

A FIFTEEN-YEAR TOXIC SCANDAL

Italian Hazardous Waste in Sinop and Samsun, Turkey

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Summary

Date:

Spring 1987 – Present day (January 2002)

The Deal:

Italian waste brokers named Sirteco S.R. of Agrate Brianza and Piattaforma Ecologica Industriale Srl of Venezia (P.E.I.Srl) sent thousands of barrels of hazardous waste to Sulina in Romania. A Romanian company, Kimika ICE, claimed that they were capable of landfilling or incinerating the waste. However, no such facilities existed

and after the waste has been stored for some time it was shipped out to the Black Sea and dumped.

The Waste

According to the Turkish Ministry of Environment, there were thousands of barrels of mixed waste, including manufacturing residues, drycleaning residues, oil, paint residues, residues from the pesticide DDT, solvent residues, organochlorines (solvents and chlorobenzenes, including hexachlorobenzene (HCB), chlorobenzene acids), trimethylbenzene, acetone and lead. Of these thousands of barrels¹, 367 have washed up on the Turkish coast.

The Hazard

Highly toxic, flammable, persistent, bioaccumulative, environmentally harmful.

Origin

Various companies in Italy including Acna Cengio and Agip Covengas, but mostly small dry-cleaning facilities, such as Centro di Pulitura Pelli, La Pulilampo.

Legal Framework

Illegal deal for toxic waste trade between Italian and Romanian companies, legal loopholes exploited for waste dumping in the Black Sea.

Perpetrators

Sirteco Italia s.r.l. of Agrate Brianza Italy; P.E.I. Piattaforma Ecologica Industriale S.r.l. of Venezia; Kimika ICE Romania; Sulina port authorities.

Fate of the waste

Most of the waste remains on the bottom of the Black Sea. 80% of the 367 barrels (152 empty and 215 full of wastes) which washed up on the Turkish Black Sea coast from Istanbul to Rize are stored in warehouses in Sinop-Soðuksu and Samsun-Alaçam.² The remaining 20% of these barrels have mostly been used by the people who found them.

Introduction: Turkey as the Victim of Toxic Waste Trade

In 1988, probably thousands (approximately 3000) drums of Italian toxic waste were dumped in the Black Sea. Since then, the metal drums have been washing ashore on the Turkish Black Sea coastline between İle and Rize. The Turkish Minister of Environment Fevzi Aytekin declared in July 2000 that 367 barrels had been found.³

¹ Official letters of Authority Chioggia Port, march, april 1987

² Fevzi Aytekin, Turkish Ministry of Environment, Official Letter to the Samsun representative in the Turkish Parliament Musa Uzunkaya as an answer to his parliamentary questions about the barrels stored in Sinop and Samsun, 27.07.2000, Ankara.

³ see 2

The Waste Management Department of the Ministry of Environment was given responsibility for finding out what had happened and determining how serious the incident was. The Turkish authorities took preliminary measures after the first barrels appeared in August 1988: the drums were covered with tarpaulin and plastic, some beaches were closed, chemical analyses were carried out and an inquiry was opened to find out who was directly responsible for the incident.

In October 1988, a group of members of the Environmental Research Commission of the Turkish Parliament (TBMM Çevre Araştırma Komisyonu), representatives of State Ministry (Devlet Bakanlıđı), officials of the Environmental Undersecretary (Çevre Müsteşarlıđı) and engineers from Germany (Hoechst representatives) went to the area and investigated the drums.⁴

The drums were labelled in Italian and documents in Italian were discovered inside some of them. Copies of this evidence were subsequently sent to the Italian government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Controllers of the Turkish Undersecretary of Treasury and Foreign Trade (Hazine ve Dış Ticaret Müsteşarlıđı) made further investigations. They found evidence that in early 1987, barrels containing hazardous waste were transported from the ports of Marina di Carrara and Chioggia in Italy to Sulina free port in Romania by the ships Akbay-1 and Corina. In June and August 1988, under the supervision of Italian chemists, the barrels were probably loaded onto Turkish vessels (such as the Munzur) sailing under the Panamanian flag. The barrels were then dumped into the Black Sea.⁵

Between June 30th and July 4th 1989, the Italian Ministry of Environment sent a group of three officials to Turkey. They were: Silano, General Director of Pollution Prevention at the Ministry of Environment, Dr Suriano, an official at the same Ministry and Colonel Palumba of the Italian National Police. Together with Turkish officials they undertook an investigation in the Turkish Black Sea region.⁶ Dr Suriano declared that although the evidence was not sufficient for Italy to be held legally responsible for the waste exported in 1987 and that it was not possible for Italy to take the barrels back, they were prepared to offer technical assistance for building a destruction facility in Turkey.⁷ However, later in 1989, the Italian Environment Minister, Giorgio Ruffolo, promised that the barrels would be taken back if their Italian origin was proven.⁸

In 1989, research was undertaken to identify a suitable location to store the barrels temporarily while they were awaiting final destruction. The State Water Affairs (DSİ- Devlet Su İşleri) and Mine Research Directorate (MTA-Maden Tetkik Arama) contributed to this research. Locations in Sivas, Yozgat and Çankırý were chosen for their convenient geographical and geological characteristics, but the work was stopped after protests from local communities. The authorities decided instead to

⁴ see 2

⁵ see2

⁶ Greenpeace International Report: "The Dumping of Italian Wastes in the Black Sea", July 1992, page 17.

⁷ Official letter of Zeynep Arat, Deputy General Director of Environment, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 1989, Ankara.

⁸ Mehmet Demirel, 05.05.1989, "Indemnity Promise Of Italy" in Turkish daily newspaper "Hürriyet", s.1, 13, sütun 5-7.

store the barrels in Sinop and in Samsun, places where they had been found in large numbers.⁹

Finally, in late 1989, a temporary storehouse was built in Samsun-Alaçam and an old police station in Sinop-Soğuksu was modified. 80% of the barrels were transferred to these places to be stored until they could be destroyed. Both of these storage sites are up in the mountains where they cannot be seen by many people, presumably to avoid protest from Sinop and Samsun residents.

Officially, the money for these activities was provided by the Governmental Fund for Environmental Pollution Prevention (Çevre Kirliliğini Önleme Fonu). But Osman Kurt, mayor of Komşupınar Village in Alaçam, told Greenpeace in May 2001 that the Italian Government had also contributed to the building of the storehouse in Alaçam. Officials told the residents in nearby villages that the building would be a Health Research Centre, but the barrels were brought in night. According to Kurt, mayors of ten nearby villages applied to the government for removal of the storehouse, but nothing happened.

The old police station in Sinop was not suitable for storage of this type of waste and in 1997, the Ministry of Environment began to investigate the possibility of having the waste incinerated. Since the only hazardous waste incinerator in Turkey, Ýzaydağ in Ýzmit, didn't have an official license to incinerate the waste, the Ministry contacted incinerators in Germany, the Netherlands and Finland, but all of these alternatives were ruled out on the as being too expensive. Although the Ministry of Environment has been informed by Greenpeace and scientists about the hazards posed to human health and the environment by incineration, the current policy is to continue to store the waste until a domestic destruction alternative can be found. In effect this means waiting until Ýzmit Hazardous Waste Incinerator, Ýzaydağ, obtains a license to incinerate the wastes.¹⁰ As a result, the hazardous waste originating in Italy will be incinerated in Ýzmit by the Turkish Ministry of Environment, posing great threat to the health and the environment in Ýzmit area.

Under pressure from the Turkish Government and public opinion in Italy, the Deputy Prosecutor of the Republic of Venice, Dr Salvarani, opened a judicial inquiry in 1990. This inquiry revealed that the material recovered on the Turkish beaches had been shipped to the Romanian port of Sulina by the company Sirteco Italia s.r.l. of Agrate Brianza and P.E.I. Piattoforma Ecologica Industriale S.r.l.¹¹ The barrels of waste were stored at Sulina until they were shipped out to sea to be dumped.

The Black Sea is a closed sea. It is more than 2000 metres deep and has a water-exchange cycle of about 140 years. Because freshwater inputs occur at the surface, the salt concentration is comparatively low at the surface but extremely high underneath. Traversed by strong cyclonic currents at the surface, the Sea is almost

⁹ see 2

¹⁰ a-see 2

b- the press release of Sinop Deputy about the activities on transporting the toxic wastes in Soguksu, 10.02.200

¹¹ Chris Endean, Enzo Di Frenna, 17.07.1992, Article of "Italy and Turkey accused of poison waste cover-up", "The European" newspaper.

completely closed below a level of 150 metres- that is 90% of the volume of the water.¹²

The condition of the drums when they were washed ashore indicates that they spent from 10 to 15 days in the water.¹³ Although most of the barrels washed up in 1988, others have come ashore over the years since then. Given the Black Sea's currents and circulation, it is believed that the drums were dumped off the western coast at some time during the first half of June 1988. Many of those washed ashore had large holes, presumably intended to ensure that the drums would sink rapidly. In most cases, these holes would indeed have prevented the drums from floating, so those drums washed ashore can be regarded as the "survivors" of a much larger number. As explained below, the drums recovered in Turkey actually belong to a cargo of thousands of drums.¹⁴ The rest are at the bottom of the Black Sea, polluting still further an already very polluted sea. Two journalists from Turkish daily newspaper *Hurriyet* confirmed that whilst diving off Inceburun in Sinop they saw, about 40 m down, several hundred drums marked "waste" in Italian and carrying the skull and crossbones.¹⁵

1.1 The "Ghost" Ships

The two ships involved, Akbay-1 and Corina, were both operated at that time by the Turkish shipping company "Öztrans Denizcilik ve Ticaret A.ª". Öztrans Denizcilik signed contracts with Sirteco Italy s.r.l to carry chemical industrial waste in drums in pallets from Italian ports to Sulina, Romania.¹⁶

Today Öztrans Denizcilik is still working as a joint-stock company with the partnership of Adnan Özkal Link Gemi Acenteliđi, but Sirteco Italia srl of Agrate Brianza has been bankrupt since 02/10/1989.

Sulina is a port in Romanian territory situated near the mouth of the Danube river. It is a free trade zone where the port authorities are free to enter into commercial contracts with any foreign company. They are known to have signed agreements with Italian and other foreign companies for the unloading and storage of toxic waste at their depots¹⁷. However, a mission to Sulina by the French environmental group Robin de Bois was unable to confirm acceptable conditions for even provisional storage of such waste. Even the fire regulations were found to be outdated. In fact, in reply to enquiries from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romanian officials declared that it was totally forbidden to store any kind of toxic or hazardous waste at Sulina port.¹⁸

¹² Oral statement of the Turkish Minister of Environment of that time, Adnan Kahveci, to Greenpeace member Andreas Bernstoff during his visit to Turkey in 1990 in Ankara.

¹³ Greenpeace International Report: "The Dumping of Italian Wastes in the Black Sea", July 1992, page 3

¹⁴ see 1

¹⁵ Jacky Bonnemais, 17.04.1990, the French newspaper "Libération".

¹⁶ Telex text for the vessel "Akbay-1"

¹⁷ Robin de Bois report "Rapport du Briefing" about the toxic waste barrels, 1990, France.

¹⁸ Official letter of the Embassy of Romania in Ankara to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, regarding the storage of hazardous toxic waste at the Sulina port, 31.01.1990, Ankara.

For years, Sulina was reasonably safe from scrutiny. The port can be accessed only from the Danube or by sea. Clearly then, it is an attractive place to load and unload illegal cargoes.

It is easy to reconstruct events from the extensive documentation available.¹⁹ Sirteco, using the Akbay-1, Corina and perhaps other similar vessels, exported the drums of mainly Italian waste to Sulina.

On the 17th of April 1987, the Akbay-1 took on a cargo of 828 tonnes of industrial waste at the port of Marina di Carrara in Italy²⁰. After 9 days in transit it arrived at Sulina and finished unloading its cargo on the 2nd of May.²¹

Corina moored at Chioggia free port in Italy several times between 13th of February and 4th of April 1987, to load chemical industrial waste destined for Sulina.²² After leaving Italy on the 4th of April, the Corina reached Romania on the 11th²³. Kimika ICE of Bucharest, which had a branch called “Chimica ICE” in Liechtenstein, declared on 16th of April 1987 that the wastes had been destroyed and discharged as per Romanian regulations.²⁴

Other ships were commissioned to do the same dirty job. For example, the Turkish vessel Kaptan Fehmi belonging to the Turkish company Desaz Deniz Ýþletmeleri tried to transport a similar cargo to Sulina on 21st of July 1987, but Italian environmental groups obtained a court order to prevent it.²⁵

Once wastes had reached Sulina, they were stored temporarily at the port until the illegal deals made by the port authorities became clear and the transportation of the waste was stopped by Romanian authorities.²⁶ Then the port authorities or other intermediates decided to get rid of the drums, either by directly disposing of them into the Danube or by using ships to dump them into the Black Sea.

Turkish captains working on ships transporting goods to Sulina port stated that the Turkish vessel Munzur belonging to Caferođlu A.Đ was being loaded with barrels marked the “R” sign (abbreviation for “rifiuti”, meaning “waste” in Italian) at Sulina in May and July 1988.²⁷ According to the findings of Turkish officials, the operations were supervised by Italian chemists.²⁸

¹⁹ see 18, 20, 21, 22, 23,24

²⁰ Turkish Treasury Controllers of the Prime Ministry, 13.03.1989, report about the barrels washed up on Black Sea.

²¹ “Statement of Facts” of Sulina freeport authorities about Akbay-1, 02.05.1987.

²² Chioggio Port Captain, 06.10.1989, Official letter to the General Consulate of Turkey in Milano.

²³ “Manifesto di Partenza” of the ship Corina stamped on 20.03.1987 in Italy.

²⁴ “Certificate of Destruction” of Kimika ICE, 16.04.1987, Bucharest.

²⁵ Ahmet Bedri Ýnce, president of Desaz Shipping Company, 02.03.1989, Statement to the Turkish Treasury Controllers.

²⁶ T.Balkas et al., “State of the marine environment in the Black Sea Region”, UNEP Regional Sea Reports and Studies no.124,1990, p. 260.

²⁷ Mustafa Aygör, Captain of the Turkish vessel “Fazýl Mete” at that time, 29.05.1989, Mersin, Statement to the Turkish Treasury Controllers.

²⁸ Draft report of the Turkish Treasury Controllers, probably in 1989.

In June 1988, members of the French environmental group Robin de Bois saw a ship being loaded with barrels at Sulina. They also saw a truck pumping some unidentified material from a warehouse into one of the channels of the river Danube.²⁹ According to the documents of Robin de Bois, the Munzur left Istanbul on the 3rd of June 1988 for Galatz, a port on the Danube delta, on which the port of Sulina depends administratively. Then from the 25th of June to the 7th of July it was reported to be at Eređli, on the 8th in Ýstanbul and from 8th to 28th of July “heading for Romania”.³⁰

Eređli is the deepest stretch of water (2245 m) along the Turkish Black Sea coast and it is one suspected dumpsite.³¹ As discussed above, barrels have also been seen on the seabed at Inceburun. Whatever the exact location the Munzur used as a dumpsite, the barrels would have been influenced by the strong currents which traverse the Black Sea from west to east. The first barrels washed up to the east, in Alaçam in Samsun on the 4th of August 1988.

2. The Deal: Illegal Toxic Waste Trade

2.1 The Sources of the Waste: Italian companies

The origin of the barrels was rapidly ascertained. The letter ‘R’ stamped on them, which had given rise to initial fears of radiation, was the first identifying feature. It stands for “rifiuti”, the Italian word for “waste”. Use of this abbreviation is compulsory in Italy for marking cargoes of toxic waste. Moreover, various cover notes and documents found by the authorities inside a few drums identified Italian companies by name.³²

The documents recovered from inside some of the drums were mostly old invoices, purchase orders and cover notes. Most of the companies specified were small firms engaged in dry cleaning and the cleaning of fur, leather and similar products. These firms were chiefly located in the Veneto region in northeastern Italy. There were labels from Acna Chimica on the barrels and some of the possible producers were Italian companies like “Agip Covengas”, “Riello Bruciatori”, “Manuli Autoadesivi”, “Antonio Ferrara”, “La Pulilampo”, “Centro di pulitura pelli”, (“Manifesto di Partenza of the ship Corina & “Mercanti dei veleni” of G.Bortolozzo and I.Mazzolin & copies of the documents found in the barrels). There was also one barrel with the label of the German firm Hoechst on it. Hoechst declared that their barrel could have been used by other firms without their knowledge and that they could not be blamed for the dumping into the Black Sea.³³

2.2 The Broker

The preliminary inquiry in Venice revealed that the material recovered on the Turkish beaches had been collected and shipped to Sulina by the company Sirteco Italia s.r.l.

²⁹ The French newspaper “Le Marin” on 30.03.1990.

³⁰ see 17

³¹ Greenpeace International Report, July 1992, “Dumping of Italian Wastes in the Black Sea”.

³² see 23 and g. Bortolozzo and I. Mazzolin, “Mercanti dei Veleni”, maggio [m](#)-giugno 1991, in “Medicina Democratica” n° 76

³³ Official letter of Hoechst officials to the lawyer Y.S. Saribrahimođlu, 29.04.1989.

of Agrate Brianza. Further investigations showed that another Italian company, P.E.I. Piattaforma Ecologica Italiana srl of Venice was also involved. Sirteco has been bankrupt since October 2nd 1989. The Italian media of that period reported that Jeroncich Gianfranco, president of P.E.I., declared that he was not directly responsible for the scandal because he just held the wastes and then passed them on to Sirteco.³⁴

Sirteco, which described itself as a “commercial intermediary in the ecological field”, was the sole Italian agent for Kimika ICE of Bucarest, Romania (through Metrode in Switzerland). In March 1987, Sirteco provided the provincial administration of Massa Carrara and the region of Tuscany with documentation certifying shipment of toxic waste originating from various large Italian industrial concerns and bound for Sulina, the final destination. According to the documentation, “these types of product are being forwarded to Kimika ICE of Bucharest for them to provide for disposal in accordance with current local legislation.” The products were to be unloaded at Sulina and stored provisionally in a prepared area of the port measuring 150000 square metres and equipped with seven ventilated sheds capable of storing up to 300000 tonnes per year. They were then to be either incinerated or landfilled.³⁵

This was all a sham. Neither the port authorities at Sulina nor Kimika ICE were in a position to fulfil these obligations and Sirteco themselves were certainly not. The environmental group, Robin de Bois, on a visit to the area of Sulina port, found the conditions for even temporary storage completely unacceptable. Also, as mentioned before, the storage of hazardous waste at Sulina was forbidden by Romanian regulations. In fact, there were no facilities in Romania licensed for treating or incinerating waste classifiable as toxic.³⁶

The cargo was loaded onto the motor vessel Akbay-1, which left Italy on 17th of April 1987 and arrived in Sulina on 26th April. The cargo consisted of manufacturing residues, drycleaning residues, oils, pesticides and isocyanates originating from various firms.

Sirteco also transported waste aboard the motor vessel Corina. This waste originated from Venetian cleaning firms, Manuli Autoadesivi and A. Ferrera, and other companies.³⁷ These same names were later found on documents attached to the drums washed up in Turkey, stained but still legible.³⁸

On one occasion, the Corina had to load approximately 2000-2500 tonnes of wastes originating from a number of industrial companies from the north of Italy. However, the dock workers interrupted the loading because they thought that the containers were dangerous and they wanted better safety guarantees. The Chioggia praetor (or

³⁴ From the newspaper “IL GAZZETTINO ITALIA”, 21.04.1989.

³⁵ Document provided by Sirteco Italia s.r.l. to the provincial administration of Massa Carrara about the toxic waste bound to Sulina, 30.03.1987

³⁶ see 15

³⁷ see 23

³⁸ Semra Somersan, a Turkish journalist of Cumhuriyet newspaper sent to Greenpeace Italy the copies of some documents found in one of the barrels during the research trip of German experts to Black Sea about the case which she joined as well.

local magistrate), E. Ciampaglia, also blocked the loading of the ship because there were irregularities in the transport authorisation of the trucks being used.³⁹

In the end, the Corina sailed from Chioggia port on the 4th of April 1987 carrying only part of the originally intended cargo: around 580 tonnes in 2796 barrels. The containers that were left behind were probably transported by train to Marina di Carrara port where they were loaded on Akbay 1.⁴⁰

2.3 The Disposer: Kimika ICE

Kimika ICE of Bucharest had a branch called “Chimica ICE” in Liechtenstein. Using this branch and Metrode of Switzerland it made deals with Sirteco to collect and send the toxic waste of Italian companies to Romania. However, there were no disposal facilities in Romania. In view of this fact, Kimika ICE’s assurances to Sirteco concerning “final destination and destruction” (as written in English on the departure documentation for the Corina)⁴¹ surely could not be depended upon.

2.4 The Money

Sirteco, as the exclusive agent in Italy for Kimika ICE of Bucharest, drew up a contract with several Italian industrial wastes disposal companies for a total of 150 000 tons of waste per year to be sent to Romania. The final destination of the wastes was to be landfill or incineration in Romania. In the contract between Sirteco and Kimika the cost of disposal was around 600 Italian lire per kilo, less than half of the usual amount required for the correct disposal of industrial waste, which would be closer to 1500 Italian lire per kilo. The total value of the contract was around 100 billion Italian lire, which would be equivalent to 50 million Euro or 75000 billion Turkish lire at the exchange rates for October 2001.⁴²

In the UNEP Regional Seas Report no.124 the amount is given as 1.168 million Swiss francs.⁴³

2.5 Legal Proceedings in Romania, Italy and Turkey

In Romania the matter went to court.⁴⁴ On 16 July, 1987, the Romanian magistrate sentenced top officials of Kimika ICE and three directors of the port of Sulina to long prison sentences: 11 to 18 years. They were charged with the illegal storage of more than 4000 tonnes of Italian waste. Among those sentenced was Mr Micu Mikai from Sulina port, who, on 21 October 1986, had issued Kimika ICE with the certificate of guarantee for storing the waste. This was the certificate used by Sirteco for its export

³⁹ from “La Nuova Venezia” dated 21.04.1989.

⁴⁰ g. Bortolozzo and I. Mazzolin, “Mercanti dei Veleni”, maggio-giugno 1991, in “Medicina Democratica” n° 76

⁴¹ from “Certificate of Destruction” dated 16th april 1987 in Sulina

⁴² “Il Gazzettino Italia”, 21.04.1989

⁴³ T.Balkas et al., “State of the marine environment in the Black Sea Region”, UNEP Regional Sea Reports and Studies no.124,1990, p. 260.

⁴⁴ “Financial Times”, 24.06.1988 and see 43.

contract. The Kimika representative, Hugo Weinstein, was sentenced to 18 years after the court concluded that he had received “*a considerable amount of foreign currency from the foreign firm to conclude the contracts.*” The court noted that they “*committed highly serious crimes by flagrantly violating the legal norms that forbid the importation of dangerous or harmful commodities apt to place public health and the environment in jeopardy.*”⁴⁵

Nicolae Ceausescu, the Romanian president of that time, who was overthrown and executed in the 1989 Romanian revolution, dismissed the Chairman of the State Planning Committee, the Minister of Foreign Trade and the State Secretary for their involvement in, or knowledge of, illegal dumping of waste. Several other Ministers including the Prime Minister were either “warned” or “censured” for not taking action to prevent the incident.⁴⁶ However, the president’s wife, Elena Ceausescu, was unaffected. She was First Deputy Prime Minister and the chairman of the National Council for Science and Technology. She had built up the petrochemical industry and Kimika ICE was also under her control, yet no action was taken against her.

The Romanian Embassy was asked by the Turkish authorities for help in their investigation, but did not disclose what had happened in Romania. This lack of cooperation had serious implications, both for the Turkish and Italian investigations.

In Italy, a Venetian judge, Ivano Nelson Salvarani had opened an inquiry into the case. An international arrest order was given for the Greek captain of the Corina, Flippos Olyanos. The Akbay-1 could not be found and it is suspected that it had been sunk.⁴⁷ Eventually, the investigations ended without a result. Salvarani told the newspaper “The European” in 1992: “*I have always maintained that proof of offence lies in Romania. Unfortunately, our foreign ministry has problems in setting up the necessary diplomatic channels to obtain certain documents from the Romanian authorities.*”

In Turkey, the investigations of the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Environment and the Treasury Controllers resulted in clear proof of the Italian origin of the waste barrels.⁴⁸ But a court case was not initiated, and nor did the Turkish Government put enough pressure on the Italian Government to take back the waste. Most probably, the case was “solved” in a diplomatic manner between the Italian and Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministries, so as not to jeopardise Turkey’s relations with a country which could help it to enter the European Union.

3. The Waste

In 1988, the Turkish Central Criminal Police Laboratory (TCCPL) analysed some 13 samples of waste washed up at Sinop and Samsun.⁴⁹ Subsequently, in 2001, Greenpeace collected a further 11 samples, some taken directly from barrels in the

⁴⁵ see 44

⁴⁶ “Financial Times”, 24.06.1988.

⁴⁷ Prereport of the judicial consultant Özden Sav, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19.06.1989, Ankara.

⁴⁸ see 2

⁴⁹ The report of Turkish Central Criminal Police Laboratory of Prime Ministry, 09.08.1988.

warehouses and some from the material that has spilled from the neglected barrels as they rusted.

The police report identified a number of toxic and environmentally harmful pollutants, including derivatives of the notorious organochlorine pesticide DDT, other organochlorines, solvents, aliphatic and aromatic hydrocarbons, activated carbon granules and residues of polymers and paints. The later Greenpeace investigation also found paint residues, activated carbon granules and what appeared to be polymer residues. The analyses confirmed the presence of hydrocarbons and organochlorines, in this case predominantly chlorobenzenes and volatile organochlorines. Moreover, the Greenpeace samples were analysed for nine metals, all of which were detectable in at least one sample. Six of the samples contained traces of mercury, one of the most environmentally damaging of metals. One sample, from the warehouse in Sinop, contained over 1% (10 000 parts per million) of lead, a metal which is toxic to most living things, including all aquatic biota.⁵⁰ This concentration of lead is approximately 350 times higher than the uppermost level typically found in uncontaminated soils, 10-30 mg/kg (parts per million).⁵¹

Even this is only a partial assessment of the wastes. Many of the barrels have never been tested and the hazards of their contents are unknown.

4. The Current Fate of the Waste

4.1 Soðuksu and Alaçam Villages: Victims of illegal waste dumping

As described above, in 1988, the Turkish authorities decided to store the waste barrels temporarily in Sinop Soðuksu and Samsun Alaçam, until a final solution could be found. But fourteen years have passed and the barrels are still in the same “temporary” storage.

Since August 1988, the barrels have continued to wash up on the Turkish coast, and the officials have put the “newcomers” into these storehouses. Today, at least 367 barrels have been washed up and over 300 remain in Sinop and Samsun.⁵²

The local people in both Soðuksu and in Alaçam were misled by officials about the real reason for the building of the storehouses. In Samsun the officials said that they were building a Health Research Centre and in Sinop the reason given was the renovation of the old forest. In both places the local people refused to have a building full of poison in their backyard, but the authorities ignored them. In the case of

⁵⁰ a-Goyer, R.A. (1996). Toxic effects of metals. In Casarett & Doull's Toxicology. The Basic Science of Poisons, Fifth Edition, Klaassen, C.D. (Ed). McGraw-Hill Health Professions Division, ISBN 0071054766.

b-Bryan, G.W. and Langston, W.J. (1992). Bioavailability, accumulation and effects of heavy metals in sediments with special reference to United Kingdom estuaries: a review. Environmental Pollution 76:89-131.

⁵¹ Alloway, B.J. (1990). Heavy metals in soils. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. New York, ISBN 0470215984.

⁵² see 2

Samsun, the wastes were brought to the storehouse at night without the local people being informed.

During the 14 years that have elapsed since then, the ceiling of the depot in Sođuksu has begun to leak. The building is now 40cm deep in a mixture of rainwater and waste. In late 2000, after Greenpeace raised the issue again, the depot was renovated, although this was a temporary solution to prevent a crisis and not a permanent resolution of the problem. Moreover, the door of the storehouse in Samsun has been used for target practice by the local hunters. The lock has been broken several times and barrels taken out to serve for the villagers' various needs including storing water. Every two months, the health technicians from the village clinic in Alaçam come and check the state of the storehouse, putting a new lock on with a simple chain.

4.2 Risks to the Environment and Human Health

The compounds in the wastes at Sinop and Samsun exhibit a wide range of toxic, hazardous and environmentally harmful properties (see eg ATSDR 2000, USDHHS 2000, Stringer & Johnston 2000). No research is available for many of the compounds in the wastes, but even so, the toxic effects described for the compounds identified in these wastes are too many to list here. Together, they can damage almost all of the organs and systems of the body, such as the liver, kidneys, lungs, the eyes, the skin, the bones, the blood system, the central nervous system, the immune system, the endocrine system and the reproductive system. Some can affect the development of the unborn, or the young. Others are mutagenic, or are known or suspected to cause cancer in humans or animals.

As well as being toxic, some of the pollutants in question- particularly the heavier organochlorines and the metals- are environmentally persistent or bioaccumulative. Persistent compounds can be transported many miles from their point of release and bioaccumulative compound may build up in animals or plants from very low levels of exposure. Conversely, some of the less persistent compounds are comparatively water soluble and could leach into groundwater, contaminating it for years or decades.

Nor are these theoretical risks. The barrels stored at both sites are in extremely poor condition and wastes have been leaking from them for years. Some of the compounds in the wastes collected from the floors of the warehouses are flammable, or may produce toxic or flammable vapours, escaping into the atmosphere. It is impossible to estimate the quantities of pollutants that have been released to the environment.

In a survey of contamination around the Sinop waste storage site, during 2000, Greenpeace found hydrocarbons, metals and organochlorines. The investigation could not prove conclusively whether these were derived from the waste stored nearby, but the possibility should be investigated further.

Musa Uzunkaya, Member of the Turkish Parliament, has expressed severe concerns about the state of the health of the local people and the environment surrounding the storehouse in Sinop and the effects on the local economy⁵³. He has raised the matter

⁵³ Cengiz Demirel, 14.09.2000, "The Posionous Scandal" in Turkish daily newspaper "Cumhuriyet".

officially with the Ministry of the Environment, but so far the situation has not been improved.

4.3. What should be done with the waste

To continue to store the hazardous wastes in the storehouses in Samsun and Sinop or to incinerate them, as suggested last year by the Turkish Minister of Environment, are both unsustainable and unacceptable ways to deal with them.

Greenpeace has warned the Ministry of Environment and Sinop Governorship several times about the risks that incinerating hazardous waste poses to public health and the environment. It is been proved that incineration is a major source of carcinogenic dioxins, targeted for elimination by world governments under the Stockholm Convention negotiated via UNEP (the United Nations Environment Programme). The convention aims to put an end to the manufacture, use and release of persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Incinerating hazardous wastes inevitably releases POPs such as dioxins, furans and PCBs which have serious long-term health effects (see eg Stringer & Johnston 2001).

Allowing the wastes to remain stored in the appalling conditions or dumping them elsewhere in Turkey are also unacceptable. This is not only because of the risks of the processes involved, but also encourage other toxic waste trade companies to see Turkey as a potential dumpsite. The only solution to the saga of the Italian toxic waste is to return its country of origin, Italy, as Greenpeace has frequently demanded.

5. Responsibility for the Waste: Legal Background

At the time that these wastes were exported and dumped, there was no international waste trade legislation. However, the 1972 London Dumping Convention (which deals with dumping of wastes at sea, now the 1996 London Convention) was already in force at the time that the wastes were dumped off the Turkish coast. Ironically, despite having been the victim of the dumping of the Italian wastes in the Black Sea, Turkey has still not signed this Convention.

In the years since these Italian wastes were exported to Romania, legislation has been drawn up which would have prohibited the Italians from exporting hazardous waste to Romania. The Basel Convention, which was signed in 1989, is a global convention designed to minimise the trade in hazardous wastes, especially wastes being shipped from the world's richer countries to the poorer ones. In 1995, the Convention was amended to include a ban, which, though it still requires ratification, prohibits export of waste from OECD countries to non-OECD countries. The Waste Trade Protocol of the Barcelona Convention, signed in Izmir in 1996 and expected to enter into force in the near future, contains similar provisions. Moreover, EC legislation currently in force would prevent Italy exporting hazardous waste to any non-EU country.

Both the Basel and Barcelona Conventions contain provisions to ensure that if waste cannot be disposed of as agreed, then it should be taken back by the State of export. Although, of course, there is no direct legal obligation on Italy since the original export did not take place under the auspices of either of these Conventions, there is a

strong moral responsibility for the government of Italy to take back these wastes and dispose of them in an environmentally sound manner.

There is enough proof that Italian companies were responsible for this toxic trade and to say that Italian Government actually does have the responsibility for the toxic waste barrels stored in Samsun and Sinop:

1. The documents found in the barrels and proofs found after investigations conducted by both governmental and non-governmental organisations, including Greenpeace, clearly indicate that the toxic waste barrels found on Turkish coast in 1988 are a part of the cargo Sirteco Italy S.R.L. sent to Romania in 1987.
2. Even though there was no international regulation banning toxic waste trade in 1987, the deal between Sirteco S.R.L. Italy and Kimika ICE Romania and the Sulina port authorities was illegal under Italian and Romanian national regulations. It was the responsibility of the Italian companies, which sent their industrial waste through Sirteco, to make sure the waste would be properly destroyed according to Italian regulations. However there was no incineration or disposal facility in Romania, and even the temporary storage of the waste at Sulina port was totally forbidden according to Romanian regulations.
3. Since the main criminal in this act, Sirteco S.R.L. of Agrate Brianza, went bankrupt in 1989, the Italian Government has to take responsibility for the toxic waste barrels washed up on shore in Turkey and for the barrels which are on the sea bed of the Black Sea.

Although the Italian delegation sent to Turkey initially declared that Italy could not be held responsible, the Italian Minister of Environment, Giorgio Ruffolo, promised later in 1989 to take back the barrels if their Italian origin was proved.⁵⁴

Turkey does not possess the technology to process or to store such wastes, and, consequently doesn't allow their import. Via a decision of the Turkish parliament on March 3, 1988, Turkey banned the import of industrial wastes.⁵⁵ Even the temporary storage of these materials, which came to Turkey because of an illegal act, cannot be tolerated.

6. Conclusion

Greenpeace demands

from the Italian Government:

- That they honour the promise and take back the waste washed up on Turkish shores since August 1988
- That they sponsor the clean up of the storehouses in Sinop and in Samsun, and any contaminated areas around them

⁵⁴ see 8.

⁵⁵ see 43.

from the Turkish Government:

- Not to dispose of these wastes in Turkey
- to use all diplomatic and legal means to send the waste back to Italy

Only this will show the good will of the Italian Government, since it is actually responsible for the whole Italian origin waste lying on the seabed of the Black Sea, and it will show that Turkey, and other developing countries are no longer the dumpsites of the developed world.

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