

**CONVENTION ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
ASSESSMENT IN A TRANSBOUNDARY CONTEXT
THIRD MEETING OF THE PARTIES**

Cavtat, Croatia, 3 June 2004

Introductory Speech by

**H. E. Ms. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović
Minister of European Integrations
Republic of Croatia**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Delegates to the Third Meeting of the Parties to the Convention,

Your Excellencies,

Honourable guests,

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In greeting you and having the pleasure of opening the Third Meeting of the Parties to Espoo Convention, I extend you a cordial welcome to Croatia and Cavtat. I particularly greet the participants of this high-level segment.

It is our honour to host the Third Meeting of the Parties in Croatia. We are firmly convinced of the Convention's significance and we have been considering it, since our accession in 1996, a highly effective multilateral agreement. We also welcome the adoption and signing of the Protocol on SEA and look forward to its rapid entry into force. We see both instruments as important for the promotion of sustainable development, environmental protection and cooperation with our neighbouring states. We also see these instruments as playing an important part in our obtaining the status of a candidate for full membership of the EU.

The Convention's purpose and efficiency for each individual country depend on how many of its neighbours accede to it. We therefore strongly urge our neighbours who have not done so as yet – Serbia and Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina – to join us as Parties to the Convention. The Convention offers a framework for us to address many common issues and problems. The length of the border and rich environmental diversity make Croatia particularly susceptible to transboundary impacts. We share the Adriatic Sea and almost all major rivers with other countries. This is a stimulus to share with the neighbouring countries also the knowledge, plans and intentions whose realization might have transboundary impacts. We would also wish to encourage other non-Parties to come forward as soon as possible. Thereby I would particularly emphasize the Russian Federation as a very important partner in environmental cooperation in the ECE region and a state which extends over a large area and which has long borders with other ECE member States.

We would also urge the Central Asian States that have not yet acceded to the Convention – Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – to become Parties soon. We understand the difficulties they face. We welcome the funding by Switzerland later this year of a workshop in this subregion to examine what needs to be done to facilitate implementation of the Convention in Central Asia. But we also need a signal from these States that they are serious partners in these endeavours – and ratification would certainly be such a signal. We are confident that the other Parties would then support them in realizing the implementation of the Convention. Turkey too is a vital partner, a bridge between the Caucasus and the Mediterranean – a country with many large-scale projects being undertaken that have significant transboundary effects.

It is not possible to mention here all the ECE member States that are not yet Parties, but I would invite them all to tell us later in the day when they intend to become Parties.

As a Mediterranean State, we work with our neighbours in the Adriatic Ionian Initiative, and in our Ministerial meeting hosted by Slovenia in October last year we together committed ourselves to accelerating ratification of the Protocol. We should each fulfil that commitment.

I take this opportunity to emphasize our support to the work of the United Nations Environment Programme and its Mediterranean Action Plan. The Convention secretariat attended a UNEP meeting last month in Tunis to examine how the Convention might work more closely with the Mediterranean Action Plan. We see the Espoo Convention and Protocol on SEA as complementing the Barcelona Convention and its protocols – and we therefore encourage all Mediterranean States, specifically the North African and Eastern Mediterranean States, to accede to both the Convention and the Protocol as soon as this becomes possible.

We encourage all Parties to the Convention to ratify the first amendment to the Convention, which will permit non-ECE States to accede.

Following this meeting, the Republic of Croatia will initiate the process of ratification of this amendment.

I wish to welcome our guests from further afield, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, Algeria and Mekong River Commission. We wish them to join the Convention and its Protocol, with other members of the United

Nations family. We of course recognize that each State has its own specific situation. In a world, however, that has been integrating, our common issues have been growing in number as well. We also see that we too would benefit from an expansion in membership of these instruments – we would enrich our knowledge both of the States that join us and of approaches that we can use to overcome common problems and constraints.

The timing of this meeting is apt – we find ourselves at the start of the implementation of the Protocol on SEA, with all the opportunities that it presents. The panel discussions today will inevitably highlight the importance of the Protocol in our efforts to achieve sustainable development.

We also find ourselves at a point in the Convention's life when many are looking at how it may mature, be consolidated, its implementation strengthened. Tomorrow, I hope the meeting will adopt the second amendment to the Convention that we will formally submit as the host country. This amendment provides a more solid foundation for the future, a more consistent and clear basis for implementation.

Let me mention again the high importance of new Parties – they too will reinvigorate the Convention.

Tomorrow, a decision is also expected to be adopted on financing of activities under the Convention that seeks to provide more predictable and secure funding. I would urge you to participate, without exception, and contribute to the adoption of this decision.

The Parties have also initiated a process of review of the implementation of the Convention. The first review has revealed great strengths in the Convention, notably as a basis for bilateral agreements to provide a practical framework for transboundary consultations, and an increasing application of its provisions. The review also revealed weaknesses – that after all was its main aim – showing us where we need to focus our efforts to make it more effective in the future.

Distinguished participants of the Third Meeting of the Convention, I invite you to work together to make the implementation of the Protocol a success and to strengthen and extend the application of the Convention. I urge you all to participate actively in today's discussions, later in the day, to support a Cavtat Declaration that looks ahead. I invite you to support the adoption of the draft decisions, before us tomorrow, so that we could start realizing this future as soon as possible.

I hope that in breaks you will find time to get to know the beauties of this area and its people, and that we will have opportunity to greet you again as welcome guests.

I am particularly pleased to greet Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECE, Mr. Patrice Robineau who will make an opening statement
Thank you.