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

Working Group of the Parties

Fifth meeting

Geneva, 23 and 24 November 2016

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Implementation of the current work programme of the Protocol, including in relation to the strategic plan for 2015–2020 and financial matters

Report on implementation of the work programme for 2015–2017, including in relation to the strategic plan for 2015–2020

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present report was prepared by the secretariat pursuant to decision II/3 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (see ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/3, para. 2). It provides an overview of the implementation of the Protocol's work programme for 2015–2017, contained in an annex to that decision. The report covers the period 16 August 2015 to 15 August 2016. Information on the implementation of the 2015–2017 work programme up to 15 August 2015 can be found in the progress report submitted to the Working Group of the Parties at its fourth meeting (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2015/3).

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I. Introduction

1. This document provides an overview of the implementation of the Protocol's work programme for 2015–2017 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/3, annex) for the period 16 August 2015 to 15 August 2016 (reporting period),¹ focusing on operational and organizational aspects. It also provides information on the linkages between the activities of the work programme and focal areas and objectives laid down in the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ibid., decision II/2, annex). In that context, it needs to be noted that, while the report on implementation is centred around activities carried out by the secretariat and the Protocol's bodies, the strategic plan includes objectives which are intended to be implemented not only by the secretariat and the Protocol bodies, but also by the Parties, civil society organizations and other partners.

2. In implementing the work programme, the secretariat made serious efforts to avoid duplication of work and inefficient use of resources through:

- (a) Pursuing synergies with activities under other partner organizations;
- (b) Conducting specific thematic surveys prior to activities in order to respond better to the needs of Parties and stakeholders;
- (c) Continuously increasing the use and development of electronic tools for Protocol activities (e.g., e-mail consultations, phone conferences, online databases, the online reporting tool for national implementation reports, the clearinghouse mechanism and the PRTR.net global portal).

II. Overview of implementation of the work programme

A. Compliance mechanism

3. In the reporting period, the Protocol's Compliance Committee held its fourth meeting (Geneva, 27–29 April 2015), and undertook several subsequent e-mail consultations.² The main focus of the Committee's work was to revise two documents submitted for the Working Group's consideration at its present session on the basis of comments received from Parties and stakeholders: (a) draft systemic issues concerning the implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers and recommendations on how to address them (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2016/5); and draft guidance for reporting on implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2016/6). The Working Group considered earlier versions of the documents at its fourth meeting (Madrid, 26 November 2015), and requested that the documents be finalized by the Chair of the Committee with the support from the secretariat on the basis of the comments received from parties and stakeholders (see ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2015/2).

4. The Committee has to date received no submissions by Parties concerning compliance by other Parties, no submissions by Parties concerning their own compliance, no formal referrals by the secretariat and no formal communications from the public regarding compliance with the Protocol.

¹ For information on the implementation of the 2015–2017 work programme up to 15 August 2015 see document ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2015/3.

² Meeting documents and other information on the work of the Compliance Committee are available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr-cc.html>.

5. Chairs of compliance or implementation bodies under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) multilateral environmental agreements continued to liaise at informal meetings to exchange information on challenges and good practices in relation to the work of the respective bodies. The fourth meeting of the compliance and implementation committee chairs was held in Geneva on 20 June 2016.³

6. The work under the compliance mechanism is relevant for the achievement of objectives I.1, I.3–I.6 under focal area I and for all the objectives of focal area III of the strategic plan 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/2, annex).

B. Technical assistance

7. Technical assistance activities may involve specific projects in countries needing assistance, including training workshops, guidance materials and expert assistance. It is relevant for the achievement mainly of focal areas I and II of the strategic plan.

1. Workshops and country-specific projects

8. The secretariat presented and promoted the Protocol at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) inception workshop for its “Global Project on the Implementation of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR) as a tool for Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) reporting, dissemination and awareness raising for Belarus, Cambodia, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Peru” (Madrid, 26–28 November 2015).

9. Preparatory work has been started with regard to a second subregional workshop for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, scheduled to take place from 19 to 21 September 2016 in Minsk. The workshop will be organized by the secretariat in cooperation with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus and the secretariat of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution. In addition, a project to promote pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs) in South-Eastern Europe and the Republic of Moldova, funded by Germany, is being implemented by the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, with advisory support from the secretariat, in 2016.

2. Technical assistance through electronic tools

10. The secretariat has continued managing the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy⁴ and the PRTR.net global portal.⁵ The PRTR.net global portal is used to facilitate the collection, dissemination and exchange of information related to PRTRs. The Protocol secretariat maintained and updated PRTR.net in cooperation with UNITAR and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and continues pursuing close cooperation with UNITAR in order to ensure the effective use of PRTR.net and PRTR:Learn⁶ by national focal points and stakeholders. In addition, the secretariat has started the upgrade of these two web portals to make them more attractive and user-friendly by integrating new technologies, web features and search options.

11. The secretariat also continues to administrate a database on capacity-building activities,⁷ which provides information on past, future and ongoing PRTR capacity-building

³ For more information see the “joint work and informal networks” page on the ECE website <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/joint-work-and-informal-networks.html>.

⁴ See <http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>.

⁵ See <http://www.prtr.net/>.

⁶ See <http://prtr.unitar.org/>.

⁷ Available from <http://apps.unece.org/ehlm/pp/NIR/RLsearch.asp>.

activities. This includes a feature on PRTR.net to enable national focal points and stakeholders to log in and add data to the PRTR capacity-building activities database.

12. The Protocol section of the ECE website has been regularly updated in the intersessional period. In addition, section D below includes information regarding the online reporting tool.

13. To support the preparation of the fourth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, the secretariat carried out an electronic survey on the current status of capacity-building activities in the countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and to analyse the needs, challenges and priorities regarding PRTRs and their successful implementation.

C. Information exchange on a technical level

14. The objective of information exchange on a technical level is to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Protocol. The method of work for information exchange is meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, ad hoc meetings and the use of electronic tools. Information exchange on a technical level is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan; specifically, for the achievement of objectives I.1, I.2, II.1, II.3 and III.1.

15. In addition, sections B above and E below describe trainings, surveys, subregional workshops, electronic tools and other activities that enable information exchange on a technical level. Sections D and F below include information on the reporting mechanism and the meetings of the Working Group of the Parties.

D. Reporting mechanism

16. The objective of the reporting mechanism is to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Protocol, the review of compliance and the exchange of experience. The method of work is meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, exchange on a technical level of information on the application of electronic information tools and the use of the online national implementation reports database in the Aarhus Clearinghouse, the PRTR:Learn website, the PRTR capacity-building activities matrix and e-reporting. This activity of the work programme is relevant for the achievement of focal area I of the strategic plan.

17. The online reporting tool⁸ that was introduced for the submission of national implementation reports by the Parties for the 2014 reporting cycle will be used also for the 2017 reporting cycle.

18. Following the failure of Albania, Cyprus and Slovenia to submit their national implementation reports for the 2014 reporting cycle before the second session of the Meeting of the Parties (Maastricht, the Netherlands, 3–4 July 2014), these Parties were invited to report by 1 October 2014. As of 15 August 2016 only Slovenia has not submitted its report.

E. Awareness-raising and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes

19. The objective of awareness-raising and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes is to expand knowledge of the Protocol

8 Available from <http://www2.unep.org/prtr-nir/>.

throughout the ECE region and beyond, to increase the number of Parties to the Protocol and to further the application of the Protocol in the context of other multilateral environmental agreements and related processes (e.g., the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)/International Conference on Chemicals Management under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)). The activity is pursued through: participation in key regional and international events and processes; the provision of support to workshops organized by others; the preparation of leaflets, publications, news bulletins and other materials on the Protocol; updating the website; and writing and reviewing articles on the Protocol. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan, specifically for the achievement of objectives I.1, II.2–4 and III.1.

20. The secretariat provided input regarding the Convention and its Protocol to the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes (Special Rapporteur on toxic wastes) for his annual report to the Human Rights Council on the right to access information throughout the life cycle of hazardous substances and wastes (A/HRC/30/40). The secretariat also took part in the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on 16 September 2015, organized within the framework of the thirtieth session of the Human Rights Council (Geneva, 14 September–2 October 2015), and a panel discussion at the side event “Right to information on hazardous substances and wastes” on 18 September 2015, raising awareness about both instruments.⁹

21. The ECE Executive Secretary promoted the Convention and its Protocol together with other ECE instruments at the fourth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (Geneva, 28 September–2 October 2015).¹⁰ The secretariat further promoted the Convention and its Protocol at a side event on “Occupational exposures: Experiences on advancing a more sustainable management of chemicals” held on 30 September 2015, where the Special Rapporteur on toxic wastes highlighted the importance of access to information for workers.

22. A second Joint Global Round Table on PRTRs, under the auspices of ECE and OECD and in cooperation with UNITAR and UNEP, was held on 24 and 25 November 2015 in Madrid, hosted by Spain. The round table was chaired by Japan and Sweden. The event helped foster the exchange of experience between different Governments and stakeholders as well as build experts’ capacities and promote synergy on PRTR-related issues. The presentations and discussions during the event were centred on good practices, common challenges and new opportunities related to development of PRTRs. The event was co-chaired by the Chair of the Protocol’s Meeting of the Parties and the Chair of the OECD Task Force on PRTRs.

23. Moreover, the secretariat has carried out this work programme activity through the participation of, or arranging for the participation of, representatives of Convention and Protocol bodies at a number of relevant workshops and other events in various countries. Notably, the secretariat promoted the work under the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes, among others, at the following events:

(a) The joint UNEP, UNITAR and Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals International Expert and Stakeholder Workshop on the Integrated National Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and International Chemicals and Waste Agreements (Geneva, 11–13 April 2016);

⁹ More information can be found from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/ToxicWastes/Pages/Righttoinformation.aspx>.

¹⁰ More information is available from http://www.saicm.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=534&Itemid=696.

(b) The consultation on Global Chemicals Outlook II (Geneva, 13–14 April 2016);

(c) The Inter-agency Meeting on Sound Chemicals Management held on 10 May 2016, in Geneva. The one-day special event was convened by the Inter-Agency Meeting and hosted by the UNEP Chemicals and Waste Branch, and brought together 25 participants from 16 different agencies and secretariats;

(d) The Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016), including the side event on PRTRs as a tool for public air quality monitoring (Batumi, Georgia, 8 June 2016);

(e) The side event on access to information and human rights, held on 14 June 2016 on the margins of the thirty-second session of the Human Rights Council (Geneva, 13 June–1 July and 8 July 2016).

24. The secretariat also promoted the Protocol through various reports and articles prepared under the auspices of ECE and partner organizations. This included contribution to the *Sixth Global Environment Outlook Assessment for the Pan-European Region*,¹¹ prepared by UNEP and ECE with the support of the European Environment Agency and in close collaboration with partner institutions and individual experts, regarding the current status of the implementation of the Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs.

25. The secretariat continued an enhanced outreach exercise, distributing materials about the Convention and the Protocol to national focal points, Aarhus Centres, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions in the ECE region.

F. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities

26. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities under the Protocol are carried out at meetings of the Working Group of the Parties, meetings of the Bureau, as necessary, and by consultations among Bureau members using e-mail. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan.

27. The secretariat serviced the fourth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, as well as the ninth and tenth meetings of the Bureau (Madrid, 27 November 2015 and Geneva, 7 July 2016, respectively), and coordinated a number of e-mail consultations among the Bureau members.

28. Representatives of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements continued to liaise at informal meetings to exchange information on priorities under the agreements and identify and discuss possible areas of cooperation and synergy in the light of recent and future key developments in the area of the environment. At the most recent meeting, in Geneva on 26 October 2015, the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol participated, as well as the secretariat.¹²

29. Activities under the Protocol were presented at the twenty-first session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, 27–30 October 2015) by the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties.

30. As of 15 August 2016, the Protocol has 35 Parties. Malta and Ukraine ratified the Protocol on 20 May 2016 and on 2 May 2016 respectively.

¹¹ Nairobi, United Nations Environment Programme, 2016.

¹² Chair's summaries of the meetings, which include a list of participants, are available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/informal-networks.html>.

G. Technical assessment of provisions of the Protocol

31. Technical assessment of the provisions of the Protocol involves the drafting of recommendations on technical issues for the Meeting of the Parties, based on the assessment reports. The method of work for this activity includes meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, electronic consultation and drafting of assessment reports on experience gained in the development of national PRTRs according to article 6, paragraph 2, of the Protocol. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan, specifically objectives I.1–6, II.1 and III.1–4.

32. At its first meeting (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2011), the Working Group of the Parties agreed that no amendments to the provisions of the Protocol were needed at that time, and that experience needed to be gathered before such a review should take place. The synthesis report on the implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/5)¹³ presented to the Meeting of the Parties at its second session and the individual national implementation reports¹⁴ from the first reporting cycle on which the synthesis was based provide insight on some of the issues related to the technical assessment of the provisions of the Protocol. The current work under the Compliance Committee on a document addressing systemic issues arising under the Protocol (see para. 3 above), currently before the Working Group for consideration, addresses this work area.

H. Horizontal support areas

33. During the period 2015–2016, the objective of horizontal support activities was to provide overall support that covered multiple substantive areas of the work programme, inter alia, through secretarial support and staff training. These activities are relevant for the achievement of all focal areas of the strategic plan.

¹³ Available from http://www.unece.org/prtrmopp2_docs.html#/.

¹⁴ Available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr_reports_implementation_2014.html.