www.unece.org/press/pr2004/04env_p09e.html

Geneva

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) will hold the third meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in a Transboundary Context in Cavtat, Croatia, on 1-4 June. The Convention is intended to help make development sustainable by promoting international cooperation in assessing the likely cross-border impact of a proposed activity on the environment before giving it the go-ahead. It came into force in 1997 and now has 40 Parties. [1]

A review of its implementation reveals that it is increasingly being applied to potential sources of cross-border pollution. For example, Austria and Germany have used it to assess a project to build interim storage facilities for spent fuel in southern Germany. As a result, Austria was told of the project and the concerns of the Austrian public were presented at a public hearing in Germany. Moreover, the permit included a consideration of the cross-border impact.

Case studies from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Italy and the United Kingdom also illustrate that practical experience with international public participation is growing. Members of the public are informed of a project planned in another country that may have an environmental impact on their own country. They usually receive such information directly or through announcements in local newspapers in their own language. The public can make comments on the project or on the environmental documentation either directly to the developer or during a public hearing.

According to Mr Wiek Schrage, the Convention's Secretary, "the case studies indicate that comments are treated the same, irrespective of boundaries, which means that the final decision on a project will reflect the comments of the public from the potentially affected countries. This is precisely the result that the Convention's negotiators had in mind."

This meeting will also be the first opportunity for the Signatories to the new Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to the Convention to meet. This Protocol was signed in May 2003, at the fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in Kiev, by 36 States[2] and the European Community, and is expected to enter into force within the next two years.

Both the Convention and the Protocol are also open to non-UNECE member States. Countries from outside the UNECE region are already taking a keen interest in the methods and tools for sustainable development that they promote. Senior environment officials from, for instance, Algeria, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Lebanon are expected to attend the meeting in Cavtat.

For further information, please contact:

Mr Wiek SCHRAGE
UNECE Environment and Human Settlements Division
Palais des Nations, office 407
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Phone: +41 (0) 22 917 24 48
Fax: +41 (0) 22 917 06 13
E-mail: eia.conv@unece.org
Web site: http://www.unece.org/env/eia/

---

[1] Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, United Kingdom and European Community.

[2] Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine and United Kingdom.

Ref: ECE/ENV/04/P09