

## **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, 22 – 23 February 2023

### **Informal notes of meeting<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Prepared by the secretariat<sup>2</sup>**

## **I. Organizational matters**

1. The meeting of the Bureau under the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment was held in Geneva, on 22 and 23 February 2023. Three Bureau members joined the meeting online, on an exceptional basis.
2. The meeting was chaired by: Mr. George Kremlis (Greece), Chair of the Bureau for the Convention matters, and Ms. Vesna Kolar-Planinšič (Slovenia), Chair of the Bureau for the Protocol matters. The following Bureau members attended the meeting: Vice-Chairs of the Bureau: Ms. Milena Novakova (European Commission) and Ms. Martine Rohn-Brossard (Switzerland) and Ms. Maryna Shymkus (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 two Vice-Chairs of the Working Group: Ms. Larissa Lukina (Belarus) and 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. The Bureau adopted its agenda, as contained in informal document ECE/MP.EIA/B/2023/INF.1. It thanked the secretariat for having prepared 18 draft documents for the Meetings of the Parties next sessions (Geneva, 12–15 December 2023) for the Bureau to comment and agree on prior to their submission to the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment at its thirteenth meeting (Geneva, 13–15 June 2023).
4. In his opening remarks, Mr. Zaal Lomtadze, Chief of section and Officer-in-Charge of the Environment Division at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) emphasized that with the massive growth in its workload but no staff increase since over 20

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environmental-Impact-Assessment/events/364365>.

<sup>2</sup> Prepared in consultation with the Bureau.

years, the secretariat had been stretched to a maximum for too long and, consequently, its resource constraints had reached their limits. He also clarified that expecting that the United Nations General Assembly would grant additional regular budget funding to ECE in the years to come was unrealistic. Therefore, additional resources from the Parties were primordial. Without them, only reduced secretariat services and activities were feasible.

5. The Bureau welcomed Ms. Amie Figuieredo, an ECE staff member, who, as of 1 March 2023, and in addition to her other functions, would temporarily support the secretariat on a 50 per cent basis, including with the preparations for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties (Geneva, 12–15 December 2023). The Bureau appreciated the offered “emergency staffing support” from ECE, while recognizing that, overall, relying on temporary fixes for the conduct of the core secretariat functions was not sustainable.

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

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

7. The Bureau welcomed the recent ratification by Ukraine of both amendments to the Convention, noting that on 15 December 2022, Ukraine had deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations its instruments of ratification of those amendments.<sup>3</sup>

8. The Bureau noted with concern that:

(a) 4 further ratifications (from Armenia, Belgium, North Macedonia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) were still needed for the first (2001) amendment to the Convention to become operational, allowing non-ECE countries to accede to the Convention;

(b) 9 Parties were yet to ratify the second (2004) amendment (Armenia, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) to ensure unified application of the Convention by all its Parties;

(c) 6 signatory States to the Protocol (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 2 signatory States to the Bucharest Agreement (Croatia and Greece) were pending.

9. The Bureau again urged the concerned Parties to the Convention that had adopted the amendments some 20 years ago, and/or signed its Protocol, and that had not yet done so, to proceed promptly with their ratification, to enable a wider and more unified application of the treaty obligations in the ECE region. As in the past, the Bureau reiterated the invitation to its members to continue to prompt their own countries, as relevant, and/or, through bilateral contacts, the other concerned countries to complete the ratification procedures as soon as possible.

10. The focal points of the concerned countries were invited to refer their respective Governments to the letters that, on 7 December 2022, at the request of the Bureau, the Executive Secretary of ECE had written to the ministers for environment and ministers for

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<sup>3</sup> They two amendments entered into force for Ukraine 90 days later, on 15 March 2023, in accordance with article 14(4) of the Convention.

foreign affairs of all Parties urging them to complete their ratifications. The Bureau also agreed that in the invitation letters to the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol to be addressed to the ministers for environment and ministers for foreign affairs of all Parties, the ECE Executive Secretary should reiterate this request.

11. The Bureau also again invited the secretariat to continue to promote the remaining ratifications by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as part of the technical assistance and capacity-building activities that provided to these countries until the end of 2023 with funding from the EU4Environment programme. The Bureau member representing Belarus could not provide the Bureau with timelines for the country's ratification of the second amendment or the Protocol but noted that the contents of the second amendment of the Convention was duly implemented in its national legislation.

12. The Bureau recalled that the Working Group, at its last meeting (Geneva, 19–21 December 2022), had been optimistic about the Convention becoming a global instrument by the next intersessional period, based on the reports by Armenia, Belgium and North-Macedonia on their progress towards the ratification of the first amendment to the Convention. It welcomed the expected global opening of the Convention, convinced of the important benefits that the treaties' application would bring also globally, and of the new opportunities and the regain of interest for both instruments that the global opening would bring about.

13. The Bureau agreed that, in the next intersessional period, the Parties should consider the implications of future accessions by non-ECE countries and address the related resource requirements and other considerations. It was noted that the preparation for the accessions would take time and resources, including for: the conduct of awareness raising and outreach activities; funding of the travel of participants from the other regions to meetings under the treaties, and; the possible organization of national or sub-regional capacity building and technical assistance events on the Convention and the Protocol.

### **III. Financial arrangements**

14. The secretariat presented the draft second financial report for the period 2021–2023, covering the years 2021 and 2022, together with information on the recent contributions to the Convention's and Protocol's trust fund that had been received between 1 January and 8 February 2023. The Bureau was informed that although more Parties had made pledges for the intersessional period, less Parties had contributed to date. Moreover, the contributions had remained insufficient and unevenly distributed, with only 3 Parties providing half of the total income to the trust fund and 6 Parties 70 % of it. The Bureau thanked the secretariat for the information and invited it to publish the finalized second annual financial report on the Convention and the Protocol website.

15. The Bureau noted the information on the contributions received thus far and regretted that, despite the reminders from the secretariat, 12 (i.e. over 25%) out of the 45 Parties had not yet contributed any funds to the trust fund. Seven of those Parties (Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Serbia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) had also not made any commitments for sharing of the workplan costs despite their duty to do so further to decision VIII/1–IV/1.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the Bureau urged those countries to also pledge and contribute funds as soon as possible and invited the secretariat to report on the receipt of the outstanding contributions to the Working Group at its next meeting (Geneva, 13–15 June 2023).

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<sup>4</sup> See ECE/MP.EIA/30/Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13/Add.1, Decision VIII/1–IV/1, para. 1.

16. The Bureau again emphasized that the secretariat remained acutely understaffed to service two legal instruments: since 2001, the Parties have funded only one professional staff member to the secretariat despite the adoption and the entry into force of a Protocol to the Convention and the multiplication of the Parties, activities and meetings since then. It thanked the secretariat for its professionalism and resilience over an extended period of time, while agreeing that, going forward, Parties should either fund more workforce for the secretariat by the start of the next period, or, else, some of the activities or services for the treaties and their workplan had to be discontinued until additional resources would become available. The workplan for 2024–2026 should be prepared keeping that in mind.

17. The Bureau recalled that, at its last meeting, the Working Group had invited the Parties to increase their financial contributions to collectively fund, as a minimum, one additional professional post and part-time administrative support staff member (on a 50 per cent basis) by the next intersessional period 2024–2026 to remedy the longstanding insufficiency of the secretariat resources for supporting the intergovernmental work under the Convention and the Protocol.<sup>5</sup> It was noted that the proposed modest strengthening of the secretariat would constitute a minimum necessary improvement, which still left the secretariat very small in comparison with the extent of its tasks and the sizes of the other ECE treaty secretariats.

18. The Bureau also took note of the initial information on the pledges of funding for the next intersessional period 2024–2026 that 11 Parties had provided ahead of the Bureau meeting. It regretted the lack of additional contributions from most of those Parties, despite the repeated calls to Parties to increase their funding, which seemed to indicate that the work under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol did not represent national funding priorities of their respective Governments.

19. The Bureau recalled that the Working Group had invited the national focal points under the Convention and the Protocol to play the primary role in advocating for and mobilizing further funding from their respective Governments for the next intersessional period and to continue to actively solicit increased contributions for the two treaties within their administration. The Bureau also invited them to inform the secretariat about their pledged contributions to the budget for the next intersessional period 2024–2026 by 15 May 2023, at the latest, prior to the forthcoming meeting of the Working Group. It echoed the Working Group in stressing that the prior information on the Parties' pledges was essential for the preparation of a realistic and implementable draft workplan for 2024–2026 that would correspond to the expected future funding.

20. The Bureau then reviewed and agreed on the draft decision IX/1–V/1 on financial arrangements for 2024–2026 and invited the secretariat to submit the document for consideration by the Working Group at its next meeting.

## **VI. Preparations for the next sessions of Meetings of the Parties**

### **A. Practical arrangements**

21. The secretariat provided an update on the preparatory work, its time-schedule and an initial list of draft decisions and documents for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 12–15 December 2023). The Bureau took note of the information.

22. The Bureau agreed that the invitation letters from the Executive Secretary of ECE to the ministers for foreign affairs and ministers for environment of all Parties should again:

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<sup>5</sup> See ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2022/2, para. 24.

(a) Urge the concerned Parties to complete their ratifications and failing that to provide for their firm commitment, with clear timelines for doing that in the next intersessional period;

(b) Invite the Parties to increase their contributions and to confirm their pledges by 6 November 2023, five weeks before the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties.

## **B. Draft agenda**

23. The Bureau reviewed and agreed on the annotated provisional agenda for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties and invited the secretariat to submit it for consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting, as an informal document.

24. As requested by the Working Group at its last meeting, and taking into account the comments made by the delegations during and after that meeting, the Bureau considered further the previously identified topics for the thematic events to be organized during the general and high-level segments of the Meetings of the Parties' sessions, namely: green financing (subject to the identification of a volunteering Party or organization to organize it, and energy transition and circular economy, respectively). It proposed that the Meetings of the Parties refrain from holding a separate event in the general segment dedicated solely to green financing and, instead, cover that topic during the high-level thematic event as a key component for energy transition and circular economy.

25. The Bureau stressed that the organization of a single thematic event focusing on the above three interlinked issues also had the advantage to shorten the Meetings of the Parties' sessions by half a day for them to close at 1 p.m. – instead of 6 p.m. – on Friday, 15 December 2023, with the high-level segment starting in the afternoon of the day before, on Thursday, 14 December 2023 at 3 p.m. The Bureau also welcomed the information from the secretariat on the plans by Spain to sponsor a reception for all the meeting participants, as the holder of the presidency of the European Council of the European Union in the second half of 2023. The Bureau recommended that that reception be held at the end of the sessions of 14 December, with a view to catering also for those high-level representatives who would only attend the high-level segment of the sessions.

26. The Bureau agreed that the thematic event at the high-level segment should aim to be as interactive as possible. It suggested that the event include:

(a) A panel of six speakers (representing Parties to the Convention and/or the Protocol, as well as one representative presenting coordinated views of the non-governmental organizations actives under the two treaties); and

(b) Pre-registered statements as well as comments and questions to the panellists from the floor of a maximum recommended duration of 3 minutes each.

27. In addition to the offers to contribute speakers for the thematic event put forward by delegations during the last meeting of the Working Group (Spain, WHO, EIB, IAIA and Nuclear Transparency Watch), the Bureau noted the possible interventions of Italy on green financing, and of Switzerland on the extraction of raw materials.

27. It again welcomed the funding from Italy that would cover the costs of consultants for preparing and moderating the event and for drafting a background document.

## **C. Draft workplan 2024-2026**

28. The Bureau agreed on draft decision IX/2–V/2 on the workplan for 2024–2026 and its annexes –with work areas and activities listed in annex I and the related minimum resource requirements for their implementation contained in annex II.

29. The Bureau member from Belarus welcomed the proposal to carry over to the next workplan the organization of a thematic event on the consideration of alternatives to and the rationale for selected options of the proposed activities in the environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment documentation, subject to the identification of lead countries/organizations. She reiterated the importance of that topic, which had initially been proposed by Belarus for the present period, but which could not be implemented in absence of resources.

30. The Bureau noted the information from the secretariat that the proposed joint budget for the Convention and the Protocol remained by far the smallest of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements (representing only some 10–30% of the budgets of the other Conventions and their Protocols). In absence of the necessary additional resources to reinforce the secretariat, the Bureau agreed on several cuts to be foreseen in terms of meetings and other activities requiring secretariat support but exceeding its current capacities.

31. The Bureau invited the secretariat to submit the draft decision for the consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting. Parties and stakeholders were invited to comment and to offer to lead or sponsor activities and host events, and to submit their proposals and comments on the draft workplan to the secretariat by 15 May 2023. It reiterated that for the conclusion of a 3-year workplan that was backed up with sufficient resources, it was imperative to know in advance how much funding Parties would provide for the intersessional period 2024–2026.

#### **D. Draft declaration**

32. The Bureau agreed that its Chairs would prepare an initial draft declaration based on the previous declarations adopted by the Meetings of the Parties and suggestions by the delegation of the European Union and its Member States – for comments and agreement by the Bureau electronically, prior to its submission for the consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting.

#### **E. Chairs of the sessions**

33. The Bureau discussed the chairing of the general and the high-level segments of the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties. It welcomed the proposed nomination of the Environment Minister of Spain as a candidate to chair the high-level segment.

34. The Bureau also noted that the Working Group had welcomed the availability of its Chair for the Convention matters, Mr. George Kremlis, to chair the general segment. It welcomed the availability of its Chair for the Protocol matters, Ms. Vesna Kolar-Planinšič, to serve as a general segment Chair for the Protocol matters - if Greece was not yet a Party to the Protocol by the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties.

#### **F. Officers for the next intersessional period**

35. The Bureau welcomed again the availability of the present Chairs of the Bureau, the Working Group and the Implementation Committee to continue chairing in 2024–2026, as needed.

36. The Bureau welcomed the nomination by Montenegro of a permanent and an alternate member to the Implementation Committee, noting that the funding of the travel related expenses by Montenegro was yet to be confirmed. It also welcomed the possible candidacy by Italy as the Vice-Chair of the Working Group.

37. The secretariat informed the Bureau on its ongoing informal consultations with the Parties regarding the nomination of officers to be elected to the Committee. The Bureau noted the information and invited Parties to confirm their nominations for officers to be elected for the next period by 15 May 2023.

## **G. Provisional schedule of meetings in the next intersessional period**

38. The Bureau noted the initial schedule of meetings for 2024 and invited the secretariat to propose a schedule for 2025 and 2026 ahead of the next meeting of the Working Group, as an informal document.

## **V. Preparations for the twelfth meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment**

39. The Bureau agreed on the annotated provisional agenda for the twelfth meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment (Geneva, 13–15 June 2023) and invited the secretariat to process it as an official document.

40. The Bureau invited Parties to provide information on their pledges for the next intersessional period by 15 May and any comments to the official documents as early as possible but not later than 23 May 2023 – that is, 3 weeks before the next meeting of the Working Group.

## **VI. Implementation of the workplan 2021–2023**

41. The Bureau considered progress in the implementation of the workplan for 2021–2023 under the Convention and the Protocol. Before that, it continued to discuss one outstanding activity from the previous workplan (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**

42. The Chair of the Bureau for the Protocol matters recalled that, initially, a 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.<sup>6</sup> At its ninth meeting (Geneva, 24–26 August 2020), the Working Group had decided, however, not to forward the draft document to the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, further to the view of the European Union and its Member States that the draft document still required further work.<sup>7</sup> In December 2020, the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol had urged Parties and stakeholders to finalize the guidance during the present intersessional period, subject to the availability of the resources, and invited Parties to contribute in-kind expertise for that purpose.<sup>8</sup>

43. The Bureau considered the extensive revision proposals by the European Union and its Member States as well as the comments from the World Health Organization (WHO) received in early February 2023 to a draft version of guidance last amended by the Chair and volunteering members of the Bureau to accommodate the previous comments from the European Union and its Member States. It agreed on a draft revised guidance accepting all the proposals by the European Union and its Member States and adding a reference to a

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<sup>6</sup> ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2020/7, available at: <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environmental-Impact-Assessment/events/350794>

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Decision VIII/2–IV/2, seventh preambular para. (f), ECE/MP.EIA/30/Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13/Add.1 and ECE/MP.EIA/30–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13, para. 33.

supplementary source material from the WHO. It invited the secretariat to submit the revised draft document for consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting.

44. The Bureau also reviewed and agreed on the text of the related draft decision V/6 on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment and invited the secretariat to forward the draft decision for consideration of the Working Group.

## **B. Compliance with and implementation of the Convention and the Protocol**

### **1. Review of compliance**

45. The Chair of the Implementation Committee informed the Bureau about the main outcomes of the Committee's fifty-fifth session (Geneva (online), 31 January-3 February 2023)<sup>9</sup> and the main objectives for the Committee's fifty-sixth session (Geneva, 2-5 May 2023). He referred to the Committee's progress in numerous compliance matters before it, including submissions, Committee initiatives, follow-up to decisions by the Meetings of the Parties, information gatherings and specific compliance issues arising from the reviews of implementation. He also informed the Bureau about the Committee's finalization of reporting templates for the European Union under the Convention and the Protocol, prepared in consultation with the European Commission, for use starting from the next reporting round covering the period (2022-2024).

46. The Committee Chair also briefed the Bureau on the Committee's preparatory work ahead of the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties. The Committee planned to prepare most of the draft decisions on compliance at its next session with a view to submitting them for information and possible comments of the Working Group at its next meeting and to finalizing them at the Committee's fifty-seventh session (Geneva, 29 August-1 September 2023) considering the comments to be received from the Parties concerned in advance of that session. The Committee Chair presented an indicative list of draft decisions to be prepared by the Committee, which was still subject to changes. Several of the draft decisions concerned the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants.

47. The Committee Chair also informed the Bureau about the Committee's ongoing preparations of amendment proposals to the Committee's structure and functions and operating rules for consideration by the Meetings of the Parties, including to rules related to conflict of interest and quorum. The amendment proposals would be provided to the Working Group for information at its next meeting.

48. The Bureau took note of the Committee Chair's report, welcoming the progress made and acknowledging the importance of the Committee's workload ahead of the Meetings of the Parties' next sessions. It welcomed again the Committee's plans to submit draft decisions on compliance for information and comments by the Working Group at its next meeting, as informal documentation. The Bureau also reiterated its invitation to the concerned Parties to facilitate the Committee's work on compliance matters by providing in a timely manner their comments and progress reports as requested by the Committee.

### **2. Reporting and review of implementation**

49. The secretariat updated the Bureau on the status of Parties' reporting on their implementation of the Convention and the Protocol in the period 2019-2021.

50. The Bureau recalled that the Working Group, at its last meeting, had urged the remaining Parties to provide their overdue reports as soon as possible and, at the latest, by 31 January 2023. The Bureau observed with regret that only around half of the Parties (47% Convention Parties and 55% Protocol Parties) had reported on time (by 30 April 2022) by returning filled-in questionnaires. The Bureau expressed serious concerns that as at 1

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<sup>9</sup> ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2023/2.



February 2023, nine months after the reporting deadline, 6 State Parties to the Convention (Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine) and 4 State Parties to the Protocol (Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine) had not responded to the questionnaire, and that the European Union had only submitted blank questionnaires and separate information for both instruments. The Bureau urged the Parties that had not yet done so to provide their outstanding reports without further delay.

51. The Bureau also considered additional amendment proposals from the European Union and its Member States to the respective sections on methodology of the draft reviews of implementation as agreed by the last meeting of the Working Group.<sup>10</sup> It noted that cut-off dates for the receipt of the reports were necessary for the timely analysis of the data. The Bureau concluded that, exceptionally, if technically possible (due to word limits of official documents), and upon agreement by the next meeting of the Working Group, the secretariat could accommodate the additional comments before forwarding the documents to the Meetings of the Parties. It invited the secretariat to consult the Working Group on the additional revision proposals at its next meeting.

52. Lastly, the Bureau reviewed and agreed on draft decision IX/5 on reporting and review of implementation of the Convention and draft decision V/5 on reporting and review of implementation of the Protocol, inviting the secretariat to forward them for consideration of the Working Group at its next session

### **3. Legislative assistance**

53. The secretariat reported on its on-going and planned legislative assistance to support the implementation, and, as relevant the accession to the Convention and the Protocol in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, funded through the EU4Environment Programme.

54. The Bureau welcomed the support provided and, as a good practice, the conclusion by Ukraine and Romania of the bilateral agreement for the implementation of the Convention in November 2022 – in line with the decisions of the Meetings of the Parties (decisions IV/2,<sup>11</sup> V/4,<sup>12</sup> VI/2,<sup>13</sup> IS/1f<sup>14</sup> and VIII/4d<sup>15</sup>) concerning compliance by Ukraine in respect of the Danube-Black Sea Deep Water Navigation Canal in the Ukrainian sector of the Danube Delta (Bystroe Canal Project). Developed with the assistance of legal experts to ECE and the secretariat and with funding from the EU4Environment, the bilateral agreement was considered to simplify the transboundary environmental impact assessment of the two countries' projects in the Carpathians and in the Danube Delta, and to serve as an example for other countries in the region.

## **C. Promoting practical application of the Convention and the Protocol**

55. The secretariat reported on the planned final implementation stages of the Italian funded activity for identifying synergies and possible future cooperation activities in marine regions, involving six regional sea conventions or commissions, which included the organization of a final joint meeting, preliminarily scheduled to take place online on 16 May 2023.

56. The Bureau noted the information. It confirmed its selection of prioritized cooperation activities to be included into the draft workplan 2024–2026 (annex I, subitems III.A.2 and 3).

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<sup>10</sup> ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2022/3 and ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2022/4

<sup>11</sup> See ECE/MP.EIA/10.

<sup>12</sup> See ECE/MP.EIA/15.

<sup>13</sup> See ECE/MP.EIA/20/Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/4/Add.1.

<sup>14</sup> See ECE/MP.EIA/27/Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/11/Add.1.

<sup>15</sup> See ECE/MP.EIA/30/Add.2–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13/Add.2.

57. It invited Parties to present further good practice in the application of the Convention and the Protocol to projects, plans and programmes in marine regions.

58. The Bureau reviewed and commented on the initial draft of the draft decision IX/3–V/3 on cooperation in marine regions and invited the secretariat to finalize it taking into account the comments made during the meeting and to circulate it for agreement of the Bureau electronically after its meeting.

59. The Bureau invited Parties/stakeholders to provide further good practice and funding for consultants or secretariat staffing for the preparation of an online database or collection/compilation of good practice –foreseen in the workplan for 2020–2023, subject to the availability of funding.

60. Lastly, the Bureau noted the update by the secretariat on the planning and implementation of the EU4Environment funded capacity building activities, including information about the replacement of the originally planned SEA pilots with other activities at the request of the three beneficiary countries (Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine).

## **VII. Management, coordination and visibility of intersessional activities**

61. The Bureau considered and agreed on the revision proposals from the European Union and its Member States to the informal note on procedural matters of relevance to meetings with remote participation due to extraordinary circumstances,<sup>16</sup> which the Bureau had prepared in 2020 with support of the secretariat and following consultations with the Treaty Section of the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs. During their last sessions (Vilnius (online), 8-11 December 2020), the Meetings of the Parties had agreed to include in the workplan for 2021-2023 a possible further clarification of procedural matters of relevance to meetings with remote participation.<sup>17</sup> The Bureau recalled, that, at its last meeting (Geneva, 16–17 June 2022), it had concluded that there was no need to revisit that procedural note, unless any extraordinary circumstances should again arise. However, due to the regrets expressed by the European Union and its Member States regarding that conclusion, as they saw a need for further clarification of the procedural matters elaborated in the note, the Working Group, at its last meeting, had invited the European Union and its Member States to provide clear textual amendment proposals to the procedural note for consideration of the Bureau.

62. The Bureau requested the secretariat to submit the document, as revised, for consideration of the Working Group at its next meeting – as an informal document – in track changes. It recommended that the version to be agreed by the Working Group would then be applied, and, as needed, further adapted, should extraordinary circumstances arise again.

63. The Bureau agreed that the procedural note should not be tabled for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, which would take place in-person and in accordance with the rules of procedure as adopted, and subsequently amended, by the Meetings of the Parties.<sup>18</sup>

64. The Bureau also agreed that since the procedural note in question applied only to extraordinary circumstances, any broader revision proposals concerning the format of the

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<sup>16</sup> Available at: <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/meeting-parties-espoo-convention-8th-session-and-meeting-parties> (under the tab “informal documents”).

<sup>17</sup> ECE/MP.EIA/30-ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13 (available at: [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/ece\\_mp.eia\\_30-ece\\_mp.eia\\_sea\\_13\\_e.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/ece_mp.eia_30-ece_mp.eia_sea_13_e.pdf)), paragraph 8.

<sup>18</sup> Decision 1/1 (ECE/MP.EIA/2, annex I); amended by decision V/1 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/15) and decision I/1 by the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2).

meetings of the Meetings of the Parties and their subsidiary bodies, or any other procedural aspects of their functioning, in general, would require:

(a) A mandate from the Meetings of the Parties to revise the applicable rules of procedure;

(b) A clarification on the resource (financial and staffing) implications of such a revision and the appropriate allocation of resources.

## **VIII. Other business**

65. The Bureau expressed its willingness to support Ukraine regarding matters of relevance to the treaties.

66. The Bureau recommended to strengthen the cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for the assessment of the environmental damage of the war in Ukraine and to stress the importance of the Convention and the Protocol in this regard, should resources become available.

## **IX. Presentation of the decisions and closing of the meeting**

67. The meeting of the Bureau concluded on Thursday, 23 February 2023.

68. 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.

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