

# **Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Environmental Policy**

## **Twenty-second session**

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### **Multilateral environmental agreements**

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### **Contribution of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA to the achievement of the SDGs**

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#### **I. Introduction**

The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment provide a legal framework and clear procedures for the comprehensive integration of environmental and health concerns into a wide range of development activities, plans and programmes, in all economic sectors.

Because of their crosscutting nature, the Convention, and in particular its Protocol, actively contribute to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda and of almost all the SDGs.

Moreover, like the Aarhus Convention, they promote access to environmental information, consultation of stakeholders, and public participation leading to greater transparency and effective public participation - which are essential in the SDG implementation.

Because the implementation of SEA is the responsibility of the sectoral authorities, and because the consultation with the environmental and health authorities is an obligation for them, SEA is indeed an excellent tool to forge cooperation between relevant sectors, without which the 2030 Agenda cannot be successfully achieved.

To support the efforts of the Governments to effectively implement the treaties, legal and technical support, pilot projects, capacity-building activities and opportunities for exchange of information and practices are available.

#### **II. The draft workplan 2017-2020**

The new draft workplan, which is expected to be adopted at the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol, in Minsk 13-16 June 2017, contains an ambitious list of proposed activities for the next three years 2017-2020. For a number of planned activities, the workplan indicates which specific SDG target they aim at contributing.

For example:

- The organization of a thematic workshop and the development of guidance on the application of the Protocol to urban planning will contribute to the target 11.3, aiming

at: enhancing “sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management”;

- The workshop and the good practice recommendations on the application of SEA to climate mitigation will assist countries in reaching the target 13.2 for integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning;
- The workshop on synergies between transboundary EIA and SEA with biodiversity assessment will contribute to SDG 15 regarding the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, forests, and combatting desertification, land degradation and biodiversity loss;
- Finally, the workshop on synergies with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas in turn would contribute to the implementation of SDG 14: on the Conservation and sustainable use the oceans, seas and marine resources [..]”

All of these planned activities will naturally also involve close cooperation with the relevant treaties and organizations within and outside the UN.

Unfortunately, you should note that despite the obvious need and interest of the Parties and stakeholders to proceed with these and many other activities, several of them still lack funding or lead countries or organizations. Therefore, it would be extremely beneficial if the CEP delegates could assist in exploring funding opportunities in their capitals including from the relevant sectors concerned.

### **III. Declaration and a possible long-term strategy**

Next, I would wish to briefly mention that at the upcoming sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, the Parties are expected to adopt a Minsk Declaration which will promote the treaties’, and in particular the Protocol’s, contribution to the SDG implementation.

During the sessions, a panel discussion will be held on the future role of the treaties notably in the SDG implementation.

The Parties may also decide to mandate the development of a long-term strategy and an action plan to identify and address priorities through concrete activities, partnerships and funding mechanisms, including with a view to contributing to the achievement of the SDGs.

### **IV. Outcomes of a brainstorming session on the future of the Convention and the Protocol**

Finally, I wish to conclude by briefing you about the outcomes of an informal brainstorming session on the future of the two treaties that was held, at the initiative of Austria, Finland and the Netherlands, in November 2016. Among the conclusions, the participants underlined the need to increasingly promote the treaties as important mechanisms for addressing key challenges, such as the achievement of SDGs. To this end, they suggested the use of modern or innovative tools, which could be more influential and effective than traditional the

documents and publications. A good illustration of such tools was the video on SEA and its benefits that the secretariat had prepared.

Participants also suggested working more with representatives of the economic sectors to which SEA was applied to increase their ownership of the SEA. They recommended moving away from the vision of SEA or EIA as a “legal” or “control” instruments, towards of a more positive vision or a mind-set of them as “support” instruments, for example, for finding the best available technologies, for integrating environmental issues into decision making, and to involving stakeholders. The Governments might also need to increasingly perceive SEA and EIA not necessarily “only” as “environmental tools” but rather as tools to “manage scarce resources (energy, food, etc.)”.

CEP’s support in promoting the mind-change and positive vision of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol, as well as of the other UNECE MEAs, would be most welcome. This would help ensure that countries in the UNECE region and beyond make full use of these effective instruments for the achievement of the SDGs.

Thank you very much for your attention.