

Minsk Declaration

We, the high-level representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) member States and the European Union gathered in Minsk from 13 to 16 June 2017 on the occasion of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment,

Recalling the entry into force of the Espoo Convention in 1997 and the considerable impact on international environmental law and the environment it has had since then,

Mindful of the added value that the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment has produced and will produce in the future by extending the application of strategic environmental assessment to the earliest stages of decision-making, i.e., to plans and programmes and, where appropriate, to policies and legislation,

Recalling decision VI/5–II/5 on accession by Member States of the United Nations not members of ECE and the Geneva Declaration (Part B) on the Global Application of the Convention and the Protocol, both adopted jointly by the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol in 2014,

Welcoming the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets, as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,¹ which came into effect on 1 January 2016 and will guide the decisions of the United Nations Member States over the next several years in areas of importance for humanity and the planet, subject to annual review and follow-up by the high-level political forum on sustainable development to ensure their implementation,

Also welcoming the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development,² the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030³ and the outcome of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Paris Agreement)⁴ as key milestones towards a sustainable future,

Further welcoming the outcomes of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016),

Recognizing that environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment are cross-cutting tools designed to prevent and mitigate a wide range of adverse environmental and health impacts likely to arise from envisaged economic activities or development,

Recognizing also that the transboundary environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment procedures render decision-making regarding economic development planning more inclusive, transparent, participatory and representative by requiring consultation of the environment and health authorities, other stakeholders and the public at the local, national and international levels, and by ensuring that the outcomes of these consultations are duly taken into account,

1. *Celebrate* the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention;

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1.

² General Assembly resolution 69/313.

³ General Assembly resolution 69/283.

⁴ FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, annex.

2. *Acknowledge* the vast benefits witnessed by Parties from the application of the Convention and the important contribution of the instrument in the protection of the environment through the development of anticipatory and prevention policies against significant adverse environmental impacts, in shaping sustainable development policies and fostering international cooperation throughout the region;

3. *Stress* the need to accelerate the entry into effect of the first amendment through the attainment of the remaining ratifications, and call once again upon those Parties that were Parties to the Convention on 27 February 2001 that have not yet done so to ratify the first amendment as soon as possible;

4. *Take note* with satisfaction that the second amendment to the Convention, adopted by decision III/7, is expected to enter into force in autumn 2017 and that it will therefore further expand and improve the application of the Convention;

5. *Recognize* that by applying the Protocol during the past seven years Parties have enhanced the protection of the environment and the implementation of their sustainable development objectives in all sectoral policies, and have promoted green growth;

6. *Also recognize* that, on account of the applied frameworks provided by the Convention and the Protocol, the region is a front-runner in integrating environmental and health concerns into economic development, which constitutes a good practice worldwide;

7. *Emphasize* that the Convention and in particular the Protocol play an important role in supporting countries to translate international principles and global commitments for the protection of the environment and sustainable development into practical action at the national level and thus contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

8. *Also emphasize* that promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals in general at the national and international levels may lead in turn to improved and all-inclusive processes for impact assessment, and hence to the effective application of the Convention and the Protocol;

9. *Further emphasize* that strategic environmental assessment is a key tool for the development of national climate change action and planning, and for the incorporation of specific climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into regional development and sectoral plans, programmes and policies;

10. *Call upon* Parties to the Convention and the Protocol to take action to maximize the effectiveness of the application of the Convention and the Protocol, respectively, so that the best possible results are achieved;

11. *Welcome* the Good practice recommendations on the application of the Convention to nuclear energy-related activities,⁵ which seek to assist countries in the consistent practical application of the Convention;

12. *Invite* Parties, signatories, civil society and all stakeholders, partner organizations, international financial institutions and the secretariat to widely promote awareness of the Convention and the Protocol, and their role in the achievement of global commitments;

13. *Recognize* that the Convention and the Protocol are also effective instruments for realizing benefits worldwide, by contributing to the achievement of the global sustainable development commitments within and beyond the ECE region;

⁵ ECE/MP.EIA/2017/10.

14. *Call upon* Parties to introduce all necessary national measures, both legal and practical, to fully meet their obligations and to reap the full benefits of the Convention and the Protocol;

15. *Invite* any interested State not party to provisionally apply the Convention and the Protocol, pending accession, and to develop sufficient capacity for the successful implementation of those treaties, including in the pursuit of sustainable development and climate change goals and actions;

16. *Request* Parties to assist other United Nations Member States from within and outside the ECE region in their efforts to implement the Convention and to implement and accede to the Protocol;

17. *Welcome* the design and implementation of workplan activities and the development of information materials in the forthcoming intersessional period that highlight the contribution of the Convention and the Protocol to the attainment of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals;

18. *Also welcome* decision VII/7–III/6 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Meetings of the Parties) on the development of a long-term strategy and an action plan for adoption at the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties;

19. *Acknowledge* the importance of information sharing and cooperation among Parties to the Convention and the Protocol, in particular through up-to-date networks of points of contact for notification and of focal points for administrative matters, bilateral agreements and subregional cooperation;

20. *Call* for the active participation of, and the strengthening of cooperation among, countries and for their cooperation with other international treaties, national and international organizations, civil society, the private sector and financial institutions to support the application of the treaties;

21. *Request* Parties to upgrade the sustainable availability of financing for the successful implementation of the activities under the Convention and the Protocol, and invite interested States, financial institutions, organizations and other stakeholders to also support the mobilization of means and resources for the widespread application of the two instruments worldwide.

22. *Thank* the Government of Belarus for hosting the seventh and third sessions, respectively, of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol in Minsk and for its generous hospitality.
