
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: INTERPOL

VAN DOORN, J.

Chief, Environmental Crime Unit, INTERPOL, National Criminal Intelligence Division, Financial and Economic Crime, The Netherlands, National Police Agency, Postbus 3016, 2700 KX Zoetermeer, The Netherlands

SUMMARY

Since 1985 environmental crime has increased considerably. One of the causes of this increase is the forever growing mountain of waste in Europe, which itself is partly due to the fact that in Europe too much waste is produced and that the development of possibilities for processing this waste does not keep pace.

Added to this are the more stringent requirements set by the authorities for waste processing and the increasing costs; in the Netherlands, for instance, these costs have tripled over the past few years.

Criminal inquiries conducted in the Netherlands have shown that the waste problem is a breeding ground for environmental crimes.

1 INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

International environmental crime takes several forms:

- The so-called waste tourism, which involves illegal cross-border transports of waste within Europe. The routes used by the international criminal organizations in question are usually part of large-scale environmental crime operations.
- The illegal dumping of waste at random spots in Europe. Investigations in the Netherlands show that Dutch waste is being transported to dumps in Belgium, France, England, former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, Poland, and Romania.

To the offenders and criminals, who operate at an international level, it is a very profitable business to gather waste in one country and dump it, sometimes under false pretences, in another country illegally. One of the major obstacles the authorities meet with in their fight against these illegal activities is that the international exchange of information is no easy matter; this is due to the differences in legislation and approach to this particular form of crime. The chance that perpetrators involved in illegal dumpings are caught is small; their financial gain, however, is very often considerable.

We can easily conclude that international environmental crime is a very profitable business; at the same time we cannot but acknowledge that fact but see that the fight against this particular form of crime poses a great many problems. Illegal activities committed in different countries attract less attention than those committed in a limited area, consequently, the chances that perpetrators are caught are not as high either. This means that those involved in professional environmental crime are continuously roaming Europe in their search for new places where they can illegally dump waste. All European countries will sooner or later be confronted with this form of crime, with serious social and economic consequences.

Obviously, the fight against international environmental crime necessitates a coordination of the efforts undertaken by the various law enforcement authorities.

2 CURRENT SITUATION

In the current situation authorities in different countries cooperate only on an ad hoc basis and on the basis of treaties on international legal assistance. This may suffice for simple crimes, but when internationally operating professional criminals are involved the case is quite different. Experience has taught us that the gathering of relevant information is particularly difficult because:

- In a great many cases information must be obtained from different sources.
- There is usually no central contact point.
- The definition of “environmental crime” is not the same in all countries.
- Almost always professional criminals make sure their illegal activities are hidden by a legal front.

Beside the information provided by judicial authorities, information from local governments and agencies is especially relevant to the fight against environmental crime, both at the national and the international levels.

For example, it should always be examined whether dispensation or certain licenses have been issued to a suspect. In almost every European country there is a government body which is to see to it that the rules and regulations regarding the protection of the environment are complied with. Still, the exchange of information is problematic because the various legal systems are all very complex, because there is a lack of knowledge regarding these systems, and because there are no central contact points.

3 IDEAL SITUATION

As explained above, the internationalization of environmental crime will continue in the future, because, as the waste issue is still increasing, the market for illegal practices is still growing. These developments will make it even more necessary for the European countries to cooperate and gear their activities where the fight against international environmental crime is concerned. It seems desirable that this occurs at two levels:

- First, it is important to coordinate the gathering of information regarding the various law enforcement activities and of the information to perform these activities efficiently.
- Second, it is also important to coordinate the gathering of information on regulatory bodies and of the information they can provide. As indicated above, almost every European country has a body that sees to it that rules and regulations regarding the environment are complied with. Linking the information provided by these bodies at an international level is essential in the fight of international environmental crime.

All this leads to the conclusion that an international platform is what is needed for the coordination of the various activities regarding the fight against environmental crime. Such a platform will provide an opportunity to exchange information, to perform crime analyses, and to make a start with international, well coordinated, concrete criminal inquiries.

4 CONCRETE MEASURES

INTERPOL has discussed the subject of environmental crime. Up to now these discussions have led to:

- An insight regarding a world and a European network of national police contact points, where environmental law is enforced at a national level.

-
- The compiling of a so-called ECO report, which is a standard form for the (bilateral) exchange of information on environmental crimes, needed in order to provide a reliable structure for the provision of information at world and European levels. As the document, which is available in three languages, has been drawn up with the help of the relevant contact points, all countries know what the ECO report is and how it can help the exchange of information. It has been agreed that ICPO INTERPOL in Lyons will collect and process information at world level, and that Denmark will do the same at for Europe.
 - The organizing of a seminar (training module) for representatives of the police forces in the various countries.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Building a network, and getting to know it thoroughly, establishing which kind of information is exchanged with whom, and providing others with one's know-how and experience are the first three steps which have now been taken.

The next step should now be a more goal-oriented and well coordinated international cooperation and image building. INTERPOL is considering paying particular attention to the following phenomena:

- Waste tourism and dumping of waste.
- Illegal trafficking of nuclear substances.
- Illegal trafficking of protected species (animals and plants).
- Illegal waste brokers.

Added to this is the attention that should be paid to cooperation among national agencies and the consultation of governmental bodies required at an international level.