

**FOURTY-THIRD 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)<sup>1</sup>**

Palais des Nations, Geneva  
26 February 2019

**REPORT OF THE MEETING**

**ATTENDANCE:**

*Bureau members:* Ms. Maia Bitadze (Georgia, Chair), Ms. Beate Berglund Ekeberg (Norway, Vice-Chair), Ms. Nicolette Bouman (Netherlands, Vice-Chair), Ms. Malaj Enkelejda (Albania), Ms. Chiara Landini (Italy), Ms. Maryna Shimkus (Ukraine).

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

*Apologies:* Ms. Angelika Wiedner (European Union).

**I. OPENING AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

1. Ms. Beate Berglund Ekeberg<sup>2</sup>, introduced the agenda, highlighting that the meeting aims to: (a) review the implementation of the current work programme and consider future planned activities; (b) consider preparations for the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 26-28 June 2019); (c) consider preparations for the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties; (d) review promotion of the Convention and its principles, and (e) consider other relevant developments. The Bureau took note of the information and adopted the provisional agenda of the meeting.

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

2. The secretariat informed the Bureau that there were no new ratifications since the twenty-second meeting of the Working Group of the Parties held in June 2018. As of 26 February 2019, there were 47 Parties to the Aarhus Convention, 31 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 36 Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs).<sup>3</sup>

3. The secretariat reported that pursuant to the request of the Bureau, it has sent letters to Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Parties, whose ratification of the GMO amendment would count towards its entry into force. Participants shared information on relevant developments regarding the GMO amendment.

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

<sup>2</sup> Due to disruptions in flights schedule, the Chair arrived with delay, and part of the meeting was chaired by a Vice-Chair.

<sup>3</sup> Information available online at <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ratification.html>.

4. The Bureau took note of the provided information and stressed the need to bring the issue of ratification to the attention of high-level officials of the Parties concerned and to promote the ratification through different mechanisms of bilateral cooperation. The Bureau also requested the secretariat to liaise with Parties that indicated the need for assistance in order to develop the necessary capacities for facilitating ratification of the GMO amendment.

### **III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2018-2021, INCLUDING FINANCIAL MATTERS**

5. The Bureau took note of the report on the implementation of the work programme for 2018-2021, and of the report on contributions and expenditures for this work programme, prepared by the secretariat. The Bureau requested the secretariat to update the reports, as required, and submit them to the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 26-28 June 2019).

6. The Bureau expressed its concerns regarding challenges associated with the preparation of the secretariat's report on expenditures. The current UN-wide reporting system (UMOJA) does not foresee provision of detailed information on the use of funds, but rather provides aggregated figures. Therefore, preparation of a comprehensive report on different areas of the work programme implies extremely time-consuming processing of data. These tasks are currently handled by staff responsible for substantive work, who has neither time nor skills to handle the tasks effectively. The Bureau stressed that transparency and accuracy of financial reporting in accordance with the adopted work programme is a key responsibility of the secretariat. The Bureau requested the secretariat to bring its concerns to the attention of responsible ECE officers in order to remedy this situation as a matter of urgency. The Bureau also requested the secretariat to report at its next meeting about steps taken by UNECE to address the Bureau concerns.

7. With regard to financial contributions, the Bureau noted positively, that only few Parties do not contribute to support the implementation of the Convention's work programme. On the down side, considering the amounts financially contributed, equity between countries has not yet been achieved. Neither provides the current voluntary scheme of contributions the necessary predictability of funds for implementing the work programme. Furthermore, most contributions are still received late in the year.

### **IV. AGENDA OF THE 23<sup>RD</sup> MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE PARTIES**

8. The Bureau agreed on the draft provisional agenda for the meeting and requested the secretariat to finalize it and submit it to the Working Group of the Parties.

### **V. PREPARATIONS FOR THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES**

#### **(a) Hosting of the session**

9. The secretariat reported that by the present time no candidate country expressed its interest to host the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties. The Bureau took note of the information provided and asked the secretariat to continue liaising with interested Parties on the hosting matter.

#### **(b) Preparation of documents for decision-making**

10. The Bureau considered several aspects related to the preparation of documents for decision-making for the next seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties. These

considerations were based on the long-standing experience of working methods of the Bureau, which has been proved effective.

11. In this regard the Bureau noted its responsibility to prepare draft documents that will be submitted to the Meeting of the Parties for decision-making, including decisions, provisional agenda for the seventh session and a possible declaration. Such draft documents were prepared in the past mostly through electronic consultations and during its regular meetings. At the same time, if need be, the Bureau may decide to hold an additional ad hoc meeting to work on the documents.

12. Further, the Bureau has been playing an important role in promoting the Convention, including, through preparing draft decisions on compliance matter that would serve the sole purpose – to assist Parties in their efforts to meet the Convention’s obligations. Such expertise-based and comprehensive decisions make the Convention a truly living document, and the Bureau has been key to promote this understanding among Parties and stakeholders. The Bureau also noted that the position of its members was always neutral and guided by the expertise of the Compliance Committee, which was elected and entrusted by the Meeting of the Parties for this purpose. In this regard, it was reiterated that members of the Bureau serve in personal capacity and do not represent formal positions of Parties in the Bureau’s work. Thus, the Bureau members are not expected to influence draft decisions that concern Parties which nominated them. The Bureau members have so far acted accordingly.

13. The Bureau also noted its responsibility to discuss and address any issues of concern that may have a negative effect on procedures established under the Convention or on its implementation, and put forward its view to the Working Group of the Parties and/or the Meeting of the Parties, as relevant.

14. Finally, the Bureau agreed on the timeline for the preparation of draft decisions for the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties. In this regard, it also decided to recommend to the Working Group of the Parties to hold the seventh session in late September/early October 2021.

(c) Strategic Plan for 2022-2030

15. The Bureau considered a draft proposal on the future Strategic Plan for 2022-2030 and requested the secretariat to revise the draft taking into consideration the comments provided at the meeting and to circulate the revised draft for final approval by the Bureau through electronic decision-making prior to its submission to the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group.

## **VI. PROMOTION OF THE CONVENTION AND ITS PRINCIPLES**

16. The Chair informed the Bureau that she delivered a presentation (through audioconference) at the 24th session of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) held in Geneva on 29-31 January 2019. The presentation focused on how the Convention is helping Parties to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this regard, she underlined that CEP requested the secretariat to give a prominent role to SDG 16 in relevant UNECE documents.<sup>4</sup>

17. The Chair also informed that she was invited in her capacity as Deputy Mayor of Tbilisi to the “Day of Cities”, an event organized by UNECE in Geneva on 9 April, where she plans to showcase an example of public participation in activities related to urban planning.

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<sup>4</sup> See outcomes adopted by the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (items (d) and (e) i – iii): [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2019/ece/cep/CEP-24\\_decisions\\_31.01.2019\\_final\\_unedited.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2019/ece/cep/CEP-24_decisions_31.01.2019_final_unedited.pdf).

18. The secretariat informed the Bureau about the outcomes of the latest informal meeting of the Chairs of the UNECE Multilateral environmental agreements held prior to CEP<sup>5</sup>, and about the preparations for the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (Geneva, 22-23 March 2019), including organising the peer learning round table on environmental dimension of SDG16, to be held on 22 March 2019.<sup>6</sup> The Bureau took note of the information provided by the Chair and the secretariat.

#### **VII. OTHER EMERGING ISSUES AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

19. The Bureau discussed the existing practice of the adoption of decisions by vote or by consensus under the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). The Bureau requested the secretariat to gather information on the practice applied by different MEAs and on other relevant procedural matters related to the above aspects of decision-making and inform the Bureau about the outcomes.

#### **VIII. CALENDAR OF THE FUTURE MEETINGS**

20. The Bureau took note of the tentative calendar of future meetings planned under the Convention and its Protocol in 2019.<sup>7</sup>

#### **IX. CLOSING**

21. The Bureau agreed to hold its next meeting back-to-back with the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group. The Chair thanked the Bureau for its constructive work and the secretariat for its support and closed the meeting.

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<sup>5</sup> Chair's summary of the latest informal meeting of the Chairs/Vice-Chairs of the UNECE MEAs held on 28 January 2019, will be made available at <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/informal-networks.html>.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.unece.org/sustainable-development/rfsd2019.html> and [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM\\_Website/SDG\\_16\\_2.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/SDG_16_2.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Available from: [https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/meetings-and-events.html#](https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/meetings-and-events.html#/).