

## **Espoo side event - Speaking points Bruno Oberle**

- Six years ago, our Bulgarian friends and colleagues welcomed us to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Espoo Convention
- It is now a great pleasure for me to be here in Belgrade at the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Espoo Convention.
- The practical application of the Convention has come a long way in those years.
- You know that Switzerland is a rather small country, so the border is never far away – this underlines the major importance of transboundary conventions for our country.
- Based on our national legislation and thanks to the close ties with our neighbours, Switzerland used to inform and consult Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Liechtenstein already before the entry into force of the Convention.
- The Convention has however brought a well structured procedure:
  - The roles and duties of the country of origin and the affected country are well specified,
  - the opportunities to be offered to the public are clearly defined.

- Today, Switzerland is looking back on 15 projects where Espoo has been actively applied:
  - a third concerned projects set in Switzerland, such as the international airport in Geneva
  - a third concerned projects set in neighbouring countries, such as a new French highway in our close vicinity, and
  - a last third concerned transboundary projects shared with our neighbours, in particular hydropower plants on the Rhine, the Rhone and the Inn.
  
- We have learnt that:
  1. Espoo guarantees a transparent procedure:

It defines and lives up to mutual expectations on both sides of the border and facilitates the interactions.
  2. Espoo contributes to lessen the transboundary impacts of projects.

We have also found that the earlier we involve our neighbours, the easier it is to integrate their knowledge and concerns. So we favour a notification already at the scoping stage.
  3. Espoo promotes the projects' acceptance,

but it is crucial that the application of Espoo is in line with the time limits set in national procedures for consent to projects – and that Espoo is thus not seen as an undue timely burden.

- We have also learnt that:

4. Espoo promotes regional cooperation:

With Austria and Liechtenstein we have drafted an Espoo application guideline –

This experience has led us to support similar regional efforts in South East Europe, in Central Asia, in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

It seems most appropriate that the first two seminars sponsored by Switzerland took place here in Belgrade under the leadership of our Serbian colleague Aleksandar Vesic.

5. Espoo merits a strong national base:

This experience has led us to support national EIA capacity building efforts in the countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan, with whom we share a common constituency at the Global Environment Fund.

The project in Tajikistan is already under way – with strong support by the Tajik colleagues and authorities,

The next project in Kyrgyzstan is starting later this fall, and the other national projects in the region will follow in 2008 and 2009.

To conclude, I would like to stress that

- My country values the Espoo Convention highly.
- We appreciate the dedication of the UNECE to this Convention, and we would like to especially thank Wiek Schrage, the Secretary of the Convention, Nick Bonvoisin and their staff for their continued support.
- Switzerland was very honoured to chair the negotiations from 2001 to 2004, between the second and the third Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention.
- I would like to renew our commitment to an active participation and promotion of the Convention also in the future:

Espoo merits our full support.

I thank you.