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## **AARHUS MEMBERSHIP CLIMBS TO FORTY: Germany to become 40th Party to environmental rights treaty**

Germany has become the latest country to ratify the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Germany's action, which took place on 15 January 2007, will raise the total number of Parties to the Convention to 40.<sup>1</sup> Germany follows Sweden, which became a Party to the treaty in 2005, and Greece, Luxembourg and Slovakia, which became Parties in 2006.

The Aarhus Convention is the world's most far-reaching treaty on environmental rights. It seeks to promote greater transparency and accountability among government bodies by guaranteeing public rights of access to environmental information, providing for public involvement in environmental decision-making and requiring the establishment of procedures enabling the public to challenge environmental decisions.

The Convention was adopted in Aarhus, Denmark, in June 1998 and signed by 39 European and Central Asian countries and the European Community. It entered into force in October 2001. Its Parties now include most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and nearly all EU member States.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Kaj Bärlund, Director of the UNECE Environment, Housing and Land Management Division, expressed satisfaction with the progress enjoyed by the Convention: "With the latest ratifications, the Convention moves much closer to creating a means by which citizens from across the entire region can enforce their rights to protect and enhance the environment. With the number of Aarhus Parties rising to 40, attention may now shift to deepening implementation of the agreement, while countries outside our region stand to gain from the valuable lessons of UNECE's experience with environmental democracy."

For further information, please visit [www.unece.org/env/pp](http://www.unece.org/env/pp) or contact:

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<sup>1</sup> The Parties are: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the European Community. Article 20 of the Convention states that the Convention enters into force for a State on the ninetieth day after the date of deposit of the State's instrument of ratification, at which point it becomes a Party.

<sup>2</sup> The UNECE region encompasses the whole of Europe and five Central Asian countries, as well as Canada, Israel and the United States. Ireland remains the sole European Union country that has not ratified the Convention.