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КОМИССИЯECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
Access to Information, Public Participation
in Decision-making and Access to Justice
in Environmental Matters

Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making

Fifth meeting

Geneva, 23-24 February 2015

Key outcomes¹

As agreed by the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making at its fifth Meeting, held 23-24 February 2015.

1. Opening and adoption of the agenda

1. The Task Force adopted the agenda as set out in the document AC/TF.PP-5/Inf.1.

2. Obstacles, challenges and good practices in relation to public participation in decision-making

2. The Task Force:

(a) Identification and notification of the public concerned

(i) Took note of the experiences and challenges shared by presenters from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Sweden, and the NGO Journalists Environmental Agency, and noted the subsequent discussions and comments from the floor;

(ii) Recognised that identification and notification of the public concerned remains an important issue;

(iii) Agreed to further consider how to address the challenges to effective identification and notification of the public concerned, taking into account issues of definition,

¹ This document was not formally edited.

marginalised and minority groups, the need for training those with responsibility for identification and notification, and allocation of resources.

(b) Early public participation

(i) Took note of the experiences and challenges shared by presenters from the Republic of Moldova and the Hellenic Society For The Protection of the Environment and the Cultural Heritage (Greece), and noted the subsequent discussions and comments from the floor;

(ii) Recognized that early public participation when all options are genuinely open remains an important issue, especially ensuring that participation comes early enough when the “zero option” is still available;

(iii) Stressed the importance of further considering this issue, taking into account the challenges highlighted during the discussion.

(c) Role of private actors and project developers

(i) Took note of the experiences and challenges shared by Mr. Jendroska (expert), and by presenters from Georgia and NGO Angel (Kazakhstan), and noted the subsequent discussion and comments from the floor;

(ii) Noted that the role of private actors and project developers is a complex issue;

(iii) Welcomed the guidance provided by the Maastricht Recommendations on promoting effective public participation in decision-making in environmental matters in this area and encouraged Parties and stakeholders to use them in their daily work;

(iv) Agreed to further consider this issue, taking into account potential drawbacks such as conflicts of interest on the part of developers and potential advantages such as financial benefits relating to developers paying for public participation processes.

(d) Due account of comments and outcomes of public participation

(i) Took note of the experiences and challenges shared by presenters from Albania, Armenia and Globe Europe (Republic of Moldova), and noted the subsequent discussion and comments from the floor;

(ii) Noted the challenges reported, including a lack of experience of how to meaningfully take into account the outcomes of public participation and the lack of legal guarantees in some countries requiring that due account be taken;

(iii) Stressed the importance of further considering this issue, taking into account the challenges highlighted during the discussion.

3. Innovative Practices of public participation in decision-making

3. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experiences shared by Mr. Ballan (expert), presenters from Ireland, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, and the Peace and Disarmament Quaker United Nations Office, and noted the subsequent discussions and comments from the floor;

(b) Encouraged the development of innovative practices that facilitate more effective public participation without entailing additional significant financial or human resources on the part of public authorities;

(c) Encouraged the sharing of innovative practices through the Aarhus Good Practice database and through bilateral cooperation.

4. Aarhus Good Practice online database

4. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the presentation by the secretariat on the Aarhus Good Practice online database;

(b) Invited all Parties, NGOs and other interested stakeholders to submit potential case studies to the secretariat by using a template for the database.²

5. Thematic session on Climate change-related decision-making

5. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experiences, including good examples, and challenges shared by presenters from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat, Belgium, the Aarhus Centre of Belarus, the Netherlands, European ECO-Forum, France, Armenia, and "Green Dossier" (Ukraine), and noted the subsequent discussions and comments from the floor;

(b) Noted that climate change-related decision-making appeared to be a complex issue, as it applies to a number of legal and policy instruments (i.e. climate change legislation, national communications, long term or thematic national strategies) and it addresses a wide range of different sectors and actors;

(c) Noted that ensuring effective public participation in such decision-making is of utmost importance;

(d) Noted the concerns expressed by NGOs that there were, in some countries, a number of obstacles to effective public participation in climate change-related decision-making, e.g. lack of legal provisions requiring public participation in climate change decision-making, lack of specific structure to involve the public, lack of funding, lack

² http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/ppdm/Case_studies_template_PPDM-form_final.doc

of effort to involve public on a regular basis, and lack of public awareness of the importance of climate change problems and/or the decision-making process;

(e) Encouraged close cooperation between national focal points of the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change and of the Aarhus Convention at the national level.

6. Closing

6. The Task Force:

(a) Thanked the speakers for their presentations;

(b) Expressed appreciation to those who had provided written statements in advance of the meeting;

(c) Agreed on the outcomes presented by the Chair at the meeting, which will be incorporated in the meeting report.