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Statement

by

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at

**the 7th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention
and 3rd session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on SEA**

Minsk, 16 June 2017

Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and honoured to address you today.

On behalf of the UNECE secretariat, I would like to sincerely thank the Government of Belarus, and in particular, Her Excellency, the First Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus, Ms. Malkina, for: inviting us to Minsk; for providing this first rate setting for the deliberations, and; for all the work of her staff in co-organizing the event with the UNECE secretariat.

This Minsk meeting marks the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Espoo Convention.

It is by now a mature instrument that is applied frequently and consistently by most of its current 45 Parties to numerous planned economic development activities.

Despite the respectable age and, I believe, the proven usefulness of the Convention, there is still a margin for widening its membership.

It would be important that all countries in our region are included under the Convention for it to effectively prevent and mitigate pollution and promote transboundary cooperation.

We are optimistic that the Russian Federation will join the Convention before long, possibly already during the next intersessional period.

I also encourage the three Central Asian Republics that are not yet Parties to consider taking the necessary steps towards this end.

I am certain that the updated guidance on the application of the environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context in Central Asia that is being finalized with funding from Switzerland will assist the countries in this.

A long time has lapsed since you, the Parties, adopted two amendments to the Convention - back in 2001 and 2004.

Therefore, I was pleased to learn that, with Denmark's expected ratification of the second amendment, that amendment will finally enter into force in the coming months.

In contrast, I am increasingly concerned that despite the efforts made to speed up the process, several more ratifications are still needed for the first amendment to become operational.

I invite all countries that adopted the amendment to complete the ratification process as soon as possible.

This would allow for countries outside the UNECE region to also accede to the Convention – which would be an important signal of openness, sharing and solidarity.

In the meantime, I welcome your willingness to share knowledge and experience with the other regions of the world and, just as importantly, to learn from these regions.

Several items on your agenda for this meeting are of global importance, and clearly demonstrate the role that the Convention, but in particular its Protocol on SEA, can play in addressing global challenges.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, its goals and related targets call for an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to sustainable development.

They constitute strong global political commitments that all of your Governments made.

The progress in achieving them will be reviewed and followed up at the regional and global level.

It is now time for all stakeholders to act, involving Governments, partner organizations, civil society and private sector.

The Protocol and the Convention can concretely help, by providing a legal framework and clear procedures for integrating environment and health concerns into economic development planning, involving and consulting with stakeholders across the sectors and the public at large.

The panel discussions you had on Wednesday illustrated this well, providing us with examples of how the treaties were already being used to promote SDGs and suggesting how to further improve and mainstream their role in this respect.

The Protocol on SEA, in particular, is also a well acknowledged tool to help ensure that climate change considerations are properly considered in planning and strategic decision-making by the sectors responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, such as, agriculture, energy, industry and transport.

I am eager to hear the panel discussions on this topic this morning; the presentation of good practice within and beyond the UNECE region; and the suggestions for further enhancing the role of the treaties in addressing climate change.

I was pleased to note that the new work plan for 2017–2020, which you are about to adopt, proposes to address climate change related concerns and also indicates for several activities which specific SDG target they aim at contributing.

I also welcome your efforts to take a step back to think strategically how the two treaties could most effectively address these and other key challenges in the UNECE region and beyond in a longer a run by deciding to develop a long-term strategy and an action plan provided that resources are identified.

The challenges ahead are great - but you also have great tools in your hands.

Capacity building has always been an important part of the work under the Convention and the Protocol.

During the period since the previous session of the Meetings of the Parties a particularly extensive amount of legislative assistance, training events, pilot projects and subregional workshops were carried out mainly for promoting the implementation and ratification of the Protocol on SEA.

Currently, the Protocol has 31 Parties.

There is still much room for enlarging its membership within the region.

Also, despite the progress made, more work still remains to be done for improving the awareness of the benefits of the Protocol and the capacity for its implementation.

Earlier in the meeting, you took stock of the main achievements of the capacity building efforts that were made possible thanks to the generous funding from the European Commission under the EaP GREEN¹ Programme for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, and from Switzerland and the European Commission for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

I understand that the countries and the donors have been satisfied with the assistance provided and that many requests for further support have been waitlisted pending the identification of funding.

Should sufficient further financial and human resources become available, the UNECE secretariat stands ready to continue its support to help sustain the results achieved thus far and improve the implementation of the newly established legislation on SEA in the countries in compliance with the Protocol.

Your commitment and support are key for the future work under the Convention and the Protocol.

These are your treaties and it will be your workplan.

A successful implementation of the future workplan and the continuation of the secretariat services will only be possible with sufficient and sustainable financial and in-kind support.

At present, the Espoo Convention and its Protocol receive the lowest amount of voluntary contributions of all the five UNECE Environmental Agreements.

The “Espoo secretariat” is also the smallest in terms of staffing.

I therefore encourage all Parties and partners to seek to support the work under the treaties.

¹ Greening Economies in the European Union’s Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries

That means continuing to expand the number of Parties and other donors that contribute financially, but also increasing the size of the contributions, and actively helping the secretariat in the resource mobilization and in the identification of new partnerships.

I also like to highlight the value of and encourage further in-kind contributions for covering the costs of workplan activities, participation of experts in meetings, but also in providing leadership and expertise within the subsidiary bodies.

Finally, I can only reiterate my wish that Parties would in the next intersessional period follow Finland's example and sponsor a junior professional officer to provide invaluable support to the secretariat.

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will now leave you under the direction of our host, Her Excellency, Ms. Iya Malkina, First Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus, and His Excellency, Mr. Neno Dimov, the Minister of Environment and Water of Bulgaria - the co-Chairs for this high-level segment.

I wish you success in your deliberations today.

I am convinced that you will strive for reaching decisions in consensus, even on the most challenging questions, in a spirit of cooperation that characterizes the Espoo Convention and its Protocol.

Thank you.
