



7th INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON ENERGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The role of Strategic Environmental Assessment in renewable energy planning

Summary of the workshop

The workshop was organized by the UNECE as an activity within the framework of the ‘Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighbourhood’ (EaP GREEN) programme.¹ The event aimed to illustrate application of SEA in the field of renewable energy emphasizing its role in facilitating investments in renewable energy through identifying and mitigating potential risks early in planning cycle, and thus streamlining project level development.

Mr. Nazir Ramazanov, Adviser to Chairman, the State Agency on Alternative and Renewable Energy Sources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in his opening remarks emphasized the role of renewable energy in building a more sustainable future. He also pointed out that Azerbaijan has recently implemented the pilot SEA on the National Strategy of Azerbaijan on the Use of Alternative and Renewable Energy Sources 2015 – 2020, and acknowledged its contribution to developing the Strategy.

Mr. Martin Smutny, consultant to the UNECE secretariat to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, launched his presentation by a short video introducing benefits of a harmonised SEA procedure set by the UNECE Protocol on SEA. He further provided that SEA can be seen as tool which helps to maximise environmental and social positive effects resulting from renewable energy development, while avoiding or minimizing potential adverse impacts.

The session on benefits of SEA application in the renewable energy sector was opened by Ms. Marta Brkić, Managing Director, Dvokut ECRO d.o.o, Croatia, who summarized the actual status of SEA application in energy and renewable energy sectors – mainly related to the wind and hydropower – in the South-East European countries. Ms. Brkić shortly described several examples of outcomes the SEA can deliver and concluded that while SEA application is essential to prepare plans and programmes which integrate relevant environmental and health concerns, its avoidance may result in higher possibility that an individual project might be rejected due to its significant adverse environmental risks.

Ms. Aysel Babayeva, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan, presented the pilot SEA of the National Strategy on the Use of Alternative and Renewable Energy Sources 2015 – 2020 of Azerbaijan and its main objectives – to ‘test’ SEA procedure as outlined in the draft national SEA legal framework, and to provide recommendations for environmental optimization of the Strategy and further development of renewable energy in the country. After introducing an approach to SEA and main analyses conducted, the main results of the pilot SEA were summarized – among others, it provided opportunities to avoid potential conflicts between energy resources development and other economic sectors, and formulated recommendations to be considered in the Action Plan to the Strategy, as well as the framework for environmental assessment to be carried out at the project level.

Ms. Olena Borysova, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), presented the EBRD’s experience with SEA from the perspective of the International Financial Institution. On two practical examples

¹ The EaP GREEN programme is funded by the European Union and other donors, and is jointly implemented by the four partner organisations: OECD, UNEP, UNECE and UNIDO.

– from Ukraine and Kazakhstan – the types of outputs and deliverables SEA can generate were illustrated. Ms. Borysova provided that spatial analysis can indicate environmental sensitivity to potential renewable energy projects where development of renewable energy is likely to require developers to demonstrate with certainty that impacts can be avoided or minimized to acceptable levels.

Concluding discussion confirmed that SEA can ensure that renewable energy development is in line with environmental and health objectives and commitments a given country has adopted. SEA can streamline development of specific projects and relevant project-level assessment (EIA), for instance by identifying locations where major environmental or health risks can be excluded or mitigated. Therefore, development and approval of specific projects including EIA can be carried out without major problems. At the policy level, SEA can facilitate the discussion on scenarios for renewable energy development. Thus it can contribute to selection of the most appropriate energy mix, which considers environmental and health risks as well as benefits of all reasonable alternatives, and thus enables objective comparison. Also, SEA applied for policies and strategies can support proper consideration of renewable energy development in sub-sequent planning schemes (e.g. spatial or land-use planning) by providing recommendations on priority renewable energy resources to be further developed and/or locations to be primarily explored.