

The OBSERVE project - Strengthening and development of Earth Observation activities for the environment in the Balkan area

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Abstract

Balkan countries do not have a coherent and continuous approach towards the challenge of implementing integrated Earth Observation (EO) applications in environmental monitoring and management. It should be mentioned that the Balkan countries, except Greece, are not ESA members. Besides, Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, FYROM, Montenegro and Bosnia Herzegovina are also not members of the GEO.

The defect in the implementation of EO applications and their use in the environmental decision making are manifested through the limited synergies among national and regional institutions, ineffective technological means and discontinuous record of participation to international organizations and committees.

On the other hand, the increasing importance of a common approach towards effective environmental monitoring practices, for the benefit of the societal web of the broader Balkan region, calls for immediate action, setting as a starting point the built up of regional institutional capacity and spillage of technology transfer.

The aim of the **OBSERVE** project is to collect and compile all the necessary information for delivering an integrated analysis on the current status of EO activities and networks in the Balkans regarding environmental monitoring, the potential benefit from the full exploitation of an integrated capacity development strategy and the prospect of creating a relevant permanent EO Community in the broader region. **OBSERVE** project has the ultimate goal to raise awareness and establish firm links with the regional decision making bodies on the importance of a mutual and enhanced EO application network on environmental monitoring according to the principles of the GEO.

An additional key objective is to ensure a focused and strong dissemination strategy in the Balkan region. This includes EO and environmental decision makers, as well as national and regional government decision makers, the international research community, local stakeholders, the media and other valuable "multipliers".

The **OBSERVE** project consortium consists of:

- **15** institutions from
- **13** different countries
- **8** of which belong to the Balkan region
- **10** of the partners are Universities/Research Organizations while the other
- **5** are from private sector.

OBSERVE has the vision of establishing a new Balkan EO community of multilevel stakeholders that will make use of state of the art technological developments, products and knowhow from the existing European EO community and industry.

The Strategic Objectives of OBSERVE are given below:

- Build a spatial database and web inventory with all existing dynamic elements related to the scope of the relevant analysis;
- Raise awareness on the need to harmonize policies and practices in the field EO applications in order to address the challenges described by the GEO societal benefit areas;
- Serve as an efficient mechanism for recording, monitoring and influencing policy in EO;

- Favour exploitation and development of EO activities and ensure coordination of these activities for the benefit of natural resources management;
- Promote the idea of permanent institutional links and mutual cooperation between Balkan states in the field of EO for environmental management;
- Ensure free access of Balkan countries to all advantages of Earth Observation techniques;
- Promote cooperation between Balkan States in the fields of training and sharing of staff and experiences in all aspects of EO.