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Economic Commission for Europe

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment
in a Transboundary Context

Eighth session

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment in
a Transboundary Context serving as the
Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on
Strategic Environmental Assessment

Fourth session

Vilnius (online), 8–11 December 2020

Report of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on its eighth session and of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on its fourth session

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I. Introduction

1. The eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol) were held from 8 to 11 December 2020. Initially planned to take place in Vilnius, at the invitation of the Government of Lithuania, the sessions were held remotely due to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic-related restrictions on physical meetings and travel. The Government of Lithuania provided for the online platform and the interpretation.

2. The Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol convened in joint and individual meetings throughout the sessional period. The present report summarizes the work of both sessions. The term “Meetings of the Parties” refers to both bodies meeting in a joint session. For practical reasons, the decisions adopted at the sessions are being issued in addenda to the present report.

A. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following Parties to the Convention and the Protocol, as well as other member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uzbekistan. The European Union was represented by the European Commission. Statements on behalf of the European Union and its member States were made by Germany, which held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2020, and by the European Commission.

4. Representatives of the ECE secretariat attended the meeting. Representatives of the three following United Nations bodies participated: the International Atomic Energy Agency the United Nations Environment Programme; and the World Health Organization (WHO). The following other intergovernmental organizations took part: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and its Nuclear Energy Agency. The European Investment Bank also took part. The following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were represented: the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network; Ecohome (Belarus); the European Atomic Forum; Friends of the Earth Europe (Belgium); Greenpeace International; Green Women Analytical Environmental Agency (Kazakhstan); Guta Environmental Law Association (Hungary); Independent Ecological Expertise (Kyrgyzstan); the International Association for Impact Assessment; Nuclear Transparency Watch; Society and Environment (Ukraine); the World Nuclear Association (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); and Ökobüro (Austria). In addition, academics from Hokkaido University (Japan) and the National University of Singapore attended the meeting.

B. Organizational matters

5. The Chair of the Bureau, Mr. George Kremlis, opened the meeting. The Secretary to the Convention and the Protocol informed the delegations that the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment, together with the Bureau, had recommended that Mr. Kremlis be elected as Chair of the general segment of the sessions. The Meetings of the Parties elected Mr. Kremlis accordingly.

6. The Acting Minister of Environment of Lithuania, His Excellency Mr. Kęstutis Mažeika, welcomed the delegates.

7. The Meetings of the Parties adopted their agenda (ECE/MP.EIA/29–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/12),¹ which had been prepared by the secretariat in agreement with the Bureau and the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

8. The Meetings of the Parties acknowledged the informal note on procedural matters of relevance to meetings with remote participation due to extraordinary circumstances that was prepared by the Bureau with support of the secretariat and in consultation with the Treaty Section of the Office of Legal Affairs.² Further to the proposal by the delegation of the European Union, the Parties agreed to include in the workplan for 2021–2023 a possible further clarification of procedural matters of relevance to meetings with remote participation.

9. The Meetings of the Parties noted the Chair's informal report on the credentials of the representatives of Parties attending the sessions. Due to COVID-19-related logistical challenges and delays in postal services, the Meetings of the Parties exceptionally agreed to also accept copies of the valid credentials, subject to the subsequent submission of the originals to the secretariat as soon as possible. The Chair reported that, of the 45 Parties to the Convention, 37 Parties attended the sessions with credentials and 1 without them. Of the 33 Parties to the Protocol, 26 Parties attended with credentials.

10. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Convention, its two amendments and the Protocol. The Meetings of the Parties noted the steps taken by delegations towards ratification, with Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland having advanced the furthest regarding the first amendment. However, they noted with concern that five further ratifications were still needed for that amendment to become operational, allowing non-ECE countries to accede to the Convention. Consequently, they urged Armenia, Belgium, North Macedonia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to make every effort to ratify the first amendment as soon as possible in the next intersessional period. Moreover, all Parties that had not yet done so were urged to ratify the second amendment (i.e. Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) to ensure unified application of the Convention by all the Parties thereto. Lastly, the Meetings of the Parties urged the signatories to the Protocol that had not already done so (i.e. Belgium, France, Georgia, Greece, Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) to ratify that instrument and encouraged the beneficiary countries of technical pre-accession assistance on strategic environmental assessment to accede thereto. Greece reported that it was currently considering the ratification of the Protocol and also of the 2008 Multilateral agreement among the countries of South-Eastern Europe for implementation of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (the Bucharest Agreement). The Meetings of the Parties also invited Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia to accede to/ratify the Bucharest Agreement. All concerned Parties were invited to report on progress towards ratification to the Bureau and the Working Group in 2021.

II. Outstanding issues

11. The Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol reviewed and agreed on outstanding issues, as outlined in paragraphs 12–27 below, prior to forwarding them for adoption at the high-level segment. The proposals for amendments to the draft documents that Parties had communicated to the secretariat had been made available to the registered participants prior to the sessions. The secretariat had also compiled and presented them on the screen during the session. After the deliberations, the secretariat posted the finalized,

¹ All official and informal meeting documentation for the sessions, the programme of the side event and other information, such as presentations that were provided to the secretariat and a list of participants, are available at www.unece.org/environmental-policy/events/meeting-parties-espoo-convention-8th-session-and-meeting-parties.

² Available at http://staging2.unece.org.net4all.ch/fileadmin/DAM/env/cia/documents/MOP8_Vilnius/Informal_docs/Note_on_procedural_issues_MOP8_and_MOPMOP4_FINAL_by_Bureau_revNov2020.pdf.

agreed texts of the draft decisions and documents on the meeting web page in track-changes markup, to provide a further possibility for the Parties to verify them, as needed, prior to their adoption. The Meetings of the Parties expressed appreciation for the availability of most amendment proposals well in advance of the sessions, which had considerably facilitated the meeting preparations and the reaching of a consensus on outstanding issues.

A. Outstanding issues relevant to the Convention and the Protocol

1. Financial arrangements for 2021–2023

12. The secretariat presented the draft report on the budget and financial arrangements 2017–2020 (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/2–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/2), as well as information on recent contributions to the trust fund of the Convention and the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.4).

13. The Meetings of the Parties noted that contributions in the period 2017–2020 had continued to be insufficient, unpredictable, unequally distributed and unsustainable, with 3 Parties providing 60 per cent of all the contributions and 12 Parties not contributing at all. The Meetings expressed appreciation for the additional funding that several Parties had provided to fill the six-month funding gap created by the unbudgeted extension of the intersessional period until December 2020. The Meetings also noted the positive balance of the trust fund as at the end of September 2020, which was mainly due to the savings realized in travel support of participants to meetings held online. The Parties expressed their satisfaction with the use of the trust fund and invited the secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, to finalize the financial report with data until end of 2020.

14. The Meetings of the Parties thanked delegations for the contributions they had pledged in advance of the sessions to fund the implementation of the workplan for the intersessional period 2021–2023 (see annex I below), expressing appreciation for the substantially increased pledges, in particular from Italy, but also from the European Union and a few other Parties. The Meetings expressed regret, however, that the total value of the pledges remained largely insufficient to cover the resource requirements for the implementation of the workplan (leaving a deficit of over \$320,000). Thanking Norway for its long-standing and substantial support, the Meetings noted the discontinuation, by Norway, of the large grant that, since 2012, had represented 25 per cent of the trust fund's revenue. To bridge the budgetary gap, the Meetings urged Parties that had not yet made pledges to do so by mid-January and/or to provide unpledged contributions during the intersessional period.

15. The Meetings of the Parties then considered and agreed on a revised draft decision VIII/1–IV/1 on financial arrangements for 2021–2023 (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/1). That decision established a financial scheme for funding the adopted workplans according to which all the Parties had a duty to contribute to the sharing of the costs that were not covered by the United Nations regular budget

2. Adoption of the workplan

16. The Meetings of the Parties reviewed and revised draft decision VIII/2–IV/2 on the adoption of the workplan for the implementation of the Convention and its Protocol for the period 2021–2023, its annexes I and II outlining the workplan activities and the corresponding resource requirements, respectively, as well as its annex III listing additional activities that could be implemented subject to the availability of funding (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/1). Since the contributions pledged by Parties had been insufficient to fund all the activities listed in annex I, several of them, including financial travel support to eligible participants, had been made conditional to sufficient additional unpledged contributions being made available by Parties.

17. The Meetings of the Parties agreed on the organization of several thematic workshops or seminars during the meetings of the Working Group and/or the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties by the volunteering lead countries and organizations. During the sessions, the list of the thematic events for the next intersessional period was complemented with the following:

(a) A seminar on the consideration of alternatives to and the rationale for selected options of the proposed activities in the environmental impact assessment documentation, to be organized by Belarus, the secretariat and interested Parties, with possible funding from the EU4Environment programme to be confirmed. Following discussions on the proposal of the delegation of Belarus to develop guidance on that topic, and further to a suggestion put forward by the delegation of the European Union, the Meetings of the Parties had agreed to the holding of the seminar;³

(b) A seminar/workshop for promoting the application of strategic environmental assessment in development cooperation, to be organized by Italy and other interested Parties with support from the secretariat.

3. Long-term strategy and the action plan for the Convention and the Protocol

18. The Meetings of the Parties reviewed and finalized the draft long-term strategy and the action plan for the Convention and the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/3–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/3) extending until 2030. The secretariat described the formatting and editorial changes to the document that would be required prior to its issuing. The Parties noted the information.

4. Declaration

19. The Meetings of the Parties agreed on a revised version of the draft Vilnius declaration (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/5–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/5). The representative of WHO stressed the importance of finalizing the guidance on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment as a priority, including in the light of the current pandemic (see also para. 33 below).

5. Nomination of officers

20. The secretariat presented an informal list of nominations of officers to the Bureau, the Working Group and the Implementation Committee, as well as criteria for officers and other procedural guidance, regarding functions and tasks of the Bureau (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.6). The list of nominations was completed during the session with the nominations by Slovenia of an alternate Chair of the Bureau to Greece and by Ukraine of an alternate Bureau member to Switzerland for Protocol matters. The criteria and procedural guidance were agreed without amendments.

B. Outstanding issues relevant to the Convention

1. Review of compliance with the Convention

21. The Chair of the Implementation Committee, Mr. Romas Švedas (Lithuania), presented draft decision VIII/4 on general issues of compliance with the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/10) and country-specific draft decisions on compliance VIII/4a, b, d and e (respectively, ECE/MP.EIA/2020/11, ECE/MP.EIA/2020/12, ECE/MP.EIA/2020/14 and ECE/MP.EIA/2020/15). The First Vice-Chair of the Committee, Maria do Carmo Figueira (Portugal), presented draft decision VIII/4c on compliance by Belarus with its obligations under the Convention in respect of the Belarusian nuclear power plant in Ostrovets (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/13). They explained that the Committee had finalized the draft decisions for consideration of the Meeting of the Parties at its forty-eighth session (Geneva, 1–4 September 2020), considering, as appropriate, the additional information and comments that Parties had provided before, during and after the ninth meeting of the Working Group (Geneva, 24–26 August 2020).

³ The delegation of Belarus requested that the meeting report reflect the fact that Belarus had, in a spirit of cooperation and compromise, agreed to the suggestion made by the European Union, considering the thematic seminar as a preliminary stage for the development of guidance, possibly in the next intersessional period. Moreover, mindful of the interest of the European Union in the subject, the delegation expressed the hope that the European Union would be involved in the organization of the seminar.

22. The Meeting of the Parties to the Convention first reviewed and deliberated on the country-specific draft decisions, prior to addressing draft decision VIII/4 on general issues of compliance. Draft decisions VIII/4a–c on compliance by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus with their obligations under the Convention, respectively, were agreed without amendment. For the remaining draft decisions (VIII/4 on general issues and VIII/4d and e on compliance by Ukraine with its obligations under the Convention) the Parties agreed on a number of revisions.

2. Applicability of the Convention to the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants

23. The representatives of Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland summarized the preparatory process for the draft guidance on the applicability of the Convention to the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/7) developed by an ad hoc working group under their co-chairmanship during the intersessional period. The Co-Chairs stressed the extent of the efforts and difficulties in producing a validated draft due to the differing views of Parties on the topic and the pandemic, outlining also the few open issues that the ad hoc group had left for the Meetings of the Parties to decide. The Meeting of the Parties to the Convention welcomed the extensive work of the ad hoc group in the drafting of the guidance, highlighting the key role of the Co-Chairs in that regard, and reiterated the urgent need for guidance. It agreed on a finalized version of the draft guidance based on compromise proposals by the delegation of the European Union, which had been circulated to the registered participants in advance of the sessions. Upon endorsement of the guidance at the high-level segment, the Meetings of the Parties requested the secretariat to arrange for its publication.

24. The Meetings of the Parties also reviewed and agreed on a revised draft decision VIII/6 on the applicability of the Convention to the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/7).

3. Reporting and review of implementation of the Convention

25. The secretariat presented draft decision VIII/5 on reporting and review of implementation of the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/7), which reproduced the findings from the draft sixth review of implementation of the Convention agreed by the Working Group at its previous meeting (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/8). The Meeting of the Parties finalized the draft decision, taking onboard revisions proposed by the delegation of the European Union.

C. Outstanding issues relevant to the Protocol

1. Review of compliance with the Protocol

26. The Chair of the Implementation Committee presented draft decision IV/4 on general issues of compliance with the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/9). The Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol agreed to forward the draft decision to the high-level segment without amendment.

2. Reporting and review of implementation of the Protocol

27. The secretariat presented draft decision IV/5 on reporting and review of implementation of the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/7), which reproduced the findings from the draft third review of implementation of the Protocol agreed by the Working Group at its previous meeting (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/8).

III. Review of the workplan

28. The Meetings of the Parties reviewed recent progress in the implementation of the workplan for the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol for the period 2017–2020 (see ECE/MP.EIA/23/Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/7/Add.1, decision VII/3–III/3, annex I), as presented in informal document ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.5. The secretariat pointed out

that despite pandemic-related challenges, all the official meetings had been held and approximately 75 per cent of the workplan activities (including 100 per cent of the priority 1 activities) had been implemented and a further 15 per cent were being completed, representing a total implementation rate of 90 per cent. Furthermore, several additional activities related to the workplan had been completed during the period.

A. Compliance with and implementation of the Convention and the Protocol

29. The Chair of the Implementation Committee reported on the Implementation Committee's activities since the previous sessions of the Meetings of the Parties in June 2017 (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/4–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/4). He highlighted that the mandated revision of draft decision VII/2 on the review of compliance with the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/2017/8) in advance of the intermediary sessions of the Meetings of the Parties (Geneva, 2–5 February 2019) had considerably delayed the Committee's consideration of numerous pending and new compliance issues. Moreover, pending the development of guidance on the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants, the Committee could not complete its deliberations on the related cases. To tackle its considerable workload, the Committee had: examined ways to improve the efficiency of its working methods; extended its sessions by one day; and held one additional session (1–4 September 2020), as well as several informal meetings and consultations in between its sessions. In 2020, due to the pandemic, the Committee's sessions had been held online and without interpretation. The Meeting of the Parties noted the information, expressing appreciation for the extensive efforts of the Committee and the importance of its work.

30. The Meetings of the Parties took note of the outcomes of the legislative assistance provided by the secretariat to support the development or amendment of the national legislation for the implementation of the Convention and/or the Protocol by the following countries:

- (a) Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova, with funding from the EU4Environment programme;
- (b) Kazakhstan, with funding from Switzerland and in cooperation with OSCE;
- (c) Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with funding from Germany, Switzerland and OSCE.

B. Subregional cooperation and capacity-building

31. The Meetings of the Parties noted the information provided by:

- (a) The secretariat and the concerned countries, on a subregional seminar on the practical application of strategic environmental assessment and transboundary environmental impact assessment in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, held online on 26 and 27 October 2020 with funding from the EU4Environment programme;
- (b) Denmark, on a subregional workshop for the Baltic Sea area, which it had organized online on 27 October 2020, jointly with Finland and Sweden;
- (c) OSCE and the concerned countries on the implementation of a joint OSCE/ECE project "Strengthening national and regional capacities and cooperation on strategic environmental assessment (SEA) in Central Asia, including as a response to climate change", funded by Germany, Switzerland and ECE.

C. Promoting ratification and application of the Protocol and the Convention

32. The secretariat reported that the International Association for Impact Assessment had published a two-page informal pamphlet, or “FasTips, on the Convention⁴, prepared by the secretariat and agreed by the Working Group at its eighth meeting (Geneva, 26–28 November 2019) (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2019/2, para. 37), after completing it with a reference to the Protocol. The separate draft FasTips on the Protocol, as agreed by the Working Group, had not been published, as it had been seen as being too procedural. A representative of the Association provided an update on the recently issued FasTips and planned FasTips.

33. The Chair expressed regret that draft guidance on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment, prepared with funding from the European Investment Bank, had not been tabled for consideration by the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. At the previous meeting of the Working Group, the delegation of the European Union had considered that the draft document still required further work. No concrete proposals for its finalization had been put forward. Aside from highlighting the urgency to issue the guidance, including to promote healthy recovery from the pandemic, the delegation of WHO reiterated the Organization’s offer to further support that work. The Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol invited Parties to contribute in-kind expertise for the finalization of the draft guidance. The Bureau and the Working Group were to consider the way forward at their meetings in 2021.

IV. Opening ceremony of the high-level segment

34. The Chair of the general segment informed the Meetings of the Parties that the Bureau had recommended that Her Excellency Ms. Krista Mikkonen, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change of Finland, be elected as Chair of the joint high-level segment of the Convention and the Protocol. The Meetings of the Parties elected Ms. Mikkonen as Chair of the high-level segment of the Meetings of the Parties.

35. After addressing the Meetings of the Parties, the Chair of the high-level segment passed the floor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania, Her Excellency Ms. Ingrida Šimonytė, and the ECE Executive Secretary, who also made opening statements.

V. High-level event to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention

36. The Meetings of the Parties celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention during a high-level event organized by the secretariat and moderated by the Chair of the high-level segment.

37. The event started with a statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, read out by the ECE Executive Secretary. There then followed the screening of a video on the Convention prepared by the secretariat with funding from the EU4Environment programme.

38. During a panel discussion dedicated to the Convention, as described below, the moderator and invited speakers: looked back at the origins of the Convention; highlighted its benefits and achievements over the past decades; and shared visions for its future:

(a) The Chair of the high-level segment noted with satisfaction that, since the signing ceremony of the Convention held in Espoo, Finland, in February 1991, the “Espoo family” had grown to include 45 Parties, and that the number of Parties would further increase with the future opening of the Convention beyond the ECE region. She emphasized that, during its 30-year journey, the Convention had proved on a daily basis to be an important and functional platform for intergovernmental consultations on a broad range of projects with

⁴ Tea Aulavuo, “Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context”, FasTips No. 21 (May 2020). Available at <https://www.iaia.org/fasttips.php>.

transboundary environmental impacts. She listed three key success factors for the Convention's future: active participation of the Parties in the treaty bodies and workplan activities; regional cooperation – which she proposed extending to the Arctic countries; and sharing the responsibility for stable and sufficient financing;

(b) Mr. Robert Connelly (Connelly Environmental Assessment Consulting, Incorporated, Canada), also known as “the father of the Espoo Convention”, declared that the need for the Convention was as valid today as it was when the instrument had first been developed. He estimated that the Convention's implementation appeared to have realized the overall benefits foreseen during its development, and recommended that Parties increasingly document their success stories, especially those related to sustainable development, one of the Convention's overall objectives;

(c) Mr. Vitalijus Auglys (Lithuania) reported on the substantial and active application of the Convention by Lithuania, both as a Party of origin and as an affected Party. He stressed the importance of the Convention's application, especially to nuclear energy-related activities, as well as its benefits and value added to projects and developers;

(d) Ms. Martine Rohn (Switzerland) underscored the Convention's usefulness over previous decades in fostering international cooperation and in enhancing environmental governance and transparency in decision-making. She stressed the present and future importance of the instrument, including for: recovery from the pandemic; implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and climate change-related goals; guiding public investments towards sustainable infrastructure projects; and, possibly, enhancing mineral resources governance. She emphasized that Switzerland had consistently promoted the Convention's implementation across the ECE region and would continue to do so, expressing the hope that non-ECE countries could also soon accede to the treaty;

(e) Ms. Nino Tandilashvili (Georgia) informed the meeting about the adoption by Georgia of legislation that fully complied with the Convention and had significantly improved public involvement in the decision-making process. She thanked ECE and the European Union for having supported her country's legal reforms. She also underlined the Convention's important role in promoting information exchange on environmental issues and in enhancing intergovernmental dialogue to ensure fairer international decision-making;

(f) Mr. Sokhib Yulodshev (Uzbekistan) reported on his country's efforts to align the national environmental impact assessment system with the Convention, including with a view to greening the economy. Currently, the country was assessing the feasibility of acceding to the Convention, wishing to enhance cooperation with the other Central Asian countries and to attract more sustainable investments. Uzbekistan was also keen to cooperate with the current Convention Parties and learn from their experience in applying the Convention;

(g) Mr. Andriy Andrushevych (the NGO Society and Environment, Ukraine), underscored that the Convention had evolved from a stamped and signed document into a real instrument for environmental civil society organizations, in particular in the previous 20 years, and that, from a civil society perspective, it was a success story. He also stressed that, currently, the Convention, together with its Protocol, represented a complex multipiece process reaching far out to the subregions, countries, local communities and citizens. He concluded by stating that the Convention's future was being built by all the stakeholders together, with bigger or smaller steps through: transboundary negotiations; the organization of seminars; and the translation of brief videos/information materials into national languages;

(h) Ms. Mari Koyano (Hokkaido University, Japan) described some of the Convention's distinctive features and stressed the treaty's value in the development of international environmental law. She presented synergy effects between the Convention and other international instruments, which promoted sustainable development in various ways. The Convention could, for example, substantially strengthen procedural requirements of other instruments. She also informed the meeting about the growing awareness of and the great potential for transboundary environmental impact assessment in the Asian region to address the increasing number of hazardous activities within that region. In her view, the Convention should be given more attention in the Asian context, and the Asian countries

could consider either acceding to the Convention or developing their own arrangements based on the lessons learnt from its application.

39. A representative of OSCE presented a birthday present prepared by the Organization: a cartoon illustrating selected elements of the Convention and its Protocol.

40. After moderating a question and answer session, the Chair thanked the speakers and summarized the discussions.

41. The Meetings of the Parties expressed their gratitude for the organization of the anniversary event and all the speakers and asked that the presentations be made available on the meeting web page.

VI. Statements by ministers and high-level representatives

42. At the high-level segment, the delegations of the following countries made statements: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. In addition, the European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries and a representative of Germany spoke on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The heads of the delegations of the International Atomic Energy Agency, OSCE and WHO also made statements. The Meetings of the Parties asked that the statements be made available on the website of the Convention, subject to agreement by the delegations concerned.

VII. Adoption of decisions and the Vilnius Declaration

43. Having reviewed the changes agreed on earlier in the sessions, the Meetings of the Parties proceeded with the adoption of decisions and a declaration.

44. The Meetings of the Parties jointly adopted the Vilnius Declaration and the following decisions:

- (a) Decision on financial arrangements for 2021–2023 (VIII/1–IV/1);
- (b) Decision on the adoption of the workplan (VIII/2–IV/2);
- (c) Decision on the long term-strategy and the action plan for the Convention and its Protocol (VIII/3–IV/3).

45. The Meeting of the Parties to the Convention adopted the following decisions:

- (a) Decisions on the review of compliance with the Convention (VIII/4 and VIII/4 a–e);
- (b) Decision on reporting and review of implementation of the Convention (VIII/5);
- (c) Decision on the applicability of the Convention to the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants (VIII/6).

46. The Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol adopted the following decisions:

- (a) Decision on general issues of compliance with the Protocol (IV/4);
- (b) Decision on reporting and review of implementation of the Protocol (IV/5).

VIII. Election of officers for the next intersessional period

47. The Meetings of the Parties thanked the outgoing Chairs and members of the treaty bodies, and elected the following officers for the next intersessional period:

- (a) Ms. Dorota Toryfter-Szumańska (Poland) as Chair of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment and Ms. Larissa Lukina (Belarus) and Ms. Anna Maria Maggiore (Italy) as Vice-Chairs;

(b) Mr. Kremlis (Greece) as the Chair of the Bureau, and Ms. Vesna Kolar-Planinšič (Slovenia) as his alternate for Protocol matters. As members or Vice-Chairs of the Bureau, the Meetings elected Ms. Milena Novakova (European Commission) and Ms. Martine Rohn-Brossard (Switzerland) and Ms. Olena Miskun (Ukraine) as alternate to Ms. Rohn-Brossard for Protocol matters. As in the past, the Chair and the Vice-Chairs of the Working Group and the Chair and first Vice-Chair of the Implementation Committee would also serve in the Bureau;

(c) Five new members of the Implementation Committee for Convention and Protocol matters and their alternates: Mr. Christian Baumgartner and his alternate (to be named later) (Austria); Mr. Joe Ducombe and his alternate Ms. Judith Scheer (Luxembourg); Ms. Heidi Stockhaus and her alternate Mr. Christof Sangenstedt (Germany); and Ms. Barbora Donevová and her alternate Mr. Roman Skorka (Slovakia). Having already served in the Committee for two terms, Ms. Zsuzsanna Pocsai (Hungary) was exceptionally re-elected for one more term. Her alternate would be nominated later. The newly elected members were to join the following continuing members of the Committee: Ms. Aysel Babayeva (Azerbaijan), a Committee member for Convention matters, and Mr. Lasse Tallskog (Finland) as her alternate for Protocol matters; Ms. Maria do Carmo Figueira (Portugal); and Mr. Anders Bengtsson (Sweden). The Committee was to elect its own chair from among its members when it first met in its new composition (Geneva (online), 2–5 February 2021). All Parties elected to the Committee that had not yet done so were invited to nominate alternate members by that meeting.

48. The Meetings of the Parties agreed on election criteria and procedural guidance regarding the Bureau and invited the secretariat to record them in the report (see annex II below).

IX. Date and venue of next meetings

49. The Meetings of the Parties agreed on a provisional calendar of official meetings in 2021–2023 (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.7). The Meetings decided that the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention would be held in conjunction with the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol and would be preliminary scheduled for December 2023. Unless hosted by a volunteering Party, the sessions would be held in Geneva. Parties to the Convention and the Protocol were invited to come forward with offers to host the sessions by the meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment in 2022.

X. Conclusion of the session

50. The Meetings of the Parties agreed on the main decisions taken during the sessional period, as presented by the secretariat. The secretariat was authorized to complete the report after the sessions, under the guidance of the Bureau.

51. In closing the joint session, the Chair thanked the delegations for their work and perseverance in finding solutions to several outstanding issues. The Meetings of the Parties also expressed their thanks to the delegation of Lithuania for providing the online platform and interpretation for the sessional period and to the secretariat for its organizational support. Lastly, the Minister of Environment of Lithuania, His Excellency Mr. Simonas Gentvilas, thanked the Chair, the delegations and the secretariat for the successful outcome of the sessions.

52. The Chair closed the joint session on Friday, 11 December 2020.

Annex I

Pledges to the budget for the intersessional period 2021–2023

<i>State (Parties and signatories)</i>	<i>Party to Convention^a</i>	<i>Party to Protocol^a</i>	<i>Total amount pledged (in original currency)</i>	<i>Pledge and/or comments</i>
Albania	Yes	Yes	— ^b	—
Armenia	Yes	Yes	—	—
Austria	Yes	Yes	\$21,000	\$21,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$7,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Azerbaijan	Yes	No	—	—
Belarus	Yes	No	—	—
Belgium	Yes	No	\$33,954	\$33,954 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, as follows: Flemish Region: \$13,785.96; Federal Government: \$10,186.66 (both paid in December 2020); Walloon Region: \$ 7,843; Brussels Capital Region: \$2,139 (to be paid in 2021).
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Yes	No	—	—
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	\$8,000	\$5,000 to the Convention and \$3,000 to the Protocol for the intersessional period 2021–2023.
Canada	Yes	No	Can\$ 15,000	Can \$15,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023 to support the implementation of the work plan for 2021–2023 under the Convention, to be paid in three instalments of Can\$ 5,000 each (2021 contribution before March 2021; 2022 contribution any time after May 2021; and 2023 contribution after April 2022).
Croatia	Yes	Yes	\$9,000	\$9,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$3,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Cyprus	Yes	Yes	—	—
Czechia	Yes	Yes	\$15,000	\$15,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$5,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Denmark	Yes	Yes	\$13,500	\$13,500 for the intersessional period 2021–2023.
Estonia	Yes	Yes	€3,000	€3,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of €1,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
European Union	Yes	Yes	€210,000	Total of €210,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of €70,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023, consisting of an unearmarked contribution of €65,000/year and of €5,000/year earmarked to cover travel- and subsistence-related costs of the Bureau Chair's

<i>State (Parties and signatories)</i>	<i>Party to Convention^a</i>	<i>Party to Protocol^a</i>	<i>Total amount pledged (in original currency)</i>	<i>Pledge and/or comments</i>
				participation at meetings under the Convention and the Protocol.
Finland	Yes	Yes	\$30,000	\$30,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments: \$10,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023 (subject to the availability of funding in the national budget).
France	Yes	No	€90,000	€90,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of €30,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Germany	Yes	Yes	\$60,000	\$60,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$20,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Georgia	No	No	—	—
Greece	Yes	No	€3,000	€3,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of €1,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023 (subject to confirmation).
Hungary	Yes	Yes	\$12,000	\$12,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$4,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Iceland	No	No	—	—
Ireland	Yes	No	\$19,500	\$19,500 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$6,500 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Italy	Yes	Yes	€240,000	€60,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023 (€20,000/year to be paid in 2021, 2022 and 2023). In addition, earmarked contributions of, in total, €180,000 for the period 2021–2023 (€60,000/year to be paid in 2021, 2022 and 2023) for two proposed workplan activities: €120,000 (or €40,000/year) for subregional cooperation activities for marine regions; and €60,000 (or €20,000/year) for a thematic seminar on promoting the application of strategic environmental assessment in development cooperation.
Kazakhstan	Yes	No	—	—
Kyrgyzstan	Yes	No	—	—
Latvia	Yes	Yes	€3,000	€3,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of €1,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Liechtenstein	Yes	No	—	—
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	\$6,000	\$6,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid by the end of 2017.

<i>State (Parties and signatories)</i>	<i>Party to Convention^a</i>	<i>Party to Protocol^a</i>	<i>Total amount pledged (in original currency)</i>	<i>Pledge and/or comments</i>
Luxembourg	Yes	Yes	—	—
Malta	Yes	Yes	—	—
Montenegro	Yes	Yes	—	—
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	€60,000	€60,000 for the intersessional period 2017–2020 (already paid).
North Macedonia	Yes	Yes	—	—
Norway	Yes	Yes	NKr 726,666	NKr 360,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of NKr 120,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023. In addition, for 2021, a one-off payment of NKr 366,666 to strengthen secretariat resources for supporting the workplan implementation.
Poland	Yes	Yes	\$21,000	\$21,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$7,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Portugal	Yes	Yes	—	—
Rep. of Moldova	Yes	No	\$1,500	\$1,500 for the next intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$500 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Romania	Yes	Yes	\$15,000	\$15,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$5,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
Russian Federation	No	No	—	—
Serbia	Yes	Yes	—	—
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	€15,000	€15,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of €5,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023, subject to approval by the Slovakian authorities within each year's budget proposal.
Slovenia	Yes	Yes	\$9,000	\$9,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$3,000 each for 2021 (already paid in December 2020), 2022 and 2023.
Spain	Yes	Yes	—	—
Sweden	Yes	Yes	\$24,900	At least \$8,300 per year for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in 2021, 2022 and 2023 (subject to confirmation).
Switzerland	Yes	No	CHF 126,000	Subject to annual budgetary approval by the Parliament, CHF 42,000 per year for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in 2021, 2022 and 2023, including an annual contribution of CHF 20,000 and an additional contribution of CHF 22,000 earmarked for

<i>State (Parties and signatories)</i>	<i>Party to Convention^a</i>	<i>Party to Protocol^a</i>	<i>Total amount pledged (in original currency)</i>	<i>Pledge and/or comments</i>
Ukraine	Yes	Yes	\$6,000	capacity-building activities in Central Asia and Azerbaijan that are to be specified subsequently. \$6,000 for the intersessional period 2021–2023, to be paid in three instalments of \$2,000 each in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
United Kingdom	Yes	No	—	—

^a These two columns reflect the status of ratification of the Convention and the Protocol as at mid-June 2017.

^b An em-dash (—) indicates that no financial resources were pledged.

Annex II

Bureau to the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment - Election criteria for the officers and guidance on tasks and procedures

I. Introduction

1. The present document outlines election criteria and guidance on tasks and procedure for the Bureau to the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, as agreed by the Meetings of the Parties to both treaties at their eighth and fourth sessions (Vilnius (online), 8–11 December 2020). It builds on proposals prepared by the Bureau with support from the secretariat that were considered by the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment at its ninth meeting (Geneva, 24–26 August 2020). As relevant, the Meetings of the Parties reserved the right to decide differently.

2. The document takes account of the: relevant provisions of the Convention and the Protocol; rules of procedure of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/2, annex I, decision I/1), which apply *mutatis mutandis* to the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (article 14 (5) of the Protocol) and to the subsidiary bodies established under them (in the absence of specific rules adopted by these bodies); relevant decisions of the Meetings of the Parties; and established practice under the two treaties.

3. Rule 2.6 of the rules of procedure defines the Bureau as “the President and one or more Vice-President(s) elected in accordance with rule 19 of the rules of procedure”,¹ but contain few other details about the Bureau.

II. Size

4. To maximise the effectiveness of its deliberations, the Bureau should consist of a maximum of 11 members, and include, in accordance with the established practice, the following five *ex-officio* members: the Chair and the first Vice-Chair of the Implementation Committee; the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment; and, as relevant, a representative of the host country for the forthcoming sessions of the Meetings of the Parties.

5. In practice, as needed, the Bureau has invited relevant stakeholders as observers to its meetings, or to parts of them, to address specific agenda items.

III. Election criteria/composition

6. The Bureau members are elected by the Meetings of the Parties. The three basic (minimum) criteria for the Bureau membership are:

- (a) Adequate representation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) subregions;²
- (b) Equal representation of the Convention and the Protocol;

¹ Referred to in practice to as “Chair” and “Vice-Chairs”.

² Rule 19.1 of the rules of procedure.

(c) Linguistic capacities: Fluency in English, the working language of the Bureau (Bureau meetings are held in English only).

7. The Bureau must also consist of an equal number of representatives of Parties to the Convention and the Protocol. The Protocol (article 14 (3)) stipulates that when any member of the Bureau represents a Party to the Convention that is not, at that time, a Party to the Protocol, a “replacement” (or an “alternate”) Bureau member must be elected by and from amongst the Parties to the Protocol. The Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol further clarified that the alternate Bureau member for Protocol matters “shall serve a term of office that expires at the same time as the term of office of the member of the Bureau whom he or she replaces” (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2, part two, decision I/1, para. 1, modifying rule 19 of the rules of procedure).

IV. Terms of office

8. To better ensure a rotation/turnover among the Bureau members, the length of the mandate/terms of service should be limited to a maximum of two consecutive terms (or intersessional periods) for each Party to the Convention and the Protocol (with the exception of the European Commission, which represents a regional economic integration organization). Parties that have never or not recently nominated officers to the Bureau or other treaty bodies should be encouraged to do so.

V. Role and tasks

9. According to rule 19 of the rules of procedure: “The Meeting of the Parties may assign specific tasks to the officers to be carried out before its next meeting.” In practice, the Bureau meets at least once a year and is consulted by the secretariat electronically, on a regular basis. Its work is supported by the secretariat.

10. The key functions of the Bureau consist of the following:

(a) Help monitor and ensure implementation of the workplans, decisions and recommendations of the Meetings of the Parties during intersessional periods, providing advice and guidance, and, if needed, making recommendations on the further development of workplans or their adaptation to changing circumstances;

(b) Help monitor the use of funding in accordance with the decisions on budget and financial arrangements of the Meetings of the Parties, involving considering annual financial reports prepared by the secretariat and agreeing on their publishing for information of the Parties; deciding on the financial support to meeting participants, including to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and countries outside the ECE region;

(c) Help ensure effective preparations of meetings of the Working Group and sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and its Protocol, including agreeing on draft agendas and draft documents, and revising documents based on the feedback;

(d) Help ensure effective conduct of business for the preparations and the conduct of the meetings of the treaty bodies in full compliance with the rules of procedure, and facilitate consensus-building process and the reaching of agreement on decisions and recommendations (Unless Parties decide otherwise, the Chair or a Vice-Chair of the Bureau chairs the general segment of the Meetings of the Parties’ sessions);

(e) Take initiatives and make recommendations to strengthen and facilitate the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol;

(f) Liaise with relevant partners, including other ECE multilateral environmental agreements, and the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy, international organizations and programmes, multilateral forums and representatives of civil society and NGOs, to cooperate, coordinate and exchange information on the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol, and their workplans;

(g) Carry out other tasks entrusted to it by the Meetings of the Parties.