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POUR L'EUROPEЕВРОПЕЙСКАЯ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ  
КОМИССИЯECONOMIC COMMISSION  
FOR EUROPE

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

**Task Force on Access to Information**

**Third meeting**

Geneva, 3-5 December 2014

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**Approval of the key outcomes of the meeting**

**Key outcomes<sup>1</sup>**

As agreed by the Task Force on Access to Information at its third meeting

**1. Opening and adoption of the agenda**

1. The Task Force adopted the agenda as set out in the document AC/TF.AI-3/Inf.1.

**2. Environmental information: minding the gap**

(a) Scope of environmental information

2. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experiences and challenges in defining the scope of environmental information shared by presenters from Armenia, the European Union, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), , the European ECO Forum, and the ECE Statistical Division as well as by representatives from Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Poland, Ukraine, Aarhus Centre of Ukraine, REC Caucasus, and the International Institute for Law and the Environment;

(b) Agreed to further consider this issue, taking into account the challenges in establishing boundaries between environmental and other types of information;

(c) Took note of the case-law database maintained under the auspices of the Aarhus Convention Task Force on Access to Justice and encouraged Parties to further populate

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<sup>1</sup>This document was not formally edited.

this database with cases relevant to access to environmental information by using the case summary template<sup>2</sup>.

(b) Quality of environmental information

3. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experiences and challenges shared by the presenters from Kyrgyzstan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and NGO “Journalist for Human Rights” as well as representatives from Armenia, the European Environmental Agency and International Charitable Organization “Green Dossier”, in improving quality of environmental information;

(b) Agreed to consider further whether a generic approach to environmental data quality, data verification and data validation is possible and possible suggestions in this regard.

(c) Comparability of environmental information

4. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experiences and challenges shared by the presenters from the European Environmental Agency and Switzerland with regard to enhancing the comparability of environmental information;

(b) Took note of the recent developments with regard to the state of environment reports in the European Union and Switzerland;

(c) Took note of the tailor-made recommendations to countries of South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia for the production and sharing of Environmental Indicators (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2014/4) and the progress in their implementation (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2014/8)<sup>3</sup>.

**4. Access to environmental information on products: implementation outlook**

5. The Task Force:

(a) Expressed its appreciation to those Parties, which provided at the request of the Task Force, detailed information on the implementation of article 5, paragraphs 6 and 8, of the Convention through the 2014 national implementation reports;

(b) Called on Parties to continue the exchange of information on this matter through the next reporting cycle;

(c) Agreed that it will be important to organize in the next inter-sessional period a workshop on public access to environment-related product information under the auspices of the Task Force on Access to Information, following up on the outcomes of

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<sup>2</sup> More information is available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/treaties/public-participation/aarhus-convention/envpptfwg/envppatoj/jurisprudenceplatform.html>

<sup>3</sup> Documents are available from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=33339#/> and the meeting webpage <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/tfai3.html#/>.

the previous workshop held in Geneva on 7 and 8 February 2013 and building upon key trends identified through the next reporting cycle;

(d) Invited the representatives of other international forums dealing with this topic to provide their input to the above workshop on environment-related product information.

### **3. The application of certain restrictions on access to environmental information in accordance with the Convention's provisions**

6. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experiences and challenges shared by the Secretary-General of the European Ombudsman, the former Chair of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee, the presenters from Poland, Denmark, the World Trade Organization, the European ECO Forum, the International Institute for Law and the Environment and the European Chemical Industry Council, as well as the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, representatives from Armenia, Belarus, International Charitable Organization "Green Dossier", Globe Europe, and EuropaBio with regard to the application of certain restrictions on access to environmental information in accordance with the Convention's provisions;

(b) Called on Parties to apply the grounds for refusal in access to environmental information in a restrictive way;

(c) Urged Parties to direct their officials to apply a presumption of maximum disclosure that when information on emissions into the environment is requested, that information is to be disclosed as appropriate and necessary.

(d) Stressed the importance to further consider this issue, taking into account the challenges highlighted during the discussion.

### **5. Increasing interoperability and facilitating data sharing at the national level through electronic information tools**

7. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experience, capacity-building initiatives and future plans shared by presenters from Austria, the European Union, Kazakhstan, Romania, Serbia, Spain, and the Open Geospatial Consortium as well as representatives from the European Investment Bank, REC Caucasus and the GEO Secretariat (the Group on Earth Observations);

(b) Underlined the importance of promoting public access to environmental information within E-government and Open Government Data and other initiatives and involving the public in supplying and re-using the data;

(c) Requested that the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, update as necessary the questionnaire and to organize a survey to monitor the progress in the implementation of decision II/3 and to report at the fourth meeting of the Task Force in 2015.

## **6. Activities under other international forums**

The Task Force:

- (a) Took note of the information provided by the representatives of the international forums at this session, including the GEO Secretariat (the Group on Earth Observations), secretariats of the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessments, the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) in Europe (UN-GGIM: Europe), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes;
- (b) Took note of Targets and performance indicators for measuring progress in developing the Shared Environmental Information System across the pan-European region as set out in document (ECE/CEP/2014/8) approved by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy at its twentieth session and agreed on the importance of establishing national Shared Environmental Information Systems in accordance with the approved targets and indicators;
- (c) Expressed its support to the forums represented at the meeting for their efforts to strengthen cooperation and build synergies so as to widen public access to environmental information;
- (d) Stressed the critical importance of effective cooperation between national focal points for different forums dealing with access to environmental information and for effective engagement of non-governmental organizations, Aarhus Centres and other stakeholders in such cooperation;
- (e) Called upon the national focal points to promote such cooperation.

## **8. Approval of the key outcomes of the meeting**

The Task Force:

- (a) Thanked the speakers for their presentations;
- (b) Expressed appreciation to Slovakia and the United Kingdom for the written statements provided in advance of the meeting;
- (c) Agreed on the outcomes presented by the Chair at the meeting and requested that the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, finalize the meeting report and incorporate these outcomes.