

Economic Commission for Europe

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

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
serving as the Meeting of the Parties
to the Protocol on Strategic
Environmental Assessment

Bureau

Geneva, 25–26 February 2020

Informal notes on the Bureau meeting¹

Prepared by the secretariat²

I. Organizational matters

1. The Bureau under the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment met in Geneva, on 25 and 26 February 2020.
2. The present document covers the main points discussed and agreed on at the meeting. In addition, it presents those conclusions that the Bureau revisited through written consultations after its meeting due to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic as of March 2020, including to postpone the ninth meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment and to adjust the schedule for the related preparatory work.
3. The meeting of the Bureau was chaired by Mr. Georges Kremlis (Honorary Director, Active senior, European Commission).
4. The Bureau noted the nomination by Ukraine of Ms. Oleksandra Kozlovska as the new Bureau member and the Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), replacing Ms. Maryna Shymkus. The following other members of the Bureau were present: Ms. Elyanora Grigoryan (Armenia); Ms. Leyla Aliyeva (Azerbaijan); Ms. Larissa Lukina (Belarus), Mr. Romas Svedas (Lithuania), the Chair of the Implementation Committee; Mr. Vegard Engh (Norway); Ms. Vesna Kolar-Planinšič (Slovenia), the Chair of the Working Group on EIA and SEA; Ms. Maria do Carmo Figueira (Portugal), the first Vice-Chair of the Implementation Committee; and Ms. Milena Novakova (European Union). Ms. Lourdes Aurora Hernando (Spain) attended parts of the meeting. Ms. Seija Rantakallio (Finland) was absent.
5. The Bureau adopted its agenda, as contained in informal document ECE/MP.EIA/B/2020/INF.1.

¹ Available at: <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=53201>.

² Prepared in consultation with the Bureau.

6. The Bureau recalled that as of January 2020, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) could no longer provide interpretation between English and Russian for the Bureau meetings for budgetary reasons and that, consequently, its present and subsequent meetings would be held in English only. The Bureau recognized that it had been the only Bureau under the ECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements to have benefitted from interpretation.

II. Status of ratification of the Convention, its amendments and its Protocol

7. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Convention, its two amendments and the Protocol. It also reported on the status of ratification of the 2008 multilateral agreement among the countries of South-Eastern Europe for implementation of the Convention (Bucharest Agreement).

8. The Bureau was concerned that in total five more ratifications from the following Parties to the Convention were still needed for the first amendment to have effect allowing countries from outside the ECE region to accede to the Convention: Armenia, Belgium, North Macedonia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Ukraine. Moreover, the Bureau was concerned that the following nine Parties: Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom were still to ratify the second amendment. It again stressed the importance of the ratification of the second amendment by all Parties to the Convention that had not yet done so to ensure the unified application of the Convention.

9. The Bureau member from Armenia informed the Bureau that its Government had formally decided to ratify the first amendment. Similarly, the Ukrainian Bureau member reported that, following the appointment of its new government, Ukraine was in the process of preparing its draft law on the ratification of the first amendment. Both countries would do their best to complete the required steps by the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties in December 2020. Moreover, for Ukraine, which already implemented the provisions of the second amendment in practice, the subsequent ratification of that amendment would only be a formality. In contrast, Armenia was not currently contemplating the ratification of the second amendment since it considered that the amended list of activities did not take account of certain regional differences. The member from Belarus stated that the country's position regarding the ratification of the second amendment or of the Protocol remained unchanged for the moment.

10. The Bureau reiterated the invitation to its members to continue to prompt their own countries and/or the other concerned countries to complete their ratification procedures by the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, and to report on progress to the Working Group at its next meeting.

11. The Bureau also agreed that in the invitation letters to the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol (Vilnius, 8–11 December 2020), to be addressed to Parties' foreign ministers and environment ministers, the ECE Executive Secretary should again urge all the concerned countries to ratify the Convention amendments, the Protocol and the Bucharest Agreement.

12. Lastly, the Bureau requested the secretariat to continue to promote the remaining ratifications by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine in the framework of the technical assistance and capacity building activities it provided to those countries.

III. Preparations for the ninth meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment

13. The Bureau agreed on the provisional agenda for the ninth meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment and invited the secretariat to process it as an official document. The Bureau ensured inter alia that enough time (as a minimum two hours) would be available for presenting and discussing the draft compliance decisions under the relevant agenda item.

14. During its meeting, the Bureau also reviewed and agreed on the other documents to be considered by the Working Group at its next meeting (with the exception of the draft compliance decisions that were to be finalized by the Implementation Committee and the draft guidance on the lifetime-extension of nuclear power plants that was being drafted by the ad hoc working group co-Chaired by Germany and the United Kingdom). The Bureau requested the secretariat to finalize the documents, by incorporating its comments and processing them, prior to posting them on the Working Group's meeting webpage by 1 April 2020, for the provisional agenda and the other official documents; and by the end of April, for most of the informal documents.

15. The Bureau acknowledged that the Working Group's main task at its next, ninth, meeting would be to reach an agreement on the provisional agenda and draft documents for the eighth and fourth sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol, respectively— leaving as little outstanding issues as possible for those sessions. It recalled that the Working Group had agreed at its last meeting (Geneva, 26–28 November 2019) that delegations should communicate their possible amendment proposals to the official meeting documentation as early as possible before the ninth meeting. To that end, the Bureau agreed on a time schedule for the delivery of the various inputs in advance of the Working Group's meeting through the secretariat.

16. The Bureau invited delegations to provide:

(a) By 15 May 2020:

(i) Information on their additional pledges for 2020 and initial information on their pledges for 2021–2023;

(ii) Inputs and ideas for the 30-year celebration of the Convention during the high-level segment of the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, including for example pictures of past meetings and events, and video messages;

(b) By 19 May 2020: possible comments revision proposals regarding the meeting documents, for the secretariat to post on the meeting website for information of the delegations.

17. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bureau subsequently carried out consultations in writing to review and to adjust the date of the meeting of the Working Group, agreeing to postpone the meeting from its originally scheduled dates of 9–11 June to 24–26 August 2020.

18. In addition, because of the later date of the Working Group's meeting, and, in general, the impact of the pandemic on Parties, stakeholders and the secretariat, the Bureau proposed adjustments to the time-schedule for the preparatory work. It pointed out, however, that, despite the challenges, the secretariat had processed and made available all the official meeting documents for the Working Group in a timely manner, by 1 April 2020. In addition, as agreed, the draft compliance decisions prepared by the Implementation Committee had been made available on the meeting webpage in mid-April, as an informal document. Lastly, most of the informal documents would be posted on-line by the end of April. Consequently, the Bureau concluded that Parties and stakeholders should be invited

to proceed without undue delay with their internal consultations and coordination on the documents and to provide any comments on them, the information on their pledges and other inputs in writing as early as possible. The Bureau agreed that all the inputs should be submitted to the secretariat by 30 June 2020, before the start of the summer holiday period of July and August.

19. The Bureau also acknowledged that with the meeting of the Working Group in the last week of August and the Implementation Committee meeting in the first week of September, the secretariat had only limited time to finalize the documents based on the Working Group's comments before the internal deadline of 15 September for processing of the official documents for the Meetings of the Parties' sessions. Consequently, it was important also to the secretariat to receive the written comments to the draft documents and other inputs well in advance of the Working Group's meeting.

IV. Preparations for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties

A. Practical arrangements

20. The secretariat provided an update on the ongoing practical arrangements for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to be held in Vilnius, from 8 to 11 December 2020, including the negotiation of a detailed host country agreement between Lithuania and the ECE secretariat and the selection of a venue for the sessions. The Bureau took note of the information.

21. The Bureau then reviewed and agreed on an indicative time schedule for the preparatory work for the Meetings of the Parties' sessions. It agreed for example that:

(a) In early September 2020, the secretariat should send out invitation letters to ministers and the heads of partner organizations, with a link to a host-country website to be set up by Lithuania containing practical information regarding the hotel bookings, local transportation etc;

(b) By 1 October 2020 (i.e. by 10 weeks before the sessions), the secretariat should make available the advance English copies of the provisional agenda and the official documents after incorporating the comments agreed by the Working Group at its ninth meeting, and after processing the documents;

(c) By 16 November 2020 (3 weeks before the sessions), delegations should submit their possible comments on the meeting documentation through the secretariat, for them to be posted on the meeting webpage.

22. The Bureau emphasized that for ensuring that the draft workplan for the next intersessional period was backed up with sufficient resources, it was imperative to know in advance how much funding Parties intended to make available for that period. Consequently, the Bureau agreed that in addition to providing initial information on their pledges by the end of June 2020, Parties should confirm that information to the secretariat no later than by 2 November 2020, well in advance of the next sessions of the Meeting of the Parties.

23. The Bureau agreed that the invitation letters from the Executive Secretary of ECE to the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties should cover the following main points:

(a) Highlight the importance of high-level participation at the 30th anniversary event of the Convention to be held on 11 December;

(b) Invite the Parties to the Convention that had adopted the amendments, or signed the Protocol, but not yet ratified them, to proceed promptly with their ratification;

(c) Invite all Parties to provide information on the contributions to the trust fund that they intended to pledge for the next intersessional period 2021–2023 (by 2 November 2020).

24. The Bureau agreed that it would next meet in Vilnius, on Monday, 7 December 2020, initially from 10 a.m. to noon, back-to-back with the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties. The meeting of the Bureau was planned to address any last-minute issues in connection with the sessions, including delegations' comments on the documentation.

B. Draft agenda

25. The Bureau reviewed and agreed on the annotated provisional agenda for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties and invited the secretariat to submit it for consideration of the Working Group at its ninth meeting, as an informal document.

26. As requested by the Working Group at its last meeting, the Bureau considered further the previously identified optional topics for panel discussions during the general segment of the Meetings of the Parties' sessions, taking into account the comments made by the delegations during and after the Working Group's meeting. The Bureau suggested that the panel focus more on the Protocol since the event planned for the high-level segment would be devoted to the Convention. It recommended that the topic of the panel discussions be sustainable infrastructure, covering also energy transition, as well as Belt and Road Initiative, the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) corridor and climate issues. The secretariat pointed out that sustainable infrastructure had also been selected as one of the two main themes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 3–5 November 2021), and that, consequently, the conclusions from the panel discussions could be reported there. Acknowledging that that topic was likely to be of interest also to ministers and other heads of delegations, the Bureau agreed that the panel should be organized at the very end of the general segment, that is, in the afternoon of Thursday, 10 December. That would allow those heads of delegations that planned to travel to Vilnius only for the high-level segment of Friday, 11 December, to consider arriving sufficiently early on the day before to also attend the general segment's panel discussions.

27. The Bureau agreed that smart and sustainable cities would also be an interesting topic, which was linked to several other topics of relevance for the application of the Protocol such as, climate change, health, and Sustainable Development Goals within urban planning. The Bureau proposed that that theme could be addressed during a possible side event – provided that lead countries or organizations would volunteer to organize it in the margins of the sessions.

28. The Bureau also discussed the preparation and the contents of the Convention's high-level 30-year anniversary event, recommending the following:

(a) The preparation by the secretariat of a video presenting the Convention and its benefits;

(b) Obtaining a video message from the United Nation's Secretary General on the Convention;

(c) Resources permitting, the preparation of another video that would illustrate key people, major events and deliverables from the Convention's past and present, featuring, for example: the Chairs of the treaty bodies; Meetings of the Parties' sessions and their hosts; the secretaries to the Convention; and the publications issued. The Bureau called for volunteering Parties or stakeholders to take on the preparation of the video;

(d) Soliciting interventions by invited high-level representatives of Parties, future Parties and stakeholders representing different sub-regions, highlighting the Convention's benefits to their countries and sub-regions.

C. Draft workplan 2021–2023

29. The Bureau reviewed and revised draft decision VIII/2–IV/2 on the adoption of the workplan for 2021–2023 and its annexes I and II prepared by the secretariat considering the feedback and requests by the Working Group. The Bureau welcomed the draft document. It agreed that it was necessary that the workplan comprehensively listed the secretariat’s tasks for servicing of the Convention and the Protocol, which had not been the case in the past. As needed, that would also facilitate the identification by Parties of those secretariat services and activities that could be cut should sufficient funding not be forthcoming in the next intersessional period. Secondly, to better ensure that the new workplan was backed by matching resources, the Bureau supported indicating both financial and human resource requirements for the workplan implementation in annex to the workplan – instead of annexing budgetary figures to a separate decision on budget. The Bureau noted that pending the information on Parties’ pledged contributions to support the implementation of the workplan during the period 2021–2023, most of the proposed workplan activities were to remain in brackets.

30. Then, the Bureau reviewed the annex III to draft decision VIII/2–IV/2 listing activities requested by Parties and future Parties that required additional financial and also secretariat staff resources to be implemented. It acknowledged the importance of capacity building and awareness raising activities for promoting the effective implementation and further ratifications of the Convention and the Protocol both within and beyond the ECE region. To facilitate the possible future fund-raising for the activities listed, the Bureau recommended that the Working Group submit also annex III for consideration of the Meetings of the Parties as part of the workplan. In terms of priorities, it considered that if sufficient additional resources became available in the future, they should be spent first for the benefit of countries in South-East Europe and in Central Asia.

31. Having agreed on the workplan and its annexes, the Bureau invited the secretariat to submit the document, including its annexes I–III, for consideration of the Working Group at its ninth meeting, as an official document.

D. Draft declaration

32. The Bureau reviewed and slightly revised the previously agreed draft Vilnius declaration, which it had submitted to the Working Group at its last meeting, as an informal document, but which the Working Group had not deliberated on. The Bureau invited the secretariat to incorporate the minor revisions made, and to resubmit the declaration for consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting, as an official document.

E. Chairs of the sessions

33. The Bureau discussed the chairing of the general and high-level segments of the sessions. It emphasized that the candidates to be put forward for election by the Meetings of the Parties, should be decided no later than during the next meeting of the Working Group.

34. The Bureau again recalled that high-level segments had usually been chaired by a host country representative and the general segments by the Chair of the Bureau. The Bureau welcomed its Chair’s availability to again chair the general segment, if needed. It further noted the wish of Lithuania not to chair the chair the high-level segment to avoid any conflict of interest.

35. The Bureau invited Parties to come forward with nominations for chairing the general and high-level segments by 15 May 2020. Subsequently, given the postponement of the meeting of the Working Group until late August, the Bureau agreed through written consultations that that information should be submitted to the secretariat by no later than 30 June.

F. Officers for the next intersessional period

36. The Bureau then considered the nominations for officials for the treaty bodies to be elected by the Meetings of the Parties for the next intersessional period, that is, the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Working Group, the Chair and members of the Bureau and five members of the Implementation Committee and their alternates.

37. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the present and past officers nominated by Parties, noting also which Parties had never or not recently nominated officers. The Bureau considered important to ensure that the membership of the treaty bodies was subject to a sufficient rotation among the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol, including because serving as an official represented an important in-kind contribution for a Party in terms of time and resources. Consequently, the Bureau recommended that Parties that have never been represented in the treaty bodies, namely Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta and Montenegro also consider nominating officers for the next intersessional period.

38. The Bureau invited the secretariat to continue to informally consult Parties regarding the future nominations, taking into account the recommendations of the Bureau. It invited Parties to submit to the secretariat initial nominations for officers

39. The Bureau also discussed possible election criteria for the officers and further procedural guidance, with the focus on the Bureau membership. It proposed that the following criteria for the Bureau membership be recorded in the report of the Meetings of the Parties on their next sessions:

- (a) Adequate representation of the ECE subregions;
- (b) Equal representation of the Convention and the Protocol (Article 14 (3) of the Protocol requires that the Bureau consist of an equal number of representatives of Parties to the Convention and the Protocol);
- (c) Linguistic capacities: Fluency in English;
- (d) Length of the mandate (with a view to ensuring sufficient rotation of the members): Maximum two consecutive terms of service per Party – except for the European Commission, which represents a regional economic integration organization;
- (e) Size: to maximise the effectiveness of the deliberations, the Bureau should consist as a maximum of eleven members (including, the following five ex-officio members of the Bureau: the Chair and the first Vice-Chair of the Implementation Committee and; Chair and two Vice-Chairs of the Working Group on EIA and SEA) – unless the Meetings of the Parties decided differently.

40. The Bureau also proposed to clarify its own key functions based on the established practice and agreed on a number them. It invited the secretariat to present that information to the Working Group in an informal document together with its recommendations on the nominations and possible criteria for officers to be elected for 2021–2023.

G. Provisional schedule of meetings 2021–2023

41. The Bureau agreed on a revised initial schedule of official meetings for 2021–2023 for consideration of the Working Group at its ninth meeting. That schedule was subsequently revised with the new date of the Working Group's next meeting of 24–26 August 2020.

V. Financial arrangements

42. The secretariat provided an update on the recent contributions to the Convention's and Protocol's trust fund. It also reported on the additional pledges further to the request for

the further funding that the ECE Executive Secretary addressed to all Parties' foreign ministers and environment ministers in December 2019.

43. The Bureau noted that all the treaty bodies recognized the urgent nature of the financial difficulties and the secretariat's staffing constraints under the Convention and the Protocol, which were due to insufficient contributions to the trust fund. The Bureau agreed that that situation strongly contrasted with the benefits of the treaties and the multiplication of their Parties, meetings and activities. Recently, the resource situation had been further aggravated by the unbudgeted convening of the intermediary session of the Meetings of the Parties in February 2019 and the extension of the intersessional period to three and a half years. Consequently, the Bureau agreed that it was time for Parties to undertake corrective actions by ensuring that all Parties without exception contributed to the trust fund and by increasing the level of the contributions to the extent possible. Alternatively, Parties would need to reduce the scope of activities and to cut some of the secretariat's services to the treaties.

44. The Bureau also noted with concern the insufficiency of Parties additional contributions received this far to fill in the budgetary gap of some 100,000 USD - with more than half of the funds still missing (as at the end of February 2020). With the understanding that some time was needed to process the requests for funding, the Bureau urged Parties to inform the secretariat as soon as possible before the ninth meeting of the Working Group of their additional contributions in 2020.

45. The Bureau then reviewed draft decision VIII/1-IV/1 on financial arrangements for the Convention and the Protocol in the period 2021-2023 prepared by the secretariat taking into account the comments from the Working Group. To respond to the Working Group's request and to ensure that the workplan matches the available human and financial resources for its implementation, the resource requirements were now detailed in annex to draft decision VIII/2-IV/2 on the workplan, (which the Bureau had agreed on earlier in the meeting, see para. 29 above). Consequently, the Bureau agreed that draft decision VIII/1-IV/1 no longer included a budget table in its annex but focused on spelling out financial arrangements for sufficient, predictable and equitable distribution of funding. In that regard, it reiterated the importance of early information from Parties on their pledged contributions to finance the workplan.

46. Following discussions, the Bureau agreed on draft decision VIII/1-IV/1, as revised, and invited the secretariat to submit it to for consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting.

47. The Bureau recommended that the United Nations scale of assessments be annexed to the draft decision and used as a reference for Parties' minimum contributions, after adjusting the percentages to the number of the Parties to the Convention. The United Nations scale, which the General Assembly adopted every three years to determine the contributions of the States Members of the United Nations to the United Nations regular budget, reflected the economic strengths of the countries. It was important, however, to encourage those Parties that currently contributed more than the amounts determined based on the scale of assessment not to lower their contributions.

VI. Implementation of the workplan 2017-2020

A. Compliance with and implementation of the Convention and the Protocol

1. Draft long-term strategy and an action plan for the Convention and the Protocol

48. The secretariat presented the draft long-term strategy and action plan for the Convention and the Protocol, which the Netherlands and Poland had finalized, with support

from the secretariat, during informal discussions of volunteering Parties held in Warsaw, on 23 and 24 January 2020. The draft had been finalized considering the comments made by the Working Group at its last meeting.

49. The Bureau reviewed and agreed on the draft long-term strategy and action plan, without changes. It also reviewed and agreed on the related draft decision VIII/3-III/3 and invited the secretariat to submit both documents for consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting.

2. Review of compliance and implementation

50. The Bureau noted the report by the Chair of the Implementation Committee on the Committee's work since the last meeting of the Working Group, covering the main outcomes of the Committee's forty-sixth session (Geneva, 10–13 December 2019) and the main objectives of its forty-seventh session (Geneva, 16–19 March 2020), including in particular regarding the preparatory work for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties.

51. The Bureau once again welcomed the Committee's plans:

(a) To prepare draft decisions of the Meetings of the Parties on compliance at the Committee's next session;

(b) By mid-April 2020, to submit the draft decisions for information and possible comments by the Working Group;

(c) To finalize them at the Committee's forty-eighth session (Geneva, 1–4 September 2020) considering the comments from the Working Group and any other information received by 31 July 2020, prior to forwarding the draft decisions to the Meetings of the Parties at their next sessions.

52. It invited the concerned Parties, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Lithuania, Romania and Ukraine, to facilitate the Committee's work on finalizing the draft decisions by providing their comments and updates on progress in implementing decisions IS/1(a), (c), (d), (g) and (f) by no later than 31 July 2020.

53. The Bureau welcomed the Committee's constant efforts to review and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its working methods and its plans to continue that work in the next intersessional period with a view to preparing amendment proposals to the Committee's structure and functions and its operating rules to enhance their coherence and to avoid duplication.

54. The Bureau reviewed and agreed on draft decisions VIII/5 and IV/5 on the review of implementation of the Convention and the Protocol, respectively, with minor adjustments.

55. The Bureau noted that its meetings were not the appropriate forums to discuss the Implementation Committee's ongoing deliberations on Parties' compliance with their obligations under the Convention and the Protocol, including in relation to reporting.

56. Taking into account the provisional schedule of meetings under the two treaties in 2021–2023, the Bureau recommended for the next reporting round, that, once the questionnaires would have been revised and agreed, the secretariat distribute them by the end of December 2021 for Parties to return four months later, by the end of April 2022.

3. Draft guidance on the applicability of the Convention to the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants

57. The Bureau reviewed and agreed on draft decision VIII/6 for the adoption of the draft guidance on the applicability of the Convention to the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants that was being prepared by the ad hoc working group co-chaired by Germany and the United Kingdom, as revised.

58. In its preparation of draft guidance on the applicability of the Convention, the Bureau invited the ad hoc working group to consider its views that:

(a) When the language of the Convention was not clear, the Convention should be interpreted taking into account its main purpose and objectives;

(b) The differences in national legislation and systems, as such, should not exempt Parties from applying the Convention.

59. The Bureau noted that to draft the guidance, the ad hoc working group had planned to hold two further meetings, (Rome, 2–4 March and Sofia, 27–29 April) before submitting the draft guidance for consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting as an informal document in English and, informally translated by Germany, in Russian. After that, the ad hoc group planned to meet one more time, in Espoo, Finland, on 23 and 24 June to incorporate the changes from the Working Group, before the document would be forwarded as an official document for endorsement by the Meetings of the Parties at their next sessions.

60. The Bureau recalled that the Working Group had requested that the ad hoc group deliver the draft guidance well in advance of its ninth meeting, and no later than by 15 May 2020 in English and, by 25 May 2020 in Russian. The Bureau invited delegations to submit their possible comments on the draft guidance by 4 June 2020. Subsequently, however, the cancellation of the two preparatory meetings that the ad hoc working group had planned for March and April 2020 delayed the drafting process and, consequently, postponed the availability of the draft guidance for commenting. The ad hoc group carried out its preparatory work through written consultations and a series of videoconferences/virtual meetings. The Bureau recommended that the draft guidance be circulated to delegations by 30 June for their comments in writing by 3 August 2020.

4. Legislative assistance

61. The Bureau noted the updated information from the secretariat and the concerned Bureau members on the ongoing and planned legislative assistance to support the implementation and, as relevant, the accession to or the ratification of the Convention and/or the Protocol. The update covered the assistance funded by the European Union under the EU4Environment project, and in particular:

(a) The on-going efforts to align Azerbaijan’s draft secondary legislation with the Convention and the Protocol;

(b) The finalization of the review of Moldova’s primary and secondary legislation in spring 2020 prior to the planned amendment of that legislation later in 2020;

(c) The planned review of the primary and secondary legislation on SEA and transboundary EIA of Belarus that was expected to be initiated in the coming months.

62. The Bureau took note of the information, welcoming the beneficiary countries’ further efforts to pursue their legislative reforms with a view to aligning their legislation with the Convention and the Protocol. It encouraged those beneficiary countries of the assistance that were not yet Parties to take steps to ratify the Protocol and/or the Convention.

B. Promoting ratification and application of the Protocol and the Convention

1. Draft guidance on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment

63. The Bureau reviewed the draft guidance on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment, which had been considerably revised by two consultants funded by the European Investment Bank based on comments from the Working Group at its last meeting and subsequent rounds of in-depth input from a task force composed of

representatives of Austria, Finland, Ireland and Slovenia. Moreover, since the meeting of the Working Group, the draft guidance had been complemented with an annex illustrating selected case studies from Czechia, Estonia and the Netherlands, which had been presented also at the workshop held during the Working Group's meeting. The secretariat informed the Bureau that the consultants' contract with the European Investment Bank had ended at the end of February and that no further funding was available.

64. The Bureau acknowledged the importance of the topic and the current lack of publicly available information on Parties' practical experience in assessing health and in involving the health sector in SEA. It also recognized that the draft guidance had been prepared in accordance with the concept note agreed by the Working Group in May 2018, which did not foresee the collection of further practical experience from Parties via a questionnaire. It encouraged Parties to submit their good practice in that field to the secretariat to be published on-line.

65. The Bureau agreed on the text of the draft guidance with some further revisions. It also reviewed and agreed on the related draft decision IV/6 on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment. It invited the secretariat to forward both documents for consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting as part of the official documentation.

2. Other activities

66. The Bureau took note of the update by the secretariat and the concerned Bureau members on the implementation of the workplan activities that related to promoting ratification and application of the Protocol and the Convention, including:

(a) The secretariat's plans to resubmit the draft informal pamphlets or "FasTips" on the Convention and the Protocol to the International Association for Impact Assessment, as revised considering the comments by the Working Group at its last meeting. Once reviewed by IAIA, the secretariat would resubmit them again for consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting;

(b) Progress in activities funded by the EU4Environment Programme in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic Moldova, and Ukraine, in particular: the development of sector or issue-specific guidelines on SEA in Armenia and Georgia and shortly also in the Republic of Moldova; plans to hold training workshops on SEA in Georgia and Moldova in autumn 2020; and expected awareness raising activities, including the production of a video on the Convention and its benefits by the next session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention. The activities in Ukraine for 2020 and 2021 were being reviewed, and, as needed, adjusted by the Government in the light of the country's new governmental programmes;

(c) A study-tour in Germany for representatives of Central Asian countries organised in December 2019 in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to share Germany's experience in application of the Protocol; ongoing feasibility and needs assessments for introducing SEA in the Central Asian countries; and to organise in March – May 2020 one awareness-raising event in each of the beneficiary countries with funding from Germany and Switzerland.

C. Subregional cooperation and capacity-building

67. The Bureau noted reports of the secretariat on the plans for the implementation of activities foreseen in or related to the workplan regarding subregional cooperation and capacity-building in the following subregions:

(a) Baltic Sea subregion, involving a subregional cooperation workshop for the Baltic Sea area that Denmark, in cooperation with Finland and Sweden planned to organize

in Copenhagen on 25–26 March 2020. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, that meeting was subsequently postponed to Autumn 2020;

(b) Central Asia, involving a subregional conference that was foreseen to be held on 7–8 July 2020 in Tashkent to be organized in cooperation with OSCE and with funding from Switzerland, ECE and Germany (new dates to be confirmed);

(c) Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, involving plans to hold the first one of the two sub-regional events funded by the EU4Environment project in Georgia, in the second half of October 2020 (dates tbc).

VII. Inputs to related international processes

68. The Bureau noted the report by the secretariat on the workshop on environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessments in areas beyond national jurisdiction (Brussels, 28–29 January 2020) organized by the European Commission (DG for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries) to support the ongoing negotiations in the United Nations on the new high seas agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction).

VIII. Other business

69. No other business was raised under the agenda item.

IX. Presentation of the decisions and closing of the meeting

70. The meeting of the Bureau concluded on Wednesday, 26 February 2020.

71. The Bureau reviewed and agreed on the main conclusions of its meeting. It invited the secretariat to draft the informal meeting report and to circulate it for comments by the Bureau members prior to its finalization.

Annex

[...]^{*)}