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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

Implementation Committee

Thirty-eighth session
Geneva, 20-22 February 2017

Report of the Implementation Committee on its thirty-eighth session

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I. Introduction

1. The thirty-eighth session of the Implementation Committee under the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment was held from 20 to 22 February 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland.

A. Attendance

2. The following members of the Implementation Committee for Convention and Protocol matters attended the session: Vladimir Buchko (Ukraine); Elyanora Grigoryan (Armenia); Kaupo Heinma (Estonia); Lourdes Aurora Hernando (Spain); Zsuzsanna Pocsai (Hungary); Ilda Shahu (Albania); Romas Švedas (Lithuania); Felix Zaharia (Romania); and Nadezhda Zdanevich (Belarus). The alternate member for Belarus on Protocol matters, Jerzy Jendrośka (Poland), and his alternate, Katarzyna Twardowska, were absent.

B. Organizational matters

3. The Chair of the Committee opened the session. The Committee adopted its agenda as set out in document ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2017/1.

4. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Protocol and the two amendments to the Convention, emphasizing that nine more ratifications were needed for the first amendment to become operational and that one ratification was missing for the second amendment to enter into force. The Committee took note of the information. Observing that, of the countries represented on the Committee, Armenia and Ukraine had not yet ratified the two amendments, and Belarus had not ratified the second amendment, the Committee urged those countries to ratify the amendments by the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (Minsk, 13–16 June 2017).

5. The member nominated by Ukraine informed the Committee that the issue of ratification of the amendments would be considered by the parliament soon after the expected adoption of the legislation on environmental impact assessment.

II. Follow-up to decision VI/2

6. Discussions on the follow-up to decision VI/2 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the review of compliance with the Convention (see ECE/MP.EIA/20/Add.1-ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/4/Add.1) were not open to observers, in accordance with rule 17, paragraph 1, of the Committee's operating rules,¹ and took place in the absence of the Committee members nominated by Armenia, Belarus, Lithuania, Romania and Ukraine during the consideration of matters where a direct or indirect conflict of interest could arise.

¹ The Committee's operating rules were adopted by decision IV/2, annex IV (see ECE/MP.EIA/10) and then later amended by decisions V/4 (see ECE/MP.EIA/15) and VI/2 (see ECE/MP.EIA/20/Add.1-ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/4/Add.1).

A. Belarus (EIA/IC/S/4)²

7. Further to its discussions at its thirty-seventh session (Geneva, 12–14 December 2016), the Committee finalized its recommendations to the Meeting of the Parties on the follow-up by Belarus with decision VI/2 (paras. 48-64) regarding the Ostrovets nuclear power plant. In finalizing its recommendations, the Committee also took into consideration the analysis by the curator for the case of the reports and correspondence submitted to the Committee by Belarus and Lithuania in the period from 5 January to 17 February 2017, including information about the Site and External Events Design (SEED) mission conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Belarus in January 2017.

8. The Committee recalled that, at its thirty-seventh session, it had agreed on most of its recommendations to the Meeting of the Parties. At that session it had concluded, based on its thorough analysis of the steps taken by both Parties since the Committee's twenty-seventh session (Geneva, 12–14 March 2013), that Belarus had undertaken all the required steps to reach the final decision on the activity at Ostrovets as provided for in the Convention. The Committee had not, however, been able to reach a final conclusion on the compliance of those steps with the provisions of the Convention, without answers to five questions on technical and scientific aspects of the environmental impact assessment (EIA) documentation that it had put forward at that session.³

9. The Committee further reiterated that it did not have the capacity or the mandate to examine the environmental and scientific issues that had been raised in connection with the activity at Ostrovets, but noted that its rules of procedure provided for the possibility to turn to expert advice. In the absence of resources for hiring a consultant to provide such expert advice, it continued the elaboration of two concrete proposals brought forward during its thirty-seventh session on how such advice could be provided to it by July 2018. It then incorporated the two proposals in draft decision VII/2 on review of compliance with the Convention,⁴ underlining that procedural and substantive aspects of the EIA procedure could not necessarily be treated separately when assessing compliance, in particular if the essence of the compliance case in question was about substantive aspects.

10. The Committee remarked that the report of the SEED mission might provide answers to some of its questions, but noted that the report would not be publicly released until April 2017. It therefore agreed to ask the co-curators for the case to try to find answers to its five questions in that report, if it was released at least two weeks in advance of the next sessions of the Meeting of the Parties. The Committee also agreed that, based on the co-curators recommendations, it would convene a virtual meeting to consider which questions had been properly answered by the report. It further agreed that its Chair would inform the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention of the outcomes of any further deliberations on the matter at its seventh session.

11. With regard to the SEED mission, the Committee regretted that, according to the information available at the session, Belarus had not entirely followed the suggestion of the Meeting of the Parties, as it had not specifically invited IAEA to evaluate the site selection criteria as well. The Committee nevertheless congratulated Belarus for having taken that confidence-building measure, and encouraged it to continue with such measures in the future.

12. After finalizing its recommendations to the Meeting of the Parties, the Committee stressed that, with the active support of both Parties, it had attempted over the past three years

² Information on this compliance case is available from http://www.unece.org/env/eia/implementation/implementation_committee_matters.html.

³ See the report of the thirty-seventh session (ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2016/6, annex I) and draft decision VII/2 (ECE/MP.EIA/2017/8, annex I).

⁴ See ECE/MP.EIA/2017/8, paras. 57-61.

all reasonable approaches to assist the Parties to fully comply with their obligations under the Convention.

13. In addition, the Committee noted the comments expressed prior to the adoption of the agenda for the session by the Committee member nominated by Belarus, that the assessment of the new legislation on EIA should not be considered in relation to the Ostrovets case. The Committee decided to consider information related to the recent adoption by Belarus of the law and subsequent regulations on EIA, strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and State ecological expertise as a separate information-gathering matter at its next session. The Committee appointed Zsuzsanna Pocsai as a curator and Volodymyr Buchko as a co-curator for that information gathering.

B. Ukraine

1. Rivne nuclear power plant (EIA/IC/CI/4)⁵

14. The Committee continued its consideration of the follow-up by Ukraine on decision VI/2 regarding the lifetime extension of reactors 1 and 2 of the Rivne nuclear power plant. The Committee noted the information from Ukraine of 7 February 2017 concerning the resolution of one of its Vice Prime Ministers of 12 January 2017 requesting the Government to initiate the transboundary EIA procedure for the planned lifetime extension of reactors 1 and 2 of the Rivne nuclear power plant, further to the decision VI/2, by January 2018. It regretted, however, that no information had been provided on the concrete steps to carry out such a procedure. The Committee also noted with concern that Ukraine had not initiated discussions with potentially affected Parties to agree on whether notification was needed for the extension of the lifetime for the Rivne nuclear power plant, as the Committee had requested at its thirty- fifth session (Geneva, 15–17 March 2016). In the meantime, Austria, Hungary and Romania had asked Ukraine to be notified regarding the activity.

15. Further to an analysis by the curator for the matter, the Committee concluded that since the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties in June 2014 Ukraine had not taken the necessary practical steps to bring the project into compliance with the Convention. The Committee further noted that decision VI/2, paragraph 71, did not provide clear guidance for Ukraine on how to bring the activity into compliance with the Convention. Therefore, it recommended the Meeting of the Parties to outline in its decision VII/2 on the review of compliance specific measures that would assist Ukraine in addressing its non-compliance with regard to the activity. In particular, Ukraine should be requested to revise by the end of 2018 its decision to extend the lifetime of reactors 1 and 2 of the Rivne nuclear power plant based on the outcomes of an EIA procedure to be carried out in full compliance with the Convention and following the time frame and concrete steps provided for in a strategy for bringing the project into compliance with the Convention to be prepared by Ukraine by the end of 2017. The strategy should include:

- (a) The adoption of the general legal and administrative framework on the implementation of the Convention;
- (b) The notification of all potentially affected Parties, in accordance with article 3 of the Convention;
- (c) The preparation of the EIA documentation, including transboundary aspects, pursuant to article 4 of the Convention;

⁵ Information on this compliance case is available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/environmental-assessment/areas-of-work/review-of-compliance/committee-initiative.html>.

(d) Consultations with authorities and the public of the affected Parties based on the EIA documentation, as set out in article 5 of the Convention;

(e) Ensuring that in the revised final decision due account was taken of the outcomes of the EIA procedure, including the EIA documentation and comments received from the affected Parties, further to article 6 of the Convention.

16. Ukraine should also be requested to report by the end of each year to the Implementation Committee on its implementation of the strategy and the revised final decision taken.

2. Bystroe Canal Project (EIA/IC/S/1)⁶

17. The Committee then continued its consideration of the follow-up by Ukraine on decision VI/2 (paras.15-28) in relation to the Danube-Black Sea Deep Water Navigation Canal in the Ukrainian sector of the Danube Delta (Bystroe Canal Project) in order to finalize its report to the Meeting of the Parties. By decision VI/2 Ukraine had been requested to adopt relevant legislation and to bring the Bystroe Canal Project into full compliance with the Convention by the end of 2015 (paras. 24-25). Ukraine had also been requested to report by the end of each year to the Committee on how it had implemented those recommendations.

18. The Committee considered the information received from Ukraine since its thirty-seventh session, including:

(a) The annual progress report of 6 January 2017 with regard to the implementation of the Government strategy to implement the Convention and concrete measures to bring the Bystroe Canal Project into conformity with the Convention;

(b) An analysis by Ukraine of 14 February 2017 of its implementation of decisions IV/2, V/4 and VI/2;

(c) A report of 13 February 2017 on the implementation by Ukraine of monitoring measures and post project analysis in accordance with article 7 of the Convention.

19. With respect to the implementation of the strategy of the Government of Ukraine to implement the Convention and the adoption of relevant draft legislation (decision VI/2, paras 24 and 25 (a)), the Committee recalled that the text of the new law on EIA had been adopted by the parliament of Ukraine on 4 October 2016, but vetoed by the Ukrainian President on 31 October 2016. It further noted that the law had been returned by the parliament to its environmental committee for revision. The Committee expressed concerns that, despite the efforts of Ukraine to develop and adopt a new law on EIA, there was still no legislation in place to ensure proper implementation of the Convention. Consequently, the Committee agreed that it was not in a position to conclude that Ukraine had implemented the provisions set out in paragraphs 24 and 25 (a) of decision VI/2 regarding the adoption of legislative measures.

20. With regard to steps taken by Ukraine to bring the Bystroe Canal Project into full compliance with the Convention, in particular the implementation of the measures referred to in decision VI/2, para 25 (b), the Committee agreed that although some steps had been taken, the information available to the Committee did not allow it to conclude that the Project had been brought into full compliance with the Convention.

21. On the above grounds, the Committee agreed that it had no basis to recommend to the Meeting of the Parties to revise its recommendations set out in decisions V/4 and VI/2

⁶ Information on this compliance case is available from http://www.unece.org/env/eia/implementation/implementation_committee_matters.html.

concerning compliance by Ukraine and that, consequently, the caution issued at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties, in 2009, remained effective.

22. The Committee finalized draft decision VII/2 on the matter, inviting the Meeting of the Parties to request Ukraine to adopt the relevant legislation and to bring the Bystroe Canal Project into full compliance with the Convention by the end of 2018. Should Ukraine fail to do so, the Committee recommended that, at its eighth session, the Meeting of the Parties consider taking more stringent measures, i.e., the suspension of the special rights and privileges accorded to Ukraine under the Convention and the Protocol, such as the possibility for Ukraine to become a member of the Bureau or the Implementation Committee.⁷

C. Azerbaijan (EIA/IC/CI/2)⁸

23. The Committee continued its consideration of the follow-up by Azerbaijan on decision VI/2 regarding the national legislation for the implementation of the Convention (paras. 41–42). Based on the latest correspondence from Azerbaijan, dated 13 December 2016, the Committee noted that, despite efforts from all authorities to amend the draft legislation on EIA and strategic environmental assessment (SEA), as recommended by international consultants, Azerbaijan had not managed to adopt the draft law and the subsequent regulations, as requested by the Meeting of the Parties (decision VI/2, para. 42). The Committee acknowledged the efforts of the Azerbaijani authorities, but noted that it was not in a position to report to the Meeting of the Parties on any relevant legislation in Azerbaijan for the implementation of the Convention. That situation confirmed the Committee's profound suspicion of non-compliance by Azerbaijan with article 2, paragraph 2, of the Convention.

24. The Committee had begun an initiative on Azerbaijan in 2009, prompted by the country's responses to the questionnaire on implementation of the Convention in the period 2003–2005 (which had indicated that the country lacked national legislation on the application of the Convention) and also the request from Azerbaijan for technical assistance from the Committee in that regard. Following that request, extensive technical assistance had been made available to Azerbaijan since 2012 without, however, producing any tangible results.

25. The Committee regretted that situation. It agreed that the Meeting of the Parties should again invite Azerbaijan to adopt its EIA law as soon as possible. The Committee also discussed the possible causes for the longstanding failure of Azerbaijan to adopt the law, and decided that the usefulness of the technical assistance provided to Azerbaijan deserved a dedicated analysis. To that end, the Committee asked the secretariat to submit a comprehensive report on the technical assistance provided to Azerbaijan together with its views on the reasons why that assistance had not contributed to the outcome requested by the Meeting of the Parties. The report should be submitted to the Committee one month in advance of its fortieth session (Geneva, 5-7 December 2017).

26. Based on the information presented orally by the secretariat during the session, the Committee noted that better communication with and within the Government could have expedited the implementation of the conclusions of the technical assistance. In that context

⁷ See rule 12, para. 2 (e), of the Committee's operating rules.

⁸ Information on this compliance case is available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/environmental-assessment/areas-of-work/review-of-compliance/committee-initiative.html>.

the Committee underlined that the full implementation of the Convention required not only technical expertise, but also dedicated political commitment.

27. The Committee also expressed its concern about the difficulties the Government of Azerbaijan had experienced in making full use of the outcomes of the technical assistance. Therefore, the Committee decided to continue its initiative by inviting Azerbaijan to a hearing during its fortieth session to present, inter alia, the reason for those difficulties. The Committee would subsequently draft its findings and recommendations to the next Meeting of the Parties in respect of Azerbaijan.

D. Armenia (EIA/IC/CI/1)⁹

28. The Committee continued its consideration of the follow-up by Armenia on decision VI/2 regarding the national legislation for the implementation of the Convention (paras. 31–35). It took note of the information provided by Armenia on 13 February, 2017, complemented by an oral report by the Committee member nominated by Armenia and information from the secretariat regarding the country's progress in ensuring that its legislation fully complied with the Convention and the Protocol.

29. The Committee noted that, with the support of the secretariat and funds from the European Union "Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighbourhood" (EaP GREEN) programme, Armenia had prepared draft amendments to its 2014 law for the implementation of the Convention and had drafted relevant secondary regulations under the supervision of the Deputy Environment Minister. In that connection, the Committee also noted the information by an international consultant to the secretariat involved in the legal drafting that the proposed legislative amendments and the draft secondary regulations in their current version provided for a better distinction between the EIA and SEA procedures. However, additional revisions would still be necessary to address deficiencies in the practical application of EIA and SEA, in particular to ensure: (a) that the final decision set the environmental conditions for the activity in real terms and was based on the results of the EIA procedure; and (b) reasonable time frames were established for different stages of public participation in EIA and SEA procedures, including the minimum time frames between notification about a planned public hearing and the holding of the hearing.

30. The Committee decided to recommend to the Meeting of the Parties to encourage Armenia to adopt the proposed amendments and the secondary legislation as soon as possible.

III. Submissions

31. No submissions had been received since the Committee's previous session and there were no earlier submissions still under consideration.

⁹ Information on this compliance case is available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/environmental-assessment/areas-of-work/review-of-compliance/committee-initiative.html>.

IV. Information gathering¹⁰

A. Convention matters

1. Belgium (EIA/IC/INFO/18)

32. The Committee then continued its consideration of the information it had gathered further to information provided by the German federal states of North Rhine-Westfalia and Rhineland-Palatinate concerning the lifetime extensions of reactors at the Doel and Tihange nuclear power plants in Belgium. The Committee recalled that at its thirty-seventh session it had requested Belgium to provide further clarifications on the matter by 3 February 2017. On 3 February 2017 Belgium had requested an extension of that deadline in order, among others, to arrange for translation of the documents required by the Committee from its three official languages into English, to carry out consultations between Belgian authorities and to conclude ongoing court proceedings regarding the activity. The Committee agreed at the present session to the extension. It requested the Chair to write to the Government of Belgium informing it of the Committee's decision to extend the deadline until 17 July 2017 and, in addition, to request any other relevant information. The Committee agreed to continue its consideration of the matter at its thirty-ninth session (Geneva, 5–7 September 2017).

2. The Netherlands (ECE/IC/INFO/15)

33. Prior to continuing its consideration of the information it had gathered regarding the lifetime extension of the Borssele nuclear power plant in the Netherlands, the Committee recalled that at its thirty-seventh session it had agreed to formulate a general opinion or a recommendation on the extension of lifetime of nuclear power plants. Such an opinion or recommendation could provide the curators of the ongoing information-gathering procedures concerning the extension of lifetime of nuclear power plants, including the one at Borssele, with the elements needed to properly assess the information received. The Committee noted in that respect that, in its letter of 2 February 2017 regarding the Dukovany nuclear power plant (see para. 36 below), Germany had also requested guidance on the matter.

34. The Committee began its discussions based on a draft text prepared in advance by its Chair in consultation with several Committee members through electronic communication means, including virtual meetings. The Committee discussed the issue at length, debating, inter alia, whether decision VI/2 referred only to the nuclear power plant at Rivne or could be applied to other similar cases. It could not, however, reach agreement on the matter. Therefore, the Committee decided to resume its discussion at its thirty-ninth session, in September 2017, based on the draft text referred to above, as amended during the session.

35. After discussing the general opinion or recommendation, the Committee took note of the information provided by the Netherlands on 3 February 2017 further to the Committee's request. The Committee expressed its gratitude to the Netherlands for all the information it had provided since the beginning of the information-gathering procedure. While regretting that it could not conclude the matter before the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties, the Committee postponed the consideration of the information it had gathered to its next session.

¹⁰ More information on information-gathering cases is available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/environmental-assessment/areas-of-work/review-of-compliance/information-from-other-sources.html>.

3. Czechia (EIA/IC/INFO/19)

36. The Committee also postponed, owing to time constraints, the consideration of the information it had gathered further to the information received from five non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerning the lifetime extension of four reactors at the Dukovany nuclear power plant in Czechia, while noting with appreciation the information provided by Austria, Czechia, Germany and Slovakia and additional information by NGOs.

4. Ukraine (EIA/IC/INFO/20)

37. Further to a letter of 1 August 2016 from the NGO Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) Bankwatch Network to the Committee, and on the basis of the information provided by Ukraine in response to the Committee's questions, the Committee continued its information gathering regarding the lifetime extension of several reactors at the Rivne, South-Ukrainian, Zaporizhzhya, and Khmelnytsky nuclear power plants located in Ukraine.

38. The Committee noted the information provided by CEE Bankwatch Network that Austria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia had considered themselves affected and had entered into discussions with Ukraine in accordance with article 3, paragraph 7, of the Convention concerning the extension of the licence of one of the three reactors of the South-Ukrainian nuclear power plant. It also noted the information of 7 February 2017 from Ukraine regarding its intention to initiate transboundary consultations under the Convention regarding reactors at the South-Ukrainian and Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plants by February 2018, and to prepare non-technical summaries of the EIA documentation for those activities. The curator for the case informed the Committee that no information had been provided regarding the Government's plans to carry out a transboundary EIA for lifetime extension of reactor 3 at the Rivne nuclear power plant, nor regarding the two reactors at the Khmelnytsky nuclear power plant.

39. Nevertheless, in respect of the Khmelnytsky nuclear power plant, the Committee recalled that at its thirty-fourth session (Geneva, 8-10 December 2015) it had agreed that, since Ukraine had denounced the cooperation agreement with the Russian Federation for the construction and financing of reactors 3 and 4 at the Khmelnytsky plant, thus ending the implementation of the activity, there was no need for it to further pursue information-gathering in respect of those two reactors (ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2015/4, para. 44). The member nominated by Ukraine confirmed, once again, the information regarding the Khmelnytsky nuclear power plant.

40. Therefore, the Committee decided to continue the information gathering only in respect of the lifetime extensions of reactor 3 at the Rivne nuclear power plant and the reactors at the South-Ukrainian and Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plants. The Committee asked its Chair to write to Ukraine to request it to provide by 16 October 2017 additional information, including about:

(a) The planned lifetime extensions for reactor 3 of the Rivne nuclear power plant, the three reactors at the South-Ukrainian nuclear power plant and the five reactors at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant, including their location, characteristics and current status;

(b) Progress in carrying out transboundary EIA procedures for the reactors at the South-Ukrainian and the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plants referred to in the letter of Ukraine of 7 February 2017;

(c) The Government's plans to carry out a transboundary EIA procedure for reactor 3 of the Rivne nuclear power plant;

(d) Whether the potentially affected countries had been notified in relation to the proposed activities in accordance with article 3 of the Convention, including, if notification

had taken place, copies of the notifications and available responses to them from the potentially affected countries or, in the absence of notifications, the reasons why in the view of its Government the planned activities fell outside of the scope of the Convention;

(e) Progress in the adoption of the law on environmental impact assessment and in setting up other legal, administrative and other measures to implement the provisions of the Convention with respect to the above-mentioned planned activities.

41. In his letter, the Chair should also ask Ukraine to confirm by the same date, in writing, that Ukraine did not plan to build the third and fourth reactors at the Khmelnytsky nuclear power plant.

5. Bosnia and Herzegovina

(a) Ugljevik thermal power plant (EIA/IC/INFO/16)

42. Further to the information received on 18 September 2014 from the NGO Center for Environment (Bosnia and Herzegovina) the Committee continued its consideration of the information it had gathered concerning the planned construction of a third block for the thermal power plant in Ugljevik, Bosnia and Herzegovina, close to the border with Serbia. The Committee noted the information from Bosnia and Herzegovina of 6 February 2017 concerning its intention to notify Serbia with respect to the planned construction of the power plant, further to the Committee's request of 20 December 2016.

43. The Committee decided to ask the Chair to write to the Government of Serbia to invite it to confirm by 17 July 2017 whether it had been notified by Bosnia and Herzegovina with respect to the planned activity. If Serbia had been notified, the Government should also be invited to provide the Committee with an English translation of its response, if any, to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

44. The Committee also requested the Chair to write to Bosnia and Herzegovina asking it to inform the Committee by 17 July 2017 about the outcomes of the discussions with Serbia regarding the further steps to be taken to implement the transboundary EIA procedure regarding the planned activity.

45. The Committee agreed to continue to consider the information-gathering case at its thirty-ninth session, and requested the curator for the case to prepare her analysis on the matter by 10 August 2017.

(b) Stanari thermal power plant (EIA/IC/INFO/17)

46. The Committee also continued its consideration of the information it had gathered further to the information received on 18 September 2014 from the NGO Center for Environment on the planned construction of a new thermal power plant in Stanari, Bosnia and Herzegovina, close to the border with Croatia. The Committee regretted that Croatia had not yet responded to the Committee's letter of 19 September 2016.

47. The Committee agreed to ask the Chair to write to the Government of Croatia one more time asking it to confirm by 17 July 2017 whether it could exclude a transboundary environmental impact of the activity proposed by Bosnia and Herzegovina on the territory of Croatia. In the letter, the Chair should also inform Croatia that, in absence of a response, the Committee would understand that Croatia could exclude a significant adverse transboundary environmental impact on its territory related to the planned construction of a new thermal power plant in Stanari by Bosnia and Herzegovina.

48. The Committee agreed that it would continue its information gathering on the matter at its thirty-ninth session, based on the reply from Croatia to the Committee's letter, if any, and an analysis to be prepared by the curator by 10 August 2017.

6. Spain

49. The Committee noted the information provided on 27 January 2017 by the Portuguese political party *Pessoas-Animais-Natureza* (PAN) concerning the planned construction of an individual temporary storage facility for radioactive waste at the Almaraz nuclear power plant in Spain. The Committee member nominated by Spain informed the Committee that Spain had suspended its decision related to storage of spent nuclear fuel and had communicated its decision to suspend the activity to the Portuguese authorities.

50. The Committee decided nevertheless to appoint Ms. Zdanevich as a curator for the matter. The curator was invited to submit by 15 August 2017 her analysis of the information provided by PAN for consideration at the thirty-ninth session of the Committee, including a list of questions that could be addressed to Spain to clarify the status of the decision to build the temporary storage.

B. Protocol matters

1. Serbia (EIA/IC/INFO/1)

51. The Committee then continued its consideration of compliance by Serbia with the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment regarding the Government's Energy Strategy and Spatial Plan. Further to detailed information presented by the curator, the Committee requested the Chair to write to the following countries bordering on Serbia — Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia — asking them to provide by 1 July 2017 a copy of the notification sent by Serbia in relation to the Energy Strategy, if any. It decided to continue its deliberation on the matter at its next session in September 2017 further to an analysis to be prepared by the curator by 1 August 2017.

2. Armenia (EIA/IC/INFO/2)

52. The Committee continued its consideration of the information it had decided to gather from Armenia regarding the Programme of the Government of Armenia adopted by decision 511-A of 19 May 2014. In response to the Committee's letter of 20 December 2016 requesting clarifications on the nature of that Programme, Armenia had provided additional information on 2 and 13 February 2017.

53. Further to an analysis by the curator for the matter, the Committee noted that the Programme of the Government of Armenia of 19 May 2014, which, *inter alia*, had envisaged the construction in 2018 of a new reactor at the Metsamor nuclear power plant, was no longer valid. It also noted that, following the resignation of the Government on 8 September 2016 and the appointment of the new Government, the new Programme of the Government adopted on 18 October 2016 by Government decision 1060A made no reference to the construction of a new reactor at nuclear power plant at Metsamor. Furthermore, subsequent to parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2017, a new Government would be formed, followed by the adoption of a new programme of the Government.

54. Having considered all the information provided by Armenia, the Committee agreed that the Programme of the Government of Armenia of 19 May 2014 was not a plan or programme under the provisions of article 2, paragraph 5, and article 4 of the Protocol. Consequently, that Programme was not subject to the SEA procedure stipulated in the Protocol.

55. The Committee concluded that the information provided by Armenia was sufficient and decided to close its information gathering on the issue. It asked the Chair to write to the Government of Armenia to inform it accordingly and to thank Armenia for its cooperation.

The Chair should also request the agreement of the Government that the correspondence between the Committee and Armenia be placed on the Convention's website, as an illustration of the Committee's approach to specific compliance issues and of a proper and sufficient response from a Party to address the issue.

V. Review of implementation

A. Specific compliance issues under the Protocol¹¹

European Union (SEA/IC/SCI/1/4)

56. The Committee noted the European Commission's response of 9 February 2017 to the Committee's letter of 28 October 2017 regarding the specific compliance issue arising from the second review of implementation of the Protocol concerning the reporting obligation of the European Union. In the absence of the curator, however, the Committee decided to resume its consideration of the matter at a dedicated virtual session to be held during the second week of March 2017, and to reflect the results of those deliberations in the present report. The curator presented his analysis at a virtual session on 9 March 2017, chaired by the Vice-Chair of the Committee. Nevertheless, because of the lack of quorum at the virtual session, the Committee had not been able to finalize its consideration of the matter. The Committee therefore agreed to further postpone its consideration of the specific compliance issue to its thirty-ninth session in September 2017, with a view to deciding on whether to open a Committee initiative. Taking into account that the current curator's membership on the Committee would expire before the next session, the Vice-Chair proposed at the virtual meeting to appoint Ms. Pocsai and Mr. Svedas as new co-curators for the issue to ensure continuity in its consideration.

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

57. The Committee finalized draft decision VII/2 on the review of compliance with the Convention to be forwarded to the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention for consideration at its seventh session. Owing to time constraints, the Committee decided to finalize decision III/2 on the review of compliance with the Protocol through its electronic decision-making procedure by 15 March 2017.

58. The Committee also agreed to finalize its report on its activities to be submitted to the Meetings of the Parties, as foreseen in the workplan (see ECE/MP.EIA/20/Add.3-ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/4/Add.3, decision VI/3-II/3), through its electronic decision-making procedure by 15 March 2017. The Committee requested the secretariat to revise the current version of the report and circulate a revised draft report to Committee members for comments.

¹¹ More information on specific compliance issues is available from http://www.unece.org/env/eia/implementation/implementation_committee_letters.html.

VII. Other business

A. Committee initiative on the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

59. The Committee welcomed the letter of 13 February 2017 from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland indicating its intention to address the Committee's findings and recommendations further to a Committee initiative (EIA/IC/CI/5)¹² concerning the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant project. The Committee noted with appreciation that the United Kingdom had written to Parties to the Convention on 21 December 2016, asking them whether they considered that a notification under the Espoo Convention was useful at the current stage of the proposed activity.

60. The Committee also remarked the commitment of the United Kingdom to notify, in future, all Parties to the Convention in respect of applications for development consent for all new nuclear power plants, which went beyond the recommendations of the Committee.

61. However, the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant had been granted development consent by the relevant Secretary of State on 19 March 2013, and, according to the letter of the United Kingdom of 13 February 2017, the work under the development consent had already commenced. The Committee was therefore concerned that the continuation of works at Hinkley Point C might influence the views of the Parties consulted by the United Kingdom on 21 December 2016. Moreover, if the potentially affected parties considered that a notification was useful and therefore asked to participate in the transboundary EIA procedure, the continuation of works might render the results of the procedure irrelevant. The Committee recalled that in a previous situation where the procedures under the Convention had not been completed it had been of the opinion that the project, including its maintenance and its operation, should have been suspended.¹³ The Committee therefore decided to ask the Chair to write to the Government of the United Kingdom, inviting it to consider refraining from carrying out works at the proposed activity until it was established whether notification was useful. The Committee also decided to recommend to the Meeting of the Parties that if a potentially affected Party requested to be notified, the United Kingdom should suspend works related to the proposed activity until the transboundary EIA procedure was finalized.

B. Operating rules and procedures

62. Because of the increasing number and complexity of issues brought before the Committee, Committee members discussed possibilities to improve the effectiveness of their work by amending the Committee's operating rules to provide for regular virtual meetings. The Committee recalled that rule 19 allowed for the use of electronic means of communication in between meetings for the purpose of decision-making and conducting informal consultations. The Committee also recalled that it had used that provision for conducting informal consultations in preparation of its sessions and noted their usefulness.

63. The Committee members considered the possibility of using electronic means of communication more frequently, and organizing at least one virtual meeting per month in English to facilitate deliberations on the compliance issues. The Committee agreed that it would continue to use virtual meetings for informal consultations on a regular basis. However, it further decided to review the existing rules for electronic decision-making procedures under other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe multilateral

¹² See ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2016/2, annex.

¹³ See ECE/MP.EIA/10, decision IV/2, annex I, paras. 69 (b) and 74 (b).

environmental agreements and to resume the discussion on amending its operating rules at its next session in September 2017.

VIII. Presentation of the main decisions taken and closing of the session

64. The Committee agreed to hold its thirty-ninth session from 5 to 7 September 2017 and its fortieth session from 5 to 7 December 2017. The Committee also took note of the preliminary schedule for its forty-first (13-15 March 2018), forty-second (11-13 September 2018) and forty-third sessions (4-6 December 2018).

65. The Committee adopted the draft report of its session, and decided to agree on the pending issues through its electronic decision-making procedure, following the meeting. The Chair then formally closed the thirty-eighth session, thanking the members for their active involvement and cooperation over the past three years.
