

TWENTY-FOURTH MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE AARHUS CONVENTION

Czech Ministry of Environment, Prague, Czech Republic

26 March 2010

Attendance:

Bureau members: Mr. Jan Dusik (Czech Republic, Chair), Ms. Maud Istasse (Belgium, Vice-Chair), Ms. Zaneta Mikosa (Latvia, Vice-Chair), Mr. Gavrosh Zela (Albania), Mr. Ivan Narkevitch (Belarus), Ms. Emmanuelle Swynghedauw (France), Ms. Loredana Dall'Ora (Italy).

NGO Observer: Mr. John Hontelez (European Environmental Bureau representing European ECO Forum).

Also attending: Mr. Michel Amand (Belgium, Chair of the Working Group on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers); Mr. Jiri Hlavacek (Czech Republic); Mr. Lukas Pokorny (Czech Republic).

For the UNECE secretariat: Ms. Monika Linn, Team Leader, Environment for Europe and Sustainable Development Team, Environment, Housing and Land Management Division; Mr. Jeremy Wates, Secretary to the Aarhus Convention; Ms. Aphrodite Smagadi, Legal Affairs Officer, Aarhus Convention secretariat.

1. Adoption of agenda

The Chair presented the provisional agenda, which was adopted without any changes.

2. Status of ratification

The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Convention (forty-four Parties, including the European Union (EU)), the amendment to the Convention (twenty-five Parties, including the EU, not yet into force) and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR) (twenty-five Parties, including the EU).¹

3. Preparation of the extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties (ExMoP) (Geneva, 19 April 2010)

The secretariat briefed the members of the Bureau on the procedure that led to the convening of the ExMoP on 19 April 2010. As envisaged at the eleventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, on 18 December 2009 the Government of Norway had submitted a request to convene an ExMoP, which had been circulated by the secretariat to all Parties to the Convention on 13 January 2010. As of 10 February 2010, sixteen Parties had indicated their support for the request by Norway as formulated and thus the conditions for convening the ExMoP as proposed by Norway (article 10, paragraph 1, of the Convention) were fulfilled. Accordingly, the ExMoP had been scheduled to take place in Geneva on 19 April 2010, back-to-back with the first session of the Meeting of the Parties (MoP) to the PRTR Protocol.

¹ Detailed information may be found on the Internet at: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ratification.htm>. The term 'Parties' in this paragraph is used loosely to refer to those States or organizations that have ratified, accepted, approved or acceded to the instrument, irrespective of whether the instrument was in force at the time for that State or organization.

The Bureau discussed the items of the provisional agenda as proposed by Norway in its request: (a) the establishment of a Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making; b) accession to the Convention by non-ECE Member States; and c) the mandate for the Compliance Committee's documentation.²

(a) Establishment of a task force on public participation in decision-making

The Bureau was informed that the EU was intending to put forward a proposal aimed at resolving the outstanding issues reflected in square brackets in the draft decision on the establishment of a task force on public participation in decision-making. The Bureau requested the secretariat to liaise with Spain in its capacity as EU Presidency and enquire whether the proposal could be circulated to the Parties for their consideration ahead of the ExMoP. The Bureau recalled its decision at its previous meeting to propose the addition of a paragraph in the decision on the establishment of the task force referring to the lead country and to propose that the Chair of the new Task Force be elected at the ExMoP. It mandated the secretariat to liaise with the lead country on the latter point. It further agreed to propose to the lead country to coordinate with the Bureau and the secretariat on the elaboration of the work plan of the task force on the basis of its mandate, following the adoption of the decision.

(b) Accession by non-ECE States

The secretariat presented the note it had prepared on this item.³ The note examined the legal and policy context, the options for addressing the issue and the expression of interest already indicated by some non-ECE States. The Bureau thanked the secretariat for the note and acknowledged the need for the MoP to clarify the matter, after considering the drafting history of the relevant provision of the Convention, the various expressions of support by the Parties to the Convention for accession by States from outside the region (e.g. decision II/9), but also capacity building priorities. It briefly considered the two options available to address the matter, namely (i) through an amendment of article 19, paragraph 3, of the Convention, at the fourth ordinary session of the MoP (MoP 4), to open the Convention to non-ECE States, following the example of the PRTR Protocol; or (ii) through the elaboration of specific criteria and procedures for approval by the MoP of non-ECE States to become Parties to the Convention. The Bureau decided that the discussion should at least be launched at the ExMoP, which could give the mandate to the Working Group of the Parties (WGP) to explore the issue further and pave the way for a solution at MoP 4. As regards expressions of interest from specific countries, the Bureau took note of such an expression of interest from the Government of Cameroon. It also noted that some Parties were believed to be reluctant to approve accession by any particular non-ECE State prior to the discussion on the procedure and criteria for doing so, implying that such a decision could not be taken before MoP-4.

(c) Problems with Compliance Committee documentation

The secretariat informed the Bureau that the problems with the publication of the reports of the four past meetings of the Compliance Committee (since its twenty-third meeting in April 2009) and the six sets of findings adopted at those meeting had not been resolved, and welcomed the inclusion of the item in the agenda of the ExMoP. It gave a short account of the efforts made by the secretariat and the senior management of the ECE to find a workable solution in coordination with the UN Conference Services (in Geneva and New York). UN Conference Services had indicated that the UN rules did not give the possibility to grant a general waiver of the length limit

² See <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/emop2010.htm>.

³ Published on the Internet at: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/documents/note%20on%20accession%20by%20non-ECE%20States%202010.03.15%20final.pdf>.

for the Committee's findings nor to produce each set of findings as a separate document, rather as an addendum to the report, on grounds of a lack of a relevant mandate. It was preparing a note to brief the Parties on the matter.

The Bureau expressed its deep regret at the fact that none of the said reports or findings of the Committee were yet published as official UN documents and that they were consequently not available to the parties concerned in the official UNECE languages in which they generally worked, i.e. French and Russian as well as in English. It considered that a clear mandate by the MoP to produce the findings of the Committee as official UN documents, with translation provided in a timely manner and addressing the need to avoid frequent submission of waiver requests, was needed to resolve the matter and requested the secretariat to prepare a specific proposal for its consideration.

(d) Other matters

The secretariat informed the Bureau about a more general problem concerning the production of UNECE documents, caused by the fact that the UN Conference Services had suddenly chosen to use the UN biennial programme budget outputs as the basis for deciding on whether to accept documents for processing. It had used this, and an argument that there were insufficient mandates from the Member States, as reasons not to process any of the ExMoP and PRTR MoPP-1 documents, meaning that no documents were available in French or Russian, despite having been submitted by the secretariat within the relevant deadlines. UNECE had robustly rejected both arguments and the matter was under discussion between the UNECE Executive Secretary and the Director General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. The Bureau expressed major concern that none of the pre-session documents for the meetings had been produced as UN documents, and urged the secretariat to do its utmost to ensure that all documents were available in all three UNECE languages. It was suggested that direct representations by Member States to the UN administration might be appropriate.

4. Preparation of the first session of the Meeting of the Parties to the PRTR Protocol (Geneva, 20-22 April 2010) and associated events⁴

The Chair of the Working Group on PRTR expressed his deep concern and disapproval at the fact that none of the pre-session documents for the first session of the Meeting of the Parties to the PRTR Protocol (MoPP-1) had been produced as UN documents in the three official UNECE languages, although submitted within the relevant deadlines.

(a) Overview of the programme of events, including side events and reception

The Chair of the Working Group on PRTR reported on the programme of the ordinary session of the MoPP-1, on the special session of the International PRTR Coordination Group and on the side events, and the proposed Compliance Committee. The Government of Switzerland would host a reception on the evening of 21 April 2010.

The Bureau took note of this information.

(b) High-level segment

The Chair of the Working Group on PRTR reported on the programme of the high-level segment of MoPP-1, during which the declaration and the decisions, presently in draft form, would be adopted and the members of the Compliance Committee to the PRTR Protocol would be selected. As regards the high-level panel discussions, he informed the Bureau that there would be one panel on the topic of achievements of the Parties and one panel on challenges, capacity

⁴ See <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/mopp1.htm>.

building and technical assistance for States that are currently developing PRTRs. There was a possibility of a third panel to discuss the views of States that have not ratified the Protocol or that are non-ECE States, depending upon the level of interest from such countries. More information on the composition of the panels would be available shortly and would be publicised once some more panellists had confirmed their participation. The Bureau took note of the information and also discussed the level of participation and ministerial representation by the Parties. It also agreed that MoPP-1 would be opened by the Chair of the Bureau of the MoP to the Aarhus Convention. The Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare the public version of the programme of the high-level segment as soon as possible.

(c) Overview of draft decisions and draft declaration

The Chair of the Working Group on PRTR reported on three issues relating to this item: (i) the work programme, with relevant updates, would cover the period January 2011 to 2014, namely up to the MoPP-2; (ii) while there was no opposition in the Working Group to the principle that financial arrangements for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be elaborated following the example of the Aarhus Convention, there were different views as to whether this should be reflected in the meeting report or in the decision on financial arrangements, and if the latter, whether in the preamble, the operative part or an annex; (iii) in the draft Geneva Declaration, that had been prepared following a commenting process, three points in particular required further discussion, namely synergies with other international forums; the possibility to recommend to the Parties to consider the inclusion in their registers of the pollutants and substances that have been already included in other international instruments, but are not covered by the Protocol (paras. 14 and 15 of the draft Declaration); and the review of implementation of the Protocol (para. 18 of the draft Declaration).

The Bureau took note of this information.

(d) Implications for the Convention's work programme arising from anticipated adoption of the PRTR work programme

The secretariat noted that the work programme of the Aarhus Convention for 2009-2011 allotted 45% of a staff member to carry out PRTR activities, and that after its entry into effect in January 2011, the PRTR work programme would supersede this element in the Convention's work programme. This could be tackled in two ways: the WGP of the Convention could formally adopt an amendment to the Convention's work programme; or the WGP could acknowledge in its report that the PRTR activities phase out after the entry into effect of the PRTR work programme and could instruct the secretariat to reflect this in its use of resources, which would in turn be reflected at the stage of reporting on the work programme. The secretariat also informed the Bureau of the UN rules governing the establishment of a new post, in that the financial resources ensuring one year's salary for any new staff member should be contributed by the Parties at least six months before the new staff member takes up his or her tasks in order to allow time for the creation and filling of the post.

The Bureau took note of this information. It acknowledged that the Parties should discuss their contributions at the MoPP-1 as a separate matter from their contributions as Parties to the Convention, and that the issue would be further raised at the WGP in June-July. It also indicated its preference for the phasing out of PRTR activities under the work programme of the Convention, without the formal adoption of a revised work programme, as a more functional and less bureaucratic solution.

(e) Election of Bureau

The Chair of the Working Group on PRTR reported that the Group had prepared a draft decision on rules of procedure to be considered and eventually adopted by the MoPP-1, which

envisaged the election of a Bureau at each session of the MoPP. He reported on informal consultations that had taken place in order to identify Parties willing to put forward candidates for election to the Bureau, including for the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair. Several candidates had been identified and it was hoped that further candidates would be identified before MoPP-1. Arrangements for the chairing of the high-level segment had also been considered. The Bureau took note of this information.

(f) Election of Compliance Committee

The Chair of the Working Group on PRTR reported that the procedure for provisional nomination of candidates for election to the Compliance Committee of the PRTR Protocol, as agreed by the Bureau at its twenty-third meeting (Geneva, 20 November 2009),⁵ was circulated by the secretariat in December 2009 and had been implemented. He informed the Bureau that, according to the procedure, Parties to the Protocol had provisionally nominated six persons, leaving scope for further nominations.

The Bureau took note of this information and requested the secretariat to inform the Parties to the Protocol and other stakeholders that further nominations would be needed.

5. Preparation of the twelfth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (30 June-2 July 2010)

The Chair informed the Bureau that for personal reasons he might be unable to attend WGP-12. Both Vice-Chairs indicated that they might have difficulties in assuming the Chair at the meeting, for different reasons. It was agreed to keep the matter under review until nearer the time.

(a) Provisional agenda

The secretariat informed the Bureau that the final version of the draft provisional agenda would be circulated shortly to the Bureau members for their comment, using the electronic decision-making procedure. It was agreed that the meeting could be held within 2.5 days rather than 3 days, starting on the afternoon of 30 June 2010.

(b) Financial arrangements, including preparation of draft decision

The Bureau acknowledged that the elaboration of any strict rules governing the Parties' contributions could face objections by many States and that the establishment of strict financial arrangements under the Aarhus Convention would be a challenge for international environmental governance in general. It also recalled decision III/7 (para. 9), according to which the Working Group of the Parties was requested by the MoP to "continue in-depth discussions on possible future schemes of financial arrangements that meet the goals of stability, predictability and equity, including schemes that combine elements of the two options presented to the Meeting of the Parties in document ECE/MP.PP/2008/L.9, and on the basis of such discussion, to make recommendations concerning one or more options for a scheme of financial arrangements with a view to their adoption at the fourth ordinary meeting of the Parties."

On the basis of the MoP mandate, the Bureau requested the secretariat to draft a decision for review by the Bureau or its Chair, to be considered at WGP-12.

⁵ See <http://www.unece.org/env/documents/2010/pp/PRTRCCnominationprocedure.doc>.

(c) Implementation of the work programme for 2009-2011, including financial report for 2009

The secretariat informed the Bureau that it would circulate a draft of the report on implementation of the work programme for 2009-2011, including the financial report for 2009, to the Bureau members for comment before their next meeting on 19 April 2010. The report would then be submitted for consideration at WGP-12.

The Bureau took note of this information.

(d) Translation of national implementation reports

The Bureau recalled that at its previous meeting it had decided that in order to limit the burden arising from the translation of the national implementation reports in all three ECE languages, a draft decision would be prepared for consideration and adoption by MoP-4. Whereas the current system requires that the national implementation reports are produced in the three official languages, the new decision would only require that the synthesis report be available in the three official languages, but would allow for use of extrabudgetary funds to cover informal translations of the reports into English for operational purposes. The secretariat reported that there had been some indications that such a shift might gain support from Parties provided that other aspects of the trilingual status of the Convention were maintained and even reinforced (e.g. through more timely availability of documents in all three languages). The Bureau welcomed this information.

The Bureau also discussed how the ExMoP in April 2010 could provide an opportunity to accelerate the coming into effect of this change. It noted that since the requirement for translation into the three languages had been imposed by the MoP, the MoP also had the authority to lift that requirement or to pave the way for lifting that requirement. Specifically, the ExMoP could give a mandate to the WGP to consider the full range of possibilities for addressing the issue of translation of the national implementation reports, including the option of not producing them for MoP-4 as official documents in the three official languages. It requested the secretariat to prepare a draft proposal for review by the Bureau and eventual consideration by the ExMoP.

(e) Preparation of work programme for 2012-2014

The Bureau agreed that following initial discussions on the elements of the work programme for 2012-2014 at WGP-12, a comprehensive draft decision on the work programme for 2012-2014 should be discussed at WGP-13.

6. Training session on preparation of national implementation reports (29 June 2010)

The secretariat reported that the training session for national focal points and other concerned stakeholders that had been scheduled to take place immediately before WGP-12 would address inter alia the use of electronic systems and on how to involve the public in consultations. It was agreed that the training session would take place in the morning of 30 June 2010, before the start of WGP-12.

The Bureau took note of this information.

7. Preparation of the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties

(a) Agreements on preparations with host country, including date of meeting

The Bureau requested the secretariat to liaise with the Government of the Republic of Moldova and prepare a check list for its consideration in view of the planning of the MoP-4 in Chisinau, provisionally scheduled to take place from 6-11 June 2011. Given that MoP-3 was hosted by Latvia, Ms. Zaneta Mikosa, a Vice-Chair and Latvian member of the Bureau, offered to

assist the secretariat and the Government of the Republic of Moldova in the preparation and negotiation of the Host Country Agreement. It was agreed that it would be useful if a mission to Moldova could be organized during May 2010 with the involvement of the Secretary to the Convention prior to his departure on special leave for one year and the interim Secretary, and also with the participation of the Chair and if possible the Latvian Vice-Chair.

(b) Themes, programme and agenda

The Bureau considered several themes that could be discussed at MoP-4, inter alia, the outreach to non-ECE States, the work carried out by the new task force on public participation after its establishment at ExMoP, and interpretation issues arising from the experience with the compliance mechanism (such as the implementation of article 6, paragraph 1 (b), of the Convention and the application of the Convention's principles in small- and medium-size activities). Since the strategic plan adopted at MoP-3 in Riga was covering a period extending up to MoP-5, at MoP-4 Parties could highlight and agree to prioritise some elements of the plan.

The Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare a list of themes for MoP-4 to be discussed by the Bureau at its next meeting in April.

8. Brief review of other activities under the Convention

The secretariat explained that due to exceptional shortages of its staff for various reasons and the necessity to give priority to the preparation of the ExMoP and the MoPP-1 in April 2010, some other activities had had to be curtailed or postponed. These included the preparation of the sixth capacity-building coordination meeting, the eighth meeting of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools and the first meeting of the Expert Group on a Communications Strategy (see below). It thanked the Bureau for its understanding.

(a) Compliance mechanism

The secretariat reported on the 26th and 27th meetings of the Compliance Committee (Geneva, 15-18 December 2009 and 16-19 March 2010 respectively), circulating written summaries of the main outcomes of those meetings (see http://www.unece.org/env/pp/compliance/CC-26/WebsiteTextCC-26_last.doc and http://www.unece.org/env/pp/compliance/CC-27/Aarhus_CC27_website.pdf).

The Bureau took note of this information.

(b) Capacity-building

The secretariat informed the Bureau that in light of the aforementioned capacity constraints, the sixth capacity-building coordination meeting had now been rescheduled to take place in Geneva in September 2010.

The Bureau took note of this information.

(c) Electronic information tools and the clearinghouse mechanism

The secretariat reported that for the same reasons, the eighth meeting of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools in Tirana (Albania) had been tentatively rescheduled to take place in June 2010. Mr. Gavrosh Zela, a member of the Bureau from Albania, highlighted the need for discussions between the secretariat and representatives of the host country concerning financing requirements and other arrangements.

The Bureau took note of this information and asked the secretariat to proceed with the questionnaire on implementation of decisions II/3 and III/2.

(d) Public participation

The Bureau referred to its discussions on the preparation of the ExMoP in April 2010 (item 3 (a) above).

(e) Access to justice

The secretariat reported on the progress of the activities following the third meeting of the Task Force on Access to Justice (Geneva, 14-15 October 2009). With regard to the jurisprudence database, the secretariat had received several case summaries from a number of States and other stakeholders. Also, the grant for the update of the Aarhus Clearinghouse to contain the jurisprudence database had been approved and the related agreement had been signed. Accordingly, the secretariat expected that the cases would start to be uploaded shortly. With regard to the analytical studies, the secretariat informed the Bureau that the Chair of the Task Force and the secretariat had initiated research for the first analytical study relating to costs. Finally, the secretariat reported that it had been in contact with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and with Tajik officials for the possible organization of a workshop for the high-level judiciary in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, tentatively scheduled to take place at the beginning of September 2010.

The Bureau took note of this information.

(f) Genetically modified organisms (preparations for Nagoya workshop)

The secretariat reported that it was liaising with the secretariat of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to organize a joint workshop on access to information and public participation in decision-making regarding GMOs, to be held back to back with the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (CoP/MoP 5, Nagoya, Japan, 11-15 November 2010) on 8-9 October 2010. The secretariat had sent its comments on the draft programme prepared by the Cartagena Protocol secretariat and it was awaiting their feedback. The secretariat also reported that it had been invited to give a presentation on the Aarhus Convention and GMOs at the annual conference of the European Biosafety Association to be held on 21-23 April 2010 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

The Bureau took note of this information.

(g) Public participation in international forums

The secretariat reported on the preparations for the forthcoming meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in International Forums and the associated workshop, which were scheduled to take place on 26-27 April 2010.

(h) Reporting requirements

The Bureau referred to its discussions on the preparation of the WGP-12 in June/July 2010 (item 6 above).

(i) Updating of the Implementation Guide

The secretariat reported on the progress of the preparation of the revised version of the Implementation Guide for the Convention. The necessary contractual arrangements were now put in place and the experts had started preparing the first draft of their respective sections. The full updated draft text would then be submitted to the Compliance Committee and the Chairs of the Convention's subsidiary bodies for comment, upon integration of which the text would be forwarded (between July and September 2010) to the national focal points and the public for comment. The draft final text would be submitted to the Bureau for its consideration and approval in October 2010, before its envisaged publication in November 2010.

The Bureau took note of this information.

(j) Preparation of a communications strategy, including Expert Group activities

The secretariat informed the Bureau that the departure to another job of the staff member who originally had been assigned to service the Expert Group on a Communication Strategy, followed by the extended absence on sick leave of the staff member who had then been assigned to replace him, had resulted in the timetable for this activity being shifted back by some months, and thanked the Bureau for its understanding.

The Bureau took note of this information and requested the secretariat to carry on with the implementation of this activity as soon as practicable. It recognized that it would not be possible to meet the original target of having the draft communication strategy ready for presentation at WGP-12, and agreed that it should be ready for consideration by the Working Group at WGP-13 (February 2011). It requested the secretariat to ensure that those individuals nominated to serve on the Expert Group were kept abreast of the situation.

9. Other relevant developments

(a) Adoption of guidelines on principle 10 by UNEP Governing Council in Bali

The Bureau expressed its satisfaction at the adoption of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Guidelines for the Development of National Legislation on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters at the eleventh special session of the UNEP Governing Council, held on 24-26 February 2010 in Bali, Indonesia. The adoption of the Guidelines, as a new instrument of global scope, constituted one of the most significant developments at the global level with respect to principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, which could have implications for outreach of the Aarhus Convention to other regions. The Chair, who had chaired intergovernmental negotiations on the draft guidelines in Nairobi in November 2009, reported on his participation in the Bali meeting, where he had expressed appreciation of the Guidelines in his capacity as Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention.

(b) Side-events at UNFCCC CoP-15

The secretariat reported on the success of the side-event on the Aarhus Convention that took place on Monday, 14 December 2009, at the UNFCCC CoP-15 in Copenhagen, hosted by the Czech Republic, in coordination with UNITAR. It also reported that a side-event on PRTRs, supported by Armenia, had been organized in the evening of 15 December 2009, but due to the unfortunate timing of the event, it did not have the attendance that was initially expected despite a good line-up of speakers.

The Bureau took note of this information.

(c) Other matters

No issues were discussed under this item.

10. Calendar of meetings including the next Bureau meeting, organizational matters

The Bureau agreed to hold its next meeting on 19 April 2010, before the ExMoP in the afternoon of that day. It agreed to review the calendar of meetings for 2011 at that point.

11. Any other business

(a) Personnel matters

The Bureau and the designated observer held a closed session to deliberate on organizational matters of the secretariat, arising from the departure of the Secretary to the Convention, Mr.

Jeremy Wates, after the approval of his request for special leave for one year starting 1 June 2010. At the open session that followed, the Bureau expressed concern over the impact of the forthcoming change in the leadership of the secretariat and expressed its intention to be even more actively involved in the work during the transition period. It mandated the Chair to write to the ECE Executive Secretary on its behalf to communicate this and other views reached in its closed session.

On behalf of UNECE, Ms. Monika Linn explained the UN rules governing the temporary filling of the vacancy and ensured the Bureau of the ECE management's commitment to select the best candidate that would successfully respond to the demanding tasks of the Secretary to the Convention. The process for the selection of the person to replace Mr. Wates was underway and the successful candidate would be announced shortly. She provided a copy of a letter from the Executive Secretary to the Chair setting out the actions taken by the UNECE to ensure the smooth functioning of the Convention secretariat. The Bureau expressed its appreciation of this information and requested that the selected new interim Secretary take part in the next Bureau meeting prior to the ExMoP in April 2010.

The secretariat gave an overview of the contractual situation of the secretariat staff. The reform of the staff rules recently introduced at the UN had significant implications for staff funded by extrabudgetary means who had been hired for their particular expertise and for those on short term contracts, which included most of the Convention secretariat's staff. The Bureau expressed its concern at the situation and requested the secretariat to draft a note on the matter for its consideration prior to its next meeting.

(b) Other matters

The secretariat reported that following a decision at the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the Legal Board of that Convention would start discussions at its seventh meeting (Geneva, 15-16 April 2010) on the elaboration of a possible future compliance mechanism. The Chairs of the compliance mechanisms of other multilateral environmental agreements had been invited to share their experience, among them the Chair of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee, Mr. Veit Koester.

The Bureau members took note of this information and agreed that they would liaise with the relevant experts from their countries on the matter, in the context also of the work on public participation in international forums taking place under the auspices of the Convention.

12. Close of the meeting

The Chair thanked the Bureau members and other participants for their participation and the secretariat for its support and closed the meeting.