

Economic Commission for Europe

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

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment

Bureau

Geneva (online), 16 – 17 June 2021

Informal notes of meeting¹

Prepared by the secretariat²

I. Organizational matters

1. The Bureau under the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment met online, on 16 and 17 June 2021.
2. The following members of the Bureau were present: Mr. George Kremlis (Greece), Chair of the Bureau for the Convention matters; Ms. Vesna Kolar-Planinskič (Slovenia), Chair of the Bureau for the Protocol matters; Vice-Chairs of the Bureau: Ms. Milena Novakova (European Commission), Ms. Martine Rohn-Brossard (Switzerland) and Ms. Olena Miskun (Ukraine) as alternate to Ms. Rohn-Brossard for Protocol matters; Chair of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment, Ms. Dorota Toryfter-Szumańska (Poland); and one Vice-Chair of the Working Group: Ms. Anna Maria Maggiore (Italy); Mr. Joe Ducombe (Luxembourg), Chair of the Implementation Committee; and Ms. Maria do Carmo Figueira (Portugal), First Vice-Chair of the Implementation Committee.
3. Ms. Larissa Lukina (Belarus), Vice-Chair of the Working Group, was absent³.
4. The Bureau adopted its agenda, as contained in informal document ECE/MP.EIA/B/2021/INF.1.

¹ Available at: <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environmental-Impact-Assessment/events/350792>

² Prepared in consultation with the Bureau.

³ After the meeting, Ms. Lukina commented the present informal notes of the meeting.

II. Status of ratification of the Convention, its amendments and its Protocol

5. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Convention, its two amendments and the Protocol. It also reported on the status of ratification of the 2008 Multilateral agreement among the countries of South-Eastern Europe for implementation of the Convention (the Bucharest Agreement).

6. The Bureau noted that there had been no new ratifications since the last sessions of the Meetings of the Parties (Vilnius (online), 8–11 December 2021). It noted with concern that:

(a) Five further ratifications (from Armenia, Belgium, North Macedonia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) were still needed for the first amendment to the Convention to become operational, allowing non-ECE countries to accede to the Convention;

(b) Nine Parties were yet 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;

(c) Six signatories to the Protocol (i.e. Belgium, France, Georgia, Greece, Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) had to still complete their ratification of that instrument;

(d) Ratifications from two signatories to the Bucharest Agreement (i.e. Croatia and Greece) were pending.

7. The Bureau welcomed the information from its member from Ukraine that the country's draft law on ratification of both amendments was currently undergoing formal approval, first by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and subsequently, by the President. The Chair briefed the Bureau that Greece was considering the ratification of the Bucharest Agreement and the Protocol. The member from Switzerland, in turn, reported that although strategic environmental assessment was being systematically applied in her country, at the present time, there were no plans, at the national level, to ratify the Protocol.

8. The Bureau regretted that the ratification of the two amendments by many of the concerned countries had been pending already for 20 years, despite the treaty bodies urging the countries, at each of their meetings, to complete the procedure. Moreover, the Bureau stressed that effective and wider implementation of the treaties, which were main strategic goals of the long-term strategy adopted by the Meetings of the Parties in last December, could not be fulfilled until the concerned countries had completed their ratification. The Bureau reiterated that ratification of the first amendment was to be given priority, including with a view to contributing to addressing environmental and climate change concerns not only within but also beyond the ECE region.

9. Echoing the requests of the Meetings of the Parties, the Bureau urged the countries that had not yet done so to ratify the amendments and the Protocol as soon as possible in the next intersessional period and to report on progress towards ratification to the Working Group in December 2021. The secretariat was requested to remind the focal points of the concerned countries to do so. The secretariat should also forward to them the invitation letter that the Executive Secretary of ECE had sent to their ministers of foreign affairs and of the environment prior to the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, inviting the countries to complete the ratification processes to honour the political commitments they had undertaken. In addition, Slovenia, as a representative of the forthcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission were invited to do the

same vis-à-vis the concerned EU countries. Lastly, the beneficiary countries of technical assistance and capacity building were encouraged to take steps to accede to the Convention and the Protocol and/or to ratify the amendments, as relevant. The secretariat was to continue to promote ratifications by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine and Central Asian countries, as part of its capacity building activities.

III. Review of decisions by the Meetings of the Parties

10. The Bureau recalled its role as an advisory body that provides guidance and recommendations to the Convention and the Protocol bodies and the secretariat on all the matters regarding the implementation of the workplan, the related budgetary matters and the preparation of the meetings under the two treaties. It also recalled the tasks assigned to it in December during the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol as included in the report of the two sessions (ECE/MP.EIA/30–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13 and Add.1–Add.3).⁴

11. The Bureau noted that, to be implementable, some of the recent decisions of the Meetings of the Parties and the mandated tasks required clarifications from the delegation of the European Union, having proposed them, or of the Working Group, as appropriate.

12. The Bureau also emphasized the importance of the early submission of proposals to draft decisions or to other meeting documentation to allow enough time for their commenting and for seeking clarifications by all the delegations and the secretariat. In the future, it also deemed important to ensure, to the extent possible, that delegations have an opportunity to discuss all draft decisions of the Meetings of the Parties during the meeting of the Working Group that preceded the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties.

IV. Financial arrangements

A. Financial report

13. The secretariat presented the draft financial report for the past intersessional period 2017–2020, which the Meetings of the Parties had requested the secretariat to complete with data until to the end of December 2020. The Bureau reviewed the draft report and agreed on its publication on the treaty website after some final adjustments (e.g. completion of the listed information on in-kind contributions). It acknowledged the gravity of the resource constraints that had been exacerbated by the unbudgeted six-month extension of the past intersessional period putting at risk the functioning of the treaties and its secretariat. It also noted that, at the end of the period, the trust fund balance was positive mainly due to large savings realized, including in travel support to meetings (held online due to the pandemic), and to additional funding provided by some Parties. It agreed that the positive trust fund balance and the outstanding budgetary requirements would be carried over to the current period 2021–2023.

B. Recent contributions

14. The secretariat reported on contributions received or pledged by Parties since the last sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to fund the implementation of the workplan for 2021–2023. The Bureau noted that 35 out of 45 Parties to the Convention had committed to

⁴ Available at: <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/meeting-parties-espoo-convention-8th-session-and-meeting-parties>.

contributing funds during the present period and recalled that the Meetings of the Parties had decided on a financial scheme for funding the adopted workplans “whereby all Parties have a duty to contribute to the sharing of the workplan costs”⁵. Consequently, the Bureau invited the following remaining ten Parties to also pledge and contribute funds for that purpose and to report to the Working Group on their contributions/plans to contribute: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Malta, North-Macedonia, Serbia, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

15. The Bureau invited the secretariat to prompt the national focal points of the concerned Parties. Moreover, as requested by the Meetings of the Parties, if contributions have not been received by 31 December, the secretariat would be invited to write to those Parties to “impress upon them the importance of contributing”.⁶

C. Possible solutions for improving funding

16. Next, the Bureau considered the request by the Meetings of the Parties to the Bureau to continue to explore possible solutions to the issue of the insufficiency, uneven distribution and unpredictability of contributions for the implementation of the workplan for 2021–2023 with a view to presenting such possible solutions to the Working Group in 2022 and further to the Meetings of the Parties in 2023. Such solutions should take account of also experiences of the other ECE multilateral environmental agreements in that regard.

17. To support the Bureau’s deliberations, the secretariat presented a compilation of the Bureau’s previous proposals for improving the financial situation under the two treaties, which had not necessarily been adopted by the Meetings of the Parties. The Bureau recalled and reconsidered the proposals. It agreed, however, that prior to presenting any new proposals, it was first necessary for it to see the extent to which the newly adopted financial scheme was implemented, that is, if all Parties respected their duty to contribute, and whether it was sufficient in remedying the insufficiency of funding. The Bureau also considered proposing to the Working Group that the questionnaires on Parties’ implementation of the Convention and the Protocol include a possible question on contributions of the Parties to the two treaties.

18. The Bureau invited the Chair of the Working Group to present the Bureau’s views to the Working Group at its next meeting. It also invited the secretariat to inform the Working Group of any new financial arrangements that the Meetings of the Parties to the other ECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements would possibly decide at their forthcoming sessions taking place prior to the Working Group’s meeting. In advance of its meeting in 2022, the Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare a more complete overview of the approaches of the other ECE MEAs. It agreed to propose possible revisions to the present financial scheme for consideration of the Working Group at its eleventh meeting, preliminarily scheduled for December 2022.

D. Recognition of in-kind contributions

19. The Bureau addressed the Meetings of the Parties’ further request for the Bureau, with the assistance of the secretariat, to develop a system “to recognize in-kind contributions in a proper manner within the financial scheme”.⁷

20. The Bureau firstly acknowledged the key importance of in-kind contributions, in addition to financial ones. It noted that the past practice had been to prominently

⁵ Decision VIII/1–IV/1, para. 1, ECE/MP.EIA/30/Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13/Add.1.

⁶ Decision VIII/1–IV/1, para. 12 (d), ECE/MP.EIA/30/Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13/Add.1.

⁷ Decision VIII/2–IV/2, para. 12, ECE/MP.EIA/30/Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13/Add.1.

acknowledge in-kind contributions in the annual financial reports and at each meeting of the Bureau, the Working Group and the Meetings of the Parties, and to record them in the corresponding meeting reports.

21. The Bureau observed that the request for the “proper” acknowledgement of in-kind contributions lacked clarity and that further explanations from the delegation of the European Union, or guidance from the Working Group, in that respect would be useful. Following discussions, the Bureau agreed that systematically “monetarizing” all in-kind contributions (e.g. of person/time spent by various countries’ officials for inputs to the workplan implementation, taking into account different salary levels and national currencies) would not be feasible as the too complex.

22. To facilitate further deliberations on this matter, the Bureau invited the Working Group to consider and to clarify for example the following issues:

(a) The determination of monetary values of in-kind contributions;

(b) The establishment of possible thresholds/ minimum values for the acknowledgement of in-kind contributions (e.g. organizing a workshop vs. delivering a presentation at the workshop);

(c) The extent to which secretariat support or other expenditure from the trust fund was required for the implementation of the activity for which in-kind contributions were available.

23. The Bureau also again strongly recommended its members and other Parties to consider the possibilities of their countries to sponsor a junior professional officer to assist the secretariat in servicing the two treaties, following the example of Finland that had financed a staff member for the secretariat in 2011–2014.

E. Financial support to NGOs and non-ECE countries

24. As the last item on its agenda related to financial matters, the Bureau considered financial support to participants to meetings and workshops organized within the framework of the Convention and the Protocol. It recalled that to support the participation of experts and representatives from countries with economies in transition, the Meetings of the Parties had recommended that the two treaties continue to apply the guiding criteria established and periodically updated by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy (para. 21 of decision VIII/1-IV/1). As in the past, the support would depend on the availability of funds for this purpose and be in accordance with the agreed budget.

25. Regarding representatives of NGOs and representatives of developing and least-developed countries from outside the ECE region, the Meetings of the Parties had decided that, contingent on the availability of funds for this purpose, financial support was to be provided for participation, “in accordance with the agreed budget and criteria to be set by the Bureau, and, for non-ECE countries, subject to a case-by-case examination by the Bureau. (para. 21 of decision VIII/1-IV/1).”

26. The Bureau stressed the important role that NGOs played for the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol. It reviewed the information that 12 NGOs, had submitted in 2018 when applying for financial support for the previous period, including on their objectives, activities, members, funding and qualifications in environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment, and which the Bureau, at that time, had evaluated and based its decisions on. In addition, the Bureau considered the NGO participation in the (physical and online) meetings and activities under the treaties in the past intersessional period, as well as the geographic representativity of the NGOs.

27. As a result of its deliberations, the Bureau decided that subject to the availability of funding, and in accordance with the agreed budget⁸ the following five NGOs would be eligible for financial support, starting with the next meeting of the Working Group, (1–3 December 2021): the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN), the European ECO Forum/Society and Environment (Ukraine), the European Environment Bureau (EEB), the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) and Nuclear Transparency Watch. The Bureau invited the secretariat to inform the five NGOs in question of the Bureau's decision, and to seek confirmation of their wish to continue to actively participate in the activities under the treaties. In addition, the five selected NGOs were invited to coordinate inputs of also other NGOs from within the region.

28. The Bureau also encouraged NGOs to finance their participation and to seek donor funding for attending meetings held in-person, and for hybrid or online ones, to attend them online. For all meetings, NGOs were encouraged to provide written statements/inputs to documents.

29. Regarding funding for non-ECE countries, the Bureau invited the secretariat to consult it on a case-by-case basis.

V. Implementation of the workplan 2021–2023

30. Prior to considering progress in the implementation of the present workplan for 2021–2023 under the Convention and the Protocol, the Bureau discussed the way forward for the finalization of one outstanding activity from the previous workplan (for the period 2017–2020), namely, the draft guidance on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment.

A. Draft guidance on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment

31. The Bureau recalled that the draft guidance on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment had been prepared with funding from the European Investment Bank and agreed by the Bureau at its meeting in February 2020.⁹ At its ninth meeting (Geneva, 24–26 August 2020), however, the Working Group had decided not to forward the document to the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, further to the view of the delegation of the European Union that the draft document still required further work.¹⁰

32. The Bureau noted that, in December, the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol had expressed appreciation for the work carried out to draft guidance and urged Parties and stakeholders to finalize that work during the present intersessional period, subject to the availability of the resources (decision VIII/2–IV/2). The Meeting of the Parties had also invited Parties to contribute in-kind expertise for that purpose. The Bureau and the Working Group had been invited to consider the way forward in that respect at their meetings in 2021.¹¹

⁸ The maximum budget agreed by the Meetings of the Parties for supporting NGO participation is \$10,000 for meetings of the Working Group and \$20,000 for the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties (decision on the adoption of the workplan VIII/II–IV/II, annex II).

⁹ ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2020/7, available at: <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environmental-Impact-Assessment/events/350794>

¹⁰ See Report of the Working Group on its ninth meeting (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2020/2) and comments to documents submitted by the delegations.

¹¹ See ECE/MP.EIA/30–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/12, para. 33.

33. The Bureau was in favour of proceeding with the work for the finalization of the draft guidance. It invited the delegation of the European Union and other delegations to provide textual revisions to the draft guidance by 1 October 2021 for consideration by the Working Group at its next meeting, as well as to volunteer to participate in an editorial group for finalizing the document.

B. Management, coordination and visibility of intersessional activities

34. The Bureau recalled that the Meetings of the Parties had acknowledged the informal note on procedural matters of relevance to meetings with remote participation due to extraordinary circumstances¹², which had been prepared by the Bureau with support of the secretariat, in consultation with the Treaty Section of the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs. Further to the proposal by the delegation of the European Union, the Meetings of the Parties requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, to provide possible further clarifications of such procedural matters for consideration by the Meetings of the Parties at their next sessions, preliminarily scheduled for December 2023.¹³

35. The Bureau invited the delegation of the European Union, and possibly other delegations, to clarify and justify possible further development needs of the paper on procedural issues and to provide textual proposals well in advance of the meeting of the Working Group for consideration at the meeting.

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

1. Review of compliance

36. The Chair of the Implementation Committee informed the Bureau about the main outcomes of the Committee's forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions (held on 2–5 February and 4–7 May 2021, respectively) and the main objectives of the Committee's forthcoming fifty-first session (Geneva, 4–7 October 2021).

37. The Committee Chair highlighted the progress made by the Committee since the December sessions of the Meeting of the Parties, including:

(a) The completion of the Committee's consideration of four information gathering matters, (out of sixteen of such matters on its agenda)¹⁴, concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹⁵ Belgium¹⁶ and two concerning Ukraine,¹⁷ which had resulted to the identification of possible non-compliance. Considering the Parties' willingness to cooperate, the Committee exceptionally decided to provide the Parties with an opportunity to rectify their non-compliance by its next session, before opening the related Committee initiatives;

¹² Available at: <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/meeting-parties-espoo-convention-8th-session-and-meeting-parties> (under the tab "informal documents").

¹³ Decision VIII/2–IV/2, annex I, item 1.A.(m).

¹⁴ Two regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina: EIA/IC/INFO/16/Construction of the Ugljevik thermal power plant and EIA/IC/INFO/23/Construction of the Banovići thermal power plant; One regarding Switzerland: EIA/IC/INFO/25/ Construction of runways at and change in operating rules of Zurich Airport; One regarding Denmark: EIA/IC/INFO/30/ Nord Stream 2.

¹⁵ EIA/IC/INFO/24: construction of the Tuzla thermal power plant.

¹⁶ EIA/IC/INFO/18: Life-time extension of the Doel and Tihange nuclear power plants.

¹⁷ EIA/IC/INFO/10: construction of units 1 and 2 at the Khmeltitsky NPP and EIA/IC/INFO/13: activities at the Muzhiyevo goldmine.

(b) A hearing held in relation to the submission by Bulgaria having concerns about compliance by Serbia with its obligations under the Convention regarding several mining activities, located close to the border of Bulgaria¹⁸;

(c) Resuming of its consideration of compliance issues related to the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants¹⁹ in light of the Guidance on the applicability of the Convention to the topic in question adopted by the Meetings of the Parties in December 2020 (ECE/MP.EIA/31);

(d) The revision of the questionnaires for the review of the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol in 2019–2021 and the preparation of reporting templates for the European Union.

38. The Bureau took note of the report by the Committee Chair. Noting that the Committee's work continued to be significantly hindered by late and incomplete responses by some Parties concerned, the Bureau reminded the concerned Parties that the Meetings of the Parties had strongly urged them to facilitate the Committee's work in good faith by providing the requested information in a timely manner and in good quality (VIII/4). In addition, the Bureau invited its members representing the concerned Parties to prompt their own countries accordingly.

2. Reporting and review of implementation

39. The secretariat presented revision proposals to the draft questionnaires for the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol in 2019–2021 that the Implementation Committee had prepared with a view to maximizing the questionnaires usefulness for: the review of implementation, including for monitoring the frequency and progress in the treaty implementation as well as remaining challenges; the review of compliance; collecting good practice; and demonstrating the treaties' relevancy for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

40. The Bureau welcomed the Committee's revision proposals and provided some comments on the draft questionnaires. Once finalized by the Committee based on the Bureau's comments, the Bureau invited the secretariat to forward the draft questionnaires as official documents for approval of the Working Group at its meeting in December 2021. Noting that the time schedule for finalizing the questionnaires based on the Working Group's comments prior to their distribution to the Parties by the end of 2021 was extremely short, the Bureau invited the Parties to provide any comments they might have on the questionnaires well in advance of the Working Group's meeting, i.e. by no later than 1 November 2021.

41. The Bureau encouraged the Parties to submit good practice in application of the Convention and the Protocol and/or to highlight remaining challenges, through the questionnaire. It invited the Working Group to also encourage the Parties to do so.

42. The Bureau agreed on a timetable for the subsequent preparation of the reviews of implementation for the reporting period 2019–2021.

¹⁸ EIA/IC/S/6.

¹⁹ EIA/IC/INFO/15: The Netherlands: Life-time extension of the Borssele nuclear power plant; EIA/IC/INFO/18: Belgium, Life-time extension of the Doel and Tihange nuclear power plants; EIA/IC/INFO/19: Czechia, Life-time extension of the Dukovany nuclear power plant; EIA/IC/INFO/20: Ukraine, Life-time extension of 11 units at the Rivne, South Ukrainian, Zaporizhia and Khmelnitsky nuclear power plants; EIA/IC/INFO/32: France, lifetime extension of 32 units of 8 nuclear power plants; EIA/IC/INFO/34: Spain, Life-time extension of the Almaraz nuclear power plant.

43. The Bureau was also informed of the draft reporting templates for the European Union that the Implementation Committee had prepared with a view to facilitating its reporting under article 14 bis of the Convention and article 14 (7) of the Protocol. It noted that the Committee was to finalize the reporting templates in consultation with the European Union, in advance of the Working Group's meeting. The Bureau encouraged the Implementation Committee and the European Union, represented by the European Commission, to hold informal discussion on the matter, as needed.

44. Lastly, the Bureau noted that the electronic publication of the sixth review of implementation of the Convention and the third review of implementation of the Protocol by the secretariat would be completed in June-July 2021.

3. Legislative assistance to support implementation and ratification

45. The Bureau noted the report from the secretariat on the on-going and planned legislative assistance to support the implementation and, as relevant, the accession to or the ratification of the Convention and/or the Protocol, since December 2020. The report covered the assistance funded by the European Union under the EU4Environment project, and in particular the following on-going activities:

(a) Review of the primary and secondary legislation of Belarus with the Convention and the Protocol, prior to the planned amendment of that legislation;

(b) Amendment of the primary legislation of the Republic of Moldova that was expected to be completed later in 2021;

(c) Assistance to support completing the work on the preparation of the draft bilateral agreement on transboundary environmental impact assessment between Ukraine and Romania.

46. The Bureau also noted the report from the secretariat on the legislative assistance in Central Asia. In particular, since March 2021, the secretariat, in cooperation with Partnership for Action on Green Economy²⁰ and funding from Switzerland, had assisted Kazakhstan in reviewing a draft implementing regulation on environmental assessment with a view to developing recommendations for its alignment with the Convention. The secretariat informed the Bureau that no funding was available for further legislative assistance to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in 2021 and that those two countries had not specified their needs for such assistance so far.

D. Promoting practical application of the Convention and the Protocol

1. Subregional cooperation and capacity-building

47. The Bureau noted reports of the secretariat on the plans for the implementation of activities foreseen in the workplan regarding subregional cooperation and capacity-building in the following subregions:

(a) Baltic Sea, including plans for two sub-regional meetings to be organized by Estonia, online, in December 2021, and by Poland in 2022, most likely in a hybrid format;

(b) Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, involving plans to hold the second of the two sub-regional events funded by the European Union's EU4Environment project in the

²⁰ A mechanism to coordinate UN action on green economy and to assist countries in achieving and monitoring the emerging Sustainable Development Goals.

first half of 2021 (dates tbc) subject to further articulation of the plans in consultation with the beneficiary countries by late 2021;

(c) Central Asia, including plans to organize, in November 2021, a final conference under the joint OSCE/ECE project “Strengthening national and regional capacities and cooperation on Strategic Environmental Assessment in Central Asia, including as a response to climate change”. The conference is planned to be hosted by Uzbekistan, but should doing this in-person not be possible, the plan is to organize it in a hybrid format.

48. The Bureau also took note of the status of implementation of the joint OSCE/ECE project “Strengthening national and regional capacities and cooperation on Strategic Environmental Assessment in Central Asia, including as a response to climate change”, that had been initiated but not completed in the last period. The secretariat informed the Bureau that:

(a) The needs assessment exercise and action plans for introducing strategic environmental assessment systems in Central Asia had been finalized for Kazakhstan in May 2021. Similar work had been successfully launched in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in early 2021. Due to the lack of responsiveness of Turkmenistan, the methods of work and the time schedule for the completion of the work had been adjusted;

(b) National awareness raising workshops to present and discuss the draft needs assessment reports and action plans had been carried out in Kazakhstan (Nur-Sultan/online, 14 December 2020); Tajikistan (Dushanbe/online, 17 March 2021); Uzbekistan (Tashkent/online, 8 June 2021) and would be organized in Kyrgyzstan in early autumn 2021.

49. Regarding the Mediterranean and other marine regions, the Bureau welcomed the secretariat’s draft concept note on the Italian funded activity. It noted that the Barcelona Convention secretariat had already welcomed the activity and indicated to the secretariat its interest to cooperate. Following discussions, the Bureau initially identified the following other marine regions to be covered by the activity: Arctic Sea; Baltic Sea; Black Sea; Caspian Sea; and the North-East Atlantic. The Bureau members were invited to provide further comments to the draft concept note by 7 July to allow the secretariat to finalize the note, to circulate it for the Bureau’s approval. Once finalized, the Bureau invited the secretariat to submit the note as a brief official document to the Working Group to consider at its meeting.

50. The Bureau agreed on the importance of liaising with the ECE Water Convention but also the Industrial Accidents Convention during the planning and the implementation of the activity.

51. The Bureau further invited the secretariat to:

(a) Inform the selected treaty secretariats about the activity and to inquire about their initial cooperation interests, needs and opportunities (in accordance with a set of issues/questions of the concept note para.19, as finalized) and invite them to designate contact points for the further communication;

(b) Launch the recruitment of a consultant, upon the receipt by ECE of the Italian funding earmarked for the purpose. (The Bureau members were invited to recommend suitable consultants);

(c) If possible, schedule the first technical joint meeting for (e.g. mid-Oct-mid Nov) 2021 and to identify participants to be invited;

(d) Provide the regional sea convention secretariats a list of the national focal points under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol in the concerned subregions in order to

facilitate any subsequent bilateral exchanges among the focal points of the respective conventions.

52. The Bureau agreed that the Bureau member from Italy or the Chair would report to the Working Group at its tenth meeting on progress in planning and implementing the activity, including possibly also on the initial feedback and/or outcomes of the first technical meeting, if available, and to seek guidance from the Working Group.

2. Exchange of good practices

53. The Bureau discussed the organization of a workshop or a seminar for the exchange of good practices within the next meeting of the Working Group, that was to focus on one of the themes/topics in the workplan. Based on a proposal by the secretariat, the Bureau agreed to focus the seminar on sustainable infrastructure, that would also touch upon the issue of greening the Belt and Road initiative. It welcomed the opportunity for the Convention and the Protocol to provide input to the forthcoming ninth “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022).

54. The Bureau welcomed the offer from the Bureau member from Switzerland to chair and co-organize the seminar. It invited other Bureau members to provide, by 7 July, good practice or offer other contributions for the seminar’s programme (e.g. from Poland regarding the Baltic Sea; from Ukraine regarding a possible hydrogen development strategy).

55. The Bureau also suggested that the seminar programme include inputs from relevant IFIs (e.g. EIB, EBRD and Asian Development Bank) and UNEP.

3. Capacity-building

56. The Bureau took note of the update by the secretariat and one of the concerned Bureau members on the planning and implementation of capacity-building activities specified in the workplan, and funded by the EU4Environment project. These included in particular the following:

(a) Two completed training workshops (on SEA in Azerbaijan; on transboundary EIA in Ukraine); and recently an initiated development of sector or issue-specific guidelines in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine;

(b) A completed national awareness-raising event in the Republic of Moldova;

(c) The expected completion of the translation of a video on the Convention and its benefits from English into the national languages of Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in June 2021, along with the plan to do the same for the three other beneficiary countries by early 2022;

(d) A needs assessment and the development of a technical concept for an SEA database model expected to start in August 2021;

(e) Planned pilot projects, identified as the most pressing priorities to be initiated in 2021. The secretariat indicated that it would further consult with Ukraine regarding a draft master plan proposed to be subject to SEA, and its possible alternatives (in light of the information that a SEA of the plan had already been completed and that a lawsuit had been recently filed against the plan);

57. It also noted the secretariat’s report on its activities to support Kazakhstan in establishing compliant national EIA and SEA systems with a view to implementing its new Environmental Code. The activities were organized in cooperation with the OSCE office in Nur Sultan and the EU funded Partnership for Action on Green Economy and involved:

- (a) The revision of a road map to implement the Convention and organization of a related round table (Nur Sultan/online, on 21 June 2021);
- (b) An awareness raising event (Nur Sultan/online, 30 March–2 April 2021);
- (c) An initial training workshop on strategic environmental assessment (Nur Sultan/online, 28–29 April 2021);
- (d) A training workshop consisting of eighth online sessions (Nur Sultan, 19-20 May, 26-27 May, 9–10 June and 15– 16 June 2021).

VI. Preparations for the tenth meeting of the Working Group

58. The Bureau reviewed and revised the annotated provisional agenda for the tenth meeting of the Working Group on EIA and SEA (Geneva, 1–3 December 2021). It invited the secretariat to make the finalized provisional agenda available to the Working Group as an official document.

VII. Related events

59. The Bureau noted the information by the secretariat on the following events of relevance to the work under the Convention and the Protocol:

- (a) Outcomes of the ECE Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (10-18 March 2021);
- (b) 69th session of the Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva, 20–21 April 2021) focusing on circular economy;
- (c) Organization of the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in 2022.

IX. Other business

60. No other business was raised under the agenda item.

X. Presentation of the decisions and closing of the meeting

61. The meeting of the Bureau concluded on Thursday, 17 June 2021.

62. The Bureau agreed to next meet on 9 and 10 June 2022. It further agreed that holding online or hybrid meetings could be a viable option to physical meetings, provided that technical facilities, conference rooms and services, in particular interpretation, were available.

63. The Bureau reviewed and agreed on the main conclusions of its meeting. It invited the secretariat to draft the informal meeting report and to circulate it for comments by the Bureau members prior to its finalization.
