

## **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), 1 March 2024

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

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

## **I. Organizational matters**

1. The extraordinary meeting of the Bureau under the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment took place on 1 March 2024 online<sup>3</sup>. The date of the online meeting of the Bureau was determined after consulting with the members of the Bureau, also considering that two members<sup>4</sup> of the Bureau would be elected<sup>5</sup> not earlier than 27 February. The aim of the meeting was to agree on the next steps for resuming the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention, MoP9) and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, MoP5).

2. The meeting was chaired by: Mr. George Kremlis (Greece), Chair of the Bureau for the Convention matters, and Ms. Vesna Kolar-Planinskič (Slovenia), Chair of the Bureau for the Protocol matters. The following Bureau members attended the meeting: Vice-Chairs of the Bureau: Mr. Adam Nagy (European Commission), Ms. Marthe Lindberg (Norway), and Ms. Martine Rohn-Brossard (Switzerland); Chair of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment, Ms. Dorota Toryfter-Szumańska (Poland); Vice-Chair of the Working Group, Ms. Anna Maria Maggiore (Italy);

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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.

<sup>3</sup> The Meetings of the Parties in December 2023 agreed that, due to resource constraints, the meeting of the Working Group in 2024 would be cancelled (implying that the Bureau meeting in 2024 in preparation of the Working Group would also be cancelled).

<sup>4</sup> Chair and First Vice-Chair of the Implementation Committee.

<sup>5</sup> At the fifty-eighth session of the Implementation Committee.

Mr. Joe Ducomble (Luxembourg), Chair<sup>6</sup> of the Implementation Committee; and Ms. Susan Vernij (the Netherlands), First Vice-Chair<sup>7</sup> of the Implementation Committee.

3. The Bureau noted the secretariat's update on its staff resources, including the extended sick leave of a staff member serving as the secretary to the Implementation Committee. Additionally, the Bureau noted the United Nations' general hiring freeze, related to liquidity crisis, that may delay the completion of the ongoing recruitment process for the position of Secretary of the Convention and the Protocol. It expressed strong concerns about the above and the need to undertake initiatives at political level to remedy to this situation and to the resources' scarcity in general of the secretariat.

## II. Preparations for the resumed sessions of Meetings of the Parties

4. The Bureau recalled that the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention, MoP9) and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, MoP5)<sup>8</sup> were held from 12 to 15 December 2023 in Geneva.

5. However, due to time constraints, the Meetings of the Parties deferred the adoption of the Geneva Declaration and one decision by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (decision IX/4i on compliance by Czechia with its obligations under the Convention in respect of the lifetime extension of four reactors at Dukovany nuclear power plant) to an "intermediate/extraordinary session" to be organized by the Bureau in 2024, with support from the secretariat.

6. The Bureau also recalled that the Meetings of the Parties in December 2023 agreed that, due to resource constraints, the meeting of the Working Group in 2024 would be cancelled implying that the Bureau meeting in 2024 in preparation of the Working Group would also be cancelled. However, to implement the request from the Meetings of the Parties for organizing the "intermediate/extraordinary session", the Bureau, further to the outcomes of online consultations in January and February 2024 agreed to organize its online extraordinary meeting to assess the current state of affairs and to determine further actions in preparation for the MoP sessions, as indicated in paragraph 1 above.

7. The Bureau recognized that the activities under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA will proceed based on the decisions adopted at MoP9/MoP5. This includes also convening meetings of the Treaties' bodies and carrying out activities under the workplan for 2024-2026. The elected bodies are also fully operational in their new composition. The Bureau took note of the information from the secretariat on the fifty-eighth session of the Implementation Committee held online from 27 to 29 February (concluded one day earlier than scheduled, due to the secretariat's limited staff resources).

8. The secretariat informed the Bureau about the current situation. The Secretariat described the status of several key issues related to the organization of the MoPs in 2024. In particular, regarding the possible date for resuming the MoPs, the secretariat advised that due to the current severe liquidity crisis ongoing at the UN, it is not possible to add additional meetings to the UN Office at Geneva (UNOG) conference schedule for the first half of 2024,

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<sup>6</sup> Elected by the Implementation Committee on 27 February 2024 at its fifty-eighth session (online, 27-29 February 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> In this document, "The Meetings of the Parties" or "MoP9/MoP5" will be used interchangeably throughout the text.

and in the second half of the year the situation is unlikely to improve. The Working Group meeting scheduled for 9–11 December 2024 was cancelled by MoP9/MoP5; however, this event remains on the UNOG conference schedule and will therefore be fully catered for if used for a resumed MoP9/MoP5. Possible alternative options, such as inviting the resumed MoPs to take place in a host country (outside UNOG premises), are not only unlikely, but also impractical, since they would not provide any benefit over a meeting held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva but would nevertheless add significant increases to the resource requirements and workload of both the Parties and the secretariat. The secretariat also reminded the Bureau of the current critical staffing situation and expectations in this regard.

9. In the light of the above, the Bureau unanimously agreed on the following:

- (a) The Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention and the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol to be organized in 2024 as mentioned in para 5 above will be a continuation of the MoP9/MoP5. Its formal title will be “the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment - resumed”.
- (b) The Chair of the high-level segment of MoP9/MoP5 will continue chairing the resumed meetings (if the Chair is not available, a new Chair will be elected at the meeting).
- (c) The “resumed MoP9/MoP5” will focus on finalizing the agenda of the MoP9/MoP5 high level segments (ECE/MP.EIA/31–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/14), i.e. finalising agenda items 8 and 9, notably by the adoption of the two draft decisions that were not adopted by the MoP9/MoP5 in December 2023 as indicated in para 5 above:
  - i. The draft Decision IX/4i on compliance by Czechia with its obligations under the Convention in respect of the lifetime extension of four reactors at Dukovany nuclear power plant by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention.
  - ii. The Geneva Declaration.
- (d) Credentials issued for MoP9/MoP5 will be valid for the resumed MoP9/MoP5 unless a Party appoints other representatives and submits new credentials.
- (e) The reports of MoP9/MoP5 and of the resumed MoP9/MoP5 will be prepared separately. The report of MoP9/MoP5 (of 2023) will be prepared in advance of the resumed MoP9/MoP5 and will cover all proceedings of those MoPs. The report of the resumed MoP9/MoP5 will be prepared after the conclusion of the resumed MoP9/MoP5 and will cover the two decisions concerned and any other business items.
- (f) On the MoP9/MoP5 report preparation the Bureau noted that, on 20 December 2023, the secretariat had circulated an email message (with the informal presentation of the main conclusions of the MoP9/MoP5 attached) to the focal points and stakeholders under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA, registered meeting participants, and the Implementation Committee members. Recalling the practice whereby, at the end of MoP sessions, Parties were given the opportunity to provide comments on an informal presentation of the conclusions read out by the Secretary, and recognizing that this process was not carried out at the recent MoP sessions due to time constraints, the Bureau requested the secretariat to recirculate the informal presentation (originally circulated on December 20, 2023, as mentioned above) inviting the Parties to provide their written comments, if any, to the main conclusions to the secretariat until April 5, 2024. After receiving

the comments, the secretariat will work together with the Bureau on finalizing the draft report of the MoP9/MoP5 held on 12-15 December 2023.

- (g) **The resumed MoP9/MoP5 will be organized on 10 December 2024** in Geneva using the existing bookings of a meeting room and other UNOG services foreseen for the cancelled Working Group meeting that was initially planned for 9-11 December 2024.
10. The Bureau invited the secretariat to draft the informal notes on its extraordinary meeting and to have them circulated for comments by the Bureau members prior to their finalization. The Bureau also requested that the secretariat drafts an email message with the information on the Bureau meeting and the informal notes attached to be circulated subsequently for the attention of the Parties and stakeholders.
  11. The Bureau agreed to hold its next meeting online (at a date to be agreed upon electronically) with a view to prepare the agenda and agree on the proceedings for the resumed MoP9/MoP5 sessions.
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