

# CoE Opens New Convention on Environmental Crime for Signature

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## News

On 3 December 2025, the Council of Europe opened the [Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law](#) (CETS No. 228) for signature, marking a significant step in the development of international legal tools to address environmental crime. The new convention seeks to strengthen criminal justice responses to serious environmental harm and promote closer cooperation between states in the investigation and prosecution of such offences.

At the opening ceremony in Strasbourg, the European Union and two Council of Europe member states (Moldova and Portugal) became the first signatories. Council of Europe [Secretary General Alain Berset called on](#) other states to join the treaty swiftly, stressing that stronger collective action was necessary to address environmental crimes that threaten ecosystems, human health, and economic stability.

The convention forms part of broader Council of Europe initiatives addressing environmental protection and responds to the growing recognition that environmental degradation is linked to the global challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The instrument focuses specifically on the role of criminal law in tackling environmental damage and aims to close enforcement gaps that have historically allowed serious environmental offences to remain insufficiently investigated or prosecuted.

In substance, the Convention obliges State Parties to do the following:

- Criminalising a range of serious acts causing environmental harm with regard to: pollution, products and substances; waste; installations; ships; natural resources; and biodiversity;
- Introducing provisions that address intentional conduct leading to environmental disasters, comparable in scale to what has been described in international debate as “ecocide”;
- Addressing corporate liability, the liability of legal persons, and sanctions that must be effective, proportionate, and dissuasive.

State Parties are also obliged to establish integrated policies to prevent and combat the commission of any offence established in the Convention, including the establishment and publication of a respective national strategy. Parties shall also allocate appropriate financial and human resources to prevent and combat the commission of the determined environmental offences. With regard to prevention, Parties need to promote or organise information and awareness-raising campaigns relating to preventing and combating environmental crime. Interestingly, the Convention also provides that Parties can stipulate to grant persons who have sufficient interest or allege a violation of a right, as well as non-governmental organisations promoting

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environmental protection, the right to participate in criminal proceedings concerning offences established in accordance with this Convention.

Last but not least, the treaty promotes international cooperation in investigations and prosecutions and provides for a monitoring mechanism to oversee implementation by participating states.

Entry into force will occur once the convention has been [ratified by at least ten parties](#), including a minimum of eight Council of Europe member states. It will also be open to accession by non-Council of Europe member states once it becomes operative – reflecting the transnational nature of environmental crime.

By establishing common criminal law standards and encouraging stronger cross-border cooperation, the new convention is expected to enhance accountability for environmental harm and reinforce the role of criminal justice systems in environmental protection. Eucrim's documentation [database on the Council of Europe conventions](#) will provide updates on signatures, ratifications and accessions of/to the new Convention.

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