

Statement

by Sirkka Hautojärvi,

the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment,

Finland

on the occasion of the Second Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context
Sofia 26-27 February 2001

Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Finnish Government I would like to express our gratitude to the Bulgarian Government for hosting the Second Meeting of the Parties.

This Meeting also brings us together to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Convention in Espoo, Finland. Much work has been done within UN/ECE and nationally in order to enhance efficient implementation and application of the Convention.

During these ten years, Finland has applied the Convention seven times. Three of these occasions were before the Convention came into force. We notified Sweden of a reservoir project and enlargement of a ferrochrome and stainless steel works, while Russia was notified of a power plant project. Later, after the Convention was in force, Sweden, Estonia and Russia were notified of a nuclear waste project and a new nuclear power plant unit. We also notified Sweden of a dredging project and a power line project.

Finland has also received a notification from Sweden concerning a waste incineration plant and from Denmark and Sweden concerning a gas pipeline project.

At all times, the cooperation has been very successful.

Bilateral and multilateral cooperation is very important from our experience, contributing to an understanding of countries' respective national administrative systems and EIA procedures. We have worked together with all our neighbouring countries in this respect. Bilateral agreements are under preparation with Estonia and Russia, and we expect to sign the agreement with Estonia this spring. We hope that the agreement with Russia will be completed soon as well.

The Nordic countries also cooperate among themselves on transboundary issues. The points of contacts meet regularly for discussion.

In addition to the national activities, it's important to contribute to the work ongoing under the auspices of the ECE. One way to do so is through the workplan, which is essential for developing the application and implementation of the Convention. Finland and Sweden acted as lead countries supported by the European Community in developing the practical application. Finland has also worked with Switzerland in introducing the networking facility to the database on EIA. In the coming workplan period, we look forward to working together with Sweden and the Netherlands on the practical application and bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Let me now turn to another important matter. We strongly encourage that this meeting will decide on the preparation of a strategic environmental assessment protocol to the Convention. By including the notification and negotiation obligations in policies, plans and programmes, we may be able to solve some problems already at the strategic level. In other words, in the early phase of the environmental decision-making procedure. This is particularly important in the framework of the ECE, where a great number of countries are represented.

We have made good progress in ten-years time. Transboundary EIA promotes sustainable development through environmental protection. Without a doubt, the Convention will continue to be an important instrument for all of us. It provides a framework for participation and negotiation for neighbouring countries, while they work to minimize and prevent the adverse environmental impacts of projects, and, also in the future, of policies, plans and programmes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finland fully supports the adoption of the draft Sofia ministerial declaration in this meeting.