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MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON
ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
IN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE
IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

Third meeting
Riga, 11–13 June 2008

REPORT OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE PARTIES

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INTRODUCTION

1. The third 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) was held from 11 to 13 June 2008 in Riga, at the invitation of the Government of Latvia.
2. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following Parties to the Convention: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The European Community, represented by the Commission of the European Communities, was also present.
3. Delegations from the following UNECE member States were also present: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Switzerland and Uzbekistan.
4. Representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the Council of Europe, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the World Bank Inspection Panel also attended.

5. Representatives of regional environmental centres, Aarhus Centres, and business, professional, research and academic organizations also attended. In addition, representatives of international, regional and more than 100 national environmental organizations participated in the meeting, many of which coordinated their input within the framework of European ECO-Forum. All participants are included in the final list of participants is available online at: www.unece.org/env/pp/mop3.htm.

I. OPENING OF THE MEETING

6. A welcome address on behalf of the host government was delivered by Mr. Raimonds Vejonis, Minister for the Environment of Latvia. The Minister noted the relevance of evaluating achievements with respect to implementation of the Convention on its tenth anniversary, as well as of discussing the lessons learned by Parties at the national level. He reflected on the challenge of ensuring the right to live in a safe and healthy environment as one of the basic human rights in countries undergoing rapid development such as Latvia, and noted the importance of effective implementation of international instruments to support this work. He stressed the importance of ensuring that all three pillars were reflected in the work programme in order to achieve the Convention's main objectives.

7. Following this statement, the Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties, Ms. Mona Aarhus (Norway)¹, thanked the Minister for his welcome message and formally opened the meeting.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

8. The Meeting of the Parties adopted the agenda of the meeting as prepared by the Working Group of the Parties (ECE/MP.PP/2008/1).

III. STATUS OF RATIFICATION OF THE CONVENTION, THE AMENDMENT TO THE CONVENTION AND THE PROTOCOL ON POLLUTANT RELEASE AND TRANSFER REGISTERS

9. The secretariat informed the Meeting of the Parties about the status of signature and ratification of the Convention and the amendments to the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PP/2008/3). Since the second meeting of the Parties (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 25–27 May 2005), the number of Parties to the Convention had risen from 35 to 41. The amendment to the Convention had been ratified, accepted or approved by 15 States and the European Community. Seven States and the European Community had

¹ In February 2008, Ms. Hanne Inger Bjurstrøm (Norway) resigned as Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties due to pressure of new commitments in her Ministry. In accordance with rule 22, paragraph 7, of the rules of procedure, the Government of Norway appointed Ms. Aarhus to replace Ms. Bjurstrøm as its representative on the Bureau. The Bureau then elected Ms. Aarhus to serve as Chairperson, with effect from 12 February 2008.

ratified, accepted, approved or acceded to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs).

10. The Chairperson invited delegates from States or regional economic integration organizations not yet Party to the Convention, the amendment and/or the Protocol on PRTRs to briefly inform the Meeting of the Parties of their plans to ratify, accept, approve or accede. Bosnia and Herzegovina indicated that it planned to ratify the Convention in 2008. Croatia expressed its intention to ratify and start implementing the Protocol in 2008, informing the Meeting that an implementing regulation was in place and that the Croatian environment agency had been appointed as the implementing agency. The Czech Republic reported that it had started ratification of the Protocol, which it expected to be finalized by the end of 2008. Finland informed the Meeting that it expected to ratify the Protocol by the end of 2008. Greece reported that it had started the ratification process for the amendment and the Protocol. Ireland reported that it continued to make progress towards ratification. Malta reported that it had started the process for ratification of the amendment to the Convention, which was at an advanced stage, and that it had also started the ratification process for the Protocol. Norway reported that its national approval procedure for the Protocol had been finalized. Portugal reported that it was in the final phase of ratifying the amendment and the Protocol and expected to complete the process soon. Romania reported that it had completed the domestic procedure for acceptance of the amendment and would deposit the instrument with the Depositary in the near future. Serbia informed the Meeting that it intended to accede to the Convention and that adoption of a law to that effect could be expected by the end of 2008 or during the first quarter of 2009. Switzerland noted that many of the provisions of the Convention were reflected in national law and that the results of a referendum on this topic would be awaited before continuing the political discussion on ratification. Tajikistan reported that it had decided to accede to the Protocol and was going through the necessary procedures to do so. The United Kingdom reported that it had started domestic parliamentary procedures for ratification of the amendment, and that it hoped to ratify the Protocol by the end of 2008. European ECO-Forum announced that preparatory work had been undertaken to pave the way for Uzbekistan to accede to the Convention.

11. The Chairperson thanked the delegations for their reports and welcomed the progress being made.

IV. INTERPRETATION OF ARTICLE 14

12. Through decision II/1, the Meeting of the Parties adopted an amendment to the Convention on the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). However, it had subsequently been noted that there was uncertainty with regard to the conditions for the entry into force of amendments, arising from the fact that the language in article 14, paragraph 4, of the Convention, and specifically the expression “these Parties” in the second sentence, did not provide clarity as to how the number of Parties was calculated in establishing whether an amendment entered into force.

13. To clarify this issue with a view to providing for earlier entry into force of amendments, the Working Group of the Parties had developed a draft decision on the interpretation of article 14 of the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2008/L.3). The draft decision had been developed in

consultation with the Bureau and the United Nations Office for Legal Affairs and with the support of an ad hoc group of legal experts nominated by delegations. It clarified that the percentage of ratifications required for the entry into force of amendments would be calculated by reference to the Parties at the time of the adoption of the amendment.

14. The Meeting of the Parties discussed the draft decision prepared by the Working Group. The main point of discussion was whether the proportion of ratifications required to trigger the entry into force of amendments should be calculated by reference to the actual Parties that were Parties at the time of adoption of the amendment, or the number of Parties that were Parties at the time of adoption of the amendment (irrespective of which those Parties were). Some delegations, representing both Parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), expressed their preference for referring to the number of Parties, so that ratifications of an amendment by Parties that had not been Parties at the time of the adoption of the amendment would count towards the amendment's entry into force, thereby bringing about an earlier entry into force of amendments. However, a majority of Parties favoured an approach based on calculating the proportion by reference to the actual Parties at the time of the adoption of the amendment. Following discussions, the Meeting reached agreement by consensus on the text of a revised version of decision III/1 on interpretation of article 14 of the Convention based on the majority view, and tabled it for formal adoption during the high-level segment.

V. SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

A. Pollutant release and transfer registers

15. At their first extraordinary meeting, the Parties to the Convention adopted the Protocol on PRTRs and established a Working Group on PRTRs to carry out activities in preparation for its entry into force and the first session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. The Chairperson of the Working Group, Mr. Michel Amand (Belgium), reported on the progress achieved. Since the second meeting of the Parties to the Convention, three meetings had been held and six draft decisions were in preparation. A guidance document on implementation of the Protocol had been published.

16. Some delegations expressed disappointment with the slow pace of ratification of the Protocol. The Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties noted that the draft statement on PRTRs, which was tabled for adoption during the high-level segment of the meeting where a special session on PRTRs would take place, called on Signatories to the Protocol to ratify the instrument as soon as possible.

17. The Meeting of the Parties noted the progress made by the Working Group and expressed its appreciation of the important work being undertaken.

B. Genetically modified organisms

18. Through decision II/7, annex, activity X, of their second meeting, the Parties to the Convention agreed to hold an international expert meeting on access to information, public participation and access to justice with respect to GMOs as part of its 2006–2008 workplan). At

its sixth meeting, the Working Group of the Parties expressed its wish to hold the expert meeting back-to-back with the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CoP/MoP-4). A two-day international expert meeting was subsequently held on 19 and 20 May 2008 in Cologne, Germany, immediately after CoP/MoP-4. The meeting was mainly funded by the Netherlands and was chaired by Mr. Helmut Gaugitsch (Austria), former Chairperson of the Working Group on GMOs.

19. The secretariat presented an oral report on the outcomes of the expert meeting. The aim of the meeting had been to provide a forum in which interested governments (including representatives of Parties to the Aarhus Convention or the Cartagena Protocol), intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, business and academia could meet to exchange information on good practices on access to information, public participation and access to justice with respect to GMOs. The meeting had a particular focus on identifying and addressing needs and challenges, especially those of countries in transition and developing countries. In their evaluation of the meeting, almost all participants indicated that there was a need for another event on GMOs to be organized under the Convention in the future. Experts had differing views as to the format, but the vast majority expressed interest in case studies and exercises, roundtable discussions and plenary presentations. There was strong support for future cooperation between the Cartagena Protocol and the Convention.

20. The secretariat also reported on the side event on public participation in biosafety it had organised at the invitation of the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity during CoP/MoP-4.

21. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the progress achieved and expressed the need for continuing work in this area, including through further workshops. Several delegations expressed the view that the GMO expert meeting was a good first collaboration between the secretariats and experts of the Convention and the Cartagena Protocol and expressed support for other such events in the future in order to take advantage of synergies. Ratification of the GMO amendment was seen as a key issue for countries from Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). The Meeting urged Parties to ratify the GMO amendment so that it would enter into force as soon as possible.

C. Electronic information tools and the clearinghouse mechanism

22. The Chairperson of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools, Mr. Chris Jarvis (United Kingdom), reported on the work undertaken by the Task Force under the mandate adopted by the Parties at their second meeting in Almaty through decision II/3. Since Almaty, three Task Force meetings had taken place. The Task Force had initiated a programme of capacity-building activities to promote implementation of the recommendations annexed to decision II/3, including two subregional workshops, the first in March 2007 in Szentendre, Hungary, and the second in June 2007 in Almaty, in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) and the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC), respectively. In 2006 and early 2007, the Task Force had conducted a survey on implementation of the recommendations. The results of the survey documented some progress in the field, in particular in the provision of environmental

information, but revealed shortcomings in the use of electronic tools to promote public participation and access to justice. The Task Force had also exchanged experience on the identification of environmental information user needs and the development and management of clearinghouse mechanisms operated by United Nations agencies at a mini-conference on “Agenda 21 and the Information Society”, which it had organized at the sixth meeting of the Task Force in December 2007. A compendium of good practices in the use of e-access, e-participation and e-justice applications was being prepared by the secretariat, with the support of REC.

23. The secretariat presented the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy, the central Internet portal of the clearinghouse mechanism, which had been upgraded in May 2007. Working with GRID-Arendal, the Clearinghouse’s resources directory had been redesigned to improve access to information of relevance to capacity-building, including information on experts, funding, projects and training materials.

24. Some delegations commented on the usefulness of the capacity-building workshops and requested that they be organized in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) to further encourage participation in the clearinghouse mechanism.

25. The Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties presented draft decision III/2 (ECE/MP.PP/2008/L.4), together with a number of amendments proposed by the Working Group of the Parties.

26. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the Task Force’s progress and expressed its appreciation of the important work being undertaken. It reached agreement by consensus on the text of decision III/2 as amended by the Working Group and during the discussion, and tabled it for formal adoption during the high-level segment.

D. Public participation in strategic decision-making

27. The secretariat, together with Austria as one of the two lead countries, reported on the workshop on public participation in strategic decision-making held on 3 and 4 December 2007 in Sofia, at the kind invitation of the Government of Bulgaria. The workshop had been organized pursuant to decision II/7, annex, activity area X, and had involved presentation and discussion of case studies of good practice with respect to public participation in various types of strategic decision-making. It was the first workshop in recent years to bring together experts from the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

28. The Meeting of the Parties noted that the workshop had been valuable as a bridge-building exercise between Aarhus and Espoo Convention experts. Participants felt that a united approach to future work in this area comprising the two Conventions’ experts was to be commended. They also observed that there might be strategic decisions within the scope of the Aarhus Convention that would not be covered by the SEA Protocol, and that these types of decisions might be a useful area for further work, for example by a task force on public

participation. The importance of addressing needs and challenges regarding public participation in strategic decision-making, in addition to highlighting good practices, was also noted.

E. Access to justice

29. Through decision I/5, the Meeting of the Parties established a Task Force on Access to Justice to support the implementation of the third pillar of the Convention. At their second meeting, through decision II/2, the Meeting provided this Task Force with a new mandate focusing on practical implementation of article 9 of the Convention.

30. The Chairperson of the Task Force, Mr. Håkan Bengtsson (Sweden), reported on the progress achieved, noting especially progress made with respect to sharing experiences, analysing availability of relevant materials, capacity-building for the judiciary and providing an opportunity for an exchange of experiences between legal professionals. Of particular note was a workshop for senior members of the judiciary from six EECCA countries (Kyiv, 4–5 June 2007).

31. The Meeting of the Parties welcomed the work of the Task Force and thanked Sweden and other countries and organizations for their active contribution.

32. The Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties presented draft decision III/3 on access to justice (ECE/MP.PP/2008/L.5), together with some amendments to the text proposed by the Working Group of the Parties. According to the draft decision, the mandate of the Task Force would be extended and the Task Force would be requested, *inter alia*, to address collection and dissemination of information on relevant practices and jurisprudence, continue implementation of strategic capacity-building activities and development of training materials for relevant legal professionals, analyse experience with the use of remedies and criteria for standing, exchange information with regard to relevant assistance mechanisms and consider practical arrangements for increasing support for public interest lawyers.

33. The Meeting reached agreement by consensus on the text of decision III/3, as amended by the Working Group and during the discussion, and tabled it for formal adoption during the high-level segment.

F. Public participation in international forums

34. Through decision II/4, the Meeting of the Parties adopted the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums and established the Task Force on Public Participation in International Forums. The Task Force was mandated to consult with relevant international forums over the Almaty Guidelines.

35. The Chairperson of the Task Force on Public Participation in International Forums, Mr. Laurent Mermet (France), together with the secretariat, reported on the Task Force's activities, notably on the outcomes of the written consultation process on the Almaty Guidelines, on the meeting of representatives of international forums and on the feedback received from Parties, Signatories and other stakeholders about their experiences with the Almaty Guidelines.

36. The Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties then presented draft decision III/4 on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums (ECE/MP.PP/2008/L.6), together with some amendments to the text proposed by the Working Group of the Parties. The proposed decision would extend in time the mandate of the Task Force and provide direction for further work in this area.

37. The Meeting of the Parties expressed its appreciation of the work undertaken by the Task Force. It reached agreement by consensus on the text of decision III/4, as amended by the Working Group, and tabled it for formal adoption during the high-level segment.

VI. PROCEDURES AND MECHANISMS FACILITATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

A. Reports on implementation

38. At their first meeting, the Parties adopted decision I/8 setting out the requirements for the Parties to report on their implementation of the Convention. The reporting mechanism was further developed through decision II/10, and the Compliance Committee subsequently drew up guidance on implementation of the reporting requirements (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2007/L.4) that was endorsed by the Working Group of the Parties at its seventh meeting.

39. The secretariat presented a synthesis report that it had prepared pursuant to decision I/8, providing an overview of the national implementation reports received (ECE/MP.PP/2008/4). The synthesis report was based on information from 32 out of 35 national implementation reports submitted by Parties. In presenting the report, the secretariat drew attention to various practical challenges presented by the late submission of many reports and the poor linguistic standard of some of them. These factors, coupled with the need to process the reports as official documentation in order for them to be produced in three official languages, significantly increased the workload of the secretariat and resulted in additional expenditures from the Convention's trust fund. Only some Parties provided copies of their reports in their national languages as required by decision I/8. Several reports were also submitted by NGOs, most of which provided comments on the official reports or an alternative analysis of the implementation.

40. With regard to the content of the reports, the synthesis report indicated that many national implementation reports had addressed issues from the optional list provided in the annex to the guidance document prepared by the Compliance Committee. The reports therefore contained more information on practical aspects of implementation, by comparison with the first reporting cycle. The overall picture showed that Parties were generally active in implementing the Convention. Positive developments both in legislative frameworks and in practical implementation had taken place, in particular with regard to greater importance being allocated to the development of practical implementation mechanisms and procedures and greater involvement of the judiciary. On the other hand, challenges to implementation remained, with some new trends identified in some countries such as a narrowing of standing requirements.

41. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the report. Italy noted a factual error in one sentence, which the secretariat agreed to rectify by issuing a corrigendum. Several delegations presented their experience with the preparation of the implementation reports. European ECO-Forum presented the experience of NGOs with participation in the consultations at the national level, maintaining that the process of preparing the reports was not always transparent. It expressed concern about the fact that only eight Parties had submitted their reports on time, that many Parties had submitted reports with a significant delay and that six Parties had not submitted a report at all.

42. The Chairperson then presented draft decision III/5 on reporting requirements (ECE/MP.PP/2008/L.7), together with a number of amendments proposed by the Bureau. According to the draft decision, States that were Parties at the time of the deadline for submission of the implementation reports and that had failed to submit such reports to the secretariat would be requested to do so by 15 September 2008. The decision would also mandate the Working Group to review the procedure for submission and processing of reports with a view to resolving the practical difficulties affecting the workload of the secretariat and the timely availability of the reports in the next reporting cycle.

43. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the synthesis report prepared by the secretariat. It discussed draft decision III/5 and the amendments proposed by the Bureau, made some further amendments and reached agreement by consensus on the amended text, which was tabled for formal adoption during the high-level segment.

44. The Meeting encouraged Parties to ensure in the future the quality of the translation and the readability of the reports when submitting them to the secretariat in one or more of the official languages of UNECE.

B. Compliance mechanism

45. At their first meeting, the Parties adopted decision I/7, setting up a compliance review mechanism. This mechanism was further developed through decision II/5 of the Meeting of the Parties.

46. The Chairperson of the Compliance Committee, Mr. Veit Koester, presented the report of the Committee on its activities and presented an overview of its findings and recommendations with respect to compliance by specific Parties on the basis of several communications from the public (ECE/MP.PP/2008/5 and Add.1–10).

47. The Meeting of the Parties noted the Committee's report and the accompanying findings and recommendations with appreciation. All delegations that intervened emphasized the importance of promoting and facilitating compliance with the Convention and welcomed the work of the Committee. One observer delegation proposed that the Committee be mandated to review all draft decisions prepared for adoption by the Meeting to assess their conformity with the objectives of compliance and implementation, but this was rejected by the Meeting.

48. The Chairperson invited the Meeting of the Parties to consider draft decision III/6 on general issues of compliance and the six accompanying draft decisions containing conclusions

with respect to specific Parties found by the Committee not to be in compliance (ECE/MP.PP/2005/L.8 and Add.1–6), prepared by the Bureau, as well as various amendments to the draft decisions proposed by the Working Group of the Parties. The Meeting made various amendments to the draft decisions without changing the substance of the Committee's findings and recommendations with respect to specific Parties found not to be in compliance. As a result of its discussions, the Meeting reached agreement by consensus on the text of revised versions of the draft decisions and tabled them for formal adoption during the high-level segment.

49. During the formal adoption of the decisions, an intervention was made by the representative of Ukraine who noted the progress made by that country in implementing the Convention overall, as reflected in Ukraine's national implementation report for the period 2005–2008. He also pointed out that in paragraph 3 of draft decision III/6f, the Parties had noted with appreciation the information provided by Ukraine on general implementation measures. He therefore considered that the conditional caution proposed in paragraph 5 was not an appropriate measure and that a simple request to implement the measures set out in that paragraph would have been sufficient. In the ensuing discussion, the Chairperson pointed out that the preceding discussions on the draft decision indicated that Ukraine, despite having provided information on some general implementation measures, had failed to implement decision II/5b of the Meeting of the Parties and to bring about compliance with the Convention. The Chairperson also noted that a general consensus had been reached on the text of the decision and that it had been provisionally agreed on by all Parties. In the interest of not preventing consensus in reaching a decision, the delegation of Ukraine did not make a formal objection to the decision but requested nevertheless that its position be reflected in the report.

50. The Meeting of the Parties then turned to the question of the election of new Compliance Committee members to replace four members whose term had expired. Taking into account decision II/5, through which it had been decided to expand the membership of the Committee to nine, the Meeting was expected to elect five members of the Committee in accordance with the procedure set out in decision I/7. Thirteen nominees had originally been proposed and delegations had been encouraged to conduct consultations with a view to reaching a consensus on five candidates in the course of the tenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

51. The consultation process was completed successfully and the Meeting of the Parties re-elected Mr. Jonas Ebbesson (Sweden), Ms. Svitlana Kravchenko (Ukraine) and Mr. Gerhard Loibl (Austria) and elected Ms. Ellen Hey (Netherlands) and Mr. Alexander Kodjabashev (Bulgaria) by consensus to serve until the end of the fifth ordinary meeting.

52. The Meeting considered that the geographical distribution reflected in this selection of candidates should not set a precedent for future elections.

53. The Meeting thanked the Compliance Committee for its work, and in particular the outgoing member of the Committee, Mr. Sandor Fülöp.

C. Capacity-building activities

54. The secretariat presented a report on capacity-building (ECE/MP.PP/2008/6), which

provided an overview of the main capacity-building activities in the region that had taken place in the intersessional period and included a short analysis of the main successes and challenges in this area. Two meetings had taken place within the capacity-building coordination framework, which provided a forum for exchange of information and coordination of activities. Several regional capacity-building events addressing specific provisions of the Convention had taken place, notably concerning GMOs, electronic information tools, public participation in strategic decision-making, and access to justice (see paras. 18–19, 22, 27–28 and 30).

55. The report emphasized that capacity-building activities currently focused primarily on countries with economies in transition. While there clearly was a need for capacity-building in these countries, potential needs of other Parties should also be considered and, where necessary, addressed through targeted activities. Throughout the region, the focus of implementation was shifting from legislative framework development to practical implementation and, in some areas, development of detailed procedures – a factor that should be considered in the planning of capacity-building activities. Expert assistance with further legislative developments and reaching the stakeholders at the local level remained crucial in countries with economies in transition. In this regard, models such as the Aarhus Centres supported by OSCE in several countries and other initiatives that linked central- and local-level implementation of the Convention were of particular interest. As the level of funding earmarked for the implementation of the Convention appeared to be decreasing, a holistic approach to capacity-building for various environmental agreements both at the international and national levels was becoming increasingly important, as was a more strategic approach to capacity-building initiatives and allocation of funds.

56. European ECO-Forum, UNITAR, UNEP, REC and OSCE described their current activities aimed at implementation of the Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs. Several delegations welcomed the activities of the capacity-building framework under the Convention, highlighted the importance of developing joint initiatives and underlined the importance of ensuring the capacity-building reached the stakeholders at the local level.

57. The Meeting of the Parties welcomed the secretariat's report on capacity-building and took note of the additional points raised in the discussion.

D. Financial arrangements

58. At their first meeting, the Parties established through decision I/13 an interim voluntary scheme of financial contributions and set up a task force to explore the possibility of establishing stable and predictable financial arrangements for the Convention based on the United Nations scale of assessment or other appropriate scales. At their second meeting, through decision II/6, the Parties extended the voluntary scheme for a further intersessional period and agreed to reconsider the options for establishing stable and predictable financial arrangements based on the United Nations scale of assessments or other appropriate scales at its third meeting.

59. At its tenth meeting, the Working Group of the Parties discussed draft decision III/7 on financial arrangements (ECE/MP.PP/2008/L.9), which had been prepared by the Bureau based on a draft discussed at the eighth and ninth meetings of the Working Group. The draft contained two options, one with the level of each Party's contribution being based on the United Nations scale of assessments and the other providing no guidance on the individual level of contributions.

As it had not been possible to reach consensus on a scheme providing guidance on the level of contributions, the Working Group had requested the secretariat to prepare a revised draft of the decision providing for continuation of the interim voluntary scheme, for discussion by the Meeting of the Parties.

60. The Meeting of the Parties discussed the issue of financial arrangements on the basis of the revised draft prepared by the secretariat. It agreed on the one hand to extend the interim voluntary scheme of contributions established under decision II/6 for a further intersessional period, and on the other, to mandate the Working Group to continue in-depth discussions on possible future schemes of financial arrangements that met the goals of stability, predictability and equity and to make recommendations in this regard for possible adoption at the fourth meeting of the Parties. When presenting the draft, the secretariat noted that continuation of the current scheme would not necessarily ensure that the funds needed to meet core requirements were available, or that a fair sharing of the financial burden would be achieved, as was shown by the list of contributions received for the biennium 2006–2007 (ECE/MP.PP/2008/7, annex I). Several delegations indicated that they shared this concern. The Meeting agreed that the practice of routinely providing financial support through the UNECE trust fund to facilitate the participation of environmental non-governmental organizations in meetings held under the auspices of the Convention, subject to the availability of funds, should continue to apply on the same basis.

61. After making some amendments to the text of draft decision III/7 presented by the secretariat, the Meeting of the Parties reached agreement on the text by consensus and tabled it for formal adoption during the high-level segment.

VII. PROGRAMME OF WORK AND OPERATION OF THE CONVENTION

A. Implementation of the work programme for 2006–2008, including financial aspects

62. Through decision I/11, the Meeting of the Parties decided that a work programme covering the period up to and including the next meeting of the Parties would be prepared for adoption at each meeting of the Parties, including an estimation of the costs. Through decision II/7, it adopted a specific work programme for 2006–2008.

63. The secretariat presented its report on the implementation of the work programme for 2006–2008, including an overview of contributions and expenditures in 2006 and 2007 (ECE/MP.PP/2008/7). The secretariat noted the negative effect of the declining value of the dollar and requested the Meeting to bear this in mind when evaluating the report. The secretariat also noted the disparities between contributions by different Parties, which indicated that a fair sharing of the burden as envisaged in decision I/13 remained to be reached. The Chairperson invited delegates to review the implementation of the work programme and the use of the funds contributed for 2006–2007 on the basis of the report prepared by the secretariat.

64. The Meeting welcomed the report, which it considered adequately analysed and presented in a transparent manner the budgetary needs and available resources for the

Convention. Austria provided additional information about a contribution in kind of €10,000, which it had made in early 2007 towards an activity falling within the scope of decision II/2 on access to justice (para. 33 (e)), namely a workshop in Budapest on alternative dispute resolution, organized by REC.

65. At the ninth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, States had informed the secretariat of their intention to contribute to the financial resources of the Convention for 2008 under the proposed voluntary scheme of contributions envisaged in the draft decision. The information had been made available to the Meeting of the Parties in the report of that meeting.

66. European ECO-Forum reported on its activities at the local, national and regional level during the past three years and expressed its appreciation to the secretariat for supporting this work. Noting both positive and negative developments, European ECO-Forum emphasized the value of the Convention as a framework for concrete steps in the relevant areas, and called on the Meeting to particularly focus on countries in the EECCA subregion with respect to the second and third pillars of the Convention. It also suggested exploring funding sources other than governments to finance the work under the Convention. The secretariat expressed its interest in the possibility of broadening the Convention's funding base.

67. The Institute for European Environmental Policy invited the Meeting of the Parties to consider its publication, *Who is paying for the European public good of environmental democracy? An analysis of financial contributions of Parties and Signatories to the Aarhus Convention to the funding of its work programme (2003–2007)*, which had been presented at one of the side-events to the meeting. The analysis was made available to the Meeting as a category III document.

B. Strategic planning for the Convention

68. Through decision II/8, the Meeting of the Parties requested the Working Group of the Parties to develop a strategic plan for consideration and adoption at the third meeting of the Parties. The Working Group had mandated the Bureau to prepare a first draft of the plan, based upon draft elements prepared by an ad hoc expert group chaired by the former Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties, Mr. Marc Pallemarts (Belgium). The Working Group discussed and further developed the draft at its eighth and ninth meetings and at the latter meeting mandated the Bureau to prepare a revised draft of the plan, based on the discussions in the Working Group, for submission to the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2008/2, para. 87).

69. The Meeting considered draft decision III/8 annexing the draft strategic plan prepared by the Bureau (ECE/MP.PP/2008/L.10), in conjunction with a revised draft prepared by the Working Group at its tenth meeting on the basis of a compromise proposal from the Chairperson of the Bureau. With the assistance of a parallel drafting group chaired by Ms. Maud Istasse (Belgium), it revised the draft decision to reflect the various concerns of delegations. The Meeting then reached agreement by consensus on the text of the draft decision as amended and tabled it for formal adoption during the high-level segment.

70. European ECO-Forum expressed its concern about what it considered to be a lack of ambition in parts of the strategic plan, especially with respect to the role of the private sector and the standing of NGOs.

C. Work programme for 2009–2011

71. Having regard to decision I/11 on procedures for the preparation, adoption and monitoring of work programmes, the Working Group of the Parties at its ninth meeting mandated the Bureau to prepare a draft decision on the work programme for 2009–2011 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2008/2, para. 99). The Bureau, taking into account comments provided by delegations through a written commenting procedure, prepared draft decision III/9 containing the proposed work programme, including the estimated costs of the envisaged activities as well as the expected sources of funding (ECE/MP.PP/2008/L.11). At its tenth meeting, the Working Group discussed the draft decision and agreed to put forward a number of amendments through a revised draft. These included amendments confirming the setting up of an expert group to develop a communications strategy and requiring estimation in advance of the cost implications of future proposed decisions of the Meeting. During this discussion, a majority of Parties emphasized the link between the work programme and the financial contributions and expressed their support for an in-depth discussion of possible future financial contribution schemes.

72. The Meeting of the Parties discussed the work programme for 2009–2011 on the basis of the revised draft prepared by the Working Group. The main outstanding point of discussion concerned the proposed activities on public participation. Many delegations expressed their concern about problems with the implementation of the public participation pillar of the Convention, as demonstrated by the national implementation reports and the report of the Compliance Committee, and the need for further work in this area. Several Parties and observers expressed their support for the establishment of a task force to address these problems. The Meeting agreed to address the implementation of the second pillar of the Convention by establishing an intersessional body under the authority of the Working Group.

73. For practical reasons, it was considered not to be possible to establish a task force at this meeting of the Parties. In the light of the political commitment to address the implementation of the public participation pillar of the Convention, the Meeting agreed to address the matter through a two-step procedure whereby an ad hoc expert group on public participation would be established at this meeting to coordinate information sharing among the Parties and other stakeholders. A Task Force on Public Participation would then be established as soon as possible and at the latest by the next ordinary meeting of the Parties, on the basis of a draft decision to be prepared by the Working Group of the Parties. The ad hoc expert group in the meantime would also be mandated to advise the Working Group on the terms of reference for such a Task Force. The Meeting agreed to introduce a new paragraph in the draft decision on the work programme for 2009–2011 reflecting this.

74. Ireland expressed its willingness to act as lead country for this important work. Ireland furthermore informed the Meeting of the Parties that it would consider hosting an appropriate event at a later date and expressed its intention to explore the possibility of facilitating the provision of translation during this event. The Meeting welcomed the offer of Ireland to act as lead country.

75. The Meeting of the Parties reached agreement by consensus on the text of the draft decision on the work programme for 2009–2011, as amended by the Working Group and during the discussion, and tabled it for adoption during the high-level segment.

VIII. RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS AND INTERLINKAGES

76. While time did not permit a discussion on the issues of synergies between the Convention and other relevant multilateral environmental agreements, the issue was touched on in the second panel discussion during the high-level segment, which addressed global and regional initiatives to promote principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (see paras. 90–93 below).

77. The secretariat drew attention to a note on global and regional developments on issues related to principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, which it had prepared at the request of the Working Group (ECE/MP.PP/2008/8).

IX. REPORT ON CREDENTIALS

78. In accordance with rule 17 of the rules of procedure, the Chairperson presented the report on credentials on behalf of the officers of the Meeting of the Parties. Thirty-eight Parties had submitted their credentials to the secretariat. While it was noted that some credentials were not originals, the Bureau recommended to the Meeting to accept them, subject to subsequent submission of duly signed originals to the Secretary.

79. The Meeting of the Parties approved the report on credentials.

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

X. OPENING CEREMONY

80. The high-level segment of the meeting was opened and chaired by Mr. Vejonis, the Latvian Minister for the Environment.

81. Mr. Gundars Daudze, Speaker of the Latvian Parliament (Saeima), delivered a welcome address. Noting the importance of reaching international agreement on common principles and joint action to achieve environmental democracy, he stressed the need for a global approach to safeguard environmental rights and prevent environmental problems for the sake of present and future generations. Reflecting on the implementation of the Convention through national legislation, he expressed his satisfaction with the possibilities for the public to participate in the creation of national environmental legislation in Latvia.

82. Mr. Marek Belka, Executive Secretary of UNECE, delivered opening remarks in which he noted the significance of both the tenth anniversary of the Convention and the progress that had been made with respect to changes brought about on the ground. He welcomed the increase

in the number of Parties to the Convention, which had led to improvements in government accountability and a strengthening of laws and practices to achieve participatory democracy throughout much of the UNECE region. He also reminded the Meeting of the Parties of the challenges that remained, in particular regarding the implementation of the provisions on access to justice and public participation. Emphasizing the role of the public in identifying such problems, he stressed the importance of capacity-building in meeting the expectations of the Convention and thanked the many partners involved in this work, paying particular tribute to the sustained input of NGOs into the work under the Convention.

83. A message was delivered on behalf of Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, by Mr. Christophe Bouvier, Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe. Applauding the extraordinary achievements of the Convention, Mr. Steiner noted its significance for the strengthening of environmental democracy beyond the scope of its text, and emphasized the interdependent and mutually reinforcing nature of the Convention's three pillars. He also stressed the need to increase government responsiveness, to strengthen the role of civil society and to promote principle 10 of the Rio Declaration beyond the UNECE region.

84. Slovenia, on behalf of the European Union (EU), highlighted some achievements of the Convention during its first decade, underlining the significance of shared efforts to improve compliance with its provisions. Noting that there was still room for improvement in the practical application of the Convention, it stressed the importance of stable and predictable financing to continue implementation and expressed the willingness of the EU to adopt a positive approach during the coming intersessional period towards the achievement of a reliable system of stable financial contributions under the Convention.

XI. CELEBRATING THE FIRST 10 YEARS: ACHIEVEMENTS, LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

85. Mr. Zaal Lomtadze, Chairperson of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy, acted as moderator of the first panel on the theme, "Celebrating the first 10 years: achievements, lessons learned and future challenges". In his introductory remarks, Mr. Lomtadze observed that with its tenth anniversary, the Convention had become a teenager, with new prospects and new challenges from those apparent when it was adopted back in 1998.

A. Panel discussion

86. Panellists were invited to briefly present their views:

(a) Mr. Huseynghulu Baghirov, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Azerbaijan, observed that the Convention has proven to be a remarkable tool not only for environmental democracy but for democratization in general. However, he noted that involving all members of the public remained a challenge, especially in remote areas, and invited advice from other Parties regarding what to do when there were only commercially interested NGOs or when corporate interests had undue influence over the media.

(b) Ms. Aarhus, Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties, Norway, observed that the strategic plan for 2009–2014 showed that there was still much to be done with respect to all three pillars of the Convention but that things were on the right track. With respect to the items in the strategic plan concerning private-sector involvement, she remarked that in Norway the public had the right to access information directly from industry, that industry actively cooperated in this, and that this access had made it easier for the public to protect the environment and themselves and to influence decision-making processes.

(c) Mr. Artūras Paulauskas, Minister for the Environment, Lithuania, stressed the importance of providing the public with improved opportunities for participating in decision-making on the deliberate release and placing on the market of GMOs. Lithuania had ratified the GMO amendment in 2007, and Mr. Paulauskas urged other countries to do likewise. Lithuania was presently supplementing its current national information system on pollutants with a view to ratifying the Protocol on PRTRs. He invited Parties to follow the Riga Declaration, adopted during the high-level segment as a declaration of basic principles promoting environmental democracy and a common standard of achievement for all UNECE nations.

(d) Mr. Koester, Chairperson of the Convention's Compliance Committee, expressed the view that the fact that there were complaints within the framework of the Convention's compliance mechanism was a positive sign that the Convention was in good shape and that the mechanism was functioning well in comparison with those under other multilateral environmental agreements because it could be triggered by civil society as well as by Parties. He remarked, however, that the mechanism should not be seen as having fulfilled its potential or be taken for granted, and emphasized that both Parties and civil society would need to take care of it for the future.

(e) Ms. Françoise Nesi, *conseiller référendaire* to the French Supreme Court and Secretary-General of the EU Forum of Judges for the Environment (EUFJE), emphasized that the present priority under the Convention for the judiciary should be to guarantee the public's access to complete information upstream of possible decision-making. She considered that improving access to justice may be a prerequisite for the judiciary to be effective in this way, including a presumption of interest for environmental NGOs, financial assistance to help NGOs to bring matters to the attention of judges, and better information, training and exchange opportunities for judges. In this regard, she drew attention to the fact that EUFJE organized judicial conferences and had a website providing opportunities for exchange and information-sharing for judges from EU Member States.

(f) Mr. Bernard Snoy, Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities, OSCE, reported that OSCE had been supporting governments in the establishment and maintenance of Aarhus Centres and Public Environmental Information Centres since 2002, with active Aarhus Centres now set up in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. A recent independent evaluation had revealed that these Centres provide a forum – in some countries the only forum – for communication between Governments and civil society, and among members of civil society. He concluded by stating that OSCE was prepared to contribute to an expanded programme for Aarhus Centres in line with the future direction of the Convention contained in the strategic plan for 2009–2014.

(g) Ms. Marta Szigeti Bonifert, Executive Director, REC, noted that the principles of the 1995 Sofia Guidelines on Access to Environmental Information and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making, later developed and elaborated in the Convention, had been a foundation for REC work to solve environmental problems in the 17 countries of its region. She observed that while much had been achieved, further work should be done at the practical level to ensure that principles of the Convention were appropriately reflected in environmental impact assessments, strategic environmental assessments, policies for energy security, strategies for sustainable consumption and development, and outreach to the judiciary and legal professionals at the national and local levels.

(h) Ms. Elizabeth Smith, Senior Environmental Adviser, EBRD, remarked that, as a bank providing project financing, EBRD saw the implementation of the Convention every day and, from what it had seen, the level of public participation in decision-making was still not very well developed. Ensuring meaningful public participation meant actively seeking out especially vulnerable stakeholders and exploring new methods and tools to involve stakeholders from the outset. Capacity-building for local permitting authorities and industries was of particular importance. Ms. Smith noted that as well as its recently adopted new public information policy, the EBRD had also prepared a number of guidance notes on the issue.

(i) Mr. John Hontelez, Secretary-General, European Environmental Bureau, and European ECO-Forum representative on the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties, remarked that to environmental NGOs, the Convention remained a symbol for environmental democracy. He nevertheless noted that there were many problems, particularly regarding the public participation and access to justice pillars, as well as the fact that no legal instruments adopted under the Convention had yet entered into force; nor had the Almaty Guidelines so far led to coordinated efforts by Parties to ensure meaningful roles for NGOs in international forums. He expressed concern about the current trend in some countries to go backwards, citing examples of powerful industrial interests lobbying Governments to limit the role of the public. He observed that in order to achieve transparency and open debate between authorities and citizens from the very start of policymaking and general acceptance of the role of citizens as responsible guardians of democratically agreed rules, the current Convention should be seen as the floor, not the ceiling.

B. General debate

87. During the general debate, the Meeting of the Parties was invited to briefly provide its views on challenges and successes in the implementation of the Convention. Several Parties made statements describing implementation measures that had been adopted in their countries.

88. France reported on several of its implementation measures, including the adoption of an environmental charter under the Constitution, the commencement of a nationwide participatory initiative with the objective of adopting a framework national law based on the principles of the Convention, and education and training for judges.

89. Greece, which chairs the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development, reported on its efforts to promote environmental education and education for sustainable development, as well as its national environmental information network and awareness-raising activities.

XII. GLOBAL AND REGIONAL INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE PRINCIPLE 10 OF THE RIO DECLARATION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

90. Ms. Rita Annus, Deputy Minister for the Environment, Estonia, acted as moderator of the second panel on the theme, “Global and regional initiatives to promote principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development”.

91. A message was delivered on behalf of Mr. Okechukwu Ibeanu, Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Council on the adverse effects of the illicit movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes on the enjoyment of human rights. Mr. Ibeanu noted that in his thematic report presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2008, he had called upon the Council to recognize explicitly the right to information as a precondition for good governance and the realization of all other rights (see A/HRC/7/21). He remarked that the Convention correctly recognizes the importance of the right to information and public participation in environmental matters and called upon other members of the United Nations to accede to the Convention.

A. Panel discussion

92. Panellists were then invited to briefly present their views:

(a) Mr. Bouvier, Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe, observed that the Convention had been an important source of inspiration at the global level and that it will continue to be for generations to come. He reported that UNEP was currently preparing draft Guidelines for the Development of National Legislation on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters to provide guidance to States, especially developing countries, in developing legislative frameworks in this area. He thanked the Convention for its support to UNEP in the development of the Guidelines.

(b) Mr. Werner Kiene, Chairperson, World Bank Inspection Panel, outlined the Panel’s mandate to respond to complaints by people who believe they have suffered or may suffer harm from a World Bank-financed project, by ensuring that in taking part in the project, the Bank has complied with its own policies. He noted that the Bank’s policies on disclosure, access to information, consultation and participation draw from principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and are similar in substance to the principles of the Convention. He indicated that the Panel was shortly to release its findings regarding the Bank’s role in financing the construction of an industrial park and thermal power plant in Albania and that the Convention’s Compliance Committee’s findings regarding the same project² had contributed to the Inspection Panel’s investigation.

(c) Mr. Lalanath de Silva, Director of the Access Initiative, World Resources Institute, presented the Institute’s new publication, *Voice and Choice: Opening the Door to Environmental Democracy*, which was based on research by the Access Initiative’s civil society

² ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2007/4/Add.1.

partners in 26 countries around the world, including the SEE region. Noting that while many countries now had freedom of information laws, implementation of those laws lagged behind, Mr. de Silva emphasized the need for laws that obligate government agencies to proactively provide the public with environmental information in special situations such as environmental emergencies, regulatory compliance and air and water quality monitoring. Parties to the Convention might assist implementation in four ways: (a) by providing funding, technical assistance and expertise to non-Parties; (b) by joining initiatives such as Partnership for Principle 10, which facilitate collaborations between Governments and civil society; (c) by supporting civil society groups in developing countries to engage their Governments in access rights reforms; and by undertaking assessments of implementation of principle 10 in the countries to which they provide funding.

(d) Mr. Craig Boljkovac, Manager, Chemicals and Waste Management Programme, speaking on behalf of the Environmental Governance Programme, UNITAR, referred to capacity-building activities organized by UNITAR in various countries, aimed at promoting more effective implementation of principle 10. Mr. Boljkovac observed that the contribution of environmental NGOs was increasingly appreciated by Governments, but that these Governments needed to acquire new knowledge and skills regarding public participation tools and methods. The greater resources available to the private sector meant that public participation was sometimes one-sided. He noted that the linkage between democracy and the environment was not clear-cut and that further knowledge was needed about how democracy could be designed to best serve the environment and the public interest.

B. General debate

93. During the general debate, several delegations stressed the importance of the public being informed and involved in the early stages of projects to be financed by international financial institutions and being able to bring complaints regarding such projects to independent review bodies.

XIII. SPECIAL SESSION ON THE PROTOCOL ON POLLUTANT RELEASE AND TRANSFER REGISTERS

94. The Working Group of the Parties at its ninth meeting, with input from the Working Group on PRTRs, had prepared a statement on the Protocol for consideration and adoption by the Meeting of the Parties. The statement urged Signatories to ratify the Protocol as soon as possible, preferably in 2008, and invited other States, including those outside the UNECE region, to accede to the Protocol.

95. Mr. Jan Dusik, Deputy Minister for the Environment, the Czech Republic, presided over the special session on the Protocol on PRTRs. He stated that although progress has been achieved in ensuring its entry in the force by the end of 2008, countries with economies in transition or countries outside the EU, i.e. in SEE and EECCA, face difficulties that impede ratification of the Protocol. There is an ongoing need to present PRTRs as an indispensable tool for changing patterns of environmental behaviour.

A. Panel discussion

96. Panellists were then invited to briefly present their views:

(a) Mr. Georgiy Filipchuk, Minister of Environmental Protection, Ukraine, presented his country's preparations for ratification of the Protocol. A national registry of releases and transfers had been developed covering 50 polluting activities and 131 substances. A multisectoral approach involving relevant ministries and stakeholders had been pursued to finalize the list of activities and substances that would be covered by the system. Ukraine aimed to ratify the Protocol by the end of 2008.

(b) Mr. Simon Papyan, Deputy Minister for the Environment, Armenia, observed that the information derived from national PRTR systems could assist countries with meeting their reporting requirements under other multilateral environmental agreements. Although Armenia had carried out legal and institutional measures to prepare for ratification of the Protocol, many challenges remained to its successful implementation. Armenia planned to establish a working group to address the requirements of the Protocol. Mr. Papyan underlined the need for technical assistance to facilitate introduction of PRTRs and welcomed the international assistance Armenia had so far received. He suggested that subregional meetings be organized to develop common approaches to the implementation of the Protocol and expressed Armenia's interest in hosting such a meeting for the South Caucasus.

(c) Mr. Jeff Huntington, Head of Programme, Environmental Assessment, EEA, reported that the first national reports prepared under the European PRTR would occur next year and the information would be displayed on the Internet from September 2009. EEA and the European Commission aimed to develop, with EU Member States, a distributed system for managing national PRTR data within the framework of the Shared Environmental Information System. European PRTR data should be integrated into other systems, such as the EU Greenhouse Gas Emission Trading Scheme.

(d) Mr. Amand, Chairperson of the Working Group on PRTRs and Interim Chairperson of the OECD Task Force on PRTRs, Belgium, maintained that the implementation of the Protocol required the strengthening of capacities both nationally and internationally, through cooperation and adequate assistance between the Parties. An international group coordinating PRTRs had been established in 2005 which enabled United Nations agencies and the main countries involved in strengthening capacities of developing countries and those with economies in transition to meet annually to exchange views and informally coordinate their actions. An important step towards the implementation of the Protocol was the official publication of the *Guidance on Implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers*, which was announced at the meeting. He also highlighted the Protocol's relevance to tackling industrial emissions of greenhouse gases as well as persistent organic pollutants. It thus made a useful contribution towards implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

(e) Ms. Elena Vasilyeva, Executive Director of Volgograd EcoPress Information Centre, speaking on behalf of European ECO-Forum, urged that practical work on implementing

PRTRs should start before the Protocol enters into force. She called upon Governments with experience with national PRTR systems, intergovernmental organization and donors to provide technical and financial support to those countries with less experience. In the EECCA subregion, it was important that information and technical materials be made available in national languages. European ECO-Forum supported the adoption of the statement on the Protocol on PRTRs.

B. General debate

97. During the general debate, several delegations stressed the importance of making PRTR data understandable to the general public, and the need to conduct capacity-building involving Governments, NGOs and the private sector. The availability of guidance in national languages, in particular the Russian language, would help to address the language barrier.

XIV. REVIEW AND ADOPTION OF DECISIONS

98. Based on the discussions under the preceding agenda items, the Meeting of the Parties formally adopted the following decisions by consensus:

- (a) Decision III/1 on interpretation of article 14 of the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.3);
- (b) Decision III/2 on electronic information tools and the clearinghouse mechanism (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.4);
- (c) Decision III/3 on promoting effective access to justice (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.5);
- (d) Decision III/4 on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.6);
- (e) Decision III/5 on reporting requirements (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.7);
- (f) Decision III/6 on general issues of compliance (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.8);
- (g) Decision III/6a on compliance by Albania with its obligations under the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.9);
- (h) Decision III/6b on compliance by Armenia with its obligations under the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.10);
- (i) Decision III/6c on compliance by Kazakhstan with its obligations under the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.11);
- (j) Decision III/6d on compliance by Lithuania with its obligations under the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.12);
- (k) Decision III/6e on compliance by Turkmenistan with its obligations under the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.13);
- (l) Decision III/6f on compliance by Ukraine with its obligations under the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.14);

- (m) Decision III/7 on financial arrangements (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.15)
- (n) Decision III/8 on the strategic plan for 2009–2014 (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.16);
- (o) Decision III/9 on the work programme for 2009–2011 (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.17).

99. The Meeting of the Parties also formally adopted the statement on PRTRs (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.2), taking note of the fact that no host country for the first session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol had so far been identified.

100. Because the work of the task forces referred to in decisions III/2, III/3 and III/4 was in large part based on the exchange and sharing of information, the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention considered it essential to ensure the participation of countries from all subregions of the UNECE region, and in particular the countries with economies in transition. It therefore requested the United Nations to continue to make interpretation and translation available for these task forces.

XV. DISCUSSION AND ADOPTION OF THE RIGA DECLARATION

101. The Meeting of the Parties was invited to consider the draft Riga Declaration, as initially prepared by the Bureau and subsequently discussed and revised by the Working Group of the Parties and during its own meeting. Ministers and Heads of delegation of Parties, Signatories and other States, as well as the international, regional and non-governmental organizations and other representatives of civil society present amended and adopted the Riga Declaration (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.1).

XVI. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND OTHER BUREAU MEMBERS

102. The Meeting of the Parties elected Mr. Dusik (Czech Republic) as Chairperson and Ms. Zaneta Mikosa (Latvia) and Ms. Istasse (Belgium) as Vice-Chairpersons from among the representatives of the Parties present at the meeting in accordance with rule 18 of the rules of procedure. It also elected the following members of the Bureau from among the representatives of the Parties in accordance with rule 22, paragraph 1 (b): Mr. Gavrosh Zela (Albania), Mr. Ivan Narkevitch (Belarus), Ms. Emmanuelle Swynghedauw (France) and Ms. Loredana Dall'Ora (Italy).

103. Mr. Hontelez (European Environmental Bureau) was re-appointed by European ECO-Forum to attend the meetings of the Bureau as an observer, in accordance with rule 22, paragraphs 2 and 4.

XVII. DATE AND VENUE OF THE FOURTH ORDINARY MEETING

104. It was agreed that the fourth meeting of the Parties would be held in 2011 in the Republic of Moldova. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the Government of the Republic of Moldova for its kind offer to host the meeting.

XVIII. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

105. The Meeting of the Parties reviewed and revised a draft of the meeting report covering most but not all of the agenda items. It requested the secretariat to circulate a complete updated draft to all delegations providing a short commenting period, following which the outgoing Chairperson and Bureau, together with the secretariat, would finalize the report.

XIX. CLOSE OF THE MEETING

106. The Meeting of the Parties expressed its gratitude to the host country for its warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements; to the former and outgoing Chairpersons, Ms. Bjurstrøm and Ms. Aarhus, for their skilful and effective leadership of the process during the intersessional period; to the interpreters and other technical staff; and to the secretariat.

107. Closing the meeting, Minister Vejonis thanked the participants for their constructive participation, and expressed his appreciation for the significant progress that had been achieved.
