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I. GOOD TO KNOW

INTERPOL operation targets illegal trade of e-waste in Europe and Africa

The first INTERPOL operation targeting the illegal trade of electronic waste led to the seizure of more than 240 tonnes of electronic equipment and electrical goods and the launch of criminal investigations against some 40 companies involved.

Operation Enigma, whose results have just been published, saw the participation of police, customs, port authorities and environmental and maritime law enforcement agencies in seven European and African countries. The operation aimed to identify and disrupt the illegal collection, recycling, export, import and shipping of discarded electronic products such as computers, televisions and other electronic devices, before they are dumped in landfills or other sites where they can cause severe environmental harm.

In Europe – considered a common source of electronic waste being shipped internationally – checks were conducted at ports in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Checks were also conducted in Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria as Africa is considered a destination region for the waste. Almost one-third of the checks resulted in the discovery of illegal electronic waste.

Operation Enigma also uncovered evidence of new concealment methods used by individuals and companies. This information will help the international law enforcement community work towards eliminating such illegal activities.

More information here.

Reducing exposure to endocrine disruptors

The EU should act to reduce exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals, the European Parliament said on 14 March in adopting Swedish MEP Åsa Westlund’s recommendation to list them as “substances of very high concern” under the REACH chemicals regulation.

In mid-February, UNEP and the World Health Organization (WHO) released the report entitled “The State of the Science on Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals 2012.” The report states that although significant knowledge gaps remain about the links between these chemicals and some diseases, there are apparent links with harmful effects on the reproductive system and the neurological system, and increased risk for certain types of cancer.

Also, on 20 March, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) endorsed WHO’s definition of endocrine disruptors, paving the way for the European Commission to regulate those chemicals in food. The pesticide industry reacted angrily, saying the scientific process has been “rushed to meet political deadlines”.

More information here and here.

Sustainable air travel takes off

On 7 March, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines Flight 642 completed the seven hour and 17 minute flight from New York’s JFK Airport to Amsterdam’s Schiphol Airport using sustainable biofuels. Flight KL642, operated by a Boeing 777-200, will fly every Thursday fueled by recycled cooking oil as part of the Dutch carrier’s goal to have one percent of its flights operate on biofuels by 2015.

More information here.

Tar sands pollution

A Canadian indigenous chief is urging the European Union to resist Canada’s efforts to soften European legislation that would label tar sands as more polluting than conventional oil, saying the burgeoning energy industry threatens the country’s northwest indigenous people.

Germany’s largest and most prestigious research institute has pulled out of a Canadian government-funded joint research project into sustainable solutions to tar sands pollution, citing concerns for its environmental reputation.

More information here and here.
Some facts and figures at a glance

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that of the 100 crop species that provide 90% of food worldwide, 71 are pollinated by bees.

In May 2012, as part of its strategy for tackling declining bee numbers, the European Commission allocated €3.3 million to support 17 member states carrying out surveillance studies aimed at gathering further information on losses of honey bee colonies.

Beekeeping is a widely-developed activity in the EU, countries both at professional (keepers with over 150 hives) and hobby level.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, beekeepers have been reporting unusual weakening of bee numbers and colony losses, particularly in Western European countries including France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain. These include the effects of intensive agriculture and pesticide use, starvation and poor bee nutrition, viruses, attacks by pathogens and invasive species – such as the Varroa mite (Varroa destructor), the Asian hornet (Vespa velutina), the small hive beetle Aethina tumida and the bee mite Tropilaelaps – genetically modified plants, and environmental changes (e.g. habitat fragmentation and loss).

There are around 700,000 beekeepers in EU countries of which around 97% are non-professional accounting for around 67% of hives. Honey production is estimated to be close to 200,000 tons.

MEPs vote for 80 percent cut in buildings’ energy waste by 2050

On 14 March, the European Parliament voted for an 80 percent cut in energy used by buildings, a move that will require a massive ramping up of the EU’s renovation targets. Although buildings account for around 40 percent of the EU’s final energy use – and much of the €400 billion it spends on energy imports – the EU currently has no binding renovation targets. Advocates of energy savings say that technologies applied to heating, cooling, ventilation, lighting, and heat pumps have the potential to recoup all money invested within less than a decade. Acting now also avoids “locking-in” future carbon emissions from buildings, they said.

More information here.
I. GOOD TO KNOW

Commission releases communication on post-Rio and post-2015 agenda

On 27 February, the European Commission released its communication (preliminary official view) on the post-Rio and post-2015 agenda, entitled “A decent life for all, ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future”. The communication broadly outlined the EU’s policy position and was a joint publication by DGs Environment and Development Cooperation in contrast to the previous approach that compartmentalized these two areas of EU work.

The Commission drew the two strands together, recommending that the UN do the same, saying “it is not sufficient to address the challenges separately; a unified policy framework is needed.” The communication referenced many of UNEP’s approaches including green economy and also expanded on the EU’s own commitment to sustainable development, saying, “the implementation and regular review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, which builds on the integrative approach initiated by the EU Strategy for sustainable development, should contribute to greater coherence, mainstreaming and integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.” Overall, the document reflected balance between environmental and development priorities.

The Communication will be followed by a debate in the European Parliament and the EU Council.

Read the full communication [here](#).

EC President and Irish Prime Minister discuss Europe’s 2020 agenda

On 7 March, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny spoke at the Think Tank, “The Lisbon Council” about Europe’s economic challenges and the 2020 agenda. The theme of the event was “Restoring Confidence and Driving Growth”. Mr Barroso said that he felt that the EU had “come through the worst of the crisis,” but that to continue the recovery, Europe would need to restore competitiveness. He said that competitiveness is not an end in itself but “the means to drive prosperity, to sustain European living standards, European values, our societies, our natural environment, our way of life that we want to keep.” Mr Barroso warned against giving in to populism and turning back from the path European member states had taken. “A weakening in our resolve would be a betrayal of Europe’s future and of the efforts which have been made across our Member States in the last few years,” he said.

Speaking about the priorities for the Irish Presidency of the EU, Mr Kenny said they are “all about jobs and work for our people. He said that his team was moving “full steam ahead” to secure Parliament’s agreement and towards the Multiannual Financial Framework, intending to make substantial progress on an integrated Banking Union, starting with adoption of the Single Supervisory Mechanism.

For the full speeches and further details, click [here](#).
Civil society and the post-2015 sustainable development agenda

Activists, key stakeholders and civil society groups worldwide – 260 participants altogether - met in Bonn, Germany, to develop ideas for their roles and contributions within the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

Ten thematic areas were addressed reflecting the need to integrate social and economic issues with those of the environment in charting “the future we want”. The themes included securing human rights for all; respecting planetary boundaries; structural transformation for women’s rights and gender justice; the new economic paradigm; securing social justice and a new global partnership on sustainable development.

Resulting key messages for a new development agenda entail particular support for addressing structural causes of poverty and inequity, and addressing extreme poverty but also the impact of extreme wealth. Implementing the more than 500 internationally agreed goals and objectives for a sustainably managed environment and improved human wellbeing was discussed as a top priority. As the discussions made clear, the new development agenda must be rooted in the existing international human rights architecture that covers social, political, economic and cultural rights. Commitments by all stakeholders must be time-bound and accountability and transparency made paramount.

The meeting was organized by the Berlin Civil Society Center, the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

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Draft guidance released on reporting, control system and illegal traffic

The Basel Convention Implementation and Compliance Committee (ICC) has finalised three draft guidance documents on national reporting, the control system, and illegal traffic. Parties and Basel Convention Regional Coordinating Centres (BCRCs) are requested to comment on the documents by 31 July 2013. The ICC is proposing to the COP 11 to the Basel Convention that these drafts be finalised as part of the ICC’s 2014-2015 work programme, and that the Basel Convention Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) be consulted during the finalization process.

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II. UNEP ON THE GROUND

SAICM agrees to increase funding opportunities for NGOs

At their eighth meeting of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) Quick Start Programme (QSP), in Geneva on 7-8 March, the Executive Board agreed to new fundraising targets, a reduction in the number of application rounds, and an allocation of QSP resources to non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The Board approved a business plan with a total fundraising target for the QSP of $40,289,445. It noted that this modest target should not disincentivize previous large donors, or new donors, to finance the QSP Trust Fund beyond the target. The Board also decided to reduce QSP funding application rounds to only one per year, and to increase the maximum level of funding to NGO-implemented projects from 10 to 20 percent of available funds.

Some Central and Eastern European countries have benefited from QSP projects, and many European countries have also made significant contributions to the Trust Fund.

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Carpathian Convention meetings on sustainability and biodiversity reporting

At separate working group meetings held in Vienna during the end of February into March, progress was made in furthering the draft text of the protocol on Sustainable Transport and Infrastructure to the Carpathian Convention and also on finalizing the Biodiversity Protocol Implementation Report Format. The first meeting, organized by UNEP’s Vienna office in collaboration with the European Academy Bolzano (EURAC), drew on results of previous projects such as “Access2Mountain” and was supported by the European Regional Development Fund. The plan is to have the final draft text of the Protocol by the end of 2013 for presentation at the COP4 of the Carpathian Convention in 2014 in the Czech Republic. Also, the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Biodiversity and the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas Steering Committee (CNPA SC) produced a Biodiversity Implementation Report Format. It will be used to evaluate implementation status by Carpathian countries of the Biodiversity Protocol.

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Two new projects in the western Balkans

Through the Vienna office of UNEP’s Regional Office for Europe (ROE), Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will start two new projects, both in support of developing National Action Programmes.

The projects align with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification’s (UNCCD) 10-year strategy and reporting process, and are expected to run for 12 months, involving a broad range of experts and stakeholders. The projects’ main focus is the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements in Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as the revision of the NBSAP (National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan) of the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) and elaboration of the national action plan for the UNCCD. UNEP’s offices in Vienna and Sarajevo started implementing the same type of project in Bosnia and Herzegovina last January, opening up the potential for cooperation and exchange.

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UNEP’s Brussels office at key events: remarks on film “More Than Honey” and presentation to Climate Parliament

UNEP, represented by Chris Vanden Bilcke, was invited by the Bozar (Centre for Fine Arts) in Brussels to moderate a debate on 17 March following “More than Honey” by film-maker Markus Imhoof. The film charts the bee crisis in different parts of the world. In the United States, specialists grapple with a rising population of so-called “killer bees.” In China, farmers now resort to human labour for pollinating crops. In Australia, the island has so far remained free of brood-destroying mites.

Earlier in March, UNEP’s Mark Radka presented its work on “Clean Energy Mini-Grids” at the Climate Parliament International Parliamentary Forum “International Cooperation for the Renewable Energy Revolution.” Mr Radka presented the large potential for mini-grids which are estimated to provide 40 percent of new capacity by 2030.

Watch the film trailer online.

See the full UNEP presentation here.

“If the bee disappears from the surface of the earth, man would have no more than four years to live.”

Albert Einstein
In the sustainable development spotlight: human rights and the environment

The Global Ministerial Environmental Forum and the first universal session of the UNEP Governing Council took place in Nairobi from 18 to 22 February. The issue of human rights and the environment was addressed during the High Level Meeting on the Rule of Law and the Environment, at the side event “Strengthening the Human Rights and Environment Nexus for Sustainable Development”, and during Ministerial Consultations.

Mr John Knox, appointed last year as Independent Expert on human rights and environment by the UN Human Rights Council, urged member states to be mindful of relevant decisions and recommendations on this issue.

The 22nd session of the Human Rights Council took place in Geneva on 25 February-22 March. During this session, Mr Knox presented the first report on human rights obligations for the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. With human rights and the environment so closely interrelated, the cooperation between UNEP and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is increasing.

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CITES: bid to curb sale of ivory and rhino horn voted down

Efforts to curb the sale of ivory and rhino horns were voted down on 7 March at the Convention in Trade in Endangered Species’ 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CITES CoP16) in Bangkok.

At the 178-nation CITES meeting, Burkina Faso and Kenya cited the “merciless slaughter of elephants” in their attempt to extend to a wider group of nations a pledge from some countries not to sell ivory stockpiles before 2016. The proposal was seen as legally flawed by many delegates and failed to get support.

But Tom Milliken, head of the elephant and rhino team at the wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC, said he was more optimistic than ever that tough action would still be taken. “This time people are listening because everything is pointing in the same direction: poaching is up to a record high, as is illegal ivory trading, and elephants seem to be down,” he said. About 25,000 elephants were killed by poachers in 2012.

At the meeting, 19 nations faced bans on all wildlife trade unless they crack down on the poaching, smuggling or sale of illegal ivory. The meeting is also considering compulsory forensic testing of seized tusks so that the criminal chain can be traced, and compulsory reporting of stockpiles of ivory in order to prevent corruption or thefts.

Unanimously, the meeting raised protection of the West African manatee to the highest level, overriding advice from officials that “scant” scientific data did not support the move.

More information here.

Project Innovations in Rural Tourism (InRuTou) kick off in Austria

InRuTou, funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the EC, aims to develop an innovative training approach to strengthen local tourism developers in rural mountainous regions. Training encompasses sustainable tourism, community participation, networking approaches, and the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to promote tourism destinations.

The InRuTou meeting was held in Krems, Austria at the end of February and UNEP, via its Vienna office, is the project partner in charge of use and promotion of results. The project consortium, led by the IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems, includes three Carpathian Convention partners: the Ekopsychology Society (Poland), Romontana (Romania), and Green Dossier (Ukraine), all looking forward to the opportunity to strengthen cooperation and widen networks for sustainable development of rural tourism in the Carpathians.

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Briefing on paths to chemicals safety at European Parliament

A briefing in the European Parliament on the new report by the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) and the Swedish Society for Nature, "Paths to Chemical Safety: The 2020 Goal and Beyond," took place on 26 March. The report stresses that while significant progress has been made to reach the 2020 goal of sound chemicals management, as declared in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, significant steps are necessary globally to help ensure chemical safety beyond 2020. It proposes the creation of a comprehensive global chemicals regime that builds on existing agreements to better protect human health and the environment from hazardous substances.

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III. ON THE CALENDAR

World Migratory Bird Day 2013

The theme of World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) 2013 “Networking for migratory birds” focuses on ecological networks as well as cooperation among organizations and individuals for the protection of migratory birds. WMBD is a joint initiative of the Secretariats of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA).

CMS and AEWA invite everyone to join the WMBD community to help raise awareness for migratory birds this year on 11-12 May, celebrating through bird-watching trips, public discussions, exhibitions, presentations, rallies, and festivals. The event is held every May and in 2012, more than 250 events registered online made it the most successful WMBD campaign yet.

Visit the online site to read more about this year’s theme, view events in your area on the Google event map, register events, and order posters.

More information here or contact@worldmigratorybirdday.org.

UNEP Vienna meetings in April

UNEP Vienna office – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention is organizing the following meetings:

15 April,

Montenegro: Meeting on Economic Cluster, co-organized with the UNEP office, Sarajevo

23 April,

Tatranska Javorina, Slovakia: BIOREGIO Carpathians Mid-Term Conference

23-26 April,

Tatranska Javorina, Slovakia: Carpathian Network of Protected Areas Conference organized by WWF DCP, State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, UNEP Vienna office - ISCC and other partners.

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Ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the CoPs to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

Four Convention-related meetings will take place from 28 April to 10 May: the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention (BC COP-11), the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention (RC COP-6), the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention (SC COP-6) and the second simultaneous extraordinary meetings of the three conferences of the Parties to the three conventions (ExCOPs-2). The meetings are meant to strengthen implementation of the three conventions at the national, regional and global levels; promote coherent policy guidance; and enhance efficiency in support to parties.

The ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the conferences of the parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions will include a high-level segment on 9-10 May. This is to raise ministers’ awareness on chemicals and wastes issues, encourage synergies among ministries at the national level, and elevate the profile of chemicals and wastes in national development agendas.

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10th annual meeting marks networking and mutual support between parties to the Montreal Protocol

The Macedonian Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of Macedonia and UNEP’s OzonAction Programme will organize two consecutive meetings: the annual meeting of the Regional Ozone Network for Europe and Central Asia (ECA network) on 21-23 May and the thematic meeting for building planners and refrigeration & air conditioning (RAC) experts on 24 May in Ohrid, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Both mark the 10th anniversary of the first meeting of the ECA network in Ohrid.

The accelerated phase-out of HCFCs requires ECA network countries to freeze their HCFC consumption at the baseline level in 2013 and to achieve a 10 percent reduction in 2015. The meetings are meant to enable National Ozone Units to efficiently implement their national HCFC phase-out management plans (HPMPs); strengthen national refrigeration and air-conditioning (RAC) associations in implementing HPMPs; link the concept of sustainable buildings to HPMP implementation; and promote cooperation between building planners and RAC experts to design integrated solutions for the heating and cooling of buildings.

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