

Integrated approaches to decision-making and the relative benefits of SEA and Sustainability Appraisal

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**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

After the Rio Conference and in implementation of the main priorities of Agenda 21, the Millennium Declaration and the decisions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 the Republic of Bulgaria as almost all countries of the UNECE region has developed policies and strategies for an overall improvement of the living conditions and environment in the human settlements. Although there is no strategy for sustainable development on a national level, Bulgaria implements a set of instruments for integration of the policy on environmental protection into sectoral and regional policies. These instruments play an important role for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on a national as well on a regional scale.

Crucial for the development of key tools for preventive control in the environmental protection have been the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act from 1991, which has introduced the principles of the EIA almost at the same time with the beginning of the democratic transition in the country. The wide application of the EIA including projects, development programmes, spatial plans, operating enterprises (in the sense of environmental audit), has given the opportunity our society gradually to adopt and to establish the EIA both as a prevention instrument, especially against negative consequences, as well as an integrated approach for decision-making both in the process of design and planning. But we have to mention however that the results of the implementation of one and the same approach in the evaluation of projects and plans have proved that a different from EIA approach is needed on the higher levels of decision-making, such as plans and programmes.

The new Environmental Protection Act in force since September 2002 has set out the framework of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (within the context of “environmental assessment of plans and programmes”). We have the task to master and put into practice an approach that gives prominence not “*to impacts*” but “*to decisions*” because it should be based on the integration of the environmental issues into all stages of the decision-making process. Thus the Strategic Environmental Assessment becomes a tool, which implementation can provide the transition from “standard” towards “sustainable” approach to environmental protection. In our country there are enough documents (plans, strategies and programmes) to ensure the application of this approach. It is obvious that the environmental assessment procedure provided by the Environmental Protection Act has a long way in order to integrate in the decision-making process and to become an operating tool promoting sustainable development.

The recognized need for an integrated approach and the existing political will provide a sound basis for Bulgaria's contribution to the joint efforts aimed at achieving better environmental status. We are especially active in our efforts the neighboring Balkan and Black Sea countries to accede to the implementation of the requirements of the Espoo Convention. In this respect Bulgaria supports the efforts for sustainable development on a global scale and calls for targeted and coordinated action-oriented measures on a regional level which will bring practical results through various international programmes and initiatives in this field.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The right to healthy and favourable environment is not just a basic human right. It is our mission as politicians and human beings to conduct a responsible policy with regard to the management and rational use of this resource in the spirit of international solidarity and cooperation. Our goal should be not only to avoid possible future conflicts, but also to provide future generations with opportunities for a better life.

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen.