for European Protected Areas research at the London University

At last! On Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> September months of planning came to fruition as the Balkan contingent of 'Sailing to Barcelona' gathered in the ancient Montenegrin port of Kotor. The quay is packed with families (including babes in arms), relatives and friends of the crew, here to wave goodbye (3 weeks is a long time) together with what looks like the cream of the Montenegrin armed forces, in their ceremonial white military suits. On deck, a ceremonial launch opened by the Mayor of Kotor, with some formal speechifying, from the Montenegrin Minister of Defence (a crucial player, for the Jadran is a training ship, but a ship of the fleet of the Montenegrin navy nevertheless), and from the Minister of Tourism and Environment, (a curious combination but perhaps appropriate in Montenegrin circumstance), each giving their good wishes for the voyage. A military band plays as the last ropes are cast, and the 75-year old sailing vessel Jadran – once the pride of the Yugoslav navy (the pre-War Kingdom and the post-war Socialist Republic), finally sets off.

The enterprise had started small. A coffee bar conversation in Belgrade, between staff in the IUCN South-East Regional Office, and the Serbian Institute of Nature Conservation (with which it is happily co-located) had led, first, to the possibility, of 'borrowing' a boat (presently moored in Trogir, up the coast in Croatia). belonging to one of the Institute's staff. But at only 4 metres long and with an outboard motor of some antiquity, it was unlikely to last the distance. Besides, he would have to ask his mother, and who knows what she would say? Or perhaps they could hire a boat from Barcelona or a nearby port for the occasion. But this would be '*šminka*' – a petty and inadequate gesture for such an important occasion. After all, the World Conservation Congress is a major event. Founded in 1948 as the world's first global environmental organisation, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) remains unique as a democratic union of over 1,000 states, government agencies and NGOs in over 160 countries. Its World Conservation Congresses, held every four years, are the principal discussion and policy-making forum for world conservation action. This year, with marine and coastal conservation a special priority, there would be a series of events involving vessels that had sailed to the conference. It would be a great shame if the Balkan countries – especially those with an Adriatic coastline were not part of this initiative, and it was clear that something special would be needed. But what could this special initiative be?

Eventually, inspiration struck. Wasn't there a boat, built as a training ship 75 years ago for the (pre-war, Kingdom of) Yugoslavia's navy? And wasn't it now in harbour in Kotor undergoing a refit? Eventually after much scheming and several false starts, the Captain was approached directly. Yes, the Jadran was fit for service, and OK for such a long journey. After all, hadn't it made it to Portsmouth in 2005 for the Battle of Trafalgar celebrations? And yes, before this, in 1938, an epic voyage, all the way to Boston, New York. And, yes, the Ministry did approve providing it was clear to all that once afloat, the Captain would be in charge of logistics, and the ship would continue in its training role during the voyage.

So – here we were, at last! 90-odd souls on board, including our small Balkan contingent *en route* to the WCC. Most of the 'Dinaric Arc' countries are represented - from Bulgaria, from Croatia (a last minute addition this), from Montenegro, from Serbia, Slovenia 'represented' by proxy by an English academic, plus a representative from the IUCN SEE Regional Office. Representatives from Italy, and from UNESCO's Regional Office in Venice would join us in Sardinia.

The rest? Well, the Jadran has a permanent crew of 10, plus the captain and first mate. The remaining 15 seamen required to sail such a vessel had been drafted in from other ships to make a complement (some have never 'sailed' before), plus *učenici* (naval high school students) and *studenti* (from the military academy or the merchant navy faculty of the university). All are male (apart from the ship's doctor, drafted in for the occasion) and most, with the male members of the WCC team, accommodated in two 30-bed compartments in the ship's hold. An odd hierarchy exists - *učenici* and *studenti* in the top buks, where they have to contend with dripping pipes and bulkhead divisions, drafted seamen in the bottom, and the WCC contingent, significantly, in the middle bunks. The women in our team have 'first class' accommodation – cabins above waterline and permission to use the Captain's WC and shower, with running hot water, rather than the 'picturesque' facilities afforded to the crew. This was the first time that women had taken part in a voyage, and our Captain was clearly anxious before we set off. Detailed rules were issued, mostly observed in the most relaxed fashion, and soon a good *rapport* was established all round. Like the crew and the trainees, we were here to work – in the case of the WCC contingent, to learn from each other, network, plan, publicise,

see how we could take our activity to a new level, so seminars on board (in the ship's hold, not the easiest place for presentations and discussion) have been a regular feature of the voyage.

Some interesting comparisons have emerged, between philosophical as well as institutional approaches to conservation. For example, on the institutional level, all the former Yugoslav republics have semi-independent State Institutes for nature conservation charged with species protection, research and monitoring, and the designation of protected areas (though Serbia traces its Institute back to 1948, Croatia dates hers only to 2002). But in Bulgaria, the 'competent authority' is the Ministry of Environment, with research contracted to university departments and specialist research institutes – all within the Academy of Sciences. The consequence is a science-driven emphasis on 'basic' ecological research, with the danger of an 'implementation deficit' with conservation subservient to economic interests. In all cases Directors of national parks are appointed directly by the Minister (rather than by autonomous executive boards as in some European countries) – is this a problem?

Some presentations raised other policy, even philosophical, issues. For example, what kind of protection is implied by the designation of Natura 2000 sites (or in pre-accession states, the Emerald Network)? In Croatia, some 44% of the land surface is considered worthy of Natura 2000 status, yet formally designated protected areas account for only around 9% of the territory. Maybe the IUCN protected area categories need revisiting (something already on the Conference agenda for when we reach Barcelona).

The promotional material produced by different national conservation agencies (including video CDs and powerpoint) has been strikingly different in approach. Some emphasise the 'scientific' values of bio (and geo) diversity and nature protection, others the heritage, emotional and scenic value of protected areas. All agreed that the crucial element in successful conservation was the active participation of local residents, however good examples of where this had been achieved were hard to come by. Only Serbia appears to have an active structure specifically promoting earth heritage conservation, although the fact that this year's biennial ProGeo conference is meeting on the island of Rab (unfortunately coinciding with WCC) makes it clear that Croatia too is actively engaged in geological conservation. Notwithstanding these differences, however, common features emerged strongly. These include:

- Poor administrative/institutional capacity (especially on county / municipality levels) and absence of management plans for PA's
- Lack of biodiversity data for key species and poor monitoring of the outcomes of PA management
- Weak co-operation with other policy sectors (e.g. economic development) at all levels
- Lack of engagement of, and poor communication with local stakeholders ('participative planning' is a new concept for many countries) and consequent weak public and political support (especially on local level)
- Lack of resources and insufficient financing.

So our voyage has not all been 'plain sailing'. Work took on a new meaning also on the afternoon of Sunday (day 5) of our voyage. Anchored in the bay of Caligari, Sardinia and lined up with the crew and the trainees, the WCC contingent were told that we could move to dock in the harbour at 9am the following morning – ships' uniform compulsory for all – but that first the Jadran had to be cleaned (literally) from top to bottom. For most of the conservation team this was their first experience of scrubbing decks and added a new dimension to what has been, so far, an extraordinary experience.

We have sailed – if not the traditional 'seven seas', then a good part of three smaller ones - the Adriatic, the top end of the Ionian and the Tyrrhenian. In five short days; we have seen the most glorious sunsets (and for those who did not party too much the night before, some magnificent sunrises); we have been visited daily by dolphins (and once, on deck, by a flying fish); we have negotiated the rapids of Scylla and Charybdis; seen lava shoot from Stromboli, and, throughout, enjoyed the wonderful company of our hosts – crew and trainees – on board the most wonderful sailing ship afloat.

Now we have a short break in Caligari, before embarking again on the last leg of our voyage 'from the Balkans to Barcelona'. The weather forecast is good. We wonder what the next few days will bring!

30 September 2008.