

**THIRTY-NINTH MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE
MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
IN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL
MATTERS (AARHUS CONVENTION)¹**

Palais des Nations, Geneva
13-14 December 2016

REPORT OF THE MEETING

ATTENDANCE:

Bureau members: Ms. Maia Bitadze (Georgia, Chair), Ms. Beate Berglund Ekeberg (Norway, Vice-Chair, present via video conference), Mr. Lukas Pokorny (Czechia, Vice-Chair), Mr. Philippe Ramet (France), Mr. Edwin Koning (Netherlands)

Observers: Mr. Jeremy Wates (NGO observer, European Environmental Bureau representing European ECO Forum),

Apologies: Ms. Gordana Petkovic (Serbia), Mr Adrian Panciuc (Republic of Moldova).

I. OPENING AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA

1. Chair opened the meeting and outlined its following main objectives: (a) review the progress in implementing the current work programme and consider future planned activities; (b) consider, revise and finalise draft decisions and draft declaration for the sixth session of the Convention's Meeting of the Parties, for their submission to the 21st meeting of the Convention's Working Group of the Parties (4-6 April 2017); and (c) deliberate on the organisation of the joint high-level segment to be held under the auspices of the Convention's sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties and the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) (Budva, Montenegro, 14 September 2017).

2. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the Chair and adopted the provisional agenda of the meeting.

II. STATUS OF RATIFICATION OF THE CONVENTION, ITS AMENDMENT AND THE PRTR PROTOCOL

3. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the status of ratifications. As of 13 December 2016 there were 47 Parties to the Aarhus Convention, 30 Parties to the amendment on public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and 35 Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs). Since the twentieth meeting of the Working Group (Geneva, 15-17 June 2016) there have been no new ratifications of the Convention or the Protocol. France ratified the GMO amendment on 11 July 2016.

¹ This document was not formally edited.

III. UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES

4. The Bureau took note of the report on the implementation of the work programme for 2015-2017 and the report on contributions and expenditures for the work programme for 2015-2017 prepared by the secretariat and requested the secretariat to prepare updated reports for the twenty-first meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 4-6 April 2017).

IV. PREPARATION OF THE TWENTY-FIRST MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE PARTIES (4–6 APRIL 2017)²

(a) Access to information

5. Pursuant to the decision of the Working Group at its twentieth meeting, the draft decision on access to information was distributed for consultation to Parties and stakeholders prior to the 39th meeting of the Bureau. The Bureau considered the comments received on the draft decision, approved the document, as was amended at the meeting, and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Working Group at its twenty-first meeting for consideration and approval.

(b) Public participation in decision-making

6. Pursuant to the decision of the Working Group at its twentieth meeting, the draft decision on public participation in decision-making was distributed for consultation to Parties and stakeholders prior to the 39th meeting of the Bureau. The Bureau considered the comments received on the draft decision, approved the document, as was amended at the meeting, and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Working Group at its twenty-first meeting for consideration and approval.

(c) Access to justice

7. Pursuant to the decision of the Working Group at its twentieth meeting, the draft decision on access to justice was distributed for consultation to Parties and stakeholders prior to the 39th meeting of the Bureau. The Bureau considered the comments received on the draft decision, approved the document, as was amended at the meeting, and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Working Group at its twenty-first meeting for consideration and approval.

(d) Promotion of the Convention's principles in international forums

8. Pursuant to the decision of the Working Group at its twentieth meeting, the draft decision on promotion of the Convention's principles in international forums was distributed for consultation to Parties and stakeholders prior to the 39th meeting of the Bureau. The Bureau considered the comments received on the draft decision, approved the document, as was amended at the meeting, and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Working Group at its twenty-first meeting for consideration and approval.

(e) Compliance mechanism

9. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat regarding the tentative timeline towards the preparation of the draft decisions on compliance matter. The

² Text of all documents subject to consultation prior to the 39th meeting of the Bureau and comments received are available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43897#/>

timeline is subject to finalisation of findings and recommendations by the Compliance Committee.

(f) Work programme 2018–2021

10. Pursuant to the decision of the Working Group at its twentieth meeting, the draft decision on the work programme for 2018-2021 was distributed for consultation to Parties and stakeholders prior to the 39th meeting of the Bureau. The Bureau considered the comments received on the draft decision, approved the document, as was amended at the meeting, and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Working Group at its twenty-first meeting for consideration and approval.

(g) Financial Arrangements

11. Following the lack of consensus in the Working Group at its twentieth meeting, the draft decision on financial arrangements was distributed for consultation to Parties and stakeholders prior to the 39th meeting of the Bureau. The Bureau considered the comments received on the draft decision and focused its discussion on: (a) schemes of contributions (mandatory or voluntary) and (b) the use of the United Nations scale of assessment as reference for a future scheme of contributions. In addition, the Bureau considered whether to suggest an increase of the minimum level of contributions from USD 500 to USD 1,000. The Bureau, approved the document, as was amended at the meeting, and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Working Group at its twenty-first meeting for consideration and approval.

(h) Reporting requirements

12. The Bureau considered the draft decision, approved the document, as was amended at the meeting, and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Working Group at its twenty-first meeting for consideration and approval.

(i) Agenda of the 21st meeting of the Working Group of the Parties

13. The Bureau considered the agenda, approved the document and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Working Group at its twenty-first meeting for consideration and adoption.

V. SIXTH SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

(a) Agenda of the sixth session

14. The Bureau discussed preparations for the joint high-level segment under the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs focusing on its possible format. The thematic session might consist of interactive panel discussions following a “Davos style”. The Bureau considered that the high-level segment should focus on concrete examples of new or on-going actions or initiatives that illustrate how the Aarhus Convention and/or the Protocol on PRTRs are being or can be used to support achievement of one or more Sustainable Development Goals.

15. The Bureau also agreed that while ministers should receive a priority for the seats on the panel, high-level representatives of civil society, private sector and other stakeholders should be also invited to take part in the panels.

16. The Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare the revised draft proposal on the segment in the light of the comments provided at the meeting and send it to both Bureaux (also the Protocol's Bureau) for comments.

(b) Declaration

17. Pursuant to the decisions of the Working Groups of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs the document was submitted to the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol at its fifth meeting (Geneva, 23–24 November 2016) and was made available to Parties to the Aarhus Convention and stakeholders for comments. The Bureaux of the Aarhus Convention and of the Protocol on PRTRs considered the comments received on the document and prepared its revised version. The revised version of the document will be submitted to the Convention's Working Group of the Parties at its twenty-first meeting, and it will be made available to the Convention's and Protocol's Parties, and stakeholders for a second commenting round. The document will then be revised again by the two Bureaux, in the light of the comments received, and submitted to the joint high-level segment of the next Meetings of the Parties (Budva, Montenegro, 14 September 2017) for consideration.

(c) Practical preparations

18. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the practical preparation for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties and the joint high-level segment.

VI. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

19. The Bureau took note of the calendar of planned activities under the Convention and its Protocol as available on the secretariat's website.

VII. CLOSING

20. The Chair thanked the Bureau for its constructive work and the secretariat for its support and closed the meeting.
