



Proposal for a new Environmental Crime Directive and its relevance for tackling water offences

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Presentation by Miroslav Angelov, European Commission, DG ENV, Unit E.4

Political context

- On 15 December 2021, the Commission adopted a proposal for **new Environmental Crime Directive (ECD)**.
- The new ECD contributes to the **European Green Deal**.
- **Biodiversity Strategy, Zero Pollution Action Plan, Chemicals Strategy** call for better enforcement and more stringent sanctions.
- Ongoing negotiations in the **Council** and work in the **European Parliament**



Why the ECD proposal is tabled?



- The existing directive from 2008 is outdated and too weak; lack of proper enforcement; undermining the environmental rule of law
- Need for precision of crime definitions; need for provisions on types and levels of sanctions, coordination and cooperation, enforcement chain
- Environmental crime is the fourth largest criminal activity in the world after drugs trafficking, human trafficking, and counterfeiting, growing at a rate between 5%-7% per year (*Interpol and the United Nations Environment Programme*)

Main novelties

- Legal basis and technique for scope definition
- Definition of offences
- Water offences
- Sanctions provisions
- Recognising the role of the civil society
- Strengthening the enforcement chain

Definition of offences – concept of “unlawful conduct”

‘**Unlawful**’ conduct as defined under Article 2(1) COM ECD proposal:

- breach of obligations deriving from relevant sectoral EU legislation
- breach of a law, an administrative regulation or a decision of a competent authority of a Member State
- conduct carried out under an authorisation obtained fraudulently, or by corruption, extortion or coercion

Definition of offences – conducts to be criminalised

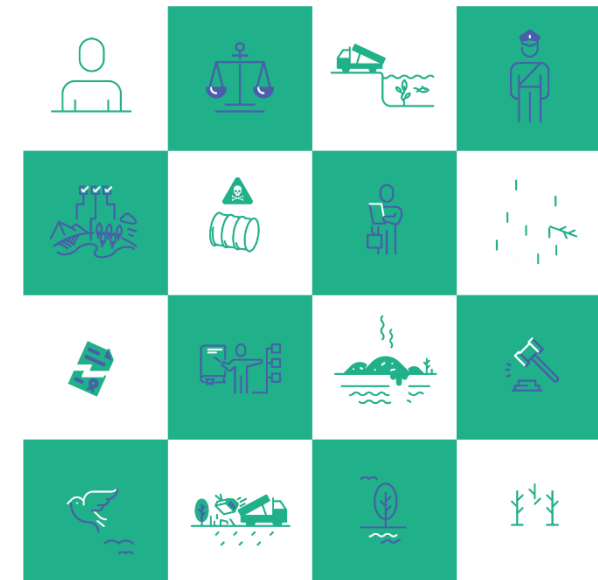
- **Refined definition of offences existing under Directive 2008/99/EC**

Examples: illegal waste management, operation of an installation where dangerous activities are carried out or dangerous substances are stored.

- **Proposed new offences**

Examples:

- illegal abstraction of surface or groundwater;
- illegal ship recycling;
- Illegal ship-source pollution;
- illegal timber trade.



Definition of offences – clarification of terms used

Clarification of terms used to define environmental offences:

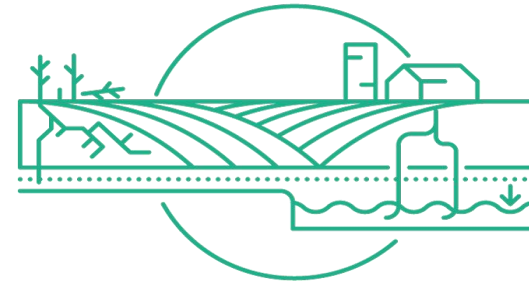
- ‘substantial damage’
- ‘negligible quantity’
- ‘likelihood to cause damage’ to the environment
- **Objective:** facilitate work on the ground and ensure consistent application across the EU by providing a non-exhaustive list of factors to be considered for investigation, prosecution and adjudication.

General pollution offence and other relevant offences

- Article 3 (1) (a) COM proposal
- Discharge, emission or introduction of a quantity of materials or substances or ionising radiation into air, soil or water...
- “Substantial damage to the quality of water” – constitutive element of other offences (e.g. breaches of legislation on chemicals, waste management, industrial activities)



Illegal water abstraction



- Text of COM proposal: “*abstraction of surface water or groundwater which causes or is likely to cause substantial damage to the ecological status or potential of surface water bodies or to the quantitative status of groundwater bodies*”.
- Examples: water abstraction without a permit or in breach of permit conditions, conducted intentionally or with at least serious negligence

Illegal ship recycling

- Ships contain many carcinogens and toxic substances (e.g. asbestos, heavy metals, oil, mercury, ODS). Illegal recycling can damage the environment and intoxicate workers. This can also lead to serious injuries and death.
- Proposed new criminal offence relates to breach of the obligation to send ships for recycling only to authorised facilities.
- Article 3 (1) (g) COM ECD proposal and Article 6 (2) Ship Recycling Regulation

Ship-source pollution

- Oil spills are one of the most concerning sources of marine pollution: difficult to clean up and lasting for long periods of time in the marine environment.
- Transfer of the relevant criminal offence from the Ship-Source Pollution Directive (SSPD) to the ECD for legal basis and consistency reasons
- Article 3 (1) (h) COM ECD proposal and Article 4 (1) SSPD

Sanctions in the ECD proposal



- **Effective, dissuasive and proportionate** sanctions for both **natural and legal persons**:
 1. Minimum maximum levels of imprisonment for natural persons;
 2. Minimum maximum level of fines for legal persons based on legal person's annual worldwide turnover.
- **Ancillary sanctions and measures** for both, natural and legal persons (Articles 5 and 7)
- **Aggravating and mitigating** circumstances (Articles 8 and 9)
- Introducing specific **limitation periods** for criminal offences (Article 11)
- **Harmonisation of rules on jurisdiction** (Article 12)

Role of citizens and civil society



Protection of persons
who report
environmental
criminal offences and
support investigation
(Article 13)



Rights for the public
concerned to
participate in
proceedings in
accordance with
national law (Article
14)

Strengthening the enforcement chain

The proposal is to strengthen the enforcement chain and facilitate a more effective investigation and prosecution of environmental crime. Proposed requirements aim at ensuring:

- ❖ sufficient human and financial resources
- ❖ efficient cooperation and coordination
- ❖ appropriate training for judges, prosecutors, police, inspectors
- ❖ availability of effective investigative tools
- ❖ adoption of a national strategy on combating environmental crime.



Increase the ability to monitor application in practice

Obligations of the Member States to:

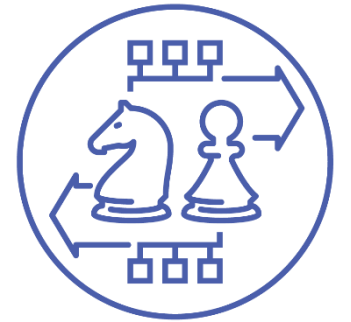
- **collect and regularly publish statistical data** on scale of environmental crime and efforts to combat it;
- **annually transmit** to the Commission the relevant statistical data.

Obligations of the Commission to:

- **regularly publish a report** based on the statistical data transmitted by the Member States;
- adopt **implementing acts establishing the standards format for data transmission.**



Strategic Commission support



- **Work under the Action Plan on Environmental Compliance and Governance:**
 1. Vade Mecum on compliance assurance in rural areas
 2. Guidance on combating environmental crime and related infringements
- **Support to and cooperation with European networks of environmental enforcement practitioners (IMPEL, ENPE, ECN, EUFJE)**

Thank you!

