



Statement by H.E. Mr. Andrej Vizjak,

**Minister of the Environment and Spatial planning
of the Republic of Slovenia**

**at the 8th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention
and
the 4th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on SEA,
Vilnius, 11 December 2020**

Thank you Madame Chair,

(Krista Mikkonen, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Finland)

Excellencies, distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am pleased and honoured to address you today. I would like to sincerely thank Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary, UNECE, for the invitation, as well as the Government of Lithuania for the excellent organisation of the Meeting of the Parties under such challenging conditions.

This Vilnius meeting marks the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Espoo Convention. By now it became a mature instrument that is applied frequently and consistently to numerous planned economic development activities. Despite the respectable age and proven usefulness of the Convention, it is of high importance that we constantly strive for effective cooperation between all countries in our region to prevent and mitigate significant transboundary effects at the early stage of planning, and find practical solutions in a positive spirit of cooperation.

Slovenia is an active member of the Convention and Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment from the beginning and supports it by a stable financial contribution and also by in-kind work such as recently chairing the Working Group.

We also adopted the amendment to complete the ratification process to allow

for countries outside the UNECE region to also accede to the Convention – which is an important signal of openness and solidarity.

I highly welcome the Espoo network of experts and the willingness to share their knowledge and experience within the UNECE region, and with the other regions on the global scale.

Several items on the agenda of this meeting are of global importance, and clearly demonstrate the role that the Convention, and in particular its Protocol on SEA, can play in addressing global challenges. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its goals and related targets call for an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to sustainable development.

I am pleased that the cooperation between all the Parties has continued also under such circumstances as Covid-19 pandemic. It is a challenge to arrange cooperation between the Governments, partner organisations, civil society and the private sector, but cooperation shows the vitality of the network and the willingness and strong commitment of the Governments to cooperate. The Protocol and the Convention can concretely help, by providing a legal framework and clear procedures for integrating and mainstreaming environmental and health concerns into economic development planning, and involving and consulting with stakeholders across sectors and the public at large.

Capacity building, legislative assistance, training events, pilot projects and sub regional workshops have been carried out mainly to promote the implementation and ratification of the Protocol on SEA also in our region. Slovenia was and will stay an active partner in those activities.

I support that sufficient further financial and human resources become available and I know that the UNECE secretariat always stands ready to support and sustain the results achieved thus far and improve the implementation of the newly established legislation.

I am aware that reaching consensus decisions entails hard work between the intersessional periods, also on the most challenging questions, such as the long-term operation of nuclear activity, but shows the spirit of cooperation that characterises the Espoo Convention and its Protocol.

I also welcome the efforts to take a step back to think strategically how the two treaties could most effectively address key challenges for the future development in our region and beyond in the longer term by deciding on

a long-term strategy and action plan. The challenges ahead are great – but we also have great tools available!

At the end, allow me to express, on behalf of the Slovenian Government, our commitment to further support and cooperation in our joint endeavours.

At the 30th Espoo anniversary, I wish to congratulate to all Parties, and thank the the Buro, all Working Groups and Secretariat for their admirable job done !