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**Economic Commission for Europe**  
Meeting of the Parties to the Convention  
on Environmental Impact Assessment  
in a Transboundary Context  
**Seventh session**

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention  
on Environmental Impact Assessment in  
a Transboundary Context serving as the  
Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on  
Strategic Environmental Assessment  
**Third session**

Minsk, 13–16 June 2017

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**Panel discussion on the contribution of the Convention and the Protocol  
to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and the future of the  
treaties**

## **Information on the panel discussion on the contribution of the Convention and the Protocol to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and the future of the treaties**

**To be held in Minsk, (Hotel Beijing) on Wednesday, 14 June 2017  
(tentative timing: 3 to 5[.30])**

### **I. Introduction**

1. The panel discussion on the contribution of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the future of the treaties will be held as decided by the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment at its fifth and sixth meetings (Geneva, April and November 2016) and further to the recommendations by the Bureau at its meeting in January 2016.
2. The panel discussion will take place on Wednesday afternoon, 14 June 2017 during the general segment of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (the Meeting of the Parties of the Protocol). The general segment will be chaired by Mr. George Kremlis, Head of Unit, Directorate General for the Environment, European Commission.
3. The panel discussion will be chaired/moderated by Ms. Alda Ozola, Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia. The panel will comprise national experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
4. The panel will begin with introductory remarks by the moderator, followed by presentation of key points and good practice of Governments and the EBRD (5-7 min per panellist) as well as by comments/clarifying questions by the other panellists. The

moderated discussions - on key strengths of SEA and EIA in addressing SDGs; challenges in mainstreaming this practice; and on follow-up activities - will be preceded by the presentation of views from non-governmental organizations and the academia on these points. After the moderated discussion, the panel will be opened for questions and observations from the audience (interventions from the floor should be precise and brief). The last ten minutes of the panel are reserved for concluding remarks by the moderator. The time allowed for this agenda item is 2 to 2,5 hours in total.

5. The consolidated key conclusions of the panel discussion will be included in the report of the Meetings of the Parties' sessions.

## II. Background

6. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which came into effect on 1 January 2016, will guide the decisions of the United Nations Member States over the next several years in areas of importance for humanity and the planet. It includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and related targets that call for an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to sustainable development. The national implementation of the 2030 Agenda is subject to both regional and global level review and follow-up.

7. The Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA 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 the crosscutting nature of EIA and SEA, the effective application of the Convention, and, in particular, the Protocol, could effectively contribute to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda and of almost all the SDGs.

8. Moreover, like the Aarhus Convention, the two treaties 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.

9. Finally, 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 an excellent tool to forge cooperation between relevant sectors – without which the 2030 Agenda cannot be successfully achieved.

10. Selected examples of how SEA and EIA can work towards SDG targets include the following:

**SDG 2. Food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture** – Preserve ecosystems and human health through integrating environmental and health concerns, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, in plans and strategies for agricultural practices and food production.

**SDG 3. Good health and well-being** – Reduce health hazards by ensuring that environmental and health considerations are taken into account when planning potentially polluting economic activities.

**SDG 6. Clean water and sanitation** – Contribute to the development of plans for sustainable management and use of water resources and foster transboundary cooperation.

**SDG 7. Affordable and clean energy** – Contribute to the development of government energy plans and programmes, (as well as policies and legislation), that meet renewable energy targets and promote effective use of energy.

**SDG 8. Decent work and economic growth** – Integrate green economy considerations into development plans, make production patterns more sustainable and provide SEA and EIA related employment opportunities.

**SDG 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure** – Drive the discovery of more sustainable alternatives and best available technologies and reduce the environmental impact of the planned industrial activities.

**SDG 11. Sustainable cities and communities** – Improve development planning and enhance sustainable urbanization and human settlements.

**SDG 12. Responsible consumption and production** – Reduce related environmental impacts of economic activities or identify more sustainable alternatives.

**SDG 13. Climate action** – Ensure integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into national planning, strategies and policies.

**SDG 14. Life under water** – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

**SDG 15. Life on land** – Protect biodiversity and natural habitats.

**SDG 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions** – Render decision-making on economic activities more inclusive, participatory and representative.

**SDG 17. Partnerships for the Goals** – Help ensure SDGs are taken into account in policymaking, in consultation with all relevant actors.

### III. Objectives

11. In Minsk, Parties are expected to adopt a declaration which highlights the contribution of the treaties to the SDG implementation and invites Parties, signatories, civil society, partner organizations, international financial institutions and the secretariat to widely promote awareness of the Convention and the Protocol, and their role in the achievement of global sustainable development commitments. The panel discussion aims to provide a platform for Parties and stakeholders to bring forward and to share good practice in using SEA and EIA as tools towards the attainment of SDGs and their targets, as well as to identify benefits and challenges in this regard.

12. In Minsk, Parties will also consider the adoption of a new draft workplan for the next intersessional period 2017–2020, which contains a list of proposed activities that could be undertaken in close cooperation with the relevant treaties and organizations within and outside the UN, subject to identification of lead countries and/or funding. These include legal and technical support, pilot projects, capacity-building activities and the exchange of information and practices. For a number of the proposed activities, the draft workplan indicates which specific SDG target they aim at contributing, such as:

(a) The organization of a thematic workshop and the development of guidance on the application of the Protocol to urban planning that would contribute to the target 11.3, aiming at: enhancing “sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management”;

(b) The workshop and the good practice recommendations on the application of SEA to climate mitigation that would assist countries in reaching the target 13.2 for integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning;

(c) The workshop on synergies between transboundary EIA and SEA with biodiversity assessment would contribute to SDG 15 regarding the sustainable use of

terrestrial ecosystems, forests, and combatting desertification, land degradation and biodiversity loss.

The outcomes of the panel discussions can be made use of and followed up when planning and implementing these, and possible future activities.

13. These outcomes may also be taken into account in the long-term strategy and an action plan that the Parties may decide on developing to identify and address present and future priorities through workplan activities, partnerships and new funding mechanisms.

14. The informal brainstorming session on the future of the two treaties, organized by Austria, Finland and the Netherlands, in November 2016, concluded among other issues on the need to increasingly promote the treaties as important mechanisms for addressing key challenges, which also included the achievement of SDGs. To this end, tools such as videos, could be increasingly used. Participants also suggested working more with representatives of the economic sectors to which SEA is applied to increase their ownership of the SEA. They recommended moving away from the vision/understanding of SEA or EIA as “legal” or “control” instruments, towards of a more positive vision or a mind-set of them as “support” instruments, 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.)”.

15. Based on the practical examples and statements presented, the panel will aim at proposing actions to raise awareness on and to further enhance the role of the Protocol and the Convention in achieving SDGs.

## IV. Provisional programme

3–5[.30] p.m.

**I. Introductory remarks by the moderator, Ms. Alda Ozola**, Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia (5-7 min);

**II. Global and regional implementation of SDGs: Role of UNECE and its Multilateral Environmental Agreements: Mr. Zaal Lomtadze**, (Chief of Section, UNECE) (5-7 min)

**III. Presentation of key points and good practice illustrating the role of SEA and EIA in achieving SDGs (general approaches and specific examples with reference to assessments of plans/programmes or projects addressing SDG targets in specific sectors)** (5-7 min/panellist. *The moderator and/or the other panellists may ask any immediate questions after the presentations*)

1. **Mr. Matthias Sauer** (Head of Division, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany): The Espoo Convention / the SEA Protocol and the Aarhus Convention as tools to support the implementation of the SDGs - the German experience on SDG-implementation
2. **Mr. Piotr Otawski** (Independent expert, Poland): Can we do more - does EIA and SEA make a difference in reaching SDG targets? – the Polish perspective.
3. **Ms Alexandra Antsugai** (Principal Advisor, Environment and Sustainability, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)): EBRD role in SDG implementation and

application of EU EIA Directive, Aarhus and Espoo Conventions in the Bank's investment projects.

#### IV. Presentation of views from non-governmental organizations and academia

(5-7 min/each) on the following key points:

- Key strengths of SEA and EIA as tools for addressing major environmental and health targets for SDGs;
  - Challenges for the efficient practice and/or its mainstreaming and how to overcome them;
  - Proposals for follow-up activities: How to promote the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol as tools for addressing SDGs, within (and beyond) the UNECE region;
1. **Prof. Maria Partidario** (International Association of Impact Assessment): Views of the IAIA Task force on Impact assessment and the Sustainable Development Goals;
  2. **Ms. Tatyana Novikova**, Project Coordinator, NGO Ecohome (Belarus);
  3. **Dr. Kaja Peterson**, Director of Sustainable Development Programme, Swedish Environment Institute (Tallinn)

#### V. Moderated discussion by the panellists on the above points (up to 20 minutes)

#### VI. Observations and questions from the audience to the panellists

#### VII. Concluding remarks by the moderator (around 10 minutes)

## V. Key points/abstracts

### Mr. Zaal Lomtadze

- Regional Commissions' role in global review and follow-up of SDGs
- UNECE various tools & instruments: brief overview
- UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements: relevance to SDGs

### Mr. Matthias Sauer

- Key points in relation to the SDGs in the draft Minsk declaration (Espoo Convention / SEA-Protocol) and in the draft joint Budva declaration (Aarhus Convention / PRTR-Protocol)
- Common contribution of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol and of the Aarhus Convention to the implementation of the SDGs
- The German experience:
  - German Sustainable Development Strategy 2016
  - Integrated Environmental Programme 2030
  - Sustainability test by the German Parliament for new draft acts – example of the new Act for the modernisation of EIA legislation (implementing Directive 2014/52/EU)

**Mr. Pitor Otawski**

- Environmental assessments can be strong tools for reaching environmental targets - underestimated preventive role;
- Various uses for reaching different targets - depending among others on the authorities involved and their position, law structure of assessment and society awareness;
- Much stronger influence of EIA than SEA on shaping the planning and investment choices;
- The more rights the civil society has- the stronger the outcome of the assessments;
- Costs of “by-products” - individual vs. social costs

**Ms. Alexandra Antsugai**

- EBRD Environmental and Social Policy (2014) provisions for projects to meet Performance Requirements prior to investment decision;
- Application of relevant EU substantive environmental standards and Good International Practice (including EU EIA Directive, Aarhus and Espoo Conventions);
- Examples of how environmental assessment procedures can contribute to addressing SDGs;
- Policy dialogue and technical cooperation with the countries of operations;
- Examples of initiated by EBRD environmental reviews in line with SEA principles (renewable energy sectors of Kazakhstan and Ukraine).

**Ms. Maria Partidario**

- Introducing the IAIA Impact Assessment and SDGs Task Force
- Sharing results of discussions at IAIA’17 on the role of IAIA and Impact Assessment in achieving SDGs
- Learning aspects for the effort of the Convention and the Protocol to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals

**Ms. Tatyana Novikova**

- Global partnerships, the EIA and SEA mechanisms, and sustainable development: conceptual correlations and contradictions.
- Environmental Assessment (EIA and SEA) as elements of strategic planning. What is the role of Espoo Convention mechanisms in strategic planning for Sustainable Development?
- Good practices for Sustainable Development of European Society: What unites us? What separates us? Some examples of the use of the Convention and Protocol on SEA mechanisms for the aims of Sustainable Development. Planning and development: the role of transboundary partnerships for Sustainable Development in specific examples.

**Ms. Kaja Peterson**

- EIA and SEA provide the tools for implementing the safe operating space for humanity – (the planetary boundaries concept developed by Johan Rockström and colleagues in 2009 and advanced in 2015). The biosphere, the SDG-s 15 and 14, as well as 6 and 13 form the foundation of human wellbeing and sustainability on the planet Earth. EIA and SEA are the tools to safeguard this foundation.
- Since the biosphere is a common good for humanity, not limited to the borders of jurisdiction, the SDGs form the heart of the Espoo Convention – taking the global impact of local actions into account.



Source: SRC, 2016

## VI. Speaker biographies

### Ms Alda Ozola



The Deputy State secretary at the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia since October 2013. Her main responsibilities are related to the management of departments in the fields of environmental protection, nature protection, climate change and environmental policy integration. Before she joined the ministry she worked as a coordinator and project manager for environmental non-governmental organisations, as well as a self-employed consultant on environmental issues and researcher and lecturer at the University of Latvia. She has a master's degree in environmental science and social

sciences in economy.

### Zaal Lomtazde



The Head of Environment for Europe and Sustainable Development Section at the Environment Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Since 2012, Mr. Lomtazde is the Secretary to the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), and to the UNECE Steering Committee for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). He was the Secretary to the 8<sup>th</sup> Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 08-10 June 2016).

Before moving to UN in 2012, he worked for a Government of Georgia for almost 20 years on the issues of international environmental cooperation. As a Government official, Mr. Lomtazde actively participated in various multilateral international environmental processes and platforms, both global and regional. He chaired the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy during the years 2004-2011.

Mr. Lomtazde holds the M.Sc. in Physics (Tbilisi State University, Georgia) and M.Sc. in Environmental Policy and Management (International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics, Lund University, Sweden). At present he lives in Geneva, Switzerland.

**Matthias Sauer**

Lawyer, head of division at the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Protection, Building and Nuclear Safety in Berlin, Germany; responsible nowadays for matters of the UNECE Aarhus Convention, including domestic legislation on access to information & to justice, the Environmental Liability Directive (ELD) and as well issues on Better Regulation; between 1999 and 2012 he served as German member of the EIA & SEA expert group of the EU and as well as German focal and contact point to the UNECE Espoo Convention and to the UNECE Protocol on SEA; between 2004 and 2011 he was furthermore a member of the Implementation Committee under the UNECE Espoo Convention and was the chair of this Committee in his second term.

**Piotr Otawski**

PhD in Law, MSc in Environmental Protection. Attorney at law. Lecturer in environmental law and environmental policy. Owner and partner in a law firm specialised in environmental law and construction law. Previously, Undersecretary of State in Ministry of Environment – Chief Nature Conservator, Deputy General Director for Environment Protection, advisor to the Minister of Environment Maciej Nowicki, and working for Provincial Administrative Court. Member of Building Law Codification Commission 2012 - 2016. Author of number of publications concerning environmental law, in particular in connection to town and country planning law and investment process regulations. Co-author of number of bills of law acts in field of environmental law. Chair of the Bureau of Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on SEA; Chair of Working Group on EIA and SEA under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol - 2011 – 2015; and Chair of the general segment of the Meetings of the Parties to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol, in June 2014. Chair of number of Polish teams negotiating international agreements in field of environment, environmental chapters of NATO Sofa Supplementary agreement, Polish-German agreement on environmental impact assessments in transboundary context.

**Alexandra Antsugai**

Principal Advisor

Environment & Sustainability Department

European European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) As part of the EBRD risk vice-presidency over eight years Alexandra leads environmental and social appraisal of investment projects in power and energy, heavy industries, infrastructure and other sectors across EBRD's region of operations (Eastern and Central Europe, Balkans, Central Asia and North Africa). The key focus is on compliance with requirements of EBRD policies and EU laws related to environmental, health, safety and social requirements, monitoring of projects' implementation, maintaining communication with various stakeholders and participating in conflict resolution and investigation efforts, as well as managing technical cooperation frameworks dedicated to sector studies and specific sustainability related assignments. Prior to joining EBRD, Alexandra completed MSc in Environmental Management from the University of Oxford with specialisation in resource efficiency, energy and climate change. This was preceded by five years in private sector with background in international relations and economics. Other professional qualifications: NEBOSH International General

Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety, IEMA Approved Certificate in Environmental Audit, and University of Oxford Continuing Professional Development Advanced Project Management.

### **Maria Rosario Partidario**



Former President of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) and the IAIA representative at the EIA working group within the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA. Maria is an international consultant in public and private sectors and university professor (Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal) on strategic thinking for sustainability in integrated, environmental and social, assessment approaches. She has a long track record on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as a researcher, author, trainer and consultant in various areas including: sustainability strategies; integration of environment and land-use/spatial planning; sustainable tourism; major infrastructure strategies and projects including in the energy, water and sewage, transport, marine and coastal sectors; and rural and urban sustainability. Maria is the author of the methodology Strategic thinking for sustainability in SEA, having developed the Critical Decision Factors (CDF) strategic focus approach.

### **Tatiana Novikova**



A journalist, human rights defendant, antinuclear activist and environmental campaigner from Belarus. She received the Viktor Ivashkevich National Award for Human Rights in 2013 from the independent Belarusian news site Charter 97. She is member of the board of the Belarusian environmental NGO Ecohome. Since 2009 Novikova has coordinated the Belarus Antinuclear Campaign, which is working to stop construction begun on a nuclear power plant in Belarus, a country still suffering from the Chernobyl disaster. The Belarus Antinuclear Campaign became well known for revealing grave violations of human rights, UN conventions, technical norms and safety standards. In early 2010, Novikova was named an executive secretary for an Independent Environmental Impact Assessment of the Belarus Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) Project. She was one of initiators to bring the case of Belarus NPP construction before the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) under the terms of the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. She has worked with the conventions' mechanisms since 2009 to achieve recognition of the violations by Belarus the rules during the NPP construction at the Meetings of the Parties to the Conventions in summer 2014. She is also a freelance columnist and observer, publishing investigative stories on environmental, HR issues, Espoo/Aarhus Conventions and NPP construction in Belarus.

### **Kaja Peterson**



The Sustainable Development (SD) programme director of SEI Tallinn, an international environmental policy research institute. She has been working on environmental assessment issues throughout her entire career, from policy analysis to policy recommendations on EIA and SEA and Appropriate Assessment, also in transboundary context. She defended the first PhD on environmental assessment in Estonia in 2010. She was the member of the national SD Commission in 2009-2017, and chairman in 2015-2017. She is the member of governmental commission on EIA licencing. She is also the member of the national (Estonian Association of Impact Assessment) and international (IAIA) association of impact assessment.