

Giving legal teeth to **environmental protection** in Croatia

Conserving endangered species now benefits from the full force of the law in Croatia, since the European Union helped with enforcement of the country's Environmental Protection Act. Tracking of hazardous waste also faces improvements since the new legislation has been enforced.

STRICT RULES

The EU's environmental protection rules require member states – now including Croatia – to prosecute offenders. Working with the Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection, EU experts improved the approach to environmental inspections, increasing rates of detection, investigation and prosecution. The success was made possible through better cooperation with other ministries, judicial bodies, police, and customs services.

MORE PROSECUTIONS

In 2010 – the first year of the project – environmental protection inspectors initiated 328 court processes. In 2011, this number rose to 839 – not only action against relatively minor misdemeanours, but also the first steps in criminal prosecution for serious offences against the environment.

For instance, in 2013 an Italian attempted to smuggle 18 specimens of live land tortoises across the border crossing with Italy. The offender was fined, while the tortoises were seized and placed in an authorised rescue centre. Another investigation detected a Croatian taxidermist dealing in strictly protected species with a view to smuggling them to Switzerland.

CONTROLLING WASTE SHIPMENTS

Detection rates of illegal movements of waste or hazardous waste reflect the effectiveness of the coordination between the customs service and border police. Joint inspections with neighbouring countries are also carried out on trans-frontier shipments of waste, and Croatia takes part in an international programme to control shipments of hazardous and non hazardous waste. This reinforces the capacity to investigate suspicious shipments, including of goods in transit through the country. This cross-border cooperation is resulting in further detection and decreased number of illegal imports and exports of waste.

BOOSTING COORDINATION

A National Environmental Security Task Force was created, to coordinate preventive action at national and international level – including through engagement with Interpol.



Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)

Croatia

IPA – AN INVESTMENT IN EUROPE. AN INVESTMENT IN SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY.

Within the project, training was given to environmental protection inspectors and to staff in other ministries, as well as judicial, police and customs authorities. Information toolkits were created for prosecutors and judges. Standardised methods were created for cooperation between environmental protection inspectors and other authorities, to make it easier to mount prosecutions, and a manual now lays down guidelines for coordinated enforcement.

According to Brigitte Mrvelj Čečatka, a senior environmental inspector in Zagreb, who benefited from the training: "Participation in this project was extremely

useful for my everyday work. It prepared me in a very practical way for better enforcement, especially with all the recent legislative changes in this field. More importantly – it connected me with all of the main stakeholders in this process, which is something that would not be possible otherwise."

PROJECT DETAILS –

Enforcement of the new Environmental Protection Act harmonised with EU legislation in cases of criminal offences against the environment

Partners:

Croatian Ministry of Environmental
and Nature Protection
Umweltbundesamt (Austrian Environment Agency)

Total cost in €: 1.1 million

EU Contribution in €: 1.045 million (95%)

Start date: September 2010

End date: June 2012

Results:

Closer cooperation among relevant authorities; improved investigation performance; higher rates of detection and prosecution of offences; better protection of the environment and of endangered species

Techniques:

Raising awareness and creating enhanced cooperation among government ministries; training and study visits for inspectors, training and guidance for staff of relevant institutions

