

Draft Statement of the European ECO Forum to the 3rd Meeting of the Parties of the Espoo Convention

Distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the European ECO Forum – a coalition of more than 200 environmental NGOs in Europe – I would like to welcome the 3rd Meeting of the Parties of the Espoo Convention and the delegates and experts present here.

Public participation in transboundary impact assessment is now widely recognized to be an integral part and a governing principle of both EIA and SEA.

In this regard, we welcome elaboration of the **Guidance on public participation** in environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context.

We also welcome draft **decision on financial assistance**, which provides for support to be given to NGOs in order to ensure involvement of the citizens' organizations in the further work under the Convention.

However, when we turn to the practice, the implementation of the Convention itself is **not a reality yet**. Further guidance and stronger commitment from the Parties are required.

We stress the need for further improvement of the practical implementation of and compliance with the Convention.

In this regard, we urge for a stronger role of the **Implementation Committee** of the Espoo Convention. This requires a commitment from the Parties to **allow communications from the public** to the Implementation Committee. So far we see a lack of such commitment, including in the draft decision on the Review of Compliance.

We are concerned of the lack of practical commitment by some countries to implement the Convention. The latest example that brought attention of the whole European environmental community was construction by the Government of Ukraine of a **navigable canal in the Ukrainian part of the Danube River Delta**. The construction planning lacked any transboundary assessment and public participation.

Practical experience shows that, especially in the EECCA region, both governmental authorities and the public **need better understanding of the value that public participation** adds to the decision making process. Public participation can ensure transparency and result in better decision taken by the governments. However, often the public and governments see public participation only as a way in which public protests against the decisions. This is the way that lawyers should probably use public participation. But in the context of good governance and sustainable development, this

perception must be overcome by specific projects and activities aimed to educate the governmental authorities and the public of the benefits of public participation.

The approaches used to educate the public and governmental authorities in the EECCA region did not achieve its goal yet – in practice public participation often plays a role of a conflict-raising rather than a role of mutual ground and cooperation between public and the government.

We are concerned of the lack of specific activities aimed to promote public participation in the **work plan** for the Convention and SEA Protocol.

It has been one year since the adoption of the **SEA Protocol** now. If this agreement is to contribute to the environmental protection in Europe, and EECCA countries in particular, two issues shall be taken into account: **quick ratifications** and **early public involvement**.

As to the first, we urge the countries to ratify the Protocol on SEA. NGOs can play a significant role in facilitating this process in the countries and should be involved.

As to the public involvement. When planning and implementing the projects to facilitate ratification and implementation of the SEA Protocol, previous experience should be taken into account. This includes support to the projects regarding public participation in the SEA process and involving NGOs into all activities designed to promote the Protocol. The experience and resources that NGOs possess can significantly contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Protocol.

We all will agree that close cooperation between the governments and NGOs is a requirement for practical achievements of the goals of the Convention and the Protocol.

Thank you.