

**Meetings of the Parties to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA
(Vilnius, 8-11 December 2020)**

**High-level event to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention To be held on-line on
Friday, 11 December 2020**

Panel Discussion

Progress made towards ratification and expectations v-à-v the Convention (7 min)

H.E. Ms. Nino Tandilashvili, Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture,
Georgia

[Full text of the intervention](#)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to address the participants of today's special event on behalf of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, on the thirties anniversary of the adoption of the Espoo Convention.

Environmental Impact Assessment procedure has been enforced in Georgia for almost 25 years. After gaining independence, the country signed and ratified a number of important international environmental treaties. Today I am addressing you as a representative of a non-party country, as Espoo Convention and its protocol is yet to be ratified by Georgia.

Despite the fact that the country has gained experience regarding the EIA procedures, national legislation still was not in line with the Espoo Convention and its Protocol, moreover SEA procedure was not in place. Hence, the first step was to develop a national legislative and institutional system to apply EIA and SEA procedures according to the provisions of the Convention and the Protocol.

On 27 June 2014 the European Union, its Member States and Georgia signed an ambitious document - Association Agreement (AA). The agreement contains binding, rule-based provisions and provides for enhanced cooperation in most of the sectors.

The practical steps were taken towards improvement of the environmental governance in our country. The law on the Environmental Assessment Code, adopted in 2017 introducing the principles of the relevant EU Directives, as well as the approaches of the Espoo

Convention, its Protocol on SEA and the Aarhus Convention, serves as a good example of the abovementioned achievements.

One of the novelties of the EA Code is the increased number of the activities that are subject to the Screening and EIA procedures. As a result, the number of decisions issued by the Ministry has increased by 355% during 2018-2019 in comparison to 2016-2017.

Significant improvements are related to the public involvement in the decision-making process. The Ministry is directly responsible for organization of the public hearings, as well as dissemination of the information. We use all possible means of communicating information to the public, such as the official website of the Ministry, information board and/or website of the relevant municipal executive body and public places. Furthermore, the period for submission of the comments and remarks has significantly increased, compared to the previous law on Environmental Impact Permits. Finally, public hearings are held on EIA Scoping and EIA stages and are transparent as well as open to any citizen for participation.

I would like to underline that the number of public hearings significantly increased throughout the last two years. During the period of 2018 - 2019, the number of public hearings conducted was approximately 91 and 270 respectively. Moreover, the number of the participants rapidly went up as well and reached 1260 and 3200 in 2018-2019, respectively. In total, 153% increase in the number of attendees at both stages (Scoping and Environmental Decision) in 2019 compared to 2018. The number of people taking part in the public hearings demonstrates an increase in the level of public awareness.

Specifically, in 2019 compared to 2018 the number of public hearings increased by 66%, in 2019 compared to 2018 the number of attendees at both stages (Scoping and Environmental Decision) was increased by 153%.

The Ministry uses all possible means of informing people and raising awareness with regard to the EIA and SEA procedures. Moreover, we are currently working on the development of the Electronic Database System for the Environmental Assessment. Improving online access to environmental data is one of the tools for the Ministry in order to ensure a high-level public access to information.

Lately, the Ministry has faced challenges in conducting the public hearings due to the ongoing pandemic as a number of restrictions and measures took place for the purposes of preventing the spread of the novel coronavirus, including the lockdown. From October 2020, the Ministry organizes public hearings in accordance with the new amendment in EA Code, via the electronic meeting platforms (such as Zoom and Webex) as plausible means of

communication. Information about the administrative procedures are posted on the website of the LEPL Environmental Information and Education Center and on its official Facebook page. Furthermore, official emails notifying the environmental NGOs, specifically more than 6,000 subscribers, are sent on a regular basis, in order to ensure an effective public participation in the online meetings.

These achievements would not have been possible without international support received in the recent years. The assistance of the UNECE deserves special attention when addressing the challenges in environmental governance in Georgia. Specifically, UNECE supported the respective legislative system and effective implementation of novel procedures. The next step is to get experience on Transboundary EIA procedure.

Since the country has no experience in conducting Transboundary EIA procedure, in the framework of the “EU4Environment” project, Georgia has requested updating general handbooks, as well as preparing detailed sectoral handbooks/manuals, including, the Guideline on EIA in the hydropower sector with a special focus on the transboundary aspects. Furthermore, a Subregional Workshop was held for Eastern Partnership countries, assisting them in comprehensive capacity-building and institution building on SEA and transboundary EIA and in finalizing legal reforms in this area.

We strongly believe that Espoo Convention plays a pivotal role in promotion of information exchange among countries on environmental issues and challenges, environmental cooperation, intergovernmental dialogues as well as ensuring a more fair decision-making process from an international standpoint. As for the expectations on becoming part of the convention, it is essential to adopt guidelines and a number of documents to ensure effective implementation of the requirements set out in the Environmental Assessment Code, along with strengthening capacity in Transboundary EIA on a national scale.

To this end, let me express our gratitude to the European Union, UNECE and Secretariat of the Espoo Convention for the unwavering support and ongoing assistance in the field of the environment in Georgia.

Thank you for your attention.