



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

13.06.2008

EU Opening Statement

Intervention of Slovenia on behalf of the EU during the HL meeting

Third Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, Riga, 13 June 2008

Item 10: Celebrating the first 10 years: achievements, lessons learned and future challenges

Mister Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for Slovenia, speaking on behalf of the European Union, to address this Forum.

1. First of all, I would like to thank our host, the Government of Latvia, represented by Mr. Raimonds Vējonis, Minister of Environment, for organizing the 3rd Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in the beautiful historical city of Riga. We are impressed by the splendid arrangements. You and your staff have worked hard to provide such excellent settings for this meeting and making this conference a success.
2. Allow me to highlight a few issues of particular importance to the EU:

This year we are celebrating the first 10 years of the Aarhus Convention. When signing it in 1998, the 25th of June, we were all aware that this would be an innovative and challenging instrument in the field of environmental democracy focusing on interactions between the public and public authorities in a democratic context, and bringing about a new model of public involvement and participation. Today we are in a position to say that a great deal has been achieved. The Convention has emerged as a uniquely effective international instrument promoting environmental democracy. Since its entry into force the number of Parties has grown steadily and we have achieved progress in implementation. Nevertheless the implementation of and compliance with the Convention have proved to be a major challenge- one we take seriously and which deserves our full attention. We also believe that the impact of the Convention in the UNECE region and beyond should and can increase.



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3. During this first decade of the Convention, several important task forces, tools and mechanisms have been set up and developed. They have all contributed to capacity building, awareness raising and implementation of the Convention. Across Europe and in Central Asia countries have been introducing new laws or amending existing ones to bring them in line with the provisions of the Convention. The uniqueness of the Aarhus Convention is demonstrated by the active involvement and participation of civil society organizations in all aspects of our work up to the Meeting of the Parties.
4. The European Union would like to underline the significance of our shared efforts to improve compliance with the provisions of the Convention. We would especially like to encourage the Compliance Committee to continue its work towards this important goal. May I congratulate the newly elected members of that Committee and wish them all the best in their work.
5. Although we have come a long way, it is also clear that there is still space left for improving the practical application of the Convention.
6. The European Union is aware that the implementation of the Convention is not an easy task, as we have learned from our experiences with Directive on public access to information and Directive on providing for public participation in respect of the drawing up plans and programmes and amending other legislation with regard to public participation and access to justice. Based on this experience and taking into account the national implementation reports as well as the Synthesis Report on implementation we support further work towards the implementation of the Convention. We support the extension of the current task forces' mandates in time, to continue their activities, including capacity buildings, seminars and workshops.
7. We are convinced that for the continuation of the good work and the implementation of the Convention, stable and predictable financing is of high importance. The European Union has demonstrated its commitment to the goals of the Convention by providing extensive financial support since the beginning. We call upon all Parties, Signatories, other States and organizations wishing and being in a position to do so, to contribute as well to a fair sharing of financial burden. The European Union is willing to cooperate during the incoming intersessional period with a positive approach towards the achievement of a reliable system of stable financial contributions under the Convention.
8. The European Union expresses its gratitude to all those who dedicate their time to concretely help forward the process of implementation of the Convention. In addition to financial resources, the hard work of many individuals, often volunteers from across the ECE region, is a crucial factor for the success of the Convention.



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9. I would also like to stress the importance of the Protocol on Pollutant release and transfer registers and call upon all parties to ratify the Protocol as soon as possible and thus enable its first Meeting of the Parties in 2009 and further strengthen citizens' environmental rights. The adoption of GMO amendment to the Convention is another major achievement of the past decade. We urge all Parties to ratify this amendment as soon as possible so that it enters into force without delay.
10. Mister Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude that the European Union attaches great importance to the Aarhus Convention, which can be seen from the adopted legislation in this field and a number of promotional activities done in the past years. The European Union will continue to cooperate and contribute actively on the good practice development and is willing to take an active part in the various bodies of the Convention as well as to continue to contribute on a large scale to the financial resources of the Convention.
11. To sum up, we have achieved remarkable results over the past decade and here in Riga. With the adoption of the Strategic Plan 2009-2014 covering the period until the 5th Meeting of the Parties we have prepared forward-looking guidance for better implementation and further development of the Convention and thus further promotion of environmental democracy.
12. Chair, I thank you and congratulate you and your team, for making this possible. I thank the Bureau and the Secretariat of the Convention for the effort and good work done and for contributing to the results we are witnessing today.

I would also like to mention our appreciation of the active participation of civil society organizations at this Meeting of the Parties, contributing to better environmental policy making as well as to democracy.

On behalf of European Union, let me express confidence that our good cooperation will continue. We look forward to working further to bring about the objectives of the Aarhus Convention.

Thank you for your attention.