



# ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

Electronic Newsletter

Western Balkans and Turkey

April 2020

## NORTH MACEDONIA: WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS OF THE ENERGY SECTOR OF NORTH MACEDONIA?



What energy perspective can we expect?

Will REK "Bitola", the largest, main electricity producer in the country, stop working completely after 20 years, or will it continue with new equipment and new coal excavations? Will there be investments in new energy facilities from domestic, renewable energy sources, which will reduce the import dependence on electricity and emissions? Which solutions are the best and will have the greatest economic benefits for the country, while bringing a secure supply of electricity?

The answers to these and many other questions from the energy sector, more than ten years ago, experts offer in development strategies, which in practice have no or minimal realization. How things will go with the latest Energy Development Strategy

by 2040 remains to be seen, although it is certain that due to the corona virus situation, the Government's decision has been postponed for a long time, which of the three offered scenarios will be accepted for implementation.

According to Vladimir Sarac of the Energy Agency, the Strategy is balanced with measures and activities that will contribute to greater electricity production and reduce the impact of climate change and environmental protection.



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## BELGIUM: AS AUSTRIA AND SWEDEN CLOSE THEIR LAST COAL-FIRED POWER STATIONS, IS THE CORONA CRISIS ACCELERATING EUROPE'S MOVE BEYOND COAL?

The global pandemic is dealing a heavy blow to the most polluting of fossil fuels. While its price hasn't gone negative, as has happened with oil, the coal market is struggling worldwide.

**In Europe, coal's share of power generation has dropped by 2% since February, Bloomberg reports, while in the US it's down by 5%.** Even in coal-heavy economies like China and India, the market share has shrunk.

The restrictive measures taken by our governments to slow down the spread of the coronavirus have caused a general decline in energy demand across the globe, yet the electricity market is among the least impacted. However, data from the International Energy Agency show that the coal sector is facing the largest decline since the Second World War.

### The true cost of coal

Coal comes at an incredibly high price for people and nature. Coal-fired power plants are responsible for enormous amounts of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as a toxic mix of harmful pollutants that contaminate the air we breathe.

In Europe, coal burning is the single biggest source of poisonous mercury entering the air, and plays a substantial role in accelerating climate breakdown.

Coal mining and washing, combustion and waste management, are also causing the deterioration of freshwater quantity and quality. This is the true cost of a business whose profitability is falling at an unprecedented pace.

**Nearly half the world's coal power plants are currently running at a loss, while coal profits are collapsing. A study run by Carbon Tracker on the profitability of 95% of coal plants in operation or planned around the world found that 46% will be unprofitable this year, up from 41% in 2019.** And as renewable energy sources grow to outcompete coal, that percentage is expected to raise further.



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Last year, a report published by climate think tank Sandbag showed **how the gross profits of German lignite collapsed by 54% in the first half of 2019, with a loss of €664 million for the sector, and no lignite unit being able to cover their full fixed costs.**

As the gap between power price and carbon price keeps narrowing, and new EU pollution limits kick in for lignite plants, Sandbag estimates that so-called **'brown coal'** will remain loss-making over the medium-term: **in other words, 'the lignite cash cow has stopped giving'.**

## Time to leave coal behind

As the coronavirus crisis accelerates coal's already written fate, **more and more governments are committing to phase it out and taking concrete steps** towards a coal-free future. In the past two weeks, Austria and Sweden shut down their last coal plants and joined Albania, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway as countries without coal in their electricity mix.

**"Against the backdrop of the serious health challenges we are currently facing, leaving coal behind in exchange for renewables is the right decision, and will repay us in kind with improved health, climate protection and more resilient economies,"** commented Kathrin Gutmann, campaign director at Europe Beyond Coal.

Yet too many countries are still lagging behind. It is the case of Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Turkey and the Western Balkans, where governments have not even started to discuss a coal exit.

Germany, the worst greenhouse gas polluter in Europe, is currently only considering a coal phase out by 2038 – almost 10 years later than recommended by the European Parliament and the OECD – while planning to hand multi-billion payouts to coal polluters.

The status and evolution of national phase out plans can be monitored via the Coal Exit Tracker, an interactive map powered by Europe Beyond Coal. Besides tracking coal exits and new coal projects currently under development, the tool also offers data on the technical specifications, contributions to CO2 emissions and modelled health impacts of all coal plants in Europe.



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## A just transition to a cleaner future

As moving beyond coal becomes as inevitable as necessary, the transition may seem particularly challenging for those countries and regions where coal mining and burning have been and still are a primary source of energy and income for thousands of people. However, a fair transition that leaves no one behind is possible. Governments are developing plans to protect local work forces and affected communities, and at least one plant has already announced it will close without the loss of any jobs.

Back in January, the EU unveiled a multi-billion euro plan, the so-called 'Just Transition Mechanism' (JTM), to support communities affected by coal phase-outs. In the short and medium term, the JTM will support coal-heavy and carbon intensive regions facing socio-economic challenges, by boosting public and private investments in low and zero-carbon sectors and creating new jobs.

## EU unveils multi-billion euro plan to support regional energy transition

As JTM funding should be conditional on the level of climate ambition detailed by governments, the plan could pave the way for higher climate targets and a swift transition beyond fossil fuels. However, campaigners are concerned that the money could end up in the wrong pockets or financing harmful projects if investments in new fossil infrastructure, such as gas pipelines, are not excluded.

Riccardo Nigro, campaign coordinator on coal combustion and mines at the EEB, told META that the Just Transition Mechanism is not a silver bullet, and will be useful only if used in the right way:

**"As we emerge from this health emergency, a just and green recovery must be the basis to rebuild our economy. The European Green Deal offers an unparalleled opportunity to boost sustainable investments. We cannot afford to throw public money after polluting fossil fuels that harm our health and the climate; it's time for a cleaner future."**



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As calls grow for a post-COVID-19 recovery plan, green groups push for a revamp of fiscal rules that would put people and nature first.

The time is ripe for a radical reform of taxes across the EU, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) said this week in its response to a public consultation launched by the **European Commission on the bloc's Energy Tax Directive.**

The EEB said that the EU executive should increase taxes on fossil fuels while reducing the fiscal pressure on renewable electricity and removing exemptions for sectors like aviation.

As EU leaders announce major investments to stem the fallout from the COVID-19 crisis, taxing polluters may provide an alternative source of revenue while ensuring continued progress in decarbonising the economy.

At the same time, the EEB argued that governments should decrease other taxes, such as labour, in order to avoid any further negative impact on people.

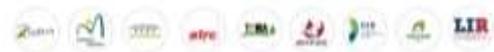
The share of environmental taxes – which include but are not limited to energy taxes – in the total revenues collected across the EU in 2017 amounted to 6.1%. In comparison, labour taxes, which weigh heavily on citizens, continue to account for 50 percent or more of the total tax revenue **in many EU countries. That's approximately eight times the share of revenues from green taxes.**

The power to introduce and approve taxes is in the hands of national governments, but the EU can set harmonised minimum rates through, for example, the Energy Tax Directive, which has been unchanged since 2003. The European Commission is now gathering feedback on its own directive with the aim of aligning the taxation of energy **products and electricity with the EU's energy and climate objectives.**

**The EEB's fiscal priorities are outlined below.**



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## Use fiscal instruments for a green recovery

Stimulus packages being developed to shield EU citizens from the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis must facilitate a green recovery and prevent a dangerous return to business as usual, the EEB writes.

**When this is all over, “climate change will remain one of the biggest threats of the 21st century,” argues Barbara Mariani, author of the response and energy expert at the EEB.**

Making pollutes pay would accelerate the transition towards a carbon-free, circular and clean economy, while public revenues generated can be used to support the most vulnerable and reduce labour taxation, she said.

## Tackle emissions in transport and buildings

**“The ‘polluter pays’ principle should be adopted systematically across Europe and cover all economic activities, with an aim of providing an adequate price to environmental externalities deriving from energy production and use,” Mariani said.**

**The EEB proposes to tax all energy products according to their energy and carbon content. The tax should complement the ‘cap and trade’ principle adopted in the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) – a scheme capping emissions from European companies and allowing them to trade carbon allowances – and be consistent with ongoing climate neutrality efforts.**

**The ETS is the EU’s main binding economic instrument aimed at reducing emissions. However, it currently covers less than half of the EU’s greenhouse gas emissions and it does not address emissions from transport and buildings – two of the most polluting sectors in the EU.**



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## Remove fossil fuel subsidies

Government subsidies to polluting industries across the EU amounted to a staggering €260 billion in 2017, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated recently. Fossil fuel subsidies are generally described as direct payments by governments to oil, gas and coal companies and consumers or as tax exemptions and reductions on specific energy products such as diesel, petrol and kerosene. However, the IMF goes a step further. The institution also factors in the negative externalities associated with the use of fossil fuels. These include, for example, the environmental cost of carbon emissions, air pollution deaths or illnesses, road congestion and accidents.



Post-tax subsidies take into account external costs. Source: IMF 2019



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In Europe, the list of exemptions and reductions include entire sectors, such as aviation and maritime, or specific fuels, including gas and LNG. **“That’s no longer appropriate,” said Mariani, citing mounting scientific evidence of the risks associated with the climate crisis, as well as the increasing cost-effectiveness of renewable energy and the need to accelerate the decarbonisation of energy production – including the energy grid infrastructure.**

Energy taxation is key

Carbon taxes – particularly in Nordic countries – have proved successful in accelerating the decarbonisation of key sectors, such as transport and heating. But their implementation remains sporadic and fragmented across Europe. In many countries, for example, gas for heating is taxed less than renewable energy and heat pumps. Mariani said that Europe needs a more coordinated and collective approach to energy taxation. For this reason, the EEB urges the European Commission to evaluate more regularly the use of energy taxes as reported by member states in their National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). This should encourage a wider use of taxation to promote the decentralised production of renewable energy.

Pressure is mounting on textile companies to take responsibility for their whole supply chain – as the European Commission begins work on draft new laws that could transform the industry.

**“Cancelled orders and delayed payments due to the coronavirus pandemic have left millions of vulnerable workers in the textile supply chain without pay and the livelihoods of their families at risk. This is once again laying bare the lack of clear legal obligations for buyers to take responsibility for their whole supply chain,”** said Patrizia Heidegger, Global Policies and Sustainability Director at the European Environmental Bureau.

**The EEB is part of a coalition of 65 campaign groups for fair trade, human and workers’ rights, environmental protection, and transparency** that today sets out its own vision for a **re-design of the industry’s business model through stricter environmental rules**, an end to the culture of unfair purchasing practices and legal obligations on companies to take responsibility for not only their own activities but their whole supply chain.



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Heidegger added: "It's time for an EU response to tackle both fashion's exploitation of workers and the shocking environmental and climate damage of an industry based on the sale of ever more new products."

Reset the industry

"Voluntary industry action has failed to bring about a fair and sustainable textile industry, so it's time for EU leaders to reset the industry's structure," said Sergi Corbalán, Executive Director of the Fair Trade Advocacy Office – the NGO that brought the broad coalition of campaign groups together.

Corbalán urged policymakers at the European Commission – **currently working on a 'comprehensive Textile Strategy' – to take heed of the campaign groups' vision paper as a whole: "It's not a menu from which the Commission can pick specific initiatives and leave others behind, but a comprehensive strategy in which taking action in each field reinforces the efforts put into others."**

## **"Little has changed"**

It's been seven years since the 2013 Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in Bangladesh which killed 1134 people and sparked worldwide indignation about exploitation and unsustainable overproduction in the global textile industry.

On Tuesday, Fashion Revolution – the campaign group founded in the wake of the Rana Plaza disaster – published its annual Transparency Index which ranks 250 of the biggest global fashion brands and retailers on how much they disclose about their social and environmental policies. More than half of the brands reviewed scored 20% or less, showing that there is still a long way to go towards transparency among the world's largest fashion brands and retailers.



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Fashion Revolution's annual Fashion Transparency Index shows signs of progress, but the fallout from Covid-19 has revealed how much the industry still needs to improve... #WhoMadeMyClothes #FashionRevolution <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/news-analysis/when-it-comes-to-social-and-environmental-transparency-fashion-continues-to-fall-short> . . .

“Little has changed since Rana Plaza,” according to Bangladeshi trade unionist Nazma Akter, General Secretary and Executive Director of the Awaj Foundation. “Power is not equally distributed; nobody is accountable when a company cancels an order and doesn’t pay. When workers work and don’t get wages what else is it but modern day slavery?”

Akter added that much of the fashion sold to consumers today is “killing nature” with industrial pollution “being dumped in our countries affecting our food, land, and water”. She said that it would be the industry’s most vulnerable workers in countries such as Bangladesh – mostly women and girls – who will be “particularly affected if the sector’s climate impact is not tackled as many of these workers will be among the over 100 million people that will be forced to migrate as a result of climate change by 2050 if no action is taken”.

In December, new research from the European Environment Agency highlighted that after food, housing and transport, textiles are the fourth largest cause of environmental pressure. Textiles also cause the second highest pressure on land use and are the fifth largest contributor to carbon emissions from household consumption.

EU action on fashion?

**The campaign groups’ vision has been backed by three influential Members of the European Parliament** – Delara Burkhardt (S&D), Heidi Hautala (Greens/EFA), and Helmut Scholz (GUE/NGL) – who are calling on more of their colleagues to support better conditions for people and nature.

Environment ministers are set to discuss the EU textile strategy on 22 June and it is expected that the Commission will publish a roadmap towards the Textile Strategy before the end of 2020.



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SERBIA: IN THE STATE OF EMERGENCY BECAUSE OF THE CORONAVIRUS, WE SHOULD HANDLE THE WASTE SAFELY AND PROPERLY



## E-campaign of attention

EASD E-campaign of attention: **"In the state of emergency because of the coronavirus, we should handle the waste safely and properly"**, designed to raise the attention of both decision makers and citizens of the state of Serbia on the management of potentially hazardous waste, which primarily includes medical waste, during the course of a coronavirus pandemic that has spread throughout the planet in a very short period of time. It is very important in this time of crisis that we raise awareness of various possibilities that virus can spread because even the slight prediction of someone's movement can tell us where, when and how to stop them. This campaign is very important



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because it has an impact on decision makers who have an impact on individuals and we as individuals are the only one that can stop spreading of this dangerous virus being responsible for our own actions. Eco-schools Serbia participate in this campaign spreading the word and doing public research. More about this campaign you can read on EASD Serbia Website. If you want to test your waste management skills and knowledge we invite you to fill out a survey about waste management in coronavirus condition in the following link [SURVEY](#).

When we are speaking about waste from healthcare facilities, it is important to know there are two kinds of it. There is: Hazardous waste (infectious waste, sharps waste, pathological waste, pharmaceutical plus cytotoxic waste, chemical waste, radioactive waste) and Non-hazardous or general health-care waste. Primarily it is important because in non pandemic time there is a procedure for handling hazardous waste to not come in situation of spreading diseases or dangerous viruses. Now, in state of coronavirus pandemic, it is even more important to follow the procedure of waste management because on average, about 15% of waste from medical facilities under normal conditions falls into the category of hazardous waste and in pandemic situations the amount of hazardous waste is multiplied, especially now. All other facilities, including temporary hospitals, reception centers and outpatient clinics, that are unsure of their medical waste management practices so far (for example, have not yet established or have no need to establish a waste classification / separation process) should be preventively consider any waste as contaminated. We need to have in mind that our medical workers are in danger as the first line of defence against coronavirus and that is essential for them to stay healthy. If the ones that heal us become the ones who spread virus then everything is pointless. This campaign have the important task to get people to understand the importance of every action they make and that we all need to act like one to prevent situation going worse than it is right now.



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The safe management of household waste is likely to be critical during the pandemic state. It is a reason why we must educate ourselves about safe waste management and consequences that can happen if we do not follow instruction. Medical waste such as contaminated masks, gloves, used or expired medicines can easily be mixed with domestic garbage, but we need to separate it and treat it as hazardous waste. In this situation where we have a lot of infected patients in home quarantine, we must be extremely careful with everything they get in touch. Advice is to use gloves and put the hazardous bag in at least another bag.

It is also recommended to not recycle contagious waste. Waste management workers are the second most endangered group of people and as such represent a risk group. People are not good at following the rules but this time it is the only thing that can help. We must be together in raising our conscience and attention and spread out this campaign instead of virus.



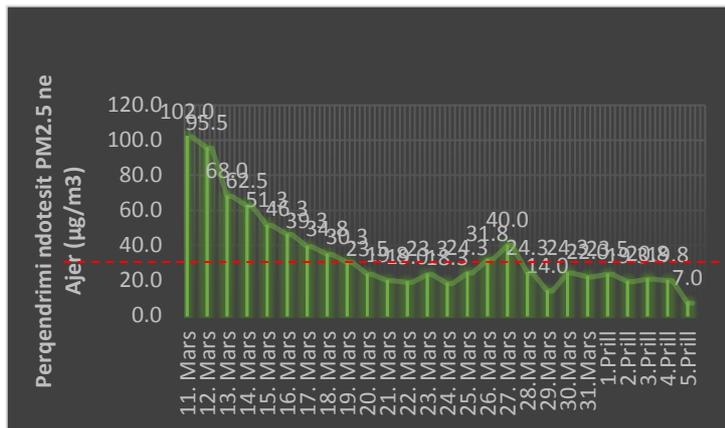
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NO2:

Average for 26 days quarantine ( $\mu\text{g} / \text{m}^3$ ) = 36

Average concentration during 2019 ( $\mu\text{g} / \text{m}^3$ ) = 112

The difference with 2019 ( $\mu\text{g} / \text{m}^3$ ) = 68 %

The difference with the standard ( $\mu\text{g} / \text{m}^3$ ) = 25%



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## MONTENEGRO: THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY NOTES MONTENEGRO'S PROGRESS IN THE FIELD OF NOISE

The European Environment Agency (EEA) published the report "Environmental Noise in Europe - 2020" which presents a comprehensive overview and an analysis of environmental noise in Europe, an overview of all measures taken to manage and reduce environmental noise, and an overview of the commitments set out in the Environmental Noise Assessment and Management Directive.

The report, which includes 32 Member States and six EEA participating countries, states that Montenegro is the only contributing country in the Western Balkans to produce a Strategic Noise Map for the capital Podgorica.

In September 2018, the capital Podgorica adopted a Strategic Noise Map for the territory of the Capital Podgorica, with the aim of obtaining data on existing and predicted noise levels, including exceedances of prescribed limit values, as well as the number of people exposed to noise in a specific area.

Also, the report stated that in order to adequately manage noise, the Capital has adopted an Action Plan for the Protection of Environmental Noise, which will contribute to better protection of people from environmental noise. The Strategic Noise Map and the Action Plan have been drafted in accordance with all laws and regulations governing this area. The report is available on the following link: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/environmental-noise-in-europe>



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## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: THE RISK OF 250,000 INHABITANTS IN 13 MUNICIPALITIES IN THE UNA RIVER BASIN

The ongoing problem in recent years, regarding nuclear waste from **Krško** brought a lot of discussion in last couple of days. The construction of a landfill on Trgovska Gora at the location **Čerkezovac municipality of Dvor, Republic of Croatia**, contrary to the Espoo Convention and other international acts signed by BiH and Croatia, could endanger 250,000 inhabitants in 13 municipalities in the Una River basin and could have negative impact on the environment in BiH. At the same time, it represents a serious security problem, given that it is area with seismic activities. The Council of Ministers of BiH adopted the Information of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations on the situation and activities related to the issue of disposal of radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel. The Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations will prepare and submit to the Council of Ministers of BiH for adoption the Proposal of the Decision on appointing a Coordination body for the issue of disposal of radioactive waste and nuclear fuel. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will intensify diplomatic activities in order to prevent attempts for the centre for radioactive waste disposal to be located on Trgovska gora.



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Following the publication of the European Green Deal, which underlines the need to engage the Western Balkans in the decarbonisation pathway, the Secretariat and Berlin-based Agora Energiewende proposed a set of specific measures and proposed development of national energy transition roadmap, which includes:

- Introduction of carbon pricing and regionally coordinated price of CO2 emissions, compatible with the EU ETS;
- Plans to set concrete dates for phasing out coal-fired power generation in line with commitments under the Energy Community Treaty and the Paris Agreement:
- Regulatory, administrative and financing frameworks to enable a massive and rapid scaling of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency measures; and
- Cooperation to make the best use of the highly interconnected transmission infrastructure within the Western Balkans and with the EU and tap the potential for creating one integrated power market in the region.

The document underlines the unique opportunity to take advantage of the political momentum of the European Green Deal and **final negotiations on the EU's budget to link concrete commitments by WB6 leaders with concrete pledges of the EU and some EU Member States to offer financial, administrative or technical support for a just transition.** The document Green Agenda for Western Balkans will be developed and presented in following period. LIR Evolution is part of the SEE network, which proposed actions and recommendations to the document (<https://bankwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NGO-paper-on-the-Green-Agenda-for-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>).



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Bankwatch and Electronics Watch conducted a webinar on mining

The webinar is conducted as part of an international project where Bankwatch and Electronics Watch are partners on 22nd April. Electronics Watch helps public sector organizations work together, and collaborate with civil society monitors in production regions, to protect the rights of workers in their electronics supply chains. Guided by workers' rights and priorities, Electronics Watch uses worker-driven monitoring to detect problems in factories of **the electronics supply chain. Through the "Make ICT Fair" Project**, Electronics Watch has started to extend its monitoring and engagement model towards mining operations that are part of the electronics supply chain. The Electronics Watch briefed participants about the strengths

and potential leverage possibilities of its worker-driven monitoring and industry engagement model and learn how Electronics Watch, its affiliates (public buyers) and monitoring partners have already improved the situation of workers. The first pilot monitoring on nickel mining operation in the Philippines is presented. The participants discussed the potential use of the approach in the context of the environment.



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"take, make, dispose" economic model of the circular economy. Companies that build their raw material needs for their production activities on completely renewable, recyclable or biodegradable materials are becoming stronger to find resources. For example, Arkim Chemicals, whose co-founder is one of the speakers in the webinar, produces food preservatives from natural sources of calcium. Based on the purification of eggshell in about 8 steps, a lower cost and more effective type of natural food preservative is provided by eggshell. Our current production and consumption method destroys fragile ecosystems, causing loss of valuable natural resources. The circular economy offers more sustainable solutions where products are used longer and materials are reused to produce new products. As mentioned in its speakers, the circular economy not only targets waste recycling, but also targets the understanding of biodegradable production and companies owning their own waste.



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