

**Statement by the Swedish Presidency of the European Union
on the occasion of the Second Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo-
Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary
Context,
Sofia 26-27 February 2001**

Madame Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I have the honour to speak on the behalf of the European Community and its Member States. The EC wants to express its thanks to the Government of Bulgaria for hosting this second meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention. We would also like to congratulate the Bureau of the Convention and the UNECE Secretariat for their valuable work leading up to this meeting.

At the tenth anniversary of the Convention the EC recognises its importance for promoting international environmental cooperation. The EC recognises the value of the work that has been accomplished since the first meeting of the Parties in Oslo and is confident that the work-plan for the next period will lead to a number of important decisions for the development and possible improvement of the Convention at the next meeting of the Parties.

The EC welcomes the intention of the meeting to adopt a decision to prepare a legally binding instrument in the form of a protocol on strategic environmental assessment to the Convention. This protocol could fulfil the general provision of the Convention to encourage Parties to apply the environmental impact assessment principle to policies, plans and programmes. The EC looks forward to take part in those preparations. We have since some years been engaged in developing the principles of the so called EIA Directive into a Directive on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment – or shortly the SEA Directive. This proposal for a Directive is now in its final stage and we are confident that a solution will be found this spring in the conciliation between the European Parliament and the Council. The EC is convinced that strategic environmental assessments are important tools for integrating environmental concerns into the different sectors of society and for ensuring that such concerns are incorporated and appropriately addressed at the earliest stage of decision-making. We further believe that the engagement of the public in these assessments is of crucial importance for making them vital instruments for sustainable development.

Madame Chairman, the European Community and its Member States look forward to pursue the vital tasks laying ahead of us in cooperation with our partners.

Thank you for your attention.