

Kiev Ministerial Conference
21-23 May 2003

Keynote statement by Minister Børge Brende, Royal Ministry of Environment, Norway,
on the
Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment

Mr. Chairman,

I am looking forward to signing the Protocol on SEA. This is not because it has been negotiated under the leadership of one of my officials, but because the Protocol will become an important tool in achieving essential environmental objectives. It will demand from us that we put strong emphasis on environmental and health concerns, and thus arrive at more informed and sounder decisions.

The Protocol will become an important tool in ensuring that rules on environmental and health concerns are incorporated in domestic legislation.

It will require national governments to anticipate, assess and prevent possible negative effects on the environment, and to integrate important environmental goals into policy design and implementation of other sectors of society. The requirement to involve environmental and health authorities and the general public, both domestically and in neighbouring countries, is an important part of this.

Many states used to put great emphasis on the production of plans, without too much consideration for environment, health or public participation. With the change to a market based economy, and after a period of more or less uncontrolled development, there is a renewed interest in land use planning as an instrument for development and control.

Several European countries have already developed - or are developing - ways to assess environmental and health concerns at the early stages of policy formulation or legislative proposals. This is also necessary in Norway's planning legislation, according to the proposals of a Royal Commission which submitted its report last week.

The Protocol will become a tool that will greatly contribute to the implementation of similar rules throughout the whole ECE region, which in turn should reduce potential transboundary conflicts and enhance co-operation between parties. Since its coming into force in 1997, the Espoo Convention has already contributed to this with regard to large scale projects, for instance involving the use of the rivers and waterways of the region. We all know that the European Union has already adopted a directive covering many of the same issues as the Protocol. The Protocol will therefore be of most immediate use to those countries that are not member states, accession countries or parties to the European Economic Area Agreement, in other words the states of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

The Protocol will become an important tool in supplementing the Espoo Convention on environmental impact assessment. It will now be demanded from us that we take similar concerns into account also in the more overriding political decision-making processes. This may of course

be a more demanding task, and not all countries will be prepared for it. It is therefore of crucial importance that we all can learn from each other, and that the NGOs, which I know have been very active during the negotiations, can and will fulfil their role as watchdogs over the governments and developers.

As a small contribution to this (I am pleased to announce that) the Government of Norway is prepared to support a project organized by Eco-Globe in Armenia. The purpose of the project is to bring together experts from the Caucasus region and from the West to a workshop on strategic environmental assessment to discuss how the Protocol can best be implemented in practical terms, and to produce a report which can be circulated to other interested parties.

Finally, Mr. Chairman

I believe the Protocol will become one of the many important tools we must use in the follow up of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. As the newly elected chair of the Commission on Sustainable Development, I consider the emphasis put on health concerns to be of utmost importance, especially in relation to the formidable task of securing clean drinking water and sanitation for a huge number of people in the years to come. Water is among the priorities in the new work programme of the CSD, and the Protocol will make sure that water related issues are taken into account when analysing and evaluating the effects of, for instance, land use plans for urban development or programmes for energy, industry or agriculture.

I am pleased to learn that many of my colleagues here today will join me in signing the Protocol, as the first step towards its implementation, and that ratifications also may be forthcoming.

"Give us the tools and we will finish the job", Winston Churchill once said. Our task now is to make sure that we finish the job by using this Protocol actively as one of our tools in the implementation of sustainable development.