



"Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference

CONCLUDING REMARKS OF THE SIDE EVENT

To review implementation of the UNECE Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment: from Kiev to Belgrade and beyond

Friday 12 October 2007, 08:00-09:30

Chaired by His Excellency Constantin Mihailescu,
Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Moldova

Purpose of the side event

To present progress with implementation of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), mainly in EECCA and South-East Europe, and to propose a way forward for improving implementation, including a possible work programme for the proposed Belgrade SEA Initiative (and so with an emphasis on EECCA);

Structure of the side event

Side event has been divided into three sections:

- I. Status of implementation of the Protocol (UNECE) with an example of its practical application in South-East Europe;
- II. Capacity development for the implementation of the Protocol
- III. Way forward with implementation of the Protocol

Facilitator

Ms. Violeta Ivanov, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Moldova

Presenters

Nenad Mikulic, Ministry of the Environment, Croatia

Marta Szigeti Bonifert, Executive Director, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe

Bobbi Schijf, Netherlands Commission for Environmental Impact Assessment

Nick Bonvoisin, UNECE

Henrieta Martonakova, UNDP Bratislava

Concluding remarks

Presentations as well as discussion have left to the following findings and conclusions:

The SEA Protocol has been signed by all EU and EU candidate countries, countries of SEE and 4 EECCA countries. 6 countries have ratified so far.

The period from Kiev to Belgrade was mainly about awareness raising and capacity development for SEA application in the countries, supported by various donors and development agencies. Just a few of them have been mentioned today. Resource Manual for SEA Protocol implementation has been developed by UNECE and REC (available both in English and Russian), UNDP, REC and UNECE has supported 5 EECCA countries in SEA application, Dutch government is providing support to Georgia, Montenegro, Albania and other countries in the region. The Executive Director of REC has highlighted the extensive assistance the organization has been providing to the countries of the CEE, SEE and increasingly the EECCA region, by



promoting SEA pilot projects, developing methodologies for SEA application and by promotion of regional cooperation. The Sophia Initiative on Environmental Impact Assessment has proved to be very instrumental in developing SEA systems and experience in Croatia and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Lessons learned from this initiative will be a valuable input for the EECCA countries in the process of developing their own systems for SEA application.

As mentioned by the representative of the Ministry of Environment of Croatia, the country has had no practical experience from applying SEA so far. However, at the same time, Croatia has made an important step for introducing the SEA into national legislation by adopting a new Law on Environment (in force from 1 November 2007), reflecting the requirements of the SEA Protocol in it.

Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Moldova has expressed high commitment of Moldova to implement the SEA Protocol by calling for further action in implementing the national SEA capacity development strategy. He has also stressed the importance of the new 'Belgrade SEA Initiative' and called upon Western European countries to support EECCA countries by transferring their experience. Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Moldova has also expressed appreciation to UNECE, REC and UNDP for initial capacity development in the country.

All the initiatives above present a good starting point but at the same time they have helped to identify the gaps and needs of the countries for applying SEA on systematic way. Countries need further support in drafting SEA legislation, promoting benefits of SEA and its potential to improve development planning, among different stakeholders, development of SEA guidance & methodologies, development of procedures for different types of plans & programmes, implementing pilot project to gain practical experience in applying SEA to concrete planning process, networking of environmental assessment experts, nationally & internationally, and capacity-development through educational institutions, etc.

Representative of the Ministry of Environment of Bulgaria has said that despite the country has a considerable experience in applying SEA (mentioned a few concrete applications) for its more effective and systematic application the country needs to strengthen legal requirements and transpose fully the EU SEA Directive into national legislation.

Some EECCA countries (Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Ukraine) have taken more strategic approach and developed national strategies for SEA capacity development, which are at different stage of inter-ministerial consultation.

As for the capacity development at the regional level, this conference has just adopted the 'Belgrade SEA Initiative', lead by Armenia and Belarus, but supported also by Moldova environmental authority. The overall aim of this Initiative is to support EECCA countries in developing effective national systems for environmental assessment at strategic level, mainly through providing a platform for the open exchange of experience between government officials responsible for developing SEA systems. The main topic / focus of the initiative will be the process of aligning current systems for environmental assessment in EECCA countries with the SEA Protocol. This appears to be a remarkable challenge.

The strong need of regional and sub-regional cooperation for sharing knowledge and experience has also been expressed by the representative of the Ministry of Environment of Bulgaria.

Note:

Reference of the *Declaration – Building Bridges to the Future – by ministers of the region of UNECE* (Belgrade ministerial declaration; 16 October 2007) to the Belgrade SEA Initiative:

“ We note with interest various initiatives submitted to our Conference aimed at building capacities of countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in various areas of environmental policy and



management, including the guiding principles of effective environmental permitting systems and the initiative on strategic environmental assessment.”