

Kiev Ministerial Conference
21-23 May 2003

Keynote statement by Mr. Petru Lificiu, Minister of Water and Environmental Protection, Romania,
on the
Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies, Dear Mr. Ministers,
Distinguished delegates,
Convention Secretary,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to start by expressing, on behalf of the Romanian Government, our appreciation to the Government of Ukraine - Prime Minister Victor Yanucovich and personally to Mr. Vasyl Shevchuk - Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, for the excellent arrangements and hospitality, on the occasion of the 5th Pan-European Conference "Environment for Europe".

May I also like to express my thanks to the representatives of the Working Group led by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, as well as to the Kiev Secretariat for all the work done during the preparatory meetings and for the completion of the 3 international binding legal instruments that will be open for adoption and signature in Kiev.

The cross-sectoral approach by integrating environmental and health considerations into strategic decision-making is an essential and comprehensive vision and tool for the future of humanity and its sustainable development.

Romania has ratified both the Espoo and Aarhus Conventions, in 200 and 2001. Since then, we have developed a modern national legislation and we accelerated the creation of an appropriate institutional infrastructure that support implementation of these provisions. In the process of modernization of our environmental legislation and regulations, especially in the assessment of the environmental impact, we deeply considered the requirements and provisions of the EC Directive on Environmental Impact Assessment as well as the Espoo Convention.

Romania wishes to implement the Espoo Convention using bilateral agreements as a tool in order to harmonize different national Environmental Impact Assessment systems with its specific requirements; that is why specific procedures for the notification system will be drafted and proposed within the framework of the existing bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries, including details concerning the impact assessment in a transboundary context.

We are convinced that the provisions of both Espoo and Aarhus Conventions - which are the basis for the Strategic Environmental Assessment Protocol - contribute to build trust across frontiers and extend citizens' right to know, to be consulted and their opinions to be taken into consideration and will ensure better public participation.

In October this year, Romania will host an international seminar on "Strengthening co-operation with other ECE Conventions", in compliance with the outcomes of the Second Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention. We consider this event as a profitable debate on mechanisms of

co-operation, policies and strategies aiming to sustainable development, which can support to avoid duplication of our efforts.

In the same time, the negotiations of the SEA Protocol have concluded successfully and we considerate it a good example of a closing co-operation in the field of transboundary EIA/SEA. We express the hope that this co-operation will continue in the same way and the fast ratification of the today signed SEA Protocol will bring it soon into force.

The Romanian Environmental Policy is addressing both the goals existing in the EU Accession Partnership and those proposed in the multilateral environmental agreements signed and ratified. A sustainable development requires a suitable balance between environment, social and economic needs. In this respect, the concept of strategic environmental assessment to plans, programmes, policies and legislation will give us a basic support for the development of national environmental policy.

In our view, the SEA Protocol will also contribute to strengthen regional co-operation on environmental assessment of plans and programmes.

Like all the Member States of European Union, Romania has established the year 2004 as final term for the transposition of the SEA Directive. We are now in a full process to accumulate experience in applying the concept of environmental impact assessment to spatial and territorial planning.

The Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment represents a significant milestone document which ensures that the environment and health considerations are timely integrated in the programmatic process. This aspect will support us to extend our national system of strategic environmental impact assessment starting with policies and legislation development process.

Public participation, including NGOs, has a vital role to play in the development, implementation and support of the values we strongly believe: improving relations between peoples and countries, prevention of transboundary environmental conflicts and development of the civil society and democracy in the countries of the ECE region.

The Ministerial Resolution that will be adopted today smoothes the path to the ratification of the SEA Protocol; we consider that it sets out the main directions to be followed until the first Meeting of the Signatories to the Protocol with a view to further support the implementation of the SEA Protocol.

Romania is prepared to further contribute to the implementation of the SEA Protocol and we are also available to participate at the preparation of the First Signatories meeting which will be held in Croatia in 2004.

The proposed work-plan of the SEA Protocol identifies the right issues to be addressed. We consider that the Implementation Committee established under the Espoo Convention may also function for the implementation of the Protocol and should support the development of a very welcomed Implementation Guide. In order to increase the public awareness and to have a clear and real picture of the goals and areas where the Protocol will be implemented, we strongly support the development of a web page for the SEA Protocol, similar to the EIA Convention one, under the auspicious of the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

Finally, I am very confident that the Protocol will lead to an improvement in our means to promote sustainable development, in particular in a transboundary context. The Protocol will enrich the

environmental assessment at a very early stage of the official draft plans, programmes, policies and legislation and will improve transparency and democracy, as it is open to all members of the United Nations.

Thank you very much for your attention.