Policy statement on behalf of the European Commission
on the occasion of the Third Meeting of Parties to the Espoo Convention on EIA in a
Transboundary Context
Cavtat, Croatia 1-4 June 2004

On behalf of the Commissioner for the Environment, Ms M Wallström, the European
Commission delegation expresses its gratitude to the government of Croatia for hosting the
Third Meeting of Parties in Cavtat.

The major achievement since MOP 2 was in agreeing a Protocol on SEA in time for signature
at Kiev last year, despite at times difficult negotiations. Meeting that deadline required
compromises, but the result is an instrument which has the potential to change for the better
the way in which planning is undertaken. Application of the Protocol will bring advantages
for democratic accountability as well as better environmental outcomes.

Limits on resources, both financial and human, mean that now more than ever we must focus
on what is essential. We should not be considering embarking on major new initiatives or
putting efforts into inessentials: instead we believe that this is a time for consolidating what
we have already done. Our primary task is to prepare for the coming into force of the SEA
Protocol and we particularly welcome the emphasis in the work plan on improving capacity to
carry out environmental assessment at a strategic level. From the Commission's point of view,
Member States' compliance with EU law is clearly the first priority. But the similarities
between the SEA Directive (which will be applied throughout the enlarged European Union in
less than two months from now) and the SEA Protocol should help us to derive the maximum
benefit from the use of finite resources. We should seek to avoid duplicating our efforts under
the two Instruments and instead concentrate in our future work on complementary activities
which bring real additional value. For our part, we will be glad to share the fruits of our
reflections on the Directive with our Espoo partners. This will also assist in the gradual
alignment of policies and practices between the EU and those of our neighbours with which
we have concluded Stabilisation and Association Agreements and Partnership and Co-
operation Agreements.

Despite the activity on SEA, there has been real progress under the Espoo Convention in
establishing the Implementation Committee and in developing practical guidance on several
aspects of the application of the Convention. In the coming years we should concentrate on
applying this material to improve the way the Convention is applied.

Better implementation may not sound glamorous. But it is clear from the Review of
Implementation that many Parties still have some way to go before we can be satisfied with
the way the Convention is operating. The building blocks are in place. We now need to make
sure they are properly used to produce high quality environmental assessments, with full and
satisfactory consultation. We must also make sure that, when the Protocol comes into force,
the assessments carried out under it are of high quality. Under both Instruments full and active
participation by the public is a crucial guarantee not only of accountability in decision-making
but also of good quality assessments. For entering into agreements is meaningless if they are
not applied fully and conscientiously. This should be our priority for the coming years.

28.v.04