

CONCLUSIONS

“STRENGTHENING THE FIGHT AGAINST CRIMES THAT AFFECT THE ENVIRONMENT IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE”

Regional Conference 13-16 November 2023 -Plitvice National Park, Croatia

At the initiative of France & Croatia, an **unprecedented regional conference** was organised on November 14 and 15, 2023 in Plitvice, Croatia, on the theme of **strengthening the fight against crimes that affect the environment in South-East Europe**. This event brought together **85 representatives from South-Eastern European countries** (academics, NGOs, law enforcement, justice, ministries of the environment), **UNODC, EUROPOL, SELEC**, as well as specialised networks in environmental law enforcement: **IMPEL** (environmental authorities), **ENPE** (Prosecutors), **EUFJE** (Judges), **EnviCrimeNet** (law enforcement agencies).

Four panels dealt respectively with: a) the commitment of **civil society**, b) the action of **international organisations** and **specialised networks**, c) the challenges raised by environmental crime to **Law and Justice** and d) the state of the art and best practices of **law enforcement agencies**.

The conference provided the opportunity to **deepen mutual knowledge of the structure of participants’ institutions** and the public and private actors acting in South-Eastern Europe. This mutual knowledge will **encourage future cooperation**.

The conference recognised **the importance of this type of criminality and the urgency to tackle it**:

1. Environmental crime, often linked to organised crime (4th largest crime sector worldwide) appears to be underestimated, not adequately documented, insufficiently prioritised and punished despite its catastrophic consequences on ecosystems and public health.

2. South-Eastern Europe is particularly affected, directly or as a transit or destination zone: trafficking and illegal burial of waste, in protected species, in timber and illegal deforestation and water pollution.

3. Strengthening national legislative frameworks to prevent and combat environmental crime and bringing them into line with European Union standards, adapted to local realities, are imperative as part of the enlargement process. These efforts are supported by the European Commission.

The Conference’s work led to the **definition of several areas for strengthening the fight against crimes that affect the environment**.

4. The development of a **global approach** to the phenomenon. This involves a double action:
→ **mobilise, synergize and coordinate all the administrations concerned** (criminal justice system: law enforcement, judiciary, environmental protection agencies) **as well as civil society** (NGOs, academics, eco-volunteer citizens, media, private companies, etc.) and international organisations.

→ use all available administrative and legal tools, whether administrative or criminal environmental law or provisions allowing action in the field of **prevention** (awareness) and **repression**, including related offenses (in particular financial offenses, fraud, money laundering, corruption), the identification and seizure of criminal assets and the compensation for damages.

5. The **imperative need for specialisation of actors in the criminal justice system**; this may be, as in France, dedicated law enforcement units and specialised offices within the courts of law or networks of specialists and experts. The technical nature of environmental law and investigations requires a **high level of training and the use of new technologies**.

6. The **development of international, operational and technical cooperation**:

→ **operational, judicial and police cooperation**, based on the exchange of information, supported by Europol, Interpol, Eurojust or SELEC at the regional level must be strengthened in matters of environmental crime and its consequences on public health.

→ international organisations, specialised networks and representatives of participating States call for the **development of technical cooperation** actions to share good practices, develop appropriate tools, increase the training and specialisation of actors, inspire and support each other mutually for better application of environmental law.

