



**Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and to the Protocol on PRTRs,  
Budva, Montenegro**

**Agenda item 6 (b) – Public participation in decision-making: European ECO Forum  
keynote statement delivered by Ms. Anke Stock, Women Engage for a Common  
Future**

First of all, we would like to thank Italy and Loredana Dall’Ora for the valuable support and leadership of the Task Force and for the willingness to continue this work within the next inter-sessional period.

In times where we see democratic rights under threat, we also fear for civic spaces and thus the right to public participation, for example as is the case when finances for civil society organisations are reduced<sup>1</sup>, or legislative reforms are made (e.g. Czechia); and in practice, such as speeding up public participation processes – all these examples are cutting back on participatory rights. However, public participation is a fundamental human right arising, among other things, out of the European Convention on Human Rights. Responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making is key for sustainable development as enshrined in Goal 16 of the Agenda 2030.

Key challenges and obstacles have been identified during the inter-sessional work of the Task Force. Similarly they emerge from the case law under the Compliance Committee:

- Identification of the public concerned, including the support of the participation of marginalised groups;
- Decision-making in a trans-boundary context – extremely relevant, for example, but not limited to, in big energy infrastructure projects;
- Early public participation when all options are still open;
- Effective notification and reasonable timeframes;

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<sup>1</sup> “Declining public financial support for civil society activity is a major area of concern for associations, and particularly for minority groups and women” (Civicus Report Europe, Oct. 16).

- Taking into account comments from the public into final decisions;
- Effective participation in the early preparation of legislation (e.g. the failures in Armenia and the UK currently);
- Non-recognition of the interaction of the different pillars of the Convention.

Unfortunately, we must express our disappointment that the same issues are repeatedly arising over the years with regards to failures by member states to implement key elements of public participation in practice. But all of these issues are important factors for effective public participation and have to be addressed. Good practices exist and have to be made widely publicly available as examples of best practice. Approaches on how to overcome some of these challenges are also detailed within the Maastricht Recommendations developed under the Task Force upon the request of the Meeting of the Parties. We very much welcome the use of the Maastricht Recommendations by some member states, but encourage others to implement them as well as part of their legal and policy frameworks, to translate them in the respective national languages for the use of national courts and to promote their application more widely.

Thank you!