

Statement

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on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context

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Ministers and Distinguished Guests,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be in Cavtat at this important event of Espoo Convention.

I wish, first of all, to thank the Croatian Government for hosting this meeting. I also would like to congratulate meeting organisers for the interesting and stimulating programme which should ensure a high level debate.

The meeting is the opportunity to go into the major issues in greater depth and to allow us to share and promote best practice of the Espoo Convention application. It will increase awareness and establish essential contacts, which are necessary to ensure that environmental impacts caused by specific sectors' activities can be better evaluated and taken into account in decision-making process.

The panel discussions we are launching today are aimed also to discuss how strategic environmental assessment fits into the decision-making process. Therefore, it is clear that we will be debating major issues, which may concern the future of our region and which are critical in supporting sustainable development.

Inevitably, our panel discussions will touch on some of issues, such as capacity building and quality assurance in environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment. These issues are precisely the ones, which we been working with last few years.

The initiatives taken, even if they started slowly in the beginning, going now in the right direction. In the last three years capacity building issues in Latvia were taken on board as part of a strong commitment to ensure better implementation of new environmental policy instruments. The approach used in introducing strategic environmental assessment procedure in Latvia showed that raising of knowledge on role of SEA by providing information, knowledge and experience are very important in preparing state, regional and municipal institutions and other interested organisations to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment. Last year we completed a new capacity building project, which aimed at:

- training a team of national experts as trainers within the public administration capable to make Strategic Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes; and
- providing appropriate assistance for assessing the environmental impacts of the Latvia's Single Programming Document and Complement in the guidance of national and international experts.

The project conclusions recognised few preconditions for successful results, which I would like to share with you all present here.

The capacity building program and work methods used were based on practical case studies, that helped to focus on applicable SEA process elements. During the project learning by doing approach was used to prepare state, regional and

municipal institutions to be ready to use the knowledge gained at their work in future when dealing with drafting of new plan or programme.

Another important point to be mentioned is continuous co-operation with our neighbours on transboundary environmental assessment issues. Process of finalising Multilateral Agreement between Latvia, Belarus and Russia on Protecting and Using of Transboundary Water Resources of River Daugava is currently under discussion, and I hope that all three neighbouring countries will be able to celebrate the signing of the Agreement in the very near future.

This new draft Agreement is presenting a good example for strengthening co-operation with other UNECE conventions (e.g. the Convention of the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)). To ensure necessary protection and ecologically sound management of transboundary river Daugava, principles and procedural elements of the Espoo Convention are incorporated in this Agreement.

Ministers, Ladies and gentlemen,

This meeting sends a positive and concrete message to those who will use these discussions to move forward on the issues of environmental assessment. These few days of discussions should allow for conceptual developments of the future activities.

I am convinced that you will share the experience gained from these discussions within your own countries to assist dissemination of good practice.

Thank you for your attention.