

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Colleagues,

The Espoo Convention was ratified by the Republic of Croatia in 1995 and since its entering into force, Croatia, along with the neighboring countries – the Parties to the Convention, conducted 7 transboundary assessments. (3 out of which by Slovenia, 2 by Italy and 2 by Hungary).

Although Bosnia and Herzegovina is still not the party to the Convention, we have conducted the procedure of transboundary consultations with the said country for the purposes of the Construction of the Land-Pelješac Bridge Project, with implementation of the Espoo Convention procedure.

We have acquired precious experience in the cooperation regarding the transboundary environmental impact assessment methodology and procedure. We are therefore willing to share the experience with our neighboring countries: namely, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which we hope shall soon join our family and become the Party to the Convention.

We believe the draft of the multilateral treaty for the Southeast European counties, which was elaborated within the Espoo Convention work program adopted in Cavtat at the 3rd meeting of the parties, to be contribution to further strengthening of the Espoo Convention. We particularly encourage the solution presented by the Draft as regards to the early notification. The solution thus does not leave the decision on the necessity to notify to the country of origin based on the results of the Environmental Impact Study elaborated by the same country, but establishes early notification by the affected country as the requirement for all projects specified in the Annex 1 to the Convention.

The ongoing Environmental Impact Procedure of the planned Hydroelectric Power Plant Krško on the Sava River in the Republic of Slovenia revealed the necessity of team work and assessment of a chain (programs) of Hydroelectric Power Plants in the Republic of Slovenia, and the planned neighboring chain in the Republic of Croatia. The example evidences the need to implement the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment and the Article 10. thereof, providing for the transboundary consultations on certain plans and programs.

The Republic of Croatia adopted the new Environmental Protection Act last week, which transposes a whole series of the Acquis Communautaire directives. The Act completely transposes the EU Directive on Environmental Impact Assessment, on the basis of experience gained through 25 years of the implementation of the instrument in the Croatian legal system.

The new Act also introduces Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment, consequently creating the preconditions for ratification of the Protocol on the Strategic Environmental Assessment, which we have signed in Kiev in 2003. It is our plan to ratify the Protocol and Amendments to the Espoo Convention prior to the 4th meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention in Bucharest, and thus also to become the party to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Mr. (Ms) Chairperson, allow me to remind you of the „Sofia Initiative on EIA“ which Croatia conducted from 1995 to 2003 with the logistic support by the REC, and which along with the participation of numerous East and Southeast European countries provided a strong incentive and contribution to the introduction of the Strategic Environmental Assessment into the legal system of the countries which are present here today. The Sofia Initiative work results are evidenced in the Declaration of Aarhus Conference in 1998, the Declaration of the First Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention in Oslo in 1998, as well as in the documents of the Kiev Conference in 2003.

It is our belief that on the basis of the positive experiences gained from the Sofia Initiative, we should encourage the exchange of experiences, particularly in the implementation of the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment. The challenges presented by the transboundary consultations on plans and programs still lie ahead and we should be ready for them. Regular, brief and efficient meetings of the neighboring countries and the countries of the wider area present the best way towards perfecting the methodological and procedural premises of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol application.

Thank You Mr. Chairman