

STATEMENT BY THE COMMISSION

(to be read following the statement by the Presidency)

Mr Chairman,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to start by joining my colleague from the Presidency of the Council of the EU in expressing, on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, our appreciation to the UN ECE, and in particular, the Secretariat of the Espoo Convention for organizing and hosting the Fifth meeting of the Parties of the Espoo Convention and the First meeting of the Parties to the SEA Protocol. I would like also to convey the best wishes of Commissioner Potočník for a successful meeting.

I would like, as well, to extend my thanks to the Bureau of the Espoo Convention, the Implementation Committee and the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment for all the work done in these three years since the last Meeting of the Parties.

This is a special meeting of the Parties, as it scores the fifth meeting for the Espoo Convention and marks the first Meeting of the Parties to the SEA Protocol. This comes to prove that with time the meaning and the role of the transboundary environmental assessments have gained importance and visibility in the overall environmental governance. Nowadays, the spread of environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessments, as environmental policy tools on national and international level, is evident. These tools apply integrated approaches for the protection of the environment. Therefore, it is clear that the Espoo Convention and the SEA Protocol support environmentally sound and sustainable development by providing information on the interrelationship between certain economic activities and their environmental consequences, in particular in a transboundary context.

Provided the practical implementation of the transboundary environmental assessments, it should be recognized that we witness and experience lots of challenges. Nowadays, large multilateral infrastructure projects, crossing the territories of more than two countries, start being more and more implemented. For instance, the Nord Stream project is followed by the Nabucco pipeline; in the near future, we expect that other similar projects will follow these two. The environmental concerns raised by such projects might be invoked by the project's scale, the number of the stakeholders involved, some of which may not be Parties to the Espoo Convention, and the fact that a project's routing crosses water basins and might affect Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully consider the possible implications of such developments and establish a common approach in the interpretation and application of the respective legislation. This is also true for projects that, although realised in one country, can have long-range transboundary impacts in other countries. An illustrative example are NPPs, for which we need to ensure transparency and the sharing of experiences as well as draw lessons from the Fukushima accident. Applying the Convention *de facto*, even vis-à-vis countries that have not ratified it, can build confidence and social acceptance for such projects.

Within the European Union and taking note of its experience during the last years, the Commission has opted for development of guidelines concerning the transboundary environmental impact assessment of large-scale projects. Our aim is to examine the existing practices in the application of the legal provisions related to transboundary EIAs carried out for large-scale transboundary projects, with a view to drawing relevant conclusions and proposing appropriate recommendations.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that sound co-operation between the Parties and non-Parties to the Espoo Convention and the SEA Protocol, as well as undertaking stakeholders' capacity building activities are the key steps to ensure viable implementation of both instruments. In the meantime, we need to further reflect on the ways to strengthen the available financial capacity for the Convention and the SEA Protocol. This appears to be one of the main challenges to be addressed, especially now, after the entry into force of the SEA Protocol.

Finally, I would like to express, on behalf of the EU and its Member States, the wish for a fruitful co-operation among all Parties to the Convention and the Protocol. We are looking forward to working together in the next few years till the next Meetings of the Parties.

Thank you for your attention.

George Kremlis
