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## CONCLUSIONS

### **“Strengthening the fight against environmental crime by enhancing cross-regional judicial cooperation among Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership countries, and EU Member States”**

20 - 21 May 2026

Zagreb, Croatia

The tri-regional conference “*Strengthening the fight against environmental crime by enhancing cross-regional judicial cooperation among Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership countries, and EU Member States*”, co-organised by the Eurojust-implemented Western Balkans Criminal Justice (WBCJ) Project, and the European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment (ENPE), brought together 37 prosecutors from Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Ireland, Kosovo\*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, alongside experts from Eurojust, ENPE, Italian Carabinieri and the Council of Europe.

The conference provided a valuable platform for prosecutors to exchange experiences, discuss emerging legislative developments, and identify practical solutions to common investigative and prosecutorial challenges. Discussions focused on the implementation and practical implications of the new EU Environmental Crime Directive and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law, as well as on operational experiences from cross-border investigations and prosecutions.

Participants discussed how Eurojust and ENPE can further support national authorities in strengthening cross-border cooperation and making use of new legal frameworks to improve environmental crime prosecutions. A recurring theme throughout the conference was that environmental crime continues to be under-detected, under-investigated and under-prosecuted. Participants confirmed the conclusions of previous environmental crime events organised by the WBCJ Project in 2025, stressing that environmental crime often remains a low enforcement priority despite its significant environmental, economic and social consequences.

The second-day field visit complemented the conference discussions by providing participants with practical insights into investigative techniques, evidence collection and the realities of environmental crime enforcement on the ground. Participants considered such practical components an important addition to future training and networking activities.

Overall, the conference strengthened mutual trust, professional networks and operational cooperation among prosecutors from the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership countries and EU Member States. It reaffirmed the shared commitment of participants to enhancing the criminal justice response to environmental crime and highlighted the importance of continued regional and cross-regional cooperation in protecting the environment and citizens’ health. Finally, the conference enabled a deeper discussion of certain issues and brought clarity to specific points.



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## **1. Same challenges are faced by the three regions (EaP, EU and WB)**

- Trafficking of waste and illegal logging represent a large part of environmental crimes in WB, EaP and EU
- The need of specialised equipment, laboratories and expertise to ensure that crimes are investigated in a secure manner without endangering health of the population and of the investigators/prosecutors in charge of the case remain a challenge in many countries.
- Length of the investigation require the implementation of urgent measures to reduce at maximum the risk for the environment and health. Such measures are sometimes not taken promptly enough, due to the low prioritisation of environmental crime cases.
- Inter-institutional cooperation including with customs, inspection services and law enforcement is a key factor for successes: national authorities should make full use of available platforms, task force available to coordinate

## **2. In addition to EU MS, WB and EaP countries should make full use of the new opportunities created by the EU Environmental Crime Directive and CoE new convention**

- As pre-accession countries, the WB, Moldova and Ukraine are strongly encouraged to align their legislations with the EU directive before EU accession
- Harmonised and more specific definition of environmental crime should enable easier cooperation with the EU MS
- Call for enhanced specialisation of police, magistrate, judges and training needed

## **3. Investigations in environmental crime cases should systematically be paired with an investigation on financial crime**

- Environmental crime cases are often linked with organised crime, corruption and money laundering. While it can be difficult in some countries to characterise the link between organised crime and environmental crime, the focus on financial investigating allows to have access to special investigative measures.
- Cooperation with the tax office (and OLAF) to start as early as possible the financial investigation was underlined as one of the best practices in the regions.
- Seizure, confiscation and asset management help with proper remediation of the damages to the environment and victims. However, companies involved in environmental crime cases are often being liquidated quickly, which represents an additional layer of difficulties for national authorities.



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#### 4. Importance of the networks and tools for judicial cooperation to handle cross-border investigations on environmental crime

- Best practices and lessons learned sharing regarding legal solutions implementation in specific cases provide crucial insight to all prosecutors from the regions.
- **Eurojust** can provide support to judicial authorities in organising coordination meetings and set up JITs; the presence of LP for most of the non-EU countries attending the event can help in having access to the Eurojust tool kits and support.
- Financial support is also available via the **WBCJ project**, for the WB since 2022 and soon for the EaP countries too (January 2027)
- ENPE, in addition of supporting its network of prosecutors, also provide case specific consultation leading to consolidation of investigation and prosecution strategies
- EMPACT actions on environmental crime, especially the O.A 2.1 on traffic of illegal timber from eastern Europe, offer also financial support especially for law enforcement.

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### Working Group Findings

#### 1. Financial investigation in Environmental Crime

Participants agreed that financial investigations should not be limited to organised crime, money laundering, and terrorist financing cases. They can be a valuable tool in any criminal investigation, including environmental crime. Participants identified a number of **challenges that are particularly relevant to environmental crime** investigations.

- A significant difficulty lies in **distinguishing legal profits from illegal gains**. Environmental offences are frequently concealed within otherwise legitimate commercial activities, making it difficult to determine which portion of a company's revenue derives from unlawful conduct. This often requires specialised forensic accounting expertise to identify the profits attributable to criminal activity and support confiscation proceedings.
- Environmental crime investigations often require the **combination of financial evidence with technical, scientific, and environmental expertise**. Establishing the illegality of activities such as illegal logging, waste trafficking, or unlawful resource extraction may require field inspections, environmental assessments, satellite imagery, surveillance data, and expert evaluations. Prosecutors must therefore work closely with financial investigators, environmental and technical experts to establish both the criminal conduct and the associated financial benefit.
- In offences such as illegal waste trafficking, the **financial model differs** from many traditional organised crime schemes. The same actor may simultaneously receive both the waste and the



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payment associated with its handling, meaning that the movement of criminal proceeds is less visible than in conventional criminal markets where goods and money are exchanged between different actors. As a result, environmental crime often requires adapted financial investigation strategies capable of identifying profits hidden within legitimate business transactions.

- Finally, several participants observed that limited practical experience with environmental crime investigations remains a challenge in itself. While prosecutors and investigators may be familiar with financial investigations in organised crime cases, they often lack experience in applying these techniques to environmental offences, which have distinct evidentiary, technical, and financial characteristics.

## 2. New European Directive on Environmental Crime and new tools

An equal balance of 4 EU and 4 non-EU countries were represented at this session providing very useful insights. It was stressed that perhaps the ECD's over-arching "super-power" is to act as an *inspiration* to drive political will as much as strengthening prosecution of environmental crime. The ECD is a new development that was welcomed, at the three levels of operation: 1) legislators; 2) enforcing authorities; 3) individual prosecutors, particularly relevant in the context of this workshop.

- The new tools will require legislation and resources and will be variable in its application given that these factors are not fixed across European states;
- Penalties under the new ECD must be **effective, dissuasive and proportionate** and starting with **these principles** is a very effective way to start a case;
- The ECD is already being followed by non-EU countries to help their case in joining the EU and it's hoped, the ECD will bring **harmonisation in sanctioning** both in **type** and **extent of sanctions**;
- The **creativity** offered under the new ECD is **welcomed**, but will require effective **collaboration** with other authorities and **specialisation** such as specialist courts;
- Restoration examples, and tools such as BIOVAL, which assign monetary value to wildlife and habitats are an exciting new development and all actors, including prosecutors involved in enforcement of environmental crime should make use of these new tools.

## 3. Illegal Logging

Participants the EU, WB and EaP countries exchanged on challenges they faced and best practices regarding illegal logging and associated illegal trafficking.

- Participants confirmed that **information sharing** remains a challenge, especially for cross-border cases, and even if there are often specialised team at national level (police and/or inspection), the lack of manpower and equipment often limit the number of identified cases and prosecution of cases. The need to identify the location from where the timber was logged,



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needed to evaluate the impact on the environment and proceed with the prosecution of the case, is also challenging for most countries.

- Illegal logging is almost always linked with **corruption** at local level forest management and **falsification of documents**, such as declaration of commercial wood as firewood for the export. Mixing of legally logged timber with illegally logged timber makes it difficult for identification. It was mentioned some cases linked to **organised crime** and **money laundering**.
- It was also demonstrated that **specific expertise**, including the use of DNA as well as EU tools, such as Copernicus which allows the direct verification of the presence or not of trees in the parcels included in documentation provided with the timber, could have an immediate and concrete positive impact on illegal logging and timber trafficking cases. However, it was agreed that the use of technology should be linked with **capacity building** within a **multidisciplinary** approach
- Finally, it was underlined that some national legislations allow the use of **financial investigation** only on some specific type of crime, and so far, environmental crime is not listed. Involvement of special prosecution offices for main cases, involving corruption and money laundering may ensure proper use of investigation tools.