

**‘Towards a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system in Belarus’
Final event on SEA and EIA component within the EaP
GREEN**

20 December 2017

Hotel Being

Minsk, Belarus

Event Report

December 2017

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1. Background information

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is seen as an essential planning tool for an environmentally sustainable economic development, which can support country's efforts in greening its economy. It is a step-by-step procedure to integrate green economy targets and other sustainability issues into strategic planning and decision-making to ensure that environmental and health implications of decisions are taken into account before they are made. A SEA is applied to governmental plans, programmes, or policy documents in accordance with requirements of the UNECE Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Espoo Convention (Protocol on SEA) and the EU SEA Directive. In June 2011, at the fifth Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention which served as the first Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on SEA, Belarus expressed its wish for technical assistance on the improvement of legislation, which would enable an accession to the Protocol.

The “Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighborhood” (EaP GREEN) project was launched in 2013 to support the six European Union's Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine – to progress faster towards a green economy through better management of natural capital supporting a higher economic productivity and competitiveness. The above listed EaP GREEN countries made their commitments related to the transition towards a green economy in the 2011 and 2013 Declarations of the EU Eastern Partnership Summits and on other international fora.

The EaP GREEN has supported countries in developing methodological, legal, and conceptual material based on international good practice adapted to the country conditions and needs. In-country pilot projects have also been implemented to demonstrate how relevant policies and tools can be applied in practice. The EaP GREEN has been jointly implemented by four international organizations: the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). The project has been funded by the European Union, implementing organisations, and supported by several EU and OECD countries.

Since 2013, the UNECE secretariat to the Espoo Convention has been providing assistance to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus in preparation of the legislation framework and in building capacities for application of SEA in order to support the country in developing its SEA system in line with requirements stipulated by the Protocol on SEA.

2. Objectives of the event and approach

The final event was jointly organized by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus and UNECE secretariat to the Espoo Convention within the framework of the EaP GREEN). The logistical support was provided by the UNDP office in Belarus.

The objectives of the workshop were as follows:

- To present the outcomes and results regarding SEA and EIA achieved within the EaP GREEN;
- To summarize the key principles of efficient SEA and EIA practice and its benefits;
- To discuss priorities and needs regarding further development of SEA and EIA system in the country.

A half-day event gathered altogether 9 participants (see Annex 1 to this report) from the representatives of the central authorities (ministries) responsible for sectoral planning, and other relevant governmental agencies.

The agenda of the event (see Annex 2 to this report) combined presentation on SEA and EIA activities implemented in Belarus within the EaP GREEN, and summary of main achievements and result, with facilitated discussions on remaining challenges and actions need to establish a full-fledged SEA and EIA system in the country.

The event was jointly delivered by the experts from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus and the international consultants to the UNECE.

3. Minutes of the event

The meeting was opened by Mr. Alexander Rachevsky, who introduced objectives of the workshop, its agenda, and facilitated introduction of the participants and a short discussion on their expectations from the training. He also stressed out that despite a progress Belarus has made towards SEA, there is still a need for activities to enhance SEA system. Mr. Rachevsky also acknowledged participation of representatives of the planning agencies at the meeting, which illustrates their interest in cooperation on SEA matters – this is of a particular importance as the Protocol on SEA and the Espoo Convention are not instruments belonging only to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, but other ministries are seen as partners in implementing relevant procedures. He claimed that the mechanism under the Protocol on SEA is being implemented at the national level in many countries, including Belarus, which has started to implement procedures under the Protocol in practice. There are several example of SEA application in Belarus – e.g. in water management sector. He concluded that support of the UNECE secretariat has been highly appreciated, and future cooperation will be important as Belarus considers preparation of further environmental guidelines on SEA and EIA, which would help plan/project developers to implement relevant procedures.

Following issues were raised in the discussion:

- A national methodology for SEA application does not exist;
- Steps to be implemented by the planning agencies to implement SEA procedure;
- The primary responsibility on SEA application belongs to the planning agency;
- The national training programme has been developed, in 2017 altogether 5-6 training courses were organized for SEA specialists, around 60 experts were awarded by the certificate. However, further training opportunities need to be created;
- SEA should address alternatives – however, there is no specific requirement on how many or in what level of detail the alternatives need to be develop/assessed. This is case-based, and each SEA is different;
- It would be important is to establish a roster of experts for SEA and EIA;

Mr. Martin Smutny, consultant to UNECE, presented a summary of SEA and EIA related activities implemented in Belarus in the frame of the EaP GREEN. He provided that the programme component the UNECE was in charge of implementing, aimed to promote the use of SEA and EIA as essential planning tools for an environmentally sustainable economic development. He mentioned that the activities have been carried out in close cooperation with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and coordinated with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Environment, and the ENVSEC Project ‘Managing Environment and Security Risks with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)’.

Ms. Marina Khotuleva, consultant to UNECE, presented main elements of efficient SEA and EIA system i.e.

- Procedural framework;
- Institutions and capacity;
- A strong system of quality control; and

- Political support.

She concluded that in a well-developed SEA/EIA system:

- The legislative framework is in line with international expectations.
- SEA/EIA is recognized as a standard practice.
- Adequate institutional capacity for coordination, effective administration and for conducting SEAs and EIAs.
- Quality is high and the results are accepted by relevant stakeholders/decision-makers.
- The system operates transparently and decision makers are accountable.
- There is strong political support for the system.

Following issues were raised in the discussion:

- There is a need to establish a library/database of SEA/EIA;
- Implemented SEA/EIA transboundary pilot project (e.g. with Russian Federation) in energy or transport (e.g. within Silk Road initiative) sectors;
- Also, urban development or spatial plans would be good candidates for SEA pilot;

The final discussion was dedicated to the way forward towards further improvements of SEA and EIA systems in the country. Among other issues, it was mentioned that SEA process is new for all authorities, and it would be need to secure relevant financial allocation on SEA implementation in the national budget (see section 4 summarizing main points).



4. Conclusions

Following conclusions can be summarized from the discussions within the event:

Further development of the SEA system in Belarus will require continuation of capacity building to coordinate and carry out SEA procedures – environmental and health authorities, planning agencies, as well as experts and practitioners can be considered as the key target groups. Awareness raising on SEA benefits and the importance of public participation among decision-makers and the public, respectively, is also needed.

Following specific issues were mentioned:

- Pilot SEA (optimally with transboundary aspect) may provide opportunity for hands-on experience for relevant stakeholders and can be efficiently combined with trainings and workshops. Possibility of interaction with Russian Federation in case of the transboundary impacts of implementation of SEA/EIA pilot project in energy or transport (e.g. within Silk Road initiative) sectors was mentioned;
- Urban development or spatial plans as well as economic development plans (under responsibility of the Ministry of Economy) represent another candidates for pilot SEA;
- Obviously, the issue of the budget needed for SEA, is of a particular importance. Therefore, it is important that the Ministry further communicates with the planning agencies at the national and the local level to ensure that appropriate amounts are allocated in respective budgetary documents for further application of SEA.
- Existing training scheme on SEA and EIA would need to be further developed and enhanced to cover the demand for SEA and EIA specialists;
- The training scheme can be linked to the scheme of certificates i.e. after successfully passing the training scheme, a person would be awarded by the certificate that he/she is trained specialist on SEA or EIA;
- A national methodology for SEA application providing detailed guide on the steps to be implemented by the planning agencies to implement SEA procedure, should be developed;
- Library/database of SEA/EIA documents and information should be developed and established.

It was concluded that above proposal should be reflected in the EaP GREEN follow up project (EU4Environment).



5. Annexes

5.1 Annex 1: List of participants

№	Name	Institution
1	Belevitch, Oxana L.	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and subordinate organizations
2	Rachevsky, Alexander N.	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and subordinate organizations
3	Belevitch, Oxana L.	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and subordinate organizations
4	Bulai A.V.	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and subordinate organizations
5	Shpak, A.N.	Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus
6	Bakinovskaya, O.A.	National Center of legislation and legal research of the Republic of Belarus (NTsZPI)
7	Naumchik, A.A.	The Chamber of representatives of the National Assembly
8	Sinitsa, T.S.	EcoDom
9	Timofeev, A.V.	UE "MinskGrado"

5.2 Annex 2: Agenda

‘Towards a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system in Belarus’

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The "Greening Economies in the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood" (EaP GREEN) project assists six countries of the European Union Eastern Neighbourhood Partnership including Belarus in progressing faster towards a green economy framework.¹ Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) have been promoted within the EaP GREEN as tools to integrate green economy targets and other sustainability issues into strategic and project-related decision-making to ensure that environmental and health implications of decisions are taken into account before they are made.

Since 2013, the UNECE within the EaP GREEN framework has been assisting Belarus in developing the national SEA and EIA system. The objective of the final event is to:

- To present the outcomes and results regarding SEA and EIA achieved within the EaP GREEN;
- To summarize the key principles of efficient SEA and EIA practice and its benefits;
- To discuss priorities and needs regarding further development of SEA and EIA system in the country.

The event is organized by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) within the framework of the EaP GREEN. The logistical support is provided by the UNDP office in Belarus.

The workshop will invite representatives of all relevant stakeholders – environmental and health authorities, planning agencies and institutes, local authorities, experts and practitioners, as well as representatives of NGOs.

Agenda

09.00 – 09.30	Registration of participants and welcome coffee
09.30 – 09.45	Opening the meeting and welcome of the participants <i>Ms. Ia Malkina, First Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Protection of the Republic of Belarus</i> <i>Mr. Martin Smutny, EaP GREEN coordinator, consultant to UNECE</i>

¹ The EaP GREEN programme is implemented with the financial support of the European Union and other donors, and is jointly implemented by the four partner organisations: OECD, UN Environment, UNECE and UNIDO. More information can be found at <http://www.green-economies-eap.org/>.



09.45 – 10.30	<p>The progress we have made – an overview of the development of SEA and EIA system in Belarus since 2013, major results and achievement</p> <p><i>Ms. Nadezhda Zdanevich, Consultant, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection</i></p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>
10.30 – 11.00	<p>Overview of the UNECE technical assistance within EaP GREEN in Belarus</p> <p><i>Presentation by Mr. Martin Smutny, EaP GREEN coordinator, consultant to UNECE</i></p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>
11.00 – 11.15	Coffee break
11.15 – 11.45	<p>Main elements of a well-developed SEA and EIA system – what is important for efficient practice, case examples</p> <p><i>Presentation by Ms. Marina Khotuleva, consultant to UNECE</i></p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>
11.45 – 12.45	<p>What needs to be further enhanced – remaining challenges for establishing a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system</p> <p><i>Ms. Nadezhda Zdanevich, Consultant, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection</i></p> <p><i>Group work – identification of priorities and needs to further develop national SEA and EIA system</i></p> <p><i>Presentation of results</i></p>
12.45 – 13.00	<p>Closing remarks – way forward</p> <p><i>Ms. Nadezhda Zdanevich, Consultant, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Martin Smutny, EaP GREEN coordinator, consultant to UNECE</i></p>
13.00	Lunch