

WASTE TRADE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WASTE ATTACK AGAINST LEBANON

CASE 3: PLASTIC WASTE FROM GERMANY IN 1996

In October 1996, the Greenpeace Mediterranean Office helped uncover a waste trade scheme in Lebanon. A ring of traders in Germany, Russia and Lebanon shipped illegally to Beirut Port 36 containers full of 680 tons of mixed plastic wastes, some of them contaminated with chemicals and outdated medicine. The containers came from Germany. Greenpeace informed the authorities, igniting an official inquiry and the detention of two men in Beirut.

The case of German waste had a snowball effect. Shortly afterwards, the authorities in Beirut Port confiscated two containers full of mixed plastic waste from Belgium. The Canadian ambassador in Beirut later stated publicly that he gave Lebanese officials information about a shipment of outdated paints from Canada to Lebanon.

1. GERMAN PLASTIC WASTE SHIPPED TO LEBANON:

The German companies "International Trade and Finance" in Saulheim and "RC-GMBH Reifenrecycling" in the city of Hagen, which is owned by Bernd Bretzing, was the source of the German waste sent to Lebanon. Bretzing was jailed under remand in Germany in August 1996 for illegal dumping of waste in Germany. Unknown companies had given Bretzing 135,000 DM to get rid of plastic waste, including the 680 tons that were shipped to Lebanon. Hundreds of tons of plastic waste were still in Bretzing's company end of 1996.

Together with a businessman residing in Moscow, Bretzing shipped the 36 containers filled of mixed plastic waste to Lebanon in July 1996. Some of the waste was contaminated by chemicals. It also included outdated medicine and small metal parts. The Lebanese plastic producing company "George Freiha and Sons" was to get some of the waste.

The first batch of 15 containers was loaded in Antwerp, Belgium, on board the ship "CB Medal" on 17th July 1996 (the other containers were shipped shortly afterwards). The agent for the carrier was "Contship Containerlines Nederland".

The bill of lading read that the 15 containers, filled with "big bags and bales with shredded and granulated plastics", were sent to Beirut for Mr. Jean Kozeiha Beinoh in Al-Kalaa, Lebanon. He is the brother of Lebanese businessman Freim Beinoh in Moscow who together with the two German companies organised the criminal deal. The bill of lading described "RC-GMBH Reifenrecycling" in Hagen as the agent. The shipping agent in Beirut was "Kosta Bitar for Shipping".

Freiha, who was promised raw plastic materials for a good price, had already issued a check of 14,000 USD to Jean Beinoh. On 8th August 1996, Freiha opened the containers in Beirut Port and was shocked to see plastic waste. He rejected to take it and cancelled the check.

Freiha called Freim Beinoh in Moscow who told him to speak with Mashor Ereiqtat, the owner of the company "International Trading and Finance". Ereiqtat is a German national of Jordanian origin. Freiha called Ereiqtat who told him he will pay him 100,000 USD if he shuts up and take all the waste containers. Freiha refused. Jean Kozeiha Beinoh then tried to sell the 36 containers to a plastic factory in the southern Lebanese city of Sidon owned by Mr. Mohammad al-Hariri. But before any agreement was made, the Lebanese authorities detained Beinoh as mentioned later in this report.

The Lebanese port authorities, alarmed by Freiha, confiscated the shipment in August 1996 and kept the case secret. Greenpeace believes that the issue was not made public in the summer of 1996 because Lebanon was in the run-off to parliamentary elections, and the government feared that the waste trade scheme would damage its image.

In the meantime, Interpol alerted the Lebanese authorities, and General State Prosecutor Adnane Addum took over the case. He asked the Environment Ministry to check the 36 containers. In a report dated 2 October 1996, ministry experts Olfat Hamdan and Dr. Naji Qdaih wrote that the 36 containers were filled with mixed plastic waste partly contaminated with chemicals. The wastes are a mixture of all sorts of plastics, including PVC cables and shredded boxes that had contained chemicals. The report said that Lebanon has "no facilities to recycle such waste" and that it is "hazardous waste that should be returned to sender". This report was kept secret, too.

2. GREENPEACE HELPS UNCOVER THE SCANDAL:

In late October 1996, Greenpeace received information about this waste trade scheme, and alarmed high-ranking politicians. Greenpeace urged them to make the issue public and to demand that Germany takes back the containers. Days later, State Prosecutor Addum went public with the case and started interrogating all involved persons in Lebanon. German embassy officials were invited to the Justice Palace and to the Foreign Ministry, and they were officially asked to return the waste.

The Lebanese authorities arrested in November 1996 Jean Kozeiha Beinh and Mikhail Andraos, who accused of helping Beinh sell the waste. Andraos told justice officials that he was offered 2,500 dollars if the waste was sold.

Greenpeace gathered information about the waste traders in Germany and found out that German national Bretzing was in 1993 the director of the German company "Asian Trade Import Export". This company was responsible for dumping 6,000 tons of used tires from Germany in the Baltic state of Estonia in the early 1990s. They were burnt illegally and emitted poisonous smoke. Bretzing was jailed on remand in Germany in August 1996 under suspicion of illegally storing hazardous waste.

Mashoor Ereqat claimed that he was fooled by Bretzing. But Greenpeace has a document in which Ereqat clearly described the contents of the containers as "mixed plastics" and "plastic waste".

In April 1997, a Lebanese court released Jean Kozeiha Beinh and Mikhail Andraos, arguing that they did not know that the 36 containers were full of plastic waste. The court decided to jail Freim Kozeiha Beinh 10 years in absence and fine him one million Lebanese pounds (about 650 dollars). Freim Kozeiha Beinh believed to be living in Russia.

3. GREENPEACE PROVES THAT EXPORT OF WASTE WAS ILLEGAL:

The export operation of the 36 containers from Germany to Lebanon was illegal under the Basel Convention because it took place without the consent of the Lebanese authorities. Moreover, it was a fraudulent operation because the hazardous waste does not conform with the material declared officially in the bill of lading. This was proven by an expertise carried out by the Hamburg-based Oekopol Institute for Greenpeace. The expertise focused on the classification of the waste in the framework of the German legislation, European Union (EU) laws and the Basel Convention.

Treatment of waste inside Germany is the first option of waste disposal under Article 3 of the German law on shipments of waste. The second priority is treatment in another EU country. "Disposal outside the EU can only be the last option when treatment inside Germany or the EU is impossible. 21 containers are clearly hazardous waste under the German legislation. This means that their export to Lebanon is illegal under article 1.1b of the Basel Convention," the expertise said.

Due to strong indications that the German waste was shipped to Lebanon for final disposal, "this waste export is prohibited by the EU Council regulation on the supervision and control of shipments of waste (EEC Nr. 259/93, Article 14)". "Even if the wastes shipped to Beirut would be considered as wastes for recovery, they would by no means fall into the Green List of Wastes (Annex II to EEC 259/93) because of their contamination," the expertise added.

Greenpeace provided copies of the expertise to the Lebanese judicial authorities and to the Environment Ministry to support them in their work to return the wastes to Germany. Copies were also given to the German authorities in Bonn and Baden-Wuerttemberg and to the German embassy in Beirut. Greenpeace was in regular contact with the authorities in Bonn and in Stuttgart, the capital of the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg from which the waste originated.

4. GERMAN EXPERTS AND GREENPEACE INSPECT THE CONTAINERS:

On November 1996, three German experts inspected the containers at Beirut Port. Lebanese officials and Greenpeace were present at the site and documented the inspection. The Germans experts told Greenpeace that they will write in their report that all the waste should be returned to Germany.

Some of the German plastic wastes carried the logo of Henkel, car parts manufacturer VDO, Chemson Polymer Additive, Brockhues Farben, Roehrig Granit and Neopol Waschmittel fuer Industrielle Verschmutzungen.

The names of the German experts are:

- Klaus Roescheisen: Director (Ministrial Dirigent, Abteilungsleiter Grundsatzangelegenheiten, Verkehr, Oekologie und Abfallwirtschaft) at the Ministry of Environment of the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg

- Hans Ernst Kunz: Head of a Project Group (Projektgruppe Sonderabfallentsorgung), at the Ministry of Environment in Baden-Wuerttemberg (Kerneplatz 9, 70182 Stuttgart, T ++49-711-1262675, F -1262881)
- Paul Wiennand: Scientific assistant at the "Research Institute Plastic Recycling" (Wissenschaftlicher Assistent, Forschungsinstitut Kunststoffrecycling) in the town of Willich. (Siemensring 79, 47853 Willich, T ++49-2154-428824, F 428823, Private: ++49-2156-2866.)

During the inspection, Greenpeace pressed Germany to take back from Lebanon all the 36 containers. No distinction should be made between contaminated and not contaminated wastes.

5. LEBANESE ENVIRONMENT MINISTER LOSES JOB OVER SCANDAL:

Environment Minister Pierre Pharaon issued a "certification" on 23 July 1996 in which he wrote that the Ministry of Environment has "no objection" about imported plastic waste being used in the industrial process of the Lebanese factory "Rocky pour le Commerce et L'industrie" in Blat-Jbeil.

Pharaon wrote a letter to the Higher Council of Customs saying that factory owner Robert Khoury wanted to use plastic waste, described in French as "Rognures et debris de matieres plastiques". But Mr. Isam Hobballah, the head of the Higher Council for Customs, answered on 4 July 1996 rejecting this.

The way Mr. Pharaon dealt with this issue and with past waste trade schemes made him lose his job during a government reshuffle in November 1996. It was not clear whether the company in Blat-Jbeil had also tried to purchase the plastic waste from Germany or from another foreign source.

6. CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS:

30 October 1996: Greenpeace calls on the German government to return the 36 containers full of contaminated plastic waste from Lebanon. Germany has a moral and legal responsibility to return the waste.

6 November 1996 - Greenpeace charged that German authorities in Bonn are dragging their feet and downplaying the issue of the 36 containers. Greenpeace also called on German officials in the Environment Ministry and in the Foreign Ministry in Bonn not to waste time and return the waste swiftly. It is unacceptable that German officials are claiming that there is no evidence that the containers are full of unsorted plastic waste partly contaminated by chemicals. And they are insinuating that they would return only the contaminated waste.

13 November 1996 - The German waste trade scheme was an illegal operation under German and European Union (EU) laws, a Greenpeace expertise said.

27 November 1996 - Greenpeace called on Germany to take back from Lebanon all the 36 containers. No distinction should be made between contaminates and not contaminated waste. The call came as three German scientific and legal experts inspected the containers at Beirut Port. Lebanese officials and Greenpeace were present at the site and documented the inspection. Officials in Germany refused to clearly state that they would return all the waste and insinuated that they might return only the contaminated wastes. This is unacceptable and outrageous.

7 February 1997 - Greenpeace said that "technical and bureaucratic" measures are delaying a decision to finance the shipments of German plastic waste back from Beirut to Germany. A official from the Environment Ministry in Bonn told Greenpeace that the German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg has informed the ministry that the 36 containers with plastic waste in Beirut should be returned, and that the financing should be done by Germany's "Solidarity Fund for Re-Exporting Waste". However, the authorities in Baden-Wuerttemberg have failed to inform Bonn about the quantity of the waste, the costs of the re-export operation and what will happen to the waste in Germany.

12 February 1997 - Greenpeace welcomed the decision of the Lebanese Ministry of Environment to adopt a new regulation that bans the import of all hazardous waste into Lebanon. The ministerial decision bans all waste imports for final disposal or for incineration and all hazardous waste imports bound for recycling. Wastes imported for final disposal disguised as "for recovery" (that is incineration) will also be outlawed. Greenpeace has provided ministry officials with documents to help them draft the strict regulation.

The Lebanese authorities had been ignoring the issue of toxic waste trade for years. They had banned Greenpeace ships from visiting Lebanon in 1995 and 1996 to prevent the organisation from working on this issue. The Greenpeace Mediterranean Office has been campaigning in Lebanon against waste imports since 1994 when it exposed that toxic waste imported from Italy in 1987 was still dumped in many areas.

28 February 1997 - Greenpeace welcomes the decision of Germany's "Solidarity Fund for Re-Exporting Waste" to finance the shipment of the 36 containers back to Germany.

19 May 1997 - Greenpeace congratulated Germany for taking back a first batch of 36 containers full of plastic waste partly contaminated with chemicals and outdated medicine. 21 containers were shipped to the German port town of Bremerhaven. The other 15 containers will be returned to Germany about 14 days later on board the Belgian vessel "Kerstin". On that day, Lebanon sent a clear warning to all waste traders world-wide. It is telling them that any waste entering Lebanon will be returned to sender at the expenses of the exporting company or government.

2 June 1997 - The second and last batch of the 36 containers was loaded into the ship "MF Levant". The vessel with 15 containers on board left to Egypt and from there the waste was to be sent on another boat to the German port town of Bremerhaven.

24 June 1997 - The Greenpeace ship today Albatros "welcomed" in the German port of Bremerhaven the batch of 21 containers. The crew held a banner saying in English and Arabic "Welcome back - Stop Waste Trade" near the ship Nuova Mediterranea which transported the containers. The remaining 15 containers full of plastic waste arrived in Hamburg shortly afterwards.

Fouad Hamdan

**Greenpeace Mediterranean
Lebanon Campaign
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