



The subregional Workshop on Espoo Convention was organized jointly by the OSCE and the UNECE Espoo Convention Secretariat within the framework of Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative on 24-25 May 2011 in Tbilisi with the participation of government and NGO representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Government representatives from Turkey also participated at the workshop. The UNECE Espoo Convention, OSCE Secretariat and OSCE Offices in Yerevan and Baku, UNDP Country Office in Georgia as well as REC Caucasus were present at the workshop.

While a detailed workshop report is currently under preparation, the preliminary summary of discussions, as also presented to the participants at the outset of the workshop, is provided below. This summary is particularly related to the discussions on (i) challenges faced by the countries in implementing the EIA process; (ii) their capacity building needs; and (iii) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Challenges:

1. Lack of sufficient technical and human resources capacities in the governmental agencies in charge of EIA – few staff, and difficulty of recruiting and retaining experts
2. Possible doubts about impartiality when developer leads organization of EIA public hearings- Aarhus Centres play an important role in addressing this challenge in Armenia and Georgia
3. Lack of clarity on legal framework or procedures for public hearings – a concern for all stakeholders, including developers
4. Ambiguity on the role and involvement of NGOs in EIA process- again Aarhus Centres can help to resolve
5. Lack of clarity on who covers the cost of procedures
6. Possible tendency to divide large scale projects into smaller elements which would neglect the cumulative effects of such large-scale projects
7. The impact of EIA procedure on decision-making was questioned
8. Potential discrepancies between the system of State ecological expertise and Western EIA systems

The commonality of problems in the countries of the region was emphasized.

Some methodological concerns were underlined, but institutional capacities and legal ambiguity were generally considered to be more severe constraints

Capacity building needs:

1. The South Caucasus countries should be provided with the opportunity to benefit from capacity building activities targeting and/or convened by other countries in the UNECE/OSCE region
2. A subregional workshop with invited experts from highly-experienced countries
3. The exchange of environmental information in this region would build common understanding
4. Strengthening capacity of, and cooperation with, NGOs on Convention in close cooperation with Aarhus Centres and REC Caucasus
5. Harmonization of EIA legislation with active involvement of NGOs
6. Pilot project on transboundary EIA
7. The need to make better use of the individual Aarhus Centres as well as the Aarhus Centres Network present in the region and further strengthen their capacities in information dissemination, organizing and following-up on the EIA public hearings.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA):

1. Challenges associated with implementation of plan not proceeding as foreseen, and as expected during SEA procedure
2. Harmonization of legislation and practices is important
3. Possibilities to be explored to benefit from good practices in this field for instance experience of Turkey in applying SEA and of developing its SEA system – UNECE and OSCE together should take this as a pilot project and consider supporting such exchange of experiences/good practices

The linkages between the actual implementation of the provisions of Aarhus Convention and Espoo Convention and its Protocol were highlighted and the role of Aarhus Centres in this respect and the need for their more active involvement with strengthened capacities was strongly emphasized.