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Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment
in a Transboundary Context

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment in
a Transboundary Context serving as the
Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on
Strategic Environmental Assessment

Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment

Sixth meeting

Geneva, 7–10 November 2016

Report of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment on its sixth meeting

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	3
A. Attendance	3
B. Organizational matters	3
II. Inputs to related international processes.....	4
III. Compliance and implementation.....	4
IV. Brainstorming session on the future of the Convention and the Protocol	6
V. Status of ratification	7
VI. Subregional cooperation and capacity-building	8

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VII.	Promoting ratification and application of the Protocol	8
VIII.	Budget and financial arrangements and financial assistance.....	9
IX.	Exchange of good practices.....	10
A.	Draft guidance on land-use planning, the siting of hazardous activities and related safety aspects	10
B.	Workshop on the global application of the Convention and the Protocol.....	11
C.	Good practice recommendations on the application of the Convention, to nuclear energy-related activities	12
X.	Preparations for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties.....	13
XI.	Presentation of the main decisions taken and closing of the meeting	15
Annexes		
I.	Co-organizers' summary of the brainstorming session on the future of the Convention and its Protocol.....	16
II.	Summary of the workshop on the global application of the Convention and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment	19

I. Introduction

1. The sixth meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment under the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Protocol on SEA) was held from 7 to 10 November 2016 in Geneva, Switzerland.

A. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following Parties to the Convention and the Protocol and other member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The European Union was represented by the European Commission. Statements on behalf of the European Union and its member States were made by both the Commission and Slovakia, which held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2016. A representative of the European Investment Bank also attended.

3. A representative of the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also attended the meeting. In addition, the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were present: Caucasus Environmental NGO Network; Ecoglobe (Armenia); European ECO Forum; International Association for Impact Assessment; Studio D — Centre for Development and Dialogue (Albania); and the World Wide Fund for Nature Russia (WWF Russia). Three independent experts also attended the meeting.

B. Organizational matters

4. The Chair of the Working Group, Ms. Migle Masaityte (Lithuania), opened the meeting. The Director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Environment Division welcomed the participants, informed them about ongoing efforts to raise funds from the European Commission and called for further financial support also from States Parties to the Convention and its Protocol.

5. The Working Group adopted its agenda as set out in document ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/3.¹

¹ Documents for the meeting, including speakers statements and presentations, are available from the ECE website from [http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42745#/#/](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42745#/). Documents with symbols ending in “INF.” plus a number are information documents that can be accessed by clicking on the “Informal Documents” tab in the documents table.

II. Inputs to related international processes

6. The secretariat presented the relevant outcomes of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016), including from a session on “Multilateral environmental agreements, mechanisms, policies and institutions supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, a side event on strategic environmental assessment (SEA) organized in collaboration with the Netherlands Commission on Environmental Impact Assessment, and two other side events organized under the framework of the European Union Greening Economies in Eastern Partnership (EaP GREEN) programme. The Working Group took note of the information provided.

7. The secretariat also presented the outcomes of the fourth meeting of the informal network of the chairs of the implementation or compliance bodies under the ECE multilateral environmental agreements (Geneva, 20 June 2016), noting that the next meeting of the network was scheduled for June 2017.

8. The secretariat reported on the positive outcomes of a review of ECE activities under the Convention and its Protocol between 2011 and 2016.² The review, a mandatory exercise for all United Nations programmes, had been conducted by an external evaluator. It had built mainly on responses to a questionnaire and to additional interviews with representatives of selected Parties. The respondents had been mostly very satisfied or satisfied with the work of the ECE secretariat, which most of them considered as very effective and efficient. The activities under the treaties had been found to be highly relevant to the treaty objectives. The secretariat also presented the review’s recommendations and the ECE management response to them. The Working Group noted those outcomes and agreed to take them into account, including in the finalization of the draft workplan and the other relevant draft decisions for the next intersessional period.

III. Compliance and implementation

9. The Implementation Committee Chair presented the report on the Committee’s thirty-sixth session (ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2016/4). The Committee had considered the follow-up to decision VI/2 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention regarding compliance by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Ukraine. The Committee had also closed its initiative regarding compliance by Serbia with the Convention and had considered information gathering cases concerning compliance by Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia and the Netherlands with the Convention and compliance by Armenia and Serbia with the Protocol.

10. The Committee Chair noted that the Committee had also discussed how to improve the efficiency of its working methods in view of its growing workload, and had considered the possible need to increase the number of its annual sessions and to hold online meetings in English between sessions.

11. The Working Group considered the draft fifth review of implementation of the Convention in the period 2013–2015 (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/8), which the secretariat had prepared with the assistance of a consultant based on the reports received by 30 April 2016 from 33 Parties to the Convention. It agreed on the main findings of the draft report. It also noted the comments and corrections from delegations to the draft regarding their own countries’ responses, and invited Parties to provide the secretariat with any further

² The review and the management reports are available from <https://www.unece.org/info/open-unece/evaluation.html>.

comments in writing by 31 December 2016. The Working Group requested the secretariat to finalize the draft, taking into account the comments received, and to forward it to the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention at its seventh session.

12. The Working Group revised decision VII/1 on the review of implementation of the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/5), and agreed to forward it to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption. It urged Cyprus, Greece, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Kingdom to provide their overdue reports for the period 2013–2015 without delay, and invited the secretariat to make them available on the website. The United Kingdom was also urged to complete its report for the previous period, 2010–2012. The Working Group requested the secretariat to share with the Implementation Committee the suggested improvements to the questionnaire, with a view to making minor adjustments for the next reporting round, and invited it also to explore opportunities for an online and/or user-friendlier format(s) for reporting.

13. The Working Group then reviewed and further revised the draft practical guidance on reforming legal and institutional structures with regard to the application of the Protocol, prepared by a consultant to the secretariat with funding from the EaP GREEN programme (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6/INF.9). The secretariat had revised the draft guidance on the basis of the comments made during and after the Working Group's fifth meeting (Geneva, 11–15 April 2016). The Working Group requested the secretariat to finalize the document, taking into account the additional comments made, post it on the Convention website and to forward it to the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at its third session. The Meeting of the Parties might wish to recommend that the guidance be used to facilitate national legal and institutional reforms seeking to ensure the effective application of the Protocol.

14. The Working Group reviewed progress since its last meeting in the implementation of technical advice foreseen in or related to the workplan for 2014–2017. It welcomed the information provided by the concerned countries and the secretariat on the further legislative advice provided to Armenia and Belarus, with funding from the EaP GREEN programme. Representatives from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan informed the meeting about their countries' progress in adopting new legislation on environmental impact assessment (EIA) and SEA that had been developed with the EaP GREEN funding, and for Kyrgyzstan with funding from Switzerland. A representative of Armenia reported on plans to submit amendments to its law on EIA and State ecological expertise to the parliament for approval in 2017. A representative of Kazakhstan briefed delegations on its legislative developments and the planned events for the implementation of the legislative advice on SEA to be provided by the secretariat in 2016–2018 with funding from the European Union. The secretariat read out written information provided by the Russian Federation on its progress in developing new legislation to implement the Convention and the Protocol, which was expected to be adopted before 2019. The Working Group welcomed the information provided on the legislative developments.

15. A representative of Kyrgyzstan and the secretariat reported on progress in the further development and update of the Guidelines on EIA in a Transboundary Context for Central Asian Countries (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.1/2007/6), being carried out under the leadership of Kyrgyzstan with funding from Switzerland, as foreseen in the workplan. Since the Guidelines were not expected to be ready until the middle or the end of 2017, the Working Group decided to review the new draft at its meeting in 2018. Once it had agreed on the text of the revised Guidelines, the Working Group would recommend that they be used by the concerned countries and submit them to the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention at its session in 2020 for information and/or approval.

16. As requested by the Working Group at its fifth meeting, the secretariat said it had submitted the proposed corrections to the three authentic language versions (English, French and Russian) of the Protocol and the two amendments to the Convention to the

depository. On receipt of the corrections, the Treaty Section of the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, responsible for the discharge of the depository functions, had requested confirmation that the Working Group's conclusions represented a general consensus among all the Parties and signatory States that the inconsistencies identified were of a technical nature and had been appropriately addressed through a correction procedure. Consequently, the secretariat had agreed to consult the Parties and the signatories both electronically and during the sixth meeting of the Working Group to establish whether they were in full consensus on the proposed corrections, as presented in informal document ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6/INF.7. The Working Group noted that even a single objection from a Party or a signatory State would block the correction procedure and lead to legal uncertainty as to the text and scope of the treaties. Following further deliberations on the proposed corrections, the Working Group confirmed its earlier conclusions, with one exception: it decided that the authentic language versions of article 11, paragraph 2, to the Protocol should remain unchanged. It requested the secretariat to inform all the Parties and signatories about that change electronically. In the absence of any concerns or objections by 25 November 2016, the secretariat was to submit the proposed corrections, as amended, to the depository to be addressed accordingly. It also invited the secretariat to initiate the procedure for publishing the revised Protocol text as soon as the correction procedure had been concluded, without awaiting the endorsement of the proposed corrections by the Meetings of the Parties at their next sessions (Minsk, 13–16 June 2017). In case concerns or objections were expressed by the deadline, the Working Group agreed to invite the ad hoc task force established in June 2014 to carry out additional work in advance of the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to try and reach consensus.

17. The Working Group noted the publications processed by the secretariat since its last meeting, which included an update on the opinions of the Implementation Committee and a brochure, "Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment — Facts and Benefits", which had been made available in the Azerbaijani, English, Georgian, Russian and Ukrainian languages.

IV. Brainstorming session on the future of the Convention and the Protocol

18. At the initiative of Austria, Finland and the Netherlands, and as agreed by the Working Group at its last meeting, a brainstorming session was held on the future of the Convention and the Protocol. It consisted of a "mind-mapping" exercise to identify which aspects of the two treaties the delegates found successful, and small group discussions on elements to be maintained or improved under the treaties. The Working Group welcomed the session and thanked its organizers and its facilitator. It noted the following main conclusions from the brainstorming (see also annex I):

- (a) There were a number of successful elements under the treaties that should be maintained:
 - (i) The network of points of contact for notification and the network of focal points for administrative matters;
 - (ii) The organizational set-up;
 - (iii) Technical assistance and capacity-building activities;
 - (iv) Exchange of experience between countries;

- (b) There remained a number of areas for improvement, including a need to:
- (i) Further intensify cooperation with other programmes, organizations and treaties, in particular with the ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention);
 - (ii) Increase flexibility regarding when and how meetings were organized, e.g., making them more interactive (with the understanding that the dates for the meetings that ECE organized and serviced had to be set one year in advance, but that those hosted by countries could have more flexible schedules);
 - (iii) Find new funding strategies, e.g., by creating further synergies with new partners, such as international financial institutions;
 - (iv) Further promote the role of the Convention and the Protocol in addressing key challenges, such as climate change or the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

19. The Working Group agreed to take those conclusions into account when discussing future workplans and their implementation. It invited the organizers to prepare a report of two to three pages on the outcomes of the brainstorming session by 1 December (annex I).

V. Status of ratification

20. The secretariat presented a report on the status of ratification³ of the Convention, its two amendments and the Protocol on SEA, as set out in informal document ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6/INF.2. The Working Group welcomed the recent ratification of the Protocol by Italy and the accession of Malta to the Protocol, which had brought the membership of the Protocol to 30 Parties. With regard to the amendments to the Convention, it noted that 10 ratifications were still needed for the first amendment to become operational, allowing any United Nations Member State to accede, and that two more ratifications were needed for the second amendment to enter into force.

21. Delegates then reported on the status of preparations for ratifying the various instruments in their countries. The most advanced in that process were Denmark with respect to both amendments to the Convention and France in terms of the Protocol. The Working Group took note of the information provided.

22. The Working Group reiterated its request to those States that were parties to the Convention when the first amendment was ratified (27 February 2001), but that had not yet ratified the amendment — that is, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the United Kingdom and Ukraine — to do so by June 2017. It also again urged all the signatories of the second amendment to ratify that amendment by the same deadline, so as to honour the political commitments taken when adopting them. The Working Group agreed, moreover, that the Bureau members and the delegations should continue to prompt the Parties in question to ratify through bilateral contacts. The Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission should also continue to prompt the relevant European Union members to ratify. The delegations from the countries mentioned were invited to report on progress at the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties

³ Ratification, accession, approval or acceptance, as appropriate.

23. The representative of Albania reported that it only remained for the Government to deposit its instrument of ratification to the multilateral agreement among the countries of South-Eastern Europe for implementation of the Convention (Bucharest Agreement), which the country had already ratified some time ago. The Working Group welcomed that step forward, while regretting the lack of information from the other signatory States of the Bucharest Agreement, i.e., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece and Serbia, on their plans to ratify the Agreement, and invited those countries to ratify and to report on progress at the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties.

VI. Subregional cooperation and capacity-building

24. With regard to the implementation of activities for subregional cooperation and capacity-building foreseen in the workplan, the Chair reported on behalf of the representative of Latvia, who was not present at the session, on the plans for the organization of the Ninth Seminar on Cooperation on the Convention in the Baltic Sea Region, scheduled to be held in Riga on 8 and 9 December 2016.

25. The secretariat reported on the plans for the organization of a subregional cooperation and capacity-building event to take stock of the outcomes of the EaP GREEN-funded workplan activities. The event was preliminarily scheduled to take place in Ukraine in 2017.

26. The Working Group welcomed the reports on the planned activities foreseen in the workplan. It also noted the wish expressed by the representative of Romania to once again postpone to the next intersessional period the workshop and the first Meeting of the Parties for the Bucharest Agreement, pending the identification of funding.

VII. Promoting ratification and application of the Protocol

27. The Working Group reviewed progress on activities to promote ratification and implementation of the Protocol on SEA. It welcomed again the brochure on the Protocol and its benefits published by the secretariat with funding from the EaP GREEN programme, and invited Parties to use it for promoting SEA at the national and subregional levels.

28. Further to the reports by delegations on the usefulness of the video⁴ prepared by the secretariat with funding from the EaP GREEN to promote the Protocol and SEA in their countries, the Working Group again encouraged all national focal points and NGOs to publish the video widely on their national websites in the field of environment and the various economic sectors.

29. The Working Group welcomed reports from the secretariat and the recipient countries on the implementation of capacity-building activities, with funding from EaP GREEN, Switzerland and Sweden, which had included the preparation of fact sheets and leaflets on SEA practice, the organization of training workshops, the development of national guidance on SEA and the carrying out of SEA pilots.⁵ It further welcomed a case study on the SEA of the sustainable energy programme of Estonia prepared with EaP GREEN funding. The Working Group encouraged other Parties to submit case studies

⁴ Available in English from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTHKqx-C_C8&feature=youtu.be and in Russian from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAOkskySYt0>.

⁵ For details on the activities, see ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6/INF.3 and ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6/INF.8.

on their application of the Protocol, and agreed to recommend that the preparation of fact sheets be included in the workplan for the next intersessional period.

30. A representative of the International Association for Impact Assessment presented further informal pamphlets, or “FasTips”,⁶ on key issues in impact assessment practice. She also reiterated the Association’s willingness to continue the collaboration with the Convention and its Protocol in 2017–2020, hoping that the organization would be eligible for financial support for attending meetings of the treaty bodies in the next intersessional period. The Working Group welcomed the information and the proposal to prepare dedicated FasTips on the Convention and the Protocol, with support from the secretariat, in the next intersessional period. It also welcomed the information from the secretariat regarding funding opportunities from the EaP GREEN programme for the translation of the relevant FasTips into Russian.

VIII. Budget and financial arrangements and financial assistance

31. The Working Group took note of the financial report for the period to 31 May 2016 and the informal list of contributions received subsequently by the Convention and the Protocol trust fund. The note demonstrated the continuing insufficiency and unpredictability of the voluntary financial contributions to the Convention trust fund and their highly unequal distribution among the contributing Parties, with a dependency on only three main donor Parties or organizations: i.e., Norway (the biggest donor), the European Commission and Switzerland. It noted that the contributions barely covered the “priority one” expenditures budgeted (i.e., the costs of one Professional secretariat staff member and the preparation of draft reviews of implementation of the Convention and the Protocol) and financial support for the travel of eligible meeting participants to official meetings under the two treaties, but did not cover the implementation of workplan activities aside from a few earmarked by a donor.

32. The secretariat informed the Working Group about changes in the level of detail of the future financial reporting by ECE. In accordance with the note verbale from the Office of the Executive Secretary to all the permanent missions of ECE member countries in Geneva, further to the implementation by ECE of the new “Umoja” enterprise resource planning system and its intention to harmonize its practice with the other United Nations Secretariat entities, the project funds would be reported at an aggregate level based upon the 10 approved expenditure groups in Umoja.

33. As in previous years, the Working Group again acknowledged the shortfall between financial contributions and the necessary expenditure to fulfil the workplan and the expected functions of the secretariat. It welcomed preliminary information on expected financial contributions to the Convention and the Protocol trust fund for the intersessional period 2017–2020 from the following Parties: Netherlands, €60,000 for the intersessional period; Poland, USD\$ 5,000 per year for the intersessional period; Slovenia: US\$ 9,000 for the intersessional period; and Switzerland, 20,000 Swiss francs per year for the intersessional period and additional earmarked contributions to be specified subsequently. A representative of Norway announced that a possible further multi-year grant to the ECE multilateral environmental agreements, including the Espoo Convention and its Protocol, was currently under discussion. He used the opportunity to encourage also other Parties to contribute more. The European Commission announced that it expected to continue contributing to the trust fund as a minimum at the same level as in the current period. The Working Group welcomed the information on the expected contributions. The Working

⁶ Available from <http://www.iaia.org/fasttips.php>.

Group invited all delegations to come forward with information on their expected financial contributions to the trust fund to be pledged at the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, to the extent possible by mid-February. It also reiterated its invitation to the countries to explore possibilities for in-kind contributions and further funding, including from other ministries, such as foreign ministries for development assistance, and for sponsoring a Junior Professional Officer to supplement the staffing of the secretariat.

34. The secretary reported on several staff changes since the last meeting of the Working Group in April, including staff and consultants hired with funding from the EaP GREEN programme, the European Union-funded project on Kazakhstan, with earmarked funding from Norway and on the basis of savings from the trust fund.

35. The Working Group revised draft joint decision VII/4–III/4 on the budget, financial arrangements and financial assistance (see ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6), and agreed to forward it to the Meetings of the Parties at their next sessions for consideration.

IX. Exchange of good practices

A. Draft guidance on land-use planning, the siting of hazardous activities and related safety aspects

36. The Working Group considered and revised the text of the two-part draft guidance on land-use planning, the siting of hazardous activities and related safety aspects, as presented in documents ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/10–ECE/CP.TEIA/2016/8 and ECE/CP.TEIA/2016/9. The drafts had been prepared by consultants to the European Investment Bank, in consultation with the constituencies under the Convention and the Protocol and the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention). The Working Group decided that that two documents should be referred to, respectively, as the “general” and the “technical” parts of the guidance. It invited the delegations and the Presidency of the Council of the European Union to coordinate in capitals with colleagues responsible for the Industrial Accidents Convention to ensure that the same comments to the two documents would be presented also for consideration by the Conference of the Parties to that Convention at its ninth meeting (Ljubljana, 28–30 November 2016), to be held shortly after the Working Group’s sixth meeting. It also requested the secretariat to share the revised documents with the Industrial Accidents Convention secretariat.

37. Subsequent to ninth meeting of the Industrial Accidents Convention’s governing body, the secretariat would inform delegations by e-mail whether the changes proposed by the Working Group were agreeable also to the the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention. In the event that they agreed with the proposed changes, the secretariat was requested to forward the revised documents to the the Meetings of the Parties to the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA for consideration at their next sessions. In the absence of agreement, the Working Group recommended that the documents be finalized by electronic means in consultation with the Bureau of the Industrial Accidents Convention in advance of the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties. The Working Group also revised draft decision VII/5–III/5 on the guidance (see ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6), and requested the secretariat to forward it to the Meetings of the Parties (provided that agreement had been reached with the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention).

B. Workshop on the global application of the Convention and the Protocol

38. The European Investment Bank, as the lead organization for the activity, had organized a workshop on the global application of the Convention and the Protocol, with support from a consultant and in cooperation with the secretariat. The workshop, foreseen in the workplan, had aimed to contribute to raising awareness on the two treaties and their benefits among countries outside the ECE region and to inform delegations about the current practices of non-ECE countries and international financial institutions in applying SEA and transboundary EIA.

39. The Working Group welcomed the workshop and thanked the speakers from Cambodia, China, Germany, the Mekong River Commission, the Republic of Korea, Slovenia and Viet Nam, and asked the secretariat to place the presentations on the website.

40. The Working Group noted the following draft conclusions from the workshop, drawn up by the consultant, which outlined opportunities and obstacles for the implementation of the treaty obligations in South-East and North-East Asia, and suggested possible ways forward:

(a) *Opportunities:*

(i) The increasingly globalized world called for regional economic cooperation and interlinkages between countries;

(ii) The numerous national and cross-border projects with important transboundary implications had increasingly caught the attention of national Governments, and had generated a growing need to foster the management of shared natural resources;

(iii) Several examples of experimentation with transboundary SEAs and EIAs existed in China, in the Greater Mekong and in the Greater Tumen Region;

(b) *Obstacles:*

(i) Fear of losing sovereignty in national decision-making;

(ii) Varying levels of economic development and aspirations, leading to differing development priorities among the countries;

(iii) Differing views on how transboundary environmental assessment procedures should be carried out;

(iv) National laws currently did not require transboundary environmental impact assessment, although some countries had begun to develop test procedures and pilots;

(c) *Possible future opportunities and ways forward:*

(i) Setting up a collaborative platform with interested countries and regional organizations, including, for example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Mekong River Commission;

(ii) Sharing lessons from the application of the Convention and the Protocol (principles and technical know-how);

(iii) Promoting common criteria for use in transboundary EIA with respect to the size, location and effects of projects, the significance of transboundary effects, procedures for consultations and cooperation;

(iv) Supporting pilot projects demonstrating best practice;

- (v) Building capacity and setting up a core team of experts to facilitate national discussions and practice;
- (vi) Supporting awareness-raising at the political and technical levels.

41. The Working Group requested the consultant to prepare by 1 December 2016 a brief report on the workshop and on the informal discussions that had taken place after the workshop among the speakers on possible follow-up activities (see annex II).

C. Good practice recommendations on the application of the Convention to nuclear energy-related activities

42. The Working Group welcomed the further work carried out by the consultants to the secretariat, under the supervision of an ad hoc editorial group established by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention at its sixth session, for the preparation of the draft good practice recommendations on the application of the Convention to nuclear energy-related activities (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6/INF.12). The preparatory work had also involved a meeting of the editorial group and the consultants in Vienna in August 2016 at the invitation of the Government of Austria. The Working Group thanked Switzerland for having funded the informal translation of the draft document into Russian. The secretariat reported that, in contrast, no funding was available for an informal French translation of the document, which Belgium (unlike France, Luxembourg and Switzerland) had expressed a wish for.

43. The Working Group revised and agreed on the body of the text of the document, but did not discuss or agree on the good practice examples presented in boxes. Instead, it invited the Parties with relevant experience to provide the editorial group with further good practice examples by 30 November, and mandated the group to finalize the draft compilation of good practice examples by 31 January 2017. The editorial group was invited to proceed with the compilation following two possible approaches, as follows:

(a) On a priority basis, it was to aim to integrate a balanced number of examples into the document containing the good practice recommendations, as agreed by the Working Group, with a view to its submission as an official document to the Meeting of the Parties in English, French and Russian. In doing so it was to take into account the maximum word limit for such an official document (10,700 words);

(b) If the first option was not feasible, the editorial group was to prepare a compilation of good practice examples as a separate informal document (in English). In that case, all the examples received would be included in the document after some editing by the editorial group.

44. The Working Group agreed that only minor further work would be needed from the consultants, with support from the secretariat, involving editing and polishing of the draft document(s) prior to its/their submission to the Meeting of the Parties. Independently of the outcome of the editorial group's work, the Bureau, at its meeting in Geneva on 23 and 24 February 2017, was invited to review the text of the good practice examples in order to ensure the coherence with the recommendations and the decisions of the Meetings of the Parties.

45. The Working Group revised the draft and agreed to forward decision VII/6 on the good practice recommendations to the Meetings of the Parties for consideration at their next sessions.

X. Preparations for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties

46. The delegation of Belarus and the secretariat reported on progress in the practical arrangements for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, to be held in Minsk. The Working Group was informed that following the assessment of several possible venues, including through on-site visits by the secretariat, the Beijing Hotel Minsk had been selected as the meeting venue. As next steps, the finalization of a detailed host country agreement between Belarus and ECE and a safety and security assessment of the venue by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security were expected to be completed by January 2017.

47. Before discussing the workplan for the next intersessional period, the Working Group considered the pros and cons of extending the interval between the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties from three to four years, as proposed by the European Union and its member States in April 2016. The Working Group referred to an informal document on the matter that it had requested the secretariat to prepare in consultation with the Bureau, taking also into account the outcomes of the related discussions held under the other ECE Conventions (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6/INF.15). Following its deliberations, the Working Group decided not to recommend extending the next intersessional period for now. It noted, however, that Parties would reserve the right to come back to the issue subsequently.

48. The Working Group then reviewed and revised the draft workplan for 2017–2020, agreeing on proposed elements for the workplan, as set out in annex I to draft decision VII/3–III/3 (see ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6) and on activities to be waitlisted in the absence of funding, as provisionally set out in annex II to that decision. It invited the delegations to provide to the secretariat further comments and clarifications to the draft workplan annexes by the end of January 2017, and requested the Bureau to finalize the draft for submission to the Meetings of the Parties at their next sessions. The Working Group also revised and agreed to forward to the Meetings of the Parties draft decision VII/3–III/3 on the adoption of the workplan.

49. The secretariat reported on the outcomes of a needs assessment for further capacity-building activities in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus that it had carried out and which it was to further complement for Central Asia (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6/INF.13). The Working Group noted the information and requested the secretariat to share with it the further information when available. It further welcomed the information from the European Commission and the secretariat about the possible further funding of activities in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus in 2017–2020 under consideration in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and in particular the Eastern Partnership Panel on Environment and Climate Change. The Working Group acknowledged that both fundraising and implementation of capacity-building activities required significant human resources from the secretariat.

50. The Working Group did not deliberate on draft decision VII/7–III/6 on the development of a strategy and an action plan for the future application of the Convention and the Protocol (see ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6), but requested written comments to it from the delegations until the end of January 2017. It requested the Bureau to finalize the draft decision for submission to the Meetings of the Parties at their next sessions, taking into account the conclusions of the Working Group's discussions and any further comments from delegations received by end January 2017.

51. The Working Group also invited delegations to comment by the end of January 2017 the draft Minsk declaration, prepared by the Bureau with support from the secretariat in January 2016 (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/L.2), taking into account the relevant conclusions of the Batumi Ministerial Conference and the outcomes of the brainstorming session. The

Bureau was requested to review and update the relevant paragraphs of the draft declaration (e.g., paragraphs 3 and 16 referring to proposals that were no longer valid concerning the acceleration of the entry into force of the first amendment and the preparation of a strategy on the global application of the treaties) and to finalize the draft for submission to the Meetings of the Parties for consideration at their next sessions.

52. The Working Group agreed on an outline of the programme for the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, as presented in document ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2016/6/INF.14. It invited delegations to volunteer as lead countries and organizations for organizing the panel discussions to be held during the sessions. It agreed that the European ECO Forum would contact local NGOs for their possible participation in the panels. It also noted the suggestions from the European Union and its member States for possible speakers in the panels, as follows:

(a) For the panel discussion on the contribution of the Convention and the Protocol to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and on the future of the treaties to be held during the general segments of both treaty bodies, suggested speakers included Hugo von Meienfeldt and Rob Verheem from the Netherlands; Piotr Otawski from Poland; Michel Prieur from France; Mathias Sauer (Germany); and a representative from the European Investment Bank;

(b) For the panel discussion on the application of the Protocol and the Convention in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation to be held during the high-level segments of both bodies, suggested speakers included representatives from the European Investment Bank and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Climate Action.

53. The Working Group requested the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, to prepare the annotated provisional agenda for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties.

54. The Working Group provided the following nominations for the chairs of the upcoming sessions of the Meetings of the Parties: Belarus, for the high-level segment of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, and possibly also for that of the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, provided that Belarus had ratified the Protocol no later than 90 days before that session. Considering the uncertainty about the timing of the ratification by Belarus, the Working Group invited delegations to come forward with nominations for a co-Chair for the high-level segment on Protocol matters. Further to the proposal at its fifth meeting, the Working Group also confirmed the nomination of the Chair of the Bureau, Mr. Georges Kremlis, from the European Commission, as the Chair of the general segments of the two sessions of the Meetings of the Parties.

55. The Working Group invited Parties to provide information by 15 February 2017 on nominations of officers to be elected by the Meetings of the Parties for the next intersessional period, for discussion by the Bureau. It took note of the preliminary information provided on the following nominations:

(a) From Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, the European Commission, Finland, Norway and Ukraine for membership in the Bureau;

(b) From Slovenia for Chair of the Working Group;

(c) From Azerbaijan, Estonia, Portugal and Switzerland for membership in the Implementation Committee, and from Finland as an alternate member (to Switzerland) of the Implementation Committee for Protocol matters.

56. The Working Group noted the proposals by the European Union and its member States for two possible side events during the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, and invited delegations to volunteer as lead countries for the organization of those events. The proposed side events related to:

- (a) Public participation in the field of sustainable energy;
- (b) The preparation of good practice recommendations on the application of the Convention to nuclear energy-related activities (with suggested participation of countries that had proposed good practice examples).

57. The Working Group agreed that the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol should be held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva in 2020, unless otherwise decided by the Meetings of the Parties in June 2017 or subsequently by the Working Group, should a Party offer to host the sessions.

XI. Presentation of the main decisions taken and closing of the meeting

58. The Working Group agreed on the main decisions taken at the meeting, as presented by the secretariat. It further agreed that the report would be prepared by the secretariat under the guidance of the Chair. The Chair officially closed the meeting on Thursday, 10 November 2016.

Annex I

Co-organizers' summary of the brainstorming session on the future of the Convention and its Protocol

I. Introduction

1. At the initiative of Austria, Finland and the Netherlands, a brainstorming session was held to informally discuss the future of the Convention and its Protocol. The Working Group agreed on its organization in April. The session was chaired by Ms. Seija Rantakallio from Finland and facilitated by Mr. Rob Verheem, the Director of the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Impact Assessment, with the assistance of Ms. Minna Torkkeli from Finland and the secretariat.

2. The session started with a mind-mapping exercise, in which all participants wrote down those aspects of the Convention and of the Protocol of which they were most proud. The session then continued with informal discussions within seven small groups on the elements of the two treaties that should be maintained as they were, and on options for improving the two instruments. The outcome of the mind-mapping session was reported at the plenary session at the end of the day. The outcome of the small group discussions was presented at the plenary session the following day, followed by a brief discussion on the outcome of the brainstorming session.

II. Outcomes of the mind-mapping exercise and the group discussions

A. What to continue doing because it works well

3. One of the key conclusions of the brainstorming was the importance of maintaining the existing networks of points of contact for notification and of focal points for administrative matters, which had been found to be extremely useful for the practical application of the two treaties. These networks facilitated the contacts between the national experts and the sharing of information about the national environmental assessment systems. In addition, the current organizational set-up (e.g., the treaty bodies and meetings) was seen as functional, and even referred to as an "Espoo family".

4. The participants wished to continue strengthening the cooperation among the Parties for the implementation of the treaties through bilateral agreements and subregional cooperation. For example, study tours for experts from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to other ECE subregions were seen as a valuable means to help countries understand how others addressed comparable challenges to their own with respect to the implementation of transboundary EIA and SEA. In addition, the cooperation in the Baltic region under the framework of the treaties, based on practical cooperation, constructive communication and exchange of information among the countries of that subregion, was considered as very fruitful.

5. The Convention was considered to have played an important role in promoting subregional cooperation: before it existed countries had focused mostly on national and bilateral activities. The participants also wished to maintain the "spirit of cooperation" under the treaties that consisted of being transparent, results- and solution-oriented, and

focusing on assistance instead of punishment (particularly concerning the compliance-related matters brought before the Implementation Committee).

6. Both treaties were seen as important instruments in setting standards and defining procedures. The participants found them helpful for improving national legislation, and wished to continue focusing also in the future on improving and harmonizing the legal frameworks and common procedures for transboundary consultations, with (public) participation as their key component.

7. The current technical assistance and capacity development provided for countries was highly appreciated and should continue to be supported, including through drafting guidance. Guidance was seen as helpful, for example for developing national legislation. Moreover, training-of-trainers events were seen as very useful for the implementation of the treaties.

B. What are the chances to increase the successes?

8. The participants also had some suggestions for further improving the work under the Convention and the Protocol. One of them involved intensifying the cooperation with other programmes, organizations and conventions, especially with the United Nations Environment Programme and the Aarhus Convention. Some cases examined by the Aarhus Convention's Compliance Committee, for example, overlapped with those brought before the Espoo Implementation Committee, and the Aarhus Compliance Committee tended also to indirectly interpret the provisions of the Espoo Convention. Another suggestion was to improve the interaction between the Convention and the International Atomic Energy Agency on issues related to the construction and extension of nuclear power plants. Some participants further suggested that elements of the revised EIA Directive^a could also be integrated into the Espoo Convention. Better connections with the academic world were also called for, for example by envisaging scientific studies on various challenging issues, or by inviting scientific experts to the meetings. Many of the discussion groups concluded there was a need to find new funding strategies for the treaties by creating synergies with new partners, such as international financial institutions. Finally, participants suggested working more with representatives of the economic sectors to which SEA was applied, thus increasing their ownership of SEA.

9. Participants also suggested allowing for more flexibility as to when and how meetings under the treaties were organized. In particular, meetings could be more interactive and focus more on exchanging information on the practical application of EIA and SEA and less on theoretical or legal frameworks. Some participants also suggested more flexible or "tailor-made" time schedules for the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties and the Working Group's meetings, depending on the needs and the progress of the work. In the same vein, some suggested more flexibility regarding the venues of the Working Group meetings, e.g., holding them in the different subregions. Another option put forward was to organize online meetings of the Implementation Committee or the Bureau, or possibly only of their preparatory meetings. However, it would be necessary to first ensure that the online meetings, which required careful management, would work well in practice.

10. Participants underlined the need to increasingly promote the Convention and the Protocol as important mechanisms for addressing key challenges, such as: climate change;

^a Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment.

the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals; biodiversity conservation; waste management; and persistent organic pollutants. To that end, the participants suggested the use of more modern or innovative tools for promoting the treaties, which could be more influential and effective than printed brochures. The video on SEA and its benefits was seen as a good illustration of that.

11. Regarding the harmonization of transboundary procedures, participants suggested addressing unresolved problems and challenges, such as translations of documents or other language-related issues. Some participants felt that the specifics of the different regions, including the differences between the European Union and the non-European Union countries, should be better taken into account in the work under the treaties. In addition, the current subregional work could be analysed to see how it could be further developed and how the activities in the different subregions could be more balanced.

12. The participants also proposed developing benchmarks for the quality of the criteria and methodology used in conducting EIAs and SEAs. It was proposed to move away from the vision of SEA as a “legal” or “control” instrument, towards a vision of SEA as a “support” instrument. For example, SEA helped to find the best available technologies through assessing alternative options in EIA, to integrate environmental issues in earlier stages of decision-making and to involve stakeholders, which was currently not sufficiently done in many countries. A new idea might be to change the mindset that saw SEA as an environmental (air, water, soil, etc.) tool to SEA as a tool to manage scarce resources (energy, food, etc.).

Annex II

Summary of the workshop on the global application of the Convention and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment

I. Introduction

1. The workshop on the global application of the Convention and its Protocol was organized by the European Investment Bank, as the lead organization for this activity, with support from a consultant, Jiří Dusík, and in cooperation with the secretariat.
2. The workshop's aims were to:
 - (a) Contribute to raising awareness on the Convention and the Protocol and their benefits among countries outside the ECE region;
 - (b) Inform Parties and signatories to the Convention, the Protocol and other stakeholders about the current practices of non-ECE countries, international financial institutions and other international organizations in applying SEA and transboundary EIA;
 - (c) Discuss expectations of the non-ECE countries and the possible avenues for enhanced future collaboration that could involve engagement of relevant international organizations in promoting the application of the provisions of Convention and the Protocol in the non-ECE countries and in supporting related capacity-building activities.
3. The workshop started with introductory speeches by Bartholomew Judd of the European Investment Bank and by the Secretary to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol. It continued with a session on lessons from the application of the Convention and the Protocol, including presentations on the key treaty obligations for the contracting parties (by the consultant, Mr. Dusík), on the German experience with the practical application of the Convention (by Marianne Richter of the Federal Environmental Agency); and on the lessons learned by Slovenia from the transboundary SEA for its national hydropower spatial plans (by Vesna Kolar Planinšič, Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning).
4. The second substantive session, which focused on perspectives of the invited countries and international institutions on SEA and transboundary EIA in Asia, comprised an introductory presentation on regional economic and environmental cooperation in South-East and North-East Asia (by Mr. Dusík) followed by substantive presentations on:
 - (a) Initiatives to promote transboundary EIA in East Asia by the Republic of Korea (by Nankyong Moon, the Korean Environment Institute);
 - (b) "Evolving EIA/SEA experimentation with considerations of transboundary issues in China" (by Li Wei, Beijing Normal University);
 - (c) The perspectives of Viet Nam on transboundary EIA and SEA (by Pham Anh Dung, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment);
 - (d) Legal frameworks for considering transboundary environmental issues on EIA and SEA in Cambodia (by Danh Serey, Ministry of Environment);
 - (e) Experience of the Mekong River Commission in promoting transboundary EIA in Asia (by Hong Tien Truong, Mekong River Commission secretariat).
5. Due to the limited time available for the debate, the workshop concluded with short observations, including from delegates representing Sweden and the European Commission, appreciating the new insights provided by the workshop on the recent

developments in Asia, and followed by a wrap-up by the consultant and concluding remarks by Mr. Judd and the Secretary to the Convention and its Protocol.

II. Key points made by the speakers

6. The consultant outlined the status of ratification of the Convention and the Protocol and the key obligations of the two treaties, and highlighted the wealth of knowledge and experience that had been gained by countries in the ECE region over the past 25 years in the consideration of transboundary impacts and the related consultations with concerned countries.

7. Ms. Richter emphasized that both treaties helped avoid conflicts between States and indirectly facilitated the accomplishment of both private and public infrastructure projects in Parties of origin. The key difficulties in treaty implementation were usually owing to differences between the Parties concerned in terms of legislation, administrative structures and responsibilities, traditions and cultures of communication, and also problems that stemmed from pressures outside the EIA, such as diverging political and development preferences or the influence of special interest groups. A concrete example of German-Polish bilateral cooperation under the Convention and the Protocol nevertheless demonstrated that most technical matters could be resolved through longer-term cooperation and regular meetings of technical experts of the respective Parties. Ms. Richter concluded that the Convention and the Protocol had proven to be effective tools for Germany and that non-Parties could consider applying their provisions on a voluntary basis prior to their accession to those instruments.

8. Ms. Kolar-Planinšič pointed out that a successful transboundary SEA was based on the following three key ingredients:

(a) A step-by-step approach that allowed for discussions on the transboundary issue of concern in a systematic manner and the creation of a good-neighbourly atmosphere;

(b) The notification of the potentially effected Party at the earliest stages, when all options were still open;

(c) The initiation of technical consultations between the national expert teams as soon as possible.

Moreover, in order to undertake the SEA process effectively, it was useful for Parties to start by agreeing on all the procedural steps and their timing in advance, including on the cooperation for carrying out effective public participation in parallel on both sides of the border. The costs of the transboundary elements of the SEA process included the translation of the SEA report into the official language of the affected Party. For Slovenia, those costs had amounted to slightly over €30,000, representing only about 10 per cent of the overall costs of the SEA for the national spatial hydropower plan, and a marginal proportion of the total investment costs for the implementation of the proposed hydropower scheme.

9. Introducing the session on EIA and SEA in Asia, Mr. Dusík briefly described the situation with regard to regional economic and environmental cooperation in North-East and South-East Asia. In South-East Asia, the key processes of interest were the gradual establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community, its partnerships with China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, including on EIA and SEA matters, and the ASEAN work programme on environmental protection. Important lessons could also be drawn from the transboundary EIA and SEA initiatives of the Mekong River Commission and from the SEA projects implemented under the auspices of the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Programme supported by the Asian Development Bank. In North-East Asia,

noteworthy experience included the implementation of the United Nations Development Programme-supported Greater Tumen Initiative and that from the other multilateral environmental cooperation initiatives, which had achieved some success but appeared to be constrained by a lack of legally binding environmental regimes.

10. Ms. Moon summarized the efforts of the Republic of Korea to promote transboundary EIA in East Asia, including the organization of annual meetings with interested countries and experts since 2004 and a pilot transboundary EIA project carried out between Mongolia and the Republic of Korea in 2014. The pilot project had assessed the transboundary impacts of a planned railway track between Mongolia and China. The pilot project demonstrated that the transboundary EIA could be initiated with a simple identification of impacts of a transboundary dimension and determine whether any additional predictions or consultations should be undertaken or what mitigation measures could be adopted to avoid, reduce or offset such impacts. Broadening the debate on the transboundary EIA in East Asia had, however, so far faced problems owing to the different political, economic and cultural context in the various countries of the subregion. Transboundary EIA was nevertheless urgently needed in Asia because of the rapid pace of economic development and the growing attention being paid to the ensuing environmental impacts and risks. It could be helpful to initiate a double-track process involving establishing a regional transboundary EIA mechanism for all Asian countries and pilot transboundary EIAs of projects building on bilateral or multilateral agreements between interested Asian countries.

11. Mr. Wei pointed out that China also inevitably dealt with an increasing amount of transboundary environmental issues or impacts when developing overseas economic activities spearheaded by its so-called “One Belt, One Road” strategy. In that regard, China had already acquired experience in transboundary SEA and EIA through the implementation of some mega-region SEAs domestically and through participating in SEAs of several important development plans in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The Ministry of Environmental Protection had proposed mandatory meetings and negotiations with neighbouring provinces or municipalities within the SEA processes in cases where transboundary airborne environmental impacts had been predicted. Further to that, China had started to implement SEAs on the six important economic corridors developed under the One Belt, One Road strategy. Mr. Wei suggested that, based on the successful implementation of the Espoo Convention in the ECE region, it could be useful to:

- (a) Set up a collaborative platform to discuss the potential application of the Convention’s principles in Asia, involving the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Asian Development Bank, ECE, the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, etc.;
- (b) Develop pilot projects and demonstrate best practice;
- (c) Build up a core team for developing a methodology for the implementation of transboundary EIA and SEA;
- (d) Use the processes mentioned for awareness-raising and capacity development on transboundary EIA and SEA in Asia.

12. Mr. Dung drew attention to the development and environmental context in South-East Asia and to the particular challenges of the lower Mekong region, where relatively small countries shared many borders and common resources, such as water and biodiversity. The rapid industrial development in the individual countries, involving for example hydropower, thermal plants, power lines, railways, transport corridors and industrial zones, had caused increasing impacts and placed growing burdens on the national and regional environment. Viet Nam was currently supported by the United States Agency for International Development and by other organizations in its development of regional guidelines on public participation in EIA in order to harmonize the quality of the national

EIA processes and to open up opportunities for community involvement in transboundary EIA. Viet Nam would nevertheless also wish to see the establishment of a concrete and binding regional framework for addressing transboundary issues that would guide the national legislative processes. That was an area where countries of the lower Mekong region could effectively learn from the ECE region.

13. Mr. Danh noted that Cambodia appreciated the Mekong River Commission's work to develop a transboundary EIA framework because it would help to address the environmental implications of the proposed development initiatives that could have significant effects on the Greater Mekong, e.g., with respect to hydropower, irrigation, ports and river works, industrial projects and mining, aquaculture, navigation and water abstraction. Most hydropower projects, however, so far did not involve the consideration of their potentially adverse transboundary effects. Cambodia therefore intended to include relevant requirements for public participation, SEA, health impact assessment, climate change risk assessment, cumulative impact assessment and transboundary impact assessment into its new draft Law on EIA, which would be submitted as part of the wider environmental code for adoption by early 2017. The Mekong River Commission or ASEAN could assist in establishing regional transboundary EIA guidelines and facilitate debates related to transboundary disputes. Such guidelines should promote sustainable development and provide a framework for consultations among the concerned countries on environmental impacts and mitigation opportunities. They should also provide mechanisms for discussing compensation measures and for the sharing of benefits of projects that had transboundary impacts.

14. Mr. Truong spoke about the cooperation on development planning in the lower Mekong region, building on the environmental and sustainability provisions of the 1995 Mekong Agreement and the work of the Mekong River Commission on procedures for notification, prior consultation and agreement that could potentially trigger the determination of whether a transboundary EIA was necessary for certain projects. In 2002, the Commission had developed a workplan to design, adopt and apply a framework and technical guidelines for transboundary EIA. The work had unfortunately progressed slowly owing, among others, to countries' concerns over losing sovereignty in decision-making, the absence of basic provisions for transboundary EIA in national legislation and diverging views on whether transboundary EIA should be voluntary or mandatory. Currently, the technical guidelines were being tested through a pilot project between Cambodia and Viet Nam for the application of transboundary EIA to hydropower plants on the Sesan River. The Commission had also undertaken an SEA study on the impacts of the mainstream dams on the Lower Mekong Basin. To effectively promote transboundary EIA and SEA, Mr. Truong called for enhanced dialogue, the sharing of best practices and awareness-raising, especially for decision makers, on the positive effects of introducing transboundary EIA in the region.

III. Follow-up plans and opportunities for cooperation with the Convention

15. Following the workshop, the speakers from Asia met with the consultant to discuss the points raised during the presentations and to informally reflect on new opportunities for cooperation. The speakers had found the workshop to be very useful because it had helped them to identify new means for promoting transboundary EIA and SEA in Asia. They agreed to report to their leadership on those results and to seek opportunities for future cooperation.

16. The speakers also accepted a tentative invitation by the Mr. Wei to contribute to two workshops within the forthcoming Chinese conference on SEA and EIA in Hong Kong, on 11 and 12 May 2017. The workshops would focus on the following issues:

(a) A simplified SEA for the “One Road, One Belt” strategy and opportunities for undertaking transboundary consultations on its preliminary findings;

(b) The perspectives of Asian countries and institutions on opportunities for the application of transboundary EIA and SEA and potential accession to the Espoo Convention and/or its Protocol on SEA.

17. The invitation to the Hong Kong workshops would be extended to both technical experts and higher-ranking government officials. ECE, the European Investment Bank and other international financial institutions, but also other interested Parties that wished to observe the process, would also be welcome to attend and provide input. The secretariat and/or Mr. Dusík could be contacted for further information.

18. The workshops would also allow informal discussions on a proposal to elaborate a regional road map for the promotion of transboundary EIA and SEA in Asia. The road map could examine issues such as:

(a) The reasons why the Espoo Convention would be important for Asia, identifying also relevant good practice examples;

(b) National reports on opportunities for and challenges and obstacles to promoting transboundary EIA and SEA in Asia, including countries’ potential future accession to the Convention and/or its Protocol;

(c) Relevant action plans and reports on any other issues of interest.

19. The road map initiative, initially scheduled to be realized over a three-year period, could be facilitated by a technical team or expert panel comprising the Asian speakers at the Geneva workshop and, within their limited resources, ECE and the European Investment Bank. The technical team would also be open to any other interested countries, international or regional institutions and international financial institutions. The team would have a rotating chairmanship. Ms. Moon agreed to explore the possibilities of the Korean Environmental Institute to nominate a first chair.

20. The outcomes of the technical team’s work could subsequently be presented to the Working Group on EIA and SEA and the other treaty bodies as informal documents prepared by observer countries interested in the promotion of transboundary EIA and SEA and potential future accession to the Convention and/or the Protocol. The outcomes could in addition be presented at potential future side events during relevant high-level meetings in Asia.

21. Aware of the funding needs for the implementation of the proposed workplan, the speakers invited the ECE secretariat and the European Investment Bank to help mobilize and coordinate potential funding from interested countries and international financial institutions that might wish to support at least the initial phases of that collaborative process.