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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment
in a Transboundary Context
Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment

REPORT ON THE FIRST MEETING

1. The first meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment took place from 4 to 5 October 1999.
2. The meeting was attended by the following delegations: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.
3. The Commission of the European Communities was also represented.
4. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: International Agency for Non-governmental Environmental Assessments "Ecoterra" and International Council on Environmental Law (ICEL).

I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

5. The President, Mr. A. McGlone, opened the meeting. The secretariat informed the Meeting of the available documentation. The Working Group adopted its agenda as set out in document MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/1. In the

light of its mandate, set out in decision I/2 adopted at the first meeting of the Parties, the Working Group requested the President, with the support of the secretariat, to prepare a draft work plan for the implementation of the Convention for the period 2000 to 2002 for its next meeting.

II. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

6. The Meeting of the Parties had elected Mr. McGlone (United Kingdom) as President of the Working Group. In accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the Working Group elected Ms. A. Radnai (Hungary) as Vice-President.

III. ACTIVITIES FOR PROMOTING THE IMPLEMENTATION AND RATIFICATION OF THE CONVENTION

7. Delegations explained how their countries were implementing the Convention or taking steps to become a Party. The provisions of the Convention were applied to a large number of cases by Parties as well as non-Parties. Several delegations from countries in transition had prepared written statements, which were circulated at the meeting. The Convention now had 28 Parties; 27 UN/ECE member States and the European Community. Non-Parties were actively finalizing their respective procedures for ratifying the Convention, which meant that by the second meeting of the Parties there could be more than 30 Parties. The Working Group, recalling the Oslo Ministerial Declaration, invited ECE member States which were not yet Parties to the Convention to finalize their procedure for ratification, acceptance, approval or accession as soon as possible. The Working Group took note of the report of the first meeting of the Bureau (MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/3).

III. WORK PLAN

A. Reviews of strategies and policies

8. The secretariat informed the Meeting of the preparation of the 1998-2000 biennial review, as included in item 1 of the work-plan. Under this activity Parties and non-Parties were expected to submit information biennially on recent developments in their national strategies and policies for applying environmental impact assessment(EIA) in a transboundary context. The secretariat would circulate a request for information and prepare a draft biennial review based on the information provided by Parties and non-Parties for discussion and possible adoption for publication at the second meeting of the Parties. Guidelines for providing this information were made available to the participants. The Meeting invited Parties and non-Parties to submit the information as included in item 1 of the work plan by 26 January 2000.

B. Aspects of bilateral and multilateral cooperation

9. The delegation of the Netherlands, lead country for this activity, introduced the progress report on aspects of bilateral and multilateral cooperation (MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/4). The Meeting requested delegations to respond promptly to the questionnaire which would be circulated so that a well-organized workshop could take place to prepare guidelines on this issue.

C. Practical application of the Convention

10. The delegation of Finland, lead country for this activity, introduced the progress report on the practical application of the Convention (MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/5). This activity was considered one of the most important in the work plan. The Working Group requested the delegation of Finland to prepare a draft final report for its next meeting.

D. Public participation in a transboundary context

11. The delegation of the Russian Federation, lead country for this activity, introduced the progress report on public participation (MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/6). Amendments to it were circulated at the meeting. The Meeting requested the delegation of the Russian Federation to continue its work and present at its next meeting a draft decision for the second meeting of the Parties, including draft guidelines on this issue.

E. Non-compliance guidelines

12. The delegation of the United Kingdom, lead country for this activity, introduced the report on compliance with multilateral agreements (MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/7). The Meeting commended the delegation for the preparation of this overview of existing compliance procedures and requested it to prepare a final draft report containing possible approaches for its second meeting.

F. Recent EIA developments and links with other ECE Conventions

13. The delegation of Italy, lead country for this activity, informed the Meeting of ongoing activities and indicated that two meetings would be held (see annex) for a limited number of countries in order to prepare documentation on new developments in EIA and where ECE Conventions had common issues. The Working Group requested that a report with proposals for future work to be prepared for its next meeting.

G. Database on environmental impact assessment

14. The delegation of Poland, lead country for this activity, introduced a report on the implementation of the database, which was made available to the Meeting. It also informed the Meeting that a user manual would be available in the near future. Delegations were reminded of the fact that the success of the database depended to a large extent on the input of Governments. The delegation of Switzerland reiterated its offer to support the establishment and maintenance of a networking system within the database. The Working Group recalled decision I/5 on the establishment of the database, taken at the first meeting of the Parties, and urged Governments to update the information included in the database on a regular basis. The Working Group requested the delegation of Poland to continue to elaborate the database and prepare for its next meeting a draft user manual.

H. Evaluation of the database

15. The delegation of Hungary, lead country for this activity, introduced the progress report on the evaluation of the database (MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/10). In the ensuing discussion it became clear that delegations considered the work undertaken so far to be a good start. The Working Group requested the delegation of Hungary to prepare the draft evaluation and recommendations on its needs and continuation for its next meeting. In this respect, delegations were invited to complete the questionnaire which would be circulated by mid-December 1999, recognizing that this information was essential to finalize the evaluation.

I. Partnerships

16. The secretariat introduced this item by making a reference to item 9 of the work plan on partnerships, which aimed at providing support to countries in transition through the exchange of information on matters related to EIA in a transboundary context by establishing bilateral and multilateral partnerships between Parties and non- Parties. So far the secretariat had not received any requests from countries in transition in this respect. The Working Group called upon the countries in transition to make use of the opportunities for partnerships by contacting the secretariat for support on matters related to EIA in a transboundary context. The Working Group also requested the secretariat to prepare a draft report on this issue for its next meeting.

J. Subregional Workshop

17. The delegation of Bulgaria, lead country for this activity, introduced the report on the subregional pilot Workshop on the practical implementation of the EIA Convention in the Balkan and the Black Sea region (MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/11). The attention of the Meeting was drawn, in particular, to the conclusions and recommendations of the Workshop (paras. 3 to 12). During the discussion the usefulness of convening subregional workshops was highlighted. They provided an opportunity for countries in a particular subregion to exchange their views on the Convention. The Working Group decided that, on the basis of the Workshop's conclusions and recommendations, the lead country, with the support of the secretariat, should prepare a draft decision on further work for its next meeting.

18. In concluding, the President thanked all delegations that had contributed to the implementation of the work plan and, in particular, the lead countries.

V. PREPARATIONS FOR THE SECOND MEETING OF THE PARTIES

19. The delegation of Bulgaria informed the Meeting of the preparations for the second meeting of the Parties, which would take place in Sofia. Information was provided on the organizational and practical aspects. First a high-level meeting was expected to be held to finalize any outstanding issues. The ministerial segment would last one and a half days. The meeting at ministerial level should have a strong political message and more efforts should be made to analyse the activities set out in the work plan so that the substantive documents could be well prepared.

20. The President reminded delegations of rule 16 of the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties on the preparation of credentials. These credentials were necessary for the proper functioning of the meetings. Examples of some letters of credentials which had been prepared for the first meeting of the Parties were circulated. The President suggested that delegations should contact their Ministries for Foreign Affairs if they needed additional information regarding credentials.

21. The President introduced document MP.EIA/WG.1/1999/12 on the amendment to the Convention. Reference was made to paragraph 13 of the Oslo Ministerial Declaration, in which Parties to the Convention were invited to consider possibilities for allowing non-ECE member countries to become a Party to the Convention. During the ensuing discussion it was suggested that, at their second meeting, the Parties could decide on a package of amendments to the Convention, which could include a revision to Annex I to the Convention or a new definition of the term "public" to bring it in line with new

developments. Mr. McGlone was requested to prepare a draft decision on this issue for the Working Group's next meeting.

22. The Working Group commended the delegation of Bulgaria for the preparations for the second meeting of the Parties and took note of the information provided on the procedure for preparing and submitting credentials at the Meeting of the Parties.

VI. COOPERATION WITH THE ECE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

23. The Meeting was informed of the discussions held and the decisions taken at the sixth session of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy. In particular the Meeting was informed of the preparations by the Committee of a paper on current cooperation between the ECE Conventions and potential synergies aimed at improving their overall effectiveness. The Working Group took note of the information and requested the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to participate actively in the cooperation between Conventions.

24. The Working Group was also informed of the activities undertaken in relation to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters and, in particular, of the proposal to prepare a legally binding instrument on strategic environmental assessment (SEA). The secretariat was requested to prepare a paper on this issue with a consultant for consideration by the Working Group as well as the Bureau of the Meeting of the Signatories to the Aarhus Convention.

VII. DATE AND VENUE OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP AND OTHER MEETINGS OF RELEVANCE TO THE CONVENTION

25. The Working Group was also informed of the date and venue of its second meeting and of other meetings of relevance to the Convention (see annex). The Working Group recalled paragraph 14 of the Oslo Ministerial Declaration, in which the Ministers welcomed cooperation between the Sofia initiative on environmental impact assessment and the work under the Convention.

26. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the delegation of the United Kingdom on the outcome of the third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (London, June 1999) and, in particular on the idea of a legally binding instrument on strategic environmental assessment which was raised at the Conference.

VIII. CLOSING OF THE MEETING

27. The President summed up the Working Group's main decisions and closed the meeting on Tuesday, 5 October 1999.

Annex**PROVISIONAL LIST OF MEETINGS IN RELATION TO THE CONVENTION****1999**

15 November	Geneva	Second meeting of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties
25-26 November	London	Group on non-compliance guidelines
10-11 December	Rome	First meeting on recent EIA developments and links with other ECE Conventions

2000

10-11 January	London	Group on non-compliance guidelines
20-21 January	Rome	Second meeting on recent EIA developments and links with other ECE Conventions
14-17 February	Moscow	Workshop on public participation in a transboundary context
21-22 February	The Hague	Workshop on aspects of bilateral and multilateral cooperation
28 Feb.-1 March	Warsaw	Training course for country data managers
13 March	Geneva	Third meeting of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties
29-31 May	Geneva	Second meeting of the Working Group on EIA
9-11 October	Geneva	Third meeting of the Working Group on EIA (and preparatory meeting for the second meeting of the Parties)

2001

24-27 February	Sofia	Second meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context
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