

Statement by Sándor Skultéty

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

Madame Chair,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the first meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention almost three years have passed. During that time, the process that gave tremendous help on the international scene and also to the individual countries to enable them to meet the provisions of the Convention made significant progress.

The creation of the many significant fora of international cooperation was made possible by the ambitious work plan accepted at the first meeting, also providing a frame for the major issues relating to the implementation of the Convention.

In our view, the analyses, guidance and recommendations elaborated for the practical implementation of the Convention on the basis of the work plan, especially those that are based on the review and evaluation of bi- and multilateral agreements and case studies, are highly useful because Hungary – due to its geographical location - considers the successful environmental co-operation with its neighbours very important. For this purpose preparation of the bilateral agreement with Slovakia in relation with the Convention has been commenced, and in this work both parties intend to strongly rely on the findings of the aforementioned documents.

Hungary also had its share in the implementation of the joint tasks defined in the work plan: our task was to lead the international team in charge of evaluating the operation of the computer database launched by the Convention for a two year trial period. The Department of Environment, Transport and Regions of the United Kingdom provided financial help for this activity. The report on the evaluation was discussed by the Working Group on EIA on two occasions, and with attention to the discussion results, the Working Group has worked out a proposal on the continuation of the operation of the database to be presented to this meeting of the Parties.

The development of a protocol on the strategic environmental assessment can bring about a break through in the consistent enforcement of modern environmental principles. The call for the incorporation of the environmental aspects into decision making on all levels is contained not only in the Espoo Convention and the Oslo Ministerial Declaration accepted at the first meeting of the Parties, but also by the recommendations of a number of significant international conventions and conferences. For the initiation of the draft decision on its realisation, a strong impetus was given by the second meeting of the signatories of the Aarhus Convention. All this may facilitate the creation of a comprehensive protocol encompassing a broad scale of, and multifaceted, environmental

interests, which may also serve as a substantial addition to the European Union Directive expected to be issued soon on this subject.

In a number of ECE countries, the creation of a national regulation in compliance with the provisions of the Convention was being realised concurrently with the international activities. As such, Hungary, that became a Party to the Convention in October 1997, also began to work out the necessary administrative changes. The implementation of the Convention required the application of a complicated, sometimes novel rules of procedure, as another country's authority and public had to be involved in our public administration procedure rather complex in itself, and the participation of Hungarian authorities and public had to be ensured in foreign procedures. The substantial changes, in fact, supplemented the provisions applicable to the content of impact assessment documentation, and it was done in order to enable us to decide whether an activity may trigger significant harmful transboundary environmental impacts. In case an impact of this nature is pre-supposed, decision on the realisation of the activity can only be passed after a detailed environment impact assessment has been made. The Government Decree containing these amendments was issued in 1999.

In summation I'd like to underline how important I consider the continuation, after this meeting, of the joint work that has been done so far for the implementation of the Convention, and at the same time, I also wish to express my gratitude to the Government of Bulgaria and Madame Minister for the preparation and organisation of this meeting and for their hospitality.

Thank you for your attention.