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German Council calls for reporting framework on environmental and social performance

The German Council for Sustainable Development has welcomed the EU Commission’s proposal on non-financial disclosure. The proposal consists of an amendment to existing accounting legislation in order to improve transparency on social and environmental matters by companies with more than 500 employees. It would require disclosure on policies, risks and results on the environment, social and employee-related aspects, respect for human rights, anti-corruption and bribery issues, and diversity on the boards of directors.

“It is time to enhance companies’ transparency on sustainability issues. It is important to make visible the contribution of the business sector towards stable economies, social equity and a healthy planet“, stated Marlehn Thieme, Council Chair. “Companies need clear guidance and market reward for their transparency efforts.”

One aim of a European framework on corporate reporting would be to give investors access to reliable and comparable data on companies’ environment, social and governance (ESG) performance. For example, the German Sustainability Code (GSC) combines twenty criteria supported by quantifiable key performance indicators on environmental, social and governance issues, and outlines the minimum requirements for sustainability management transparency. Public and financial markets can access the information to assess how enterprises anchor sustainability issues in their core business. So far, 43 companies have signed the German Sustainability Code, including medium-sized, stock-listed and publicly owned companies.

More information on the German Sustainability Code here or email katja.tamchina@nachhaltigkeitsrat.de

EEA report reveals waste management trends

The European Environment Agency (EEA) has published a new report reviewing municipal solid waste management from 2001-2010 in 32 European countries. The publication reviews progress achieved towards the EU’s 50 percent recycling target for waste from households by 2020. According to the analysis, 11 countries have met or are on track to meet the target but the remaining 21 will have to make “an extraordinary effort” to reach the target on time.

The report, "Managing municipal solid waste – a review of achievements in 32 European countries," is the result of a joint pilot project between the European Commission and the EEA, which in 2011 agreed to enhance knowledge on the implementation of waste policies in the EU-27 Member States, Croatia, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. The report offers an overview of results from the first part of this pilot study while individual country reports present national initiatives and outcomes in further detail.

According to the report, only a small number of countries reduced their municipal waste output between 2001 and 2010 but most showed a shift from landfilling towards preferred waste management practices including recycling. The report notes substantial increases in the proportion of municipal waste recycled between 2001 and 2010: 12 countries increased the percentage recycled by more than 10 percentage points (calculated as a share of municipal waste generated); another ten achieved increases of between five and ten percentage points; and the remainder showed no increases. The report predicts that if such trends continue, some countries will achieve EU targets on diverting waste from landfill but the majority will need to accelerate their shift to recycling in order to achieve the 50 percent target by 2020.

More information here
Scotland’s sustainable energy path

The UK’s emissions of climate-warming gases surged in 2012 as cheap coal replaced gas in power stations, official data recently revealed. However, 2012 was a record year for renewable energy in Scotland which produced enough electricity to power all of its homes. Fergus Ewing, the Scottish energy minister, said his government was now on track to meet its target of generating the equivalent of 50 percent of Scotland’s own electricity needs by 2015 and 100 percent by 2020.

The Scottish government has also kicked off a new initiative designed to tackle the “silod” approach many businesses take to delivering sustainability improvements, with the launch of a “one-stop-shop” green advisory service. The “Resource Efficient Scotland” programme, to be run under the auspices of the government-backed Zero Waste Scotland agency, will aim to bring together expertise on managing energy, water and materials into a single service.

More information here and here

Renewables industry calls for “hat-trick” to spur growth

Ambitious EU climate targets for 2030 that include renewable energy, energy efficiency and greenhouse gas reductions could create 4.4 million jobs, cut 550 million tonnes of fossil fuel imports, and reduce energy costs, says a new report by the European Renewable Energy Council (EREC).

“Such an integrated framework would have multiple positive impacts on Europe’s economy and environment because it would provide the necessary clear signals for investors that are currently missing,” said EREC President Rainer Hinrichs-Rahlwes.

The study, “Hat-trick 2030”, launched on 18 April, outlines many potential benefits of this three-pronged approach to slashing carbon emissions; among the benefits are a minimum 0.45 percent growth in Europe’s GDP; cuts to decarbonisation costs; project financing and the need for support mechanisms; enhancing the EU’s technological leadership; and diversifying technology leading to other benefits across industry.

More information here

Poland unsure about its energy mix

Speakers at a conference held in Warsaw on 18 March criticised EU energy policies, especially those favouring expensive green energy but admitted that the country was unsure of the kind of energy mix it wants.

The symposium, “The future of energy production in the Polish chemical industry,” was organised by EurActiv.pl in cooperation with the Polish Chamber of Chemical Industry and the Information Office of the European Parliament in Poland.

A representative from the Department of Energy of the Ministry of Economy admitted that the aims of the Polish energy policy did not always align with European priorities.

More information here

Chair and Vice Chairs of UNECE elected

The Netherlands is the new Chair of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) while Turkmenistan and Switzerland are Vice Chairs. The elections took place during the 65th session of UNECE, held in Geneva, 9-11 April. The chairman and vice chairmen of UNECE are also the Chair and Vice Chairs of the UNECE executive committee and will remain in their posts until the next elections in April 2015.

More information here
First nuclear power plants may be built in Balkhash and East-Kazakhstan oblast

Balkhash, Aktau and Kurchatov (East-Kazakhstan Oblast) are being considered as likely locations for construction of nuclear plants in Kazakhstan by the country's National Nuclear Center. The researchers also named several countries that were expected to take part in the tender for construction of the nuclear power station in Kazakhstan. “Relying on global experience of nuclear energy development and considering the fact that it is based on the light-water reactors (80 percent of the existing energy blocks), it is practical to develop nuclear energy in Kazakhstan on the basis of LWR-type reactors of II and III+ generation” the researchers said.

The former head of the Nuclear Energy Institute of Kazakhstan National Nuclear Center stated that Kazakhstan may become a leader through exporting energy among Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries in the post-soviet era.

More information [here](#) and [here](#)

Central Asia facing water management challenges

The shortage of water in Kazakhstan can increase significantly by 2050, Minister of Environmental Protection Nurlan Kaparov, stated on 12 April at the conference “Building a green economy in Kazakhstan.” Mr Kaparov added that today, more than half of the country’s water comes from neighbouring states and that without action, the demand for water resources could exceed supply threefold by 2050.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is increasing the amount of financing for modernization of wastewater treatment facilities in the city of Shymkent in southern Kazakhstan. The new €10.3 million loan will be added to earlier financing of €13.6 million to Vodnye Resursy Marketing, a private water utility company in Shymkent.

Central Asian countries also discussed the impact of melting glaciers on water resources in the region and all agreed on the need to conduct research and monitoring.

More information [here](#) and [here](#)
II. UNEP ON THE GROUND

CITES conference takes decisive action to halt decline of tropical timber, sharks, manta rays and many other species

The 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), adopted robust measures to protect precious timber and marine species from overexploitation. The meeting held in Bangkok from 3 to 14 March, declared the 3rd of March as World Wildlife Day and accepted South Africa’s invitation to host the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in 2016.

170 governments have turned to CITES to ensure the legal, sustainable and traceable trade in their precious timber and forest products, with the Conference unanimously bringing hundreds of new timber species under CITES controls, along with a number of tortoises and turtles and a wide range of other plant and animal species. Five shark species and manta rays were also brought under CITES controls following a vote.

The CITES Secretary-General, John E. Scanlon, said: “This is a big moment for CITES and for the world’s wildlife. The international community has decided to make best use of this pragmatic and effective agreement to help it along the path to sustainability in our oceans and forests. CITES Parties have heeded the call from Rio+20 and recognised the important role of CITES as an international agreement that stands at the intersection between trade, the environment and development.”

Unprecedented levels of international cooperation to combat serious wildlife crime have seen past differences set aside to stop the poaching of elephants and rhinoceroses for their ivory and horn. These international commitments will now be translated into national action, with the CITES Standing Committee reviewing progress between now and the next meeting in 2016.

For more information here and here

New agreement to strengthen Russia-UNEP partnership

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner and Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation, Sergey Donskoy, signed a cooperation agreement on 16 April at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi. The partnership covers conservation of biological diversity, addressing the environmental aspects of the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics as well as joint work through the GEF project “Arctic Agenda 2020”.

“UNEP welcomes the opportunity to further strengthen and develop our long-standing partnership with the Russian Federation,” said Mr Steiner, adding that the programmes and priorities “provide new focus and momentum for addressing environmental issues in the context of Russia’s future economic development.”

Minister Donskoy reiterated that “signing of the Agreement opens new opportunities for broader cooperation and implementation of programmes and projects in most priority areas.” These areas include support to the development of the “green economy”; water resources management; marine protection; regulation of the use of chemicals; utilization and processing of wastes; and building capacity and awareness for better environmental protection.

Russia has been a longstanding partner and donor to UNEP, increasing its contribution to the UNEP Environment Fund to US$1.5 million in 2013 and 2014. UNEP has been designated the Programme Coordination Agency for the Arctic Agenda 2020, a Russian-government project, co-funded by the Global Environment Facility and the Russian Federation, aimed at meeting the challenges of the Arctic’s rapidly changing climate. And at the invitation of the Russian Government and the Organizing Committee of the Sochi 2014 Olympic Games, UNEP will provide guidance on environmental considerations in preparing and hosting the Winter Games. Last year, UNEP and partners proposed close to 90 projects designed to minimize the impact of infrastructure developments around the Sochi National Park area where the Games will take place.
Regional conference spotlights sustainability and urban living

The 7th European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns, hosted by the City of Geneva and its partners from 17-19 April 2013, addressed how cities can move towards sustainability in the face of current economic, environmental and social crises. One of the largest events on sustainable development in Europe, delegates and participants discussed the role of European cities in driving such a transition while struggling with austerity measures.

A distinguished line-up of speakers and hundreds of delegates came from local and national governments, European and international organizations as well as business, research groups and NGO associates. Through its Secretariat of the Geneva Environment Network (GEN), UNEP assisted with preparations, working with ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) and the City of Geneva to involve international figures in the various sessions and stands.

Acting Director of UNEP’s Regional Office for Europe, Jan Dusik, reminded participants that the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference, “The Future We Want”, reaffirms that sustainable development requires the meaningful involvement and active participation of all relevant decision-makers in the planning and implementation of sustainable development policies. This entails a key role for local, regional and national players as well as public and private partners.

Regional Director of ICLEI Europe, Wolfgang Teubner, remarked that “local production of renewable energy and food will not only reduce the ecological footprint but the value created will also benefit the local economy,” with Vice Mayor of Geneva, Sandrine Salerno emphasising that “local solutions can be implemented through public-private and public-public partnerships.”

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II. UNEP ON THE GROUND

Technology for advancing food security and a sustainable environment

The International Institute of Refrigeration (IIR) held its 2nd International Conference on Sustainability and the Cold Chain in Paris, 2-4 April. Developing efficient cold chains could help save harvests, avoid waste and protect public health while improving energy efficiency. Some of the conference highlights are particularly interesting in the context of UNEP’s current campaign “Think.Eat.Save.” They include findings that new cold storage technologies can consume 66 percent less energy (<10W/m3) than traditional systems; and that closed display cabinets with double glass doors and better insulation can save 50 percent in energy.

With an expected population of over 9 billion people by 2050, food security will remain a global challenge. The need to minimize food losses during production, transport and storage and to avoid consumer waste is being increasingly recognized. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), about one-third of the food produced for human consumption every year – approximately 1.3 billion tonnes – is lost or wasted.

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UNEP participates in Committee of the Regions post-2015 discussions

On 9 April, the Head of UNEP’s Brussels office Chris Vanden Bilcke spoke at a roundtable discussion at the European Union’s Committee of the Regions (CoR). The Committee, which represents regional and local governments throughout the EU, met about the international agenda on development post-2015. Mr Vanden Bilcke highlighted UNEP’s recognition of the importance of local and regional authorities for accelerating sustainable development and environmental protection by contributing to a more participatory and inclusive realisation of the post-2015 agenda. His participation was in keeping with UNEP’s strategy of building stronger relations with the CoR, symbolised by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two bodies at Rio+20 in 2012.

The panellists from the CoR stressed the need for the EU to include local and regional authorities (LRA) more in post-Rio and post-2015 thinking, referencing Green Economy ideas and stressing that environmental issues such as waste, transport and water problems are more of a priority for LRA than for national governments.

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Visegrad seminar on green economy best practices - Implementation of the Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want”

The seminar on green economy best practices - Implementation of the Rio+20 outcome was held in Warsaw, on 23-24 April, under the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4). The seminar was attended by representatives from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania (next Presidency of the EU Council), Poland, UNEP Regional Office for Europe and Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC).

The seminar underlined that many environmental challenges could be transformed into economic opportunities, not only reversing negative environmental trends, but also promoting growth, competitiveness, jobs and poverty eradication. It was also stressed that a green economy offers opportunities for countries at all stages of economic development. Economic growth can be promoted in numerous ways, including investments and innovation, more efficient use of natural, human and financial resources and by preventing damage to the environment and human health.

During a short exchange after the presentation of the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) project, the possibility of involving the V4 Group and expanding cooperation under the PAGE umbrella through a communication mechanism was examined.

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Central European Initiative Ministerial Meeting in Budapest

UNEP’s Vienna office – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (ISCC) was invited to the Central European Initiative (CEI) Ministerial Meeting “Green Growth – with focus on Rural Development” that took place in Budapest on 15-16 April under the Hungarian Presidency of CEI.

Ministers of Agriculture and Environment from the CEI countries, plus Latvia and Lithuania, the European Commission, the CEI Secretariat, and FAO all participated, and a joint declaration on the importance of green growth and rural development in CEI countries was adopted.

UNEP’s Vienna office – ISCC actively contributed to the segment “The Key to Liveable Environment: the Revival of the ‘Local’” stressing that the Carpathian Convention offers a legal framework and platform for stakeholder cooperation, and development of activities to promote local knowledge, capacity, traditions and resources in the Danube and Carpathian Region.

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UK-funded UNEP study shows good governance of natural resources vital for peace and economic development

Good governance of the environment and natural resources is key to building lasting peace in Sudan, specifically Darfur, according to a UNEP study launched in April at the landmark International Donor Conference on Darfur.

The report was funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) and looks at the importance of equitable and participatory environmental governance in Sudan, and how other countries across Africa, such as Kenya, Niger and South Africa, have tried to reduce tension over the environment and improve the management of land, water, forests and other resources.

“One of the main goals of this International Donor Conference is to raise funds for the development and reconstruction of Darfur. Any peace process in this war-torn region of Sudan must consider environmental governance, and the lessons we can learn from other African countries,” said Robin Bovey, UNEP’s Country Director in Sudan. “UNEP recommends that all parties ensure that land and natural resource issues are placed high on the peacebuilding agenda”, Mr Bovey added.

By publishing this analysis, UNEP aims to contribute to the reconstruction process in Darfur, informing decision-makers of viable models for peaceful “co-management” of natural resources.

More information here

GRID-Geneva Advisory Board progresses towards a fifth partnership agreement

The 28th meeting of the DEWA/GRID-Geneva “Partnership” Advisory Board took place at the University of Geneva’s Institute for Environmental Sciences (UniGe/ISE) on 11 April. The Advisory Board (AB) is the guidance mechanism for GRID-Geneva organized between three partners: the Swiss Federal Office for Environment (CH-FOEN), UNEP and UniGe. The formal partnership has existed since 1998 and is now in its fourth four-year period while the current plan is to renew this fruitful interaction with GRID-Geneva for a fifth mandate (2014-18).

The partners developed an advanced draft for the fifth agreement for eventual review by the legal services of the three institutions. The GRID-Geneva AB consists of two representatives from each of the three partner organizations. UNEP’s Regional Director for Europe Jan Dusik reported on major outcomes of UNEP’s 27th Governing Council (GC), and DEWA Director Peter Gilruth on significant decisions, also at the GC.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be via the fourth “Science Day,” a Geneva Environment Network (GEN) event in late 2013.

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22nd International Children’s Painting Competition

The global Children’s Painting Competition on the Environment, now in its 22nd year, ran on the theme of “Water: The Source of Life”. The European region saw an impressive number of art pieces submitted with over 9,000 paintings from 41 countries. The competition called for children aged 6 to 14 to share their message and understanding of environmental conservation through the medium of painting.

A selection event for the European entries was held on 17 April in Geneva. The top 10 paintings were selected and sent to UNEP’s headquarters in Nairobi, where the global and regional winners will be announced in June. The children’s artwork submitted this year demonstrated their effervescent imagination, skills, and thoughtfulness when depicting water as the source of life.

The International Children’s Painting Competition on the Environment is organized every year by UNEP, the Japan-based Foundation for Global Peace and Environment (FGPE), Bayer, and Nikon Corporation. It has been held since 1991 and has received more than 3 million entries from children in more than 150 countries.

More information here
III. ON THE CALENDAR

Italian opera sings Verdi for birds

For the first time, a charity concert will be held to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day, a campaign jointly organized by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). On Saturday, 11 May, in Bonn, Germany the opera choir Corale Lirica San Rocco from Bologna, Italy will sing a selection of works by Verdi, an event that coincides with the bicentennial of the Italian composer. This initiative has been suggested by the Chair of the CMS Scientific Council, one of the choir members. The idea is to build a “musical bridge” between the songs of migratory birds announcing the arrival of spring and opera singing that expresses human emotions.

The CMS and AEWA Secretariats invite bird and music lovers to enjoy this unique artistic performance in the recently renovated Namen Jesu Baroque church. Donations at the concert will be used to support the conservation of the endangered Grey Crowned Crane, an iconic African bird known for its beauty and grace, highly sought-after by zoos and private collectors and taken in large numbers for global trade.

More information here and here.

Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions hold first joint meetings for human health and environment

The three conventions that govern chemicals and hazardous waste safety at the global level will, for the first time, convene in historic back-to-back meetings of the parties in Geneva from 28 April to 10 May, with nearly two thousand participants from more than 160 countries expected to attend.

The joint meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions will discuss strengthening trilateral collaboration to work more effectively on the ground, following which each convention will continue to address its specific topics. The agenda includes a review of the impact of the arrangements put in place by governments in 2011 to strengthen synergies among the treaties. The parties will also consider whether to make further modifications to the organization of the Secretariat, the programme of work and budget for joint activities in 2014-2015, and a proposal for financing chemicals and waste related activities. There will also be joint discussions on compliance, technical assistance and financing, reporting and Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) wastes.

Over the two-week period, UNEP will also showcase its support to the three Conventions and their Parties as part of its work on harmful substances and hazardous waste. UNEP DTIE Chemicals Branch supports the Joint Secretariat of the Conventions through scientific knowledge, technical guidelines and tools such as the dioxin/furan toolkit which provides a consistent approach to preparing inventories of the POPs. It also works directly with the Parties to build their capacity to implement the Conventions, and with different industry sectors to demonstrate good management practices; UNEP continues to develop and supervise an important portfolio of GEF-financed work in support of the Conventions.

For more information, see the 2013 COPs website or email Michael Stanley-Jones. Follow the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions on Twitter @brsmeas.

More information on the Chemicals Branch: cyrille.siewe@unep.org

5 June - Sarajevo is European hub for World Environment Day 2013

UNEP will hold this year’s World Environment Day (WED2013) regional celebration on 5 June 2013 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

World Environment Day marks the biggest global celebration for the environment and it will be devoted, this year, to the issue of food waste.

Events will take place all over Europe, promoting the Think.Eat.Save campaign against food waste.

More information here and here.