

Economic Commission for Europe

Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Bureau

Ninth meeting

Madrid, Spain, 27 November 2015

Report of the ninth meeting of the Bureau¹

1. Attendance

Bureau members: Ms. Tina Skårman (Sweden, Chair), Ms. Ulrike Schüler (Germany, Vice-Chair), Mr. Chris Allen (European Union), Mr. Nebojsa Redzic (Serbia) and Mr. Roland Ritter (Switzerland).

Observers: Mr. Iñigo de Vicente-Mingarro for Ms. Carmen Canales (Spain) and Ms. Mara Silina (European ECO-Forum).

Not present: Mr. Øyvind Hetland (Norway, Vice-Chair) and Ms. Carmen Canales (Spain).

2. Opening and adoption of the agenda

The Bureau adopted the provisional agenda as amended at the meeting.

3. Membership of the Compliance Committee

Pursuant to the decision I/1 (Rules of Procedure, see rule 22 paragraph 5 and rule 23 paragraph 2) and decision I/2 (Structure and functions of the Compliance Committee and procedures for the review of compliance, see chapter I paragraph 9 of the Annex) (ECE/MR.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1)² of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs), the Bureau appointed Mr. Nicolas Encausse as new member of the Compliance Committee. Mr. Encausse had been nominated by France as a replacement for Mr. Ralid Ajaboune. Mr. Ajaboune had been elected member of the Committee at the second session of the Meeting of the Parties (3-4 July 2014, Maastricht), but had not been in a position to fulfil his duty due to other commitments.

4. Documents prepared by the Compliance Committee

The Bureau considered the following two documents in the light of the comments provided by the Working Group of the Parties at its fourth meeting (26 November 2015, Madrid):

¹ This document was not formally edited.

² Available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/mopp1.html#/>.

(a) Draft systemic issues concerning the implementation of the Protocol and recommendations on how to address them (ECE/MR.PRTR/WG.1/2015/5)³.

(b) Draft guidance for reporting on implementation of the Protocol (ECE/MR.PRTR/WG.1/2015/6)⁴.

The Bureau focused its discussion on the document on systemic issues, which attracted most comments at the meeting of the Working Group of the Parties:

(a) Substantive scope of the document

Some Bureau members considered that several recommendations are going beyond the requirements set by the Protocol. Others highlighted that the document is a flexible guidance that Parties will apply voluntarily and it would be beneficial for Parties to learn examples on a progressive implementation of the Protocol. It was also noted that non-Parties, in particular, countries with economies in transition, are looking for the most advanced ways of implementation of the Protocol, and this document could offer a useful source of information in this respect.

(b) Priorities

Some Bureau members considered that it will be useful to set priorities regarding different issues addressed in the document. The Bureau, however, questioned the feasibility of such approach as the priorities would likely differ between Parties.

The Bureau concluded that it is necessary to provide in the document's introduction a more clear explanation regarding the voluntarily status of the document and of the issue of prioritization. The Bureau was also reminded to send any written comments on the documents to the secretariat by 20 January 2015.

In the context of the discussion on systemic challenges to the implementation of the Protocol, the Bureau addressed the issue of national resources required for the development and upgrade of PRTRs software. To provide Parties with the up-to-date information on this matter, the Bureau requested the secretariat to review, in cooperation with partner organisations, the note on Technical assistance and resources (ECE/MR.PRTR/WG.1/2012/4)⁵ and to submit the revised note as official document in the three ECE official languages to the fifth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties for its consideration.

The Bureau also discussed other practical ways to assist countries willing to ratify the Protocol. In this regard it suggested a so-called "checklist" of specific steps or practical measures that country will have to apply prior to the ratification of Protocol. The Bureau requested the secretariat to analyse existing material on the subject matter and to inform the Bureau accordingly.

5. Subregional workshop for countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia

The Bureau agreed that the secretariat should continue liaising with Belarus as a potential host country for the subregional workshop for countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia to take place in May/June 2016. The Bureau also noted that its members are expected to participate in the workshop as speakers.

³ Available from <http://www.unece.org/prtrwgp4/>.

⁴ Available from <http://www.unece.org/prtrwgp4/>.

⁵ Available from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=28225#/>.

6. Third session of the Meeting of the Parties

The Bureau took note of the statement by the European Union and its Member States regarding the future work programme of the Protocol. The following suggestions were submitted for the Bureau's consideration:

(a) Extend the timing between sessions of the Meeting of the Parties to four years. This will also apply to the extension of time for electing members of the Compliance Committee and for preparing national implementation reports;

(b) In principle, hold sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and to the Protocol on PRTRs back to back. The sessions should take place in Geneva unless the Parties decide otherwise;

(c) To discontinue automatically organize a High Level Segment during the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, thus fitting the sessions in one working week. The decision whether or not a High Level Segment would be deemed relevant will lie with the Working Group of the Parties.

The Bureau understood that these suggestions, subject to the decision by the Meeting of the Parties, are intended for the next intersessional period, notably after the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to be held in 2017. The Bureau unanimously supported these suggestions and agreed to submit them to the Working Group of the Parties for consideration at its fifth meeting.

7. Global promotion of the Protocol

The Bureau reaffirmed its support to the global promotion of the Protocol and recognised the second Global round table on PRTRs (24-25 November 2015, Madrid), hosted by the Government of Spain, as a very useful event. The Bureau noted that the Global round table had fostered the fruitful exchange of experiences between numerous Governments and stakeholders, such as the industry, research institutions and non-governmental organizations, from different regions.

8. Other relevant matters derived from the discussions during the meeting of the Working Group of the Parties

The Bureau took note of the information provided by the Chair and the secretariat on the latest meeting between the representatives of the governing bodies of Economic Commission for Europe multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and the Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, 26 October 2015), including on the agenda item on MEAs and other instruments of the eight Environment for Europe (EfE) Ministerial Conference (Batum, 8-10 June 2016). The Bureau stressed the strong linkages between PRTR and the two topics, air pollution and green economy, which will be at the centre of discussions at the EfE Conference. The Bureau discussed possible examples of the use of PRTRs e.g. in the context of air quality and health; green chemistry; as well as PRTR-related initiatives by the textile industry. The Bureau recalled the importance for Parties to promote the Protocol at this event through cooperating closely with the EfE focal points in their respective countries as to: (a) provide inputs to the documents prepared for the Conference and (b) contribute to formal statements to be delivered at the Conference.

9. Key outputs from relevant international processes

The secretariat briefed the Bureau on potential linkages between the work under the Protocol and other international processes regarding chemicals and waste issues, such as the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) MEAs, as well as work under the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC). While the relevance of PRTRs has been widely recognized in these processes, e.g. for reporting under the Stockholm or Minamata Conventions, an improved communication at national level and in particular between focal points to the Protocol and to other international processes will be

of great importance. This will help to support the promotion of the Protocol in other international forums, and to implement different instruments in synergy.

The Chair introduced the project “Solutions”⁶, funded by the European Union (EU). The overall goal project is to produce consistent solutions for the large number of legacy, present and future chemicals posing a risk to European water resources with respect to ecosystems and human health. Solutions searches for new and improved tools, models, and methods to support decisions in environmental and water policies. Results will become available in 2018, and they should cover PRTR and other international reporting. The Chair also presented a document, prepared on behalf of the Swedish EPA, entitled “PRTR and synergies with other multilateral agreements, EU legal acts and EEA reportings” (SMED Report, No 167, 2014)⁷.

In addition, the Chair introduced the ongoing Swedish project “Environmental weather”, which promotes a user-friendly application of PRTR data, also for monitoring of health-related issues. The project will help public to identify areas with less polluted air and thus to make a choice about a travelling way where you will be less exposed to the polluted air.

10. Sustainable Development Goals and the Protocol on PRTRs

Pursuant to the outcomes of the discussions by the Working Group of the Parties, the Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare a note on the linkages between Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Protocol on PRTRs, with a view to submit the note as official document in the three ECE official languages to the upcoming meeting of the Working Group of the Parties for its consideration.

11. Calendar of the future meetings

The Bureau took note of the following tentative calendar of meetings prepared by the secretariat:

- May-June 2016 – Sub-regional capacity building workshop.
- May-June 2016 – Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs.
- September/October 2016 – International PRTR Coordination Group, back to back with the OECD TF on PRTRs.
- 23-25 November 2016 – Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs.
- 25 November 2016 – Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs.
- Meetings of the Compliance Committee, as required.

⁶ <http://www.solutions-project.eu/>.

⁷ Available from <http://www.smed.se/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/SMED-report-2014-167.pdf>.