

**POLICY STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE PARTIES
TO THE ESPOO-CONVENTION ON TRANSBOUNDARY EIA
SOFIA 26 TO 27 FEBRUARY 2001**

On behalf of the Commissioner for the Environment, Ms. Wallström, the European Commission welcomes the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Espoo Convention and expresses its gratitude to the government of Bulgaria for hosting the Second Meeting of the Parties in Sofia.

Since the First Meeting of the Parties in 1998 in Oslo significant progress has been achieved with respect to the practical application of the Espoo Convention as well as to the numbers of ratifications. Applying the Convention between 33 Parties is a considerable progress in terms of transborder environmental protection and involvement of the public.

At European Community level the Espoo Convention is implemented by the EIA-Directive (97/11/EC amending Directive 85/337/EEC) which incorporates the main provisions of the Convention leaving the detailed arrangements to the Member States. The EIA-Directive also forms a key instrument of the environmental acquis to be taken over by the candidate countries in the context of the enlargement of the European Union.

The European Commission welcomes the intention to negotiate an SEA Protocol at UNECE level supplementing the principles of the Espoo Convention to strategic levels of decision-making. We also support the particular attention planned to be given to health impacts in this context since the area of health and environment is a major item of the proposed 6th Environmental Action Programme covering the next 10 years to come. The SEA Protocol development follows directly the recent progress achieved at EU level with respect to the SEA-Directive on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. This future EC Directive already incorporates a transboundary provision allowing for transmitting relevant information, holding consultations between Member States concerned and involving the public concerned which could serve as a valuable example for the future SEA Protocol. Also the principles of the Aarhus Convention on public participation in environmental decision-making are implemented in the future SEA Directive. These principles will need to be reflected in an appropriate way in the future SEA Protocol as well.

The European Commission was actively involved in the meetings preparing for this Second Meeting of the Parties and intends to continue supporting the activities under the Convention also in the future. The financing of the Convention in form of voluntary contributions by Parties to the activities under the Convention as decided at the First Meeting of the Parties proved to work well and the corresponding results represent valuable guidance and information with a view to an improved application of the Convention. The European Commission agrees to continue with this approach and is willing to financially support the UNECE Secretariat for ensuring professional support to the upcoming negotiations of an SEA Protocol.