

## **ECONOMIC 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**

Fourth meeting

Chişinău, June 2011

Item.. of the provisional agenda

Procedures and mechanisms facilitating the implementation of the Convention:

Reports on implementation

### **IMPLEMENTATION REPORT SUBMITTED BY AUSTRIA\***

*Article 10, paragraph 2, of the Convention requires the Parties, at their meetings, to keep under continuous review the implementation of the Convention on the basis of regular reporting by the Parties. Through decision I/8, the Meeting of the Parties established a reporting mechanism whereby each Party is requested to submit a report to each meeting of the Parties on the legislative, regulatory and other measures taken to implement the Convention, and their practical implementation, according to a reporting format annexed to the decision. For each meeting, the secretariat is requested to prepare a synthesis report summarizing the progress made and identifying any significant trends, challenges and solutions. The reporting mechanism was further developed through decision II/10, which addressed, inter alia, the issue of how to prepare the second and subsequent reports and decision III/5.*

#### **I. PROCESS BY WHICH THE REPORT HAS BEEN PREPARED**

1. This report (the first implementation report as well as its first update) was prepared on the basis of Decisions I/8, II/10 and III/5 on reporting and, where possible, in accordance with the recommendations of the Convention's Compliance Committee dating from February 2007 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2007/L.4).

2. In the framework of public consultation, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW), which is responsible for the

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coordination of matters pertaining to the Convention, has invited all the other relevant Austrian Federal ministries (in particular the Federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth, the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Justice, the Federal Ministry of Health, , the Ministry of Finance and the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology), the nine Federal provinces (contacted via the liaison office in Vienna), the Austrian Parliament, the representations of interest (social partners), the Umweltbundesamt GmbH (hereinafter: Umweltbundesamt, the Austrian Federal Environment Agency) as well as environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the interested public to participate.

3. With regard to the first implementation report the participation included, in particular, as recommended by the Compliance Committee, a consultation period of approximately nine weeks, already prior to the first draft via the Internet, e-mail and in a coordination meeting. After completion of the draft and its submission via electronic file and after publication on the Internet, together with an e-mailing submitted to the potentially interested parties, the project entered into a second, somewhat shorter, consultation phase.

4. Regarding the update of the implementation report the consultation period on the content of the report was approximately five weeks due to the fact that the current exercise was based on the already existing report. The draft of the amended report containing the necessary updates and new developments - with the changes marked by track changes as recommended by the Compliance Committee - was open for consultation for about two months via internet and e-mail.

5. For the national consultation process on the first implementation report and the received statements, see the following information available on the website of the BMLFUW: <http://www.umweltnet.at/article/articleview/62563/1/7247/>. Concerning the update click on the same website to find the updated implementation report.

In summary, public consultation on the first implementation report has shown that some environmental organizations and one of the five political parties represented in the Austrian Parliament viewed the implementation of the third pillar in Austria rather critically. Yet there has been broad agreement as regards the first two pillars of the Convention.

6. Public consultation on the update of the implementation report has shown similar results. The concerns of the participating stakeholders have been appropriately taken into account in all the concerned sections during the process of the update of the implementation report.

## **II. PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES RELEVANT FOR UNDERSTANDING THE REPORT**

Austria ratified the Convention in 2005 and thus became a Party to the Convention (Federal Law Gazette III No. 88/2005 of June 10, 2005). For the purpose of a general understanding of this report, it must be stressed that the implementation and application of the Convention in Austria are generally based on European Union (EU) Directives which have already entered into force, especially concerning the first and second pillars. In this process,

respective EU Directives have been transposed into national law at Federal as well as at provincial levels.

7. As in several other EU Member States which are Parties to the Convention, in Austria it is domestic implementation which is the first prerequisite for ratification. In Austria, the provisions of the Convention have been transposed into national law in the relevant laws and regulations. Conclusion of the Convention was unanimously approved by the two chambers of the Austrian Parliament (the National Council and Federal Council).

8. The Republic of Austria is a Federal State. This means that legislation and the execution of laws are distributed among the Federal Government and the nine Federal provinces according to the competencies they have been assigned. The Austrian Federal Constitution provides for a general regulation of legislative and executive competencies assigned to the Federal Government and the Federal provinces. This is why for some areas of the Convention provincial legislation is required in addition to Federal laws. Thus, legislative measures for the implementation of EU law and of the Convention are generally required at Federal and provincial levels and are therefore accordingly complex. With a few exceptions, the application and administration is organised locally, i.e. via the Federal provinces or the district administration and municipal authorities.

9. According to the Federal Constitution, environmental protection is a cross-sectional issue, which is distributed among the Federal Government and the Federal provinces with a view to the competencies assigned by law. On the basis of a constitutional act, Austria commits itself to comprehensive environmental protection for the purpose of the preservation of the natural environment as the basic resource on which human life depends, protecting humans against harmful impact (Federal Law Gazette 1984/491). Protection includes measures to keep air, water and the soil clean and to prevent noise.

10. In Austria, provisions on the protection of the environment are, in particular, to be found in the area of public-administration law, with action taken by the Federal Government/Federal provincial authorities being subject to legal regulations. Besides bans of massive damage to the environment and codes of conduct, permits issued by public authorities are prevailing in environmental administration law, which means that (mostly economic) activities are subject to control exerted or permits granted by administrative authorities.

11. Besides the Federal structure, the social partners also play a very important role in Austria. In Austria, the social partners, e.g. the Federal Chamber of Commerce (WKÖ), the Chamber of Agriculture (LWK), the Federal Chamber of Labour (BAK) and the national trade-union federation (ÖGB) as well as the Federation of Austrian Industry (IV), play a key role in representing the interests of the respective groups in society (stakeholders).

12. In Austria, we can witness not only a high degree of environmental awareness, but also high interest in the principles underlying the Convention. Public administration tries to increasingly take account of this by enhancing new forms of public participation, such as e.g.: e-government, e-participation or citizen-service facilities available online.

### **III. LEGISLATIVE, REGULATORY AND OTHER MEASURES IMPLEMENTING THE GENERAL PROVISIONS IN PARAGRAPHS 2, 3, 4, 7 AND 8 OF ARTICLE 3**

#### **Article 3, paragraph 2**

13. Based on the political key concept of “good governance”, public participation, i.e. the integration of the public in policymaking, has established itself as a cornerstone of decision-making processes.

14. For Austria, the objective of an innovative, cooperative, efficient and high-quality public administration within the meaning of enhanced citizen orientation is the guiding theme. This objective as well as the consideration of the Aarhus Convention has again been underlined in the current Austrian Government programme dating from late 2008. Efforts made over the last years to modernize administration have brought about many good examples proving how the general public can be successfully made an active partner in policymaking and how this process can be fostered.

15. In order to provide another important impetus for good governance at federal level, standards for public participation have been developed at the instigation of the Federal Chancellery and the BMLFUW in the framework of an interministerial working group, in which stakeholders, NGOs and external experts for public participation also took part. These standards are also a contribution to the implementation of the Austrian and the EU sustainability strategies (European Council conclusions of June 2006) and have been adopted by the Austrian Government on July 2, 2008. The Austrian government thereby recommended their application throughout the federal administration. On this basis, the citizens are to be better integrated into policymaking within the meaning of the political guiding principles, as they are called, for the promotion of sustainable development. The goal of the process for the development of public participation standards, which was launched in 2005, was to develop good practice recommendations in the form of standards, which are to be used as routine measures in administrative public participation procedures (“Code of Conduct”). The standards are primarily relevant for plans and programmes as well as for policies and legal instruments developed by administrative bodies. The standards are aimed at providing precise content as to the definition of public participation and specific action which is to be taken. The public participation standards are deemed as a service and hands-on support for administrators involved in public participation processes.

In 2009 the standards were awarded with the “Best Practice Certificate” of the European Public Service Award EPSA. By now, the standards are not yet applied comprehensively but they are claimed by NGOs in the environmental sector when they are invited to participate in the preparation of plans, programmes or policies in the environmental field. In 2009 additional practical guidelines for the application of the public participation standards were published. In 2010 a public participation website on [digitales.oesterreich.gv.at](http://digitales.oesterreich.gv.at) (→ Verwaltung → Bürgerinnen- und Bürgerbeteiligung) went online, providing basic information on public participation for administrators. As a central access point to participation processes running in the Austrian ministries, a central public participation platform was prepared on [help.gv.at](http://help.gv.at). This platform will go online as soon as the first public participation processes will be accessible on this site.

As a recent example for promoting public participation the province of Vorarlberg has launched a public participation focus in its “Office for Future-Related Issues”. In 2010 a public participation handbook for municipalities and the regional administration was published. It provides information about public participation methods and examples of public participation processes which were carried out in Vorarlberg in the recent years. An official presentation chaired by the State Governor and a seminar for administrators of municipalities and the regional administration were carried out. Furthermore a specific participation method, which is called “wisdom council”, is promoted in order to activate citizens to participate in the development of their communities. A broad evaluation process on this specific method is supported by the BMLFUW.

### **Article 3, paragraph 3**

16. The environmental education activities coordinated by the BMLFUW include numerous education projects dealing with sustainable development as well as different subject areas. The target groups are, among others, the general public, schools, children and young people, research and multipliers. Summaries of these activities are available in brochures on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), including various and highly specific examples at the regional and local levels.

17. Since 2002, the Austrian Eco-Label for Schools has been awarded by the BMLFUW jointly with the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. It is to honour schools for their special commitment in the fields of environmental education, environmentally sound action and the promotion of a socially viable school environment. It is the aim of the initiative to prompt all school stakeholders to strive towards the sustainable development of the environment in which they live today and tomorrow.

18. On 1 April, 2007, the Austrian Eco-Label Guideline for Extracurricular Educational Institutions entered into force. It is awarded to educational institutions living up to the principles of sustainable development. This new guideline is to put forward a dynamic process of further development aiming at enhanced sustainability. With both these instruments, childrens’ as well as adults’ awareness of environmental protection and the responsible use of natural resources is to be heightened.

19. Numerous other public and private institutions as well as NGOs round out these activities.

### **Article 3, paragraph 4**

20. According to the Federal Ministries Act, coordination at all levels of environmental protection falls within the purview of the BMLFUW. This also includes the coordination of the Austrian position voiced in the EU Council of Environment Ministers. As soon as a Commission proposal for a legal instrument in the field of the environment is available, such proposal is submitted to the relevant other ministries, the social partners, the liaison office of the Federal provinces and (where applicable, depending on the subject) the Austrian Association of Municipalities, together with a request for submission of a statement. The process is coordinated by the relevant divisions of the BMLFUW and/or the Division EU Affairs Environment (for

horizontal subjects) by way of written procedure or in the framework of coordination meetings. If NGO's (as a rule, these will be NGOs active in the field of environment) are directly concerned by a project, or if they should have a particular level of expertise in the respective field, they will be invited as well (e.g. as for the EU Environmental Liability Directive).

21. The BMLFUW also invites the concerned portfolios, social partners and the Federal provinces on a regular basis to take part in the coordination meetings held in the run-up to the formal Councils of EU Ministers (*jour fixe* on Environment). In addition to these official coordination meetings, there is a separate NGO round organized in the Federal Ministry held on a regular basis approximately at the time of the Council of EU Ministers in the framework in which environmental subjects are discussed, which usually are also on the Council agenda.

22. Moreover, the BMLFUW actively integrates NGOs active in the field of the environment into the political dialogue held on current legislative projects, especially at EU level: there are, for example, regular round tables involving the Federal Minister for the Environment and representatives of NGOs on current subjects, with the NGOs also setting the agenda. The BMLFUW also grants, on a regular basis, funds to national NGOs and to an EU environment office managed by NGOs, which provides excellent information on EU legislation on a regular basis, and to the biggest EU-NGO network in Brussels.

At the level of the nine Austrian "Länder" (provinces) ombudsmen for the environment are established. Their main tasks are observing the compliance with environmental interests in the application of regional laws as well as advising and informing the public in environmental matters. They also cooperate with and support environmental NGOs. In Vorarlberg, the most western province of Austria, for example, the ombudsman for the environment is elected by local NGOs.

23. In recent years, many stakeholder dialogues - starting at the administrative level have been held in Austria at the Federal level for the development of programmes and policies in the environmental sector. Special mention should be made of the following initiatives: Forest Dialogue, Austrian Climate Protection Strategy, Rural Development Programme and the Round Table on Water. Also, in the field of torrent and avalanche control, ever-more intense efforts have been made to include the general public. Nine public participation processes of the BMLFUW were consolidated, including the experience made by the administrators and practical tips for further participation processes. The results will be published in a brochure. Austria also promotes the Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) as a model approach for participatory and proactive democracy aimed at implementing sustainable development. It is the aim to implement such processes in some 600 municipalities and 30 regions/districts all over Austria. In the future, LA 21 will constitute an explicit focus in the framework of the National Rural Development Programme.

24. Over the last years, the activities aiming at the promotion of public participation have been stepped up (e.g. creation of an interdisciplinary expert group "Strategy Group Participation"; creation of a working group on "e-democracy" and "e-participation"; preparation of worksheets on participation containing specific recommendations; strategy talks held with representatives of the business world and with stakeholders of representative democracy; organization of events and issuing of publications on public participation and the relationship between the state and civil society). Moreover, Austria is an active partner in the Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD) working group on “Open and Inclusive Policymaking” and contributed to its publication “Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services” (GOV/PGC(2008)8/REV2), which was published in 2008.

### **Article 3, paragraph 7**

In order to assess the participation of the Austrian public in the context of international negotiations in the environment field the BMLFUW entrusted the Ökobüro (an Austrian environmental NGO) with the task to identify the current practise as well as best practise examples of public participation and to provide related recommendations. The project was carried out in three steps. Firstly, interviews were conducted with both representatives of NGOs as well as with ministry representatives who take part in international negotiations in October 2009. Secondly, a summary and commented German version of the PPIF-Guidelines was produced and finally, based on the results of the interviews, recommendations were compiled. These recommendations were published both on the Ökobüro website and on the website of the BMLFUW. Finally, a PPIF-workshop took place in November 2009 at the BMLFUW, where the results and recommendations were presented to the interested public and discussions took place.

To ensure the knowledge of the guidelines for the future, the BMLFUW spread the results of the project and the workshop by e-Mail and published them on the BMLFUW website (the Ökobüro also published the results in their newsflash magazine to about 3000 recipients and on its website). The results of the project were also presented in the UNECE workshop on “experiences of promoting the application of the principles of the Aarhus Convention in international forums” that took place in June 2010 in Geneva as part of the fifth meeting of the Task Force on PPIF.

25. The project showed that while knowledge of the Aarhus Convention and awareness about its aims existed, knowledge about the Almaty guidelines was less widespread. But it also showed that international negotiators within the BMLFUW broadly acted in conformity with the guidelines, even if they did not know them. It proved useful to have an early or ongoing exchange of information process in the run up to international negotiations and to have well established personal contacts between involved players of the Ministry and NGOs. The exchange of information on a national level regarding international forums, however, varies depending on the type of international forum and the quality and confidentiality of the information. Due to these differences there is no formalised procedure for the exchange of information on a national level. In addition to the information provided on the BMLFUW website and related websites, specific information is often provided upon request. In many cases a climate of personal acquaintance and mutual trust proves useful as a solid basis for the exchange of information. The coordination of Austrian positions in international matters is also part of the consultation mechanism stated under article 3, paragraph 4. As regards several meetings of international bodies, environmental organizations are also part of the Austrian delegation (e.g. the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” as well as in the framework of the last United Nations Climate Conferences (held in Bali and Copenhagen). Especially in the framework of the Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity, environmental organizations are involved very deeply.

### **Article 3, paragraph 8**

26. Austrian constitutional law contains the following non-discrimination provisions: according to Article 2 of the Basic Law on the General Rights of Nationals and Article 7 of the

Federal Constitutional Law, all nationals (Austrian citizens) are equal before the law. In addition, paragraph 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which was ratified by Austria in 1958, provides for an accessory discrimination ban which bans discriminatory actions with regard to the rights granted by the European Convention on Human Rights. A certain level of protection against discrimination irrespective of nationality is granted by the Implementation of the International Convention on the Abolishment of all Forms of Racial Discrimination in the Federal Constitutional Law (Federal Law Gazette 1973/390).

27. Based on EU membership, EU citizens (nationals of European Union Member States) are equally guaranteed the fundamental rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and in the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights or are provided with protection against discrimination on grounds of nationality, sex, race, or ethnic origin, religion or philosophy, disability, age or sexual orientation.



#### **IV. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 3**

28. Concerning Article 3 (7) Austria has already used the second meeting of the Parties to the Convention to point to the complex challenges constituted by the guidelines, as they include manifold international details. Also, in a basically highly-networked State featuring a high environmental profile, the implementation of the guidelines represents a major task which demands the cooperation of several ministries and sectors.

#### **V. FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE GENERAL PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 3**

29. In the area of e-government used in public administration, Austria has been a European pioneer for several years and has received several awards for its activities in the field. In addition to a broad range of information offered, the main focus is on the electronic handling of procedures (from the application all the way to settlement or delivery, one-stop-shop approach) which lives up to the needs of the users.

#### **VI. WEBSITE ADDRESSES RELEVANT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 3**

<http://www.partizipation.at>  
<http://www.umweltnet.at/article/archive/7412/>  
<http://www.help.gv.at>  
<http://www.umweltbildung.at>  
<http://www.umweltberatung.at>  
<http://www.generationblue.at>  
<http://www.wien.gv.at/umweltschutz>  
<http://www.nachhaltigkeit.at>  
<http://www.help.gv.at/Content.No.de/281/Seite.2811000.html>  
<http://www.umweltzeichen.at>  
<http://www.umweltnet.at/article/articleview/83708/1/7247/>  
<http://www.oekobuero.at/start.asp?b=1513>

#### **VII. LEGISLATIVE, REGULATORY AND OTHER MEASURES IMPLEMENTING THE PROVISIONS ON ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION IN ARTICLE 4**

30. The amendment registered under Federal Law Gazette I No. 6/2005 of the Austrian Environmental Information Act, Federal Law Gazette No. 495/1993, which had been in force already prior to Austria's accession to the EU in 1995, brought Austria in line with the provisions of the EU Environmental Information Directive (2003/4/EC) and the Convention. The Federal provinces also have adapted their pertinent legislation accordingly. In the following, there will be only references to the Austrian Environmental Information Act in answering the individual questions, as provincial provisions are generally based on this piece of legislation.

## **Relevant definitions**

31. The definitions are transposed into national law in paragraphs 2 and 3, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act, with the term of “environmental information” being broadly phrased, so that any kind of information on the state of the environment, factors, measures or activities (possibly) having an impact on the environment or conducive to the protection of the environment can be collected. This also refers to environmental information supplied to bodies obliged to provide information by other institutions. Another focus of the Austrian Environmental Information Act is making information accessible to the general public in an effective and easy way as well as providing environmental information in a citizen-friendly way. Every person (e.g. also minors, foreign nationals, legal persons such as companies, non-profit legal persons (*Vereine*) and corporate bodies) is entitled to apply for environmental information without having to provide any evidence.

### **Article 4, paragraph 1**

#### *Article 4, paragraph 1 (a)*

32. Free access to environmental information is ensured in paragraph 4 of the Austrian Environmental Information Act and constitutes its key provision. Thereby everyone is granted a subjective public right to environmental data without such right to access being subject to being individually affected, to a de facto or legal interest, to a position as a party in legal proceedings or any other involvement in proceedings. The claim to environmental information is deemed as *actio popularis*.

#### *Article 4, paragraph 1 (b)*

33. The duty of information to be fulfilled by the bodies obliged to provide information is regulated under paragraph 5 of the Austrian Environmental Information Act. The requested information is to be provided in the form requested individually by the information-seeker or, where appropriate, in another form, with electronic data transfer to be preferred wherever possible.

### **Article 4, paragraph 2**

In accordance with paragraph 5 of the Austrian Environmental Information Act, the deadline for making environmental information accessible is one month, with the possibility of extending this deadline to at maximum two months whenever comprehensive and complex information is involved. In such cases the Austrian Environmental Information Act provides for the applicant to be informed, at the latest before the end of the one month period, of such extension and the reasons for it (Art 5 para 6).

**Article 4, paragraphs 3 and 4**

34. Paragraph 6 of the Austrian Environmental Information Act regulates the constraints to information and the reasons for denying information, according to which it is admissible to hold back environmental information, provided that:

- (a) The request for information refers to the transfer of internal information;
- (b) The information is requested in a way that is obviously abusive;
- (c) The request for information is too general;
- (d) The request for information refers to material which is in the process of being completed or involves written documents which have not yet been finalized or data which have not yet been edited.

35. Paragraph 6, subparagraph 2, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act states the reasons for denying information, according to which it shall not be permitted to give information, if the disclosure of environmental information would have a negative impact on certain objects of legal protection (e.g.: maintenance of public safety or comprehensive national defence, but also the protection of environmental areas, such as the habitation of rare animal species, which would be disclosed when providing the information, to the extent that perturbation of such species' habitats is feared). In addition, the confidentiality of personal data constitutes a reason for denying information to the extent that there is a protectable interest in non-disclosure within the meaning of the 2000 Austrian Data Protection Act. Moreover, the protection of business and company secrets constitute a reason for denying information.

36. Paragraph 6, subparagraph 4, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act stipulates that both the constraints to information and the reasons for denying information are to be interpreted narrowly and that, in the individual case, the public interest in disclosing the relevant environmental information must be considered. This is to ensure that the constraints to information and the reasons for denying information do not result in a limited obligation to information incumbent on the body obliged to provide information.

**Article 4, paragraph 5**

37. As in many cases it is not easy for citizens to find the body obliged to provide information which disposes of the environmental information requested by him/her, paragraph 5, subparagraph 2, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act provides for a respective duty to forward/refer to the competent authorities holding the information so that a lack of knowledge of the structure of public authorities will not lead to any legal disadvantage for the applicant.

**Article 4, paragraph 6**

38. In accordance with paragraph 6, subparagraph 4, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act, the disclosure of environmental information can be denied if the request for information refers to material which is in the process of being completed or involves written documents which have not yet been finalized or data which have not yet been edited.

#### **Article 4, paragraph 7**

39. The deadlines for notification, the extension of deadlines and the negative response are regulated in paragraph 5, subparagraphs 6 and 7, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act. If the request for information is not provided by the competent authority a formal notification on the refusal shall be issued on request of the applicant, and the information seeker shall be informed of legal remedies (para. 8).

In case the authority does not issue such notification the competence for issuing such formal refusal notification is transferred to the independent administrative tribunal of the relevant province.

In order to avoid unnecessary lengthy procedures there is the possibility that the applicant asks for a formal notification on a refusal together (at the same time) with the information request itself. In this case the authority would need to decide (issue a formal notification) in accordance with the General Administrative Procedure Act.

#### **Article 4, paragraph 8**

40. In accordance with paragraph 5, subparagraph 5, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act, access to public registers or lists and the on-site access to the requested information shall be free of charge, while it shall be permissible to charge purchase prices or protective charges for publications.

### **VIII. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 4**

The competent authorities did not provide any information on this issue. An NGO claimed that in case no information is provided by the competent authority the following procedure may occasionally be too long.

### **IX. FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 4**

41. Many inquiries and requests for information concerning the environment are constantly submitted to the BMLFUW and to the Federal provinces per telephone, e-mail or in writing. Yet only very few inquiries are expressly based on the Austrian Environmental Information Act. As the BMLFUW tries to handle all inquiries as fast and as unbureaucratically as possible and the documentary handling procedures of inquiries concerning various subject matters are not separately collected under the heading of environmental information, it is not possible to supply detailed information on figures, contents and possible reasons for not providing the requested information.

42. The inquiries concern many different areas: waste legislation, legislation on the remediation of contaminated sites, soil protection legislation, nature conservation legislation, water legislation, water-supply companies, hydraulic engineering legislation, water management and institutions responsible for water bodies, power plants, transport, clean air legislation, urban

development and urban planning, Mineral Resources Act, Emission Allowances Act, radiation protection law, industrial law and environmental noise.

43. The Federal Environment Agency (UBA) is also home to a liaison office aiming at providing everyone with smooth access to environmental information. The task of the office is to support the exchange of information between the bodies obliged to provide information and to propose measures which are suitable for facilitating access to environmental information and to ensure the high level of quality of environmental information.

44. In its capacity as a body obliged to provide information, UBA handles about 7,000 inquiries per calendar year, approximately 60% of which are submitted and answered in writing (via e-mail). In 2006, seven requests for information were submitted which referred to the Austrian Environmental Information Act. Two were submitted orally. In 2005, the number of inquiries was about the same. Although these are the most recent statistics on the subject, a slow downward trend has been noticed within the last few years in the number of inquiries. This is likely to be due to the constantly growing amount of environmental information provided on websites on different environment-related subjects.

45. In 2006, information seekers accessed the environmental information actively made available on the Internet by UBA just under 2 million times. Websites dealing with the subjects of waste, air, water and contaminated sites were accessed most the frequently. Of the publications made available at [www.umweltbundesamt.at](http://www.umweltbundesamt.at), the number of downloads of publication details was approximately 810,000.

#### **X. WEBSITE ADDRESSES RELEVANT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 4**

<http://www.usp.gv.at/Portal.Node/usp/public/content/umwelt/umweltinformation/Seite.1660000.html>

[http://www.usp.gv.at/Portal.Node/usp/public/content/umwelt/oeffentlichkeitsbeteiligung\\_umweltbereich/41451.html](http://www.usp.gv.at/Portal.Node/usp/public/content/umwelt/oeffentlichkeitsbeteiligung_umweltbereich/41451.html)

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.at/koordinierungsstelle/>

<http://www.ref.gv.at/Umweltinformation.1024.0.html>

<http://www.umgebungslaerm.at>

[http://www.landoberoesterreich.gv.at/cps/rde/xchg/SID-D1DF6248-225B01A1/ooe/hs.xsl/153\\_DEU\\_HTML.htm](http://www.landoberoesterreich.gv.at/cps/rde/xchg/SID-D1DF6248-225B01A1/ooe/hs.xsl/153_DEU_HTML.htm)

<http://www.tirol.gv.at/themen/umwelt/umweltrecht/umweltinformation/>

<http://www.umwelt.steiermark.at/>

[https://www.wien.gv.at/wudk/internet/wuisbatch/Prod/html/schlagworte\\_a.html](https://www.wien.gv.at/wudk/internet/wuisbatch/Prod/html/schlagworte_a.html)

#### **XI. LEGISLATIVE, REGULATORY AND OTHER MEASURES IMPLEMENTING THE PROVISIONS ON THE COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION IN ARTICLE 5**

## **Article 5, paragraph 1**

### *Article 5, paragraph 1 (a)*

46. In accordance with paragraph 9, subparagraph 3, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act, the bodies obliged to provide information shall update the environmental information at suitable intervals.

### *Article 5, paragraph 1 (b)*

47. The provision on the publication of environmental information (para. 9 of the Austrian Environmental Information Act) emphasizes the duty to actively supply environmental information on the part of administrative bodies. The bodies obliged to provide information shall edit the environmental information which is relevant for fulfilling their tasks and which they have at their disposal or which is being supplied to them in order to disseminate it to the public actively and systematically. This includes e.g. environment-related legal provisions; policies; plans and programmes; reports on the state of the environment and, in particular, reports on environmental control; permits having an impact on the environment; and risk assessments;

### *Article 5, paragraph 1 (c)*

48. Paragraph 9, subparagraph 5, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act stipulates that, in the event of imminent danger to human health or the environment, the bodies obliged to provide information shall disseminate all information directly and without any delay. In addition, the owners of plants affected by failure shall, from the outset and without being instructed to do so, disclose the following information (para. 14 of the Austrian Environmental Information Act) to the affected population: general information on the plant (location, plant description), possible hazards and consequences in the event of failure, existing safety precautions and appropriate action to be taken in the event of failure.

49. Also this information shall be provided appropriately and in a way that it is understandable by the general public. It is the responsibility of the individual companies to determine the appropriate form of information.

## **Article 5, paragraph 2**

50. In order to fulfil their duty of information in accordance with paragraph 9, subparagraph 2, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act, the bodies obliged to provide information shall take practical precautions facilitating access to information, in particular by:

- (a) Publishing charts concerning organisation and the distribution of functions to the extent that such charts are available;
- (b) Naming contact persons or information centres;
- (c) Managing lists or registers concerning the environmental information they have at their disposal.

**Article 5, paragraph 3**

Electronic dissemination of environmental information is regarded as a priority instrument for active environmental information management, which is firm ed up in the paragraphs 9, 10, 13 and 14 of the Austrian Environmental Information Act.

51.

**Article 5, paragraph 4**

52. In accordance with paragraph 3 of the Austrian Environmental Control Act, the Federal Minister for the Environment shall submit a written report on the state of implementation of environmental control to the Austrian National Council every three years. On the basis of paragraph 6 of the Austrian Environmental Control Act and in its capacity as the environmental expert body of the Austrian Federal government, UBA shall be responsible for drawing up this environmental control report. The chapters of the current 9<sup>th</sup> Report on the State of the Environment in Austria (2010) are available for download at: [www.umweltbundesamt.at](http://www.umweltbundesamt.at).

**Article 5, paragraph 5**

53. The obligations incumbent on the bodies obliged to provide information to actively and systematically disseminate information are set forth in paragraph 9, subparagraphs 1 and 2, of the Austrian Environmental Information Act. In particular, the following information shall be made available and disseminated:

(a) The wording of contracts, conventions and agreements under international law, as well as Community and other legal provisions on the environment or that touch upon environmental issues;

(b) Policies, plans and programmes referring to the environment.

**Article 5, paragraph 6**

54. In accordance with paragraph 13 of the Austrian Environmental Information Act, the owners of companies, obliged to measure and record emission data shall actively (i.e. without being asked to do so) disclose such environmental information. This means that the respective company shall publish the emission data he/she is obliged to measure for the period of the respectively last month (or the last year) in a way that is easily understood by the general public and in a place which is easily accessible.

**Article 5, paragraph 7**

55. The information stated in paragraph 7 is made available to the general public in the framework of the review procedures used and by way of settlement in parliament (laws and regulations) on the respective websites (see answer concerning Art. 8).

**Article 5, paragraph 8**

56. The website of the environmental consultancy body, *Umweltberatung* ([www.umweltberatung.at](http://www.umweltberatung.at)), provides information on precautionary environmental protection in various fields (e.g. chemicals, building and living, climate protection, energy etc.). In addition, citizens can turn to dedicated information centres in the federal provinces. The municipality of Vienna, for instance, has published the “*Gut-gekauft-Bezirkspläne*”, i.e. city district guides including a register of companies selling environmentally friendly products as well as advice on sustainable shopping.

57. In the framework of the “*Nachhaltige Wochen*” (Sustainability Weeks), sustainable products bearing the campaign brand “*Das bringt’s. Nachhaltig*”. (“That’s what cuts it. Sustainably.”) are advertised by merchants ([www.nachhaltigewochen.at](http://www.nachhaltigewochen.at)), enabling consumers to make informed choices when shopping. Food stuff, electric equipment and hardware retailers, butchers and furniture traders are taking part in the campaign. Moreover, a growing number of self-employed merchants are supporting the campaign, which has been launched by the BMLFUW, its partners and the Austrian retail industry.

#### **Article 5, paragraph 9**

58. Austria ratified the UNECE Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers on 23 March 2010. The Protocol entered into force for Austria on 21 June 2010. Prior to the ratification the Austrian Environmental Information Act was amended (Fed. Law Gazette I No. 128/2009) to create a legal basis for the national PRTR. The national PRTR can be found on: [www.prtr.at](http://www.prtr.at). Data are also provided for the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (regulation (EC) No. 166/2006, Austrian ordinance Fed. Law Gazette II 380/2007): <http://prtr.ec.europa.eu/>.

## **XII. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 5**

59. The competent authorities did not provide any information on this issue.

## **XIII. FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 5**

60. In the framework of the Austrian e-government strategy, a working group on environmental information was set up, dealing with the approach to joint implementation of the requirements placed by the Austrian Environmental Information Act in the framework of the cooperation between the Federal Government, the Federal provinces and the municipalities. With a view to the requirements pertaining to access to and dissemination of environmental information arising from the Austrian Environmental Information Act, the Federal provinces and the municipalities in Austria are required to find a new and comprehensive position. This is to make an important contribution to more transparency and more attention to the citizen in the field of environmental administration.

## **XIV. WEBSITE ADDRESSES RELEVANT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 5**

<http://www.help.gv.at/Content.No.de/166/Seite.1660000.html>

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.at/koordinierungsstelle>



[http://reference.e-government.gv.at/UW-UI\\_Umweltinformation.1024.0.html](http://reference.e-government.gv.at/UW-UI_Umweltinformation.1024.0.html)

<http://prtr.ec.europa.eu/>

<http://www.bmvit.gv.at/Verkehr/Straße> (contact adress under “Kontakt zum Thema”)

<http://www.bmvit.gv.at/Verkehr/Straße/Umwelt>

## **XV. LEGISLATIVE, REGULATORY AND OTHER MEASURES IMPLEMENTING THE PROVISIONS ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS ON SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES IN ARTICLE 6**

61. In order to comply with the citizen-participation provisions of the Convention, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Directives were adapted at the European level by Directive 2003/35/EC which amends with regard to public participation and access to justice Council Directives 85/337/EEC and 96/61/EC. The same Directive was also used to implement the Convention for the plans and programmes (listed in Annex I to Directive 2003/35/EC) not yet covered by Directive 2001/42/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA Directive), adopted only two years earlier. The SEA Directive had already implemented the Convention with regard to the plans and programmes covered by it.

A need for implementation evolved in particular from the interaction of Article 2, paragraph 5, Article 6 and Article 9, paragraph 2 of the Convention, requiring the involvement of certain environmental non-governmental organizations in approval procedures.

62. Austria transposed the EIA Directive 85/337/EEC (amended by Directives 97/11/EC and 2003/35/EC), the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and the Aarhus Convention at the project level into national law in the Federal Act on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA Act 2000, Federal Law Gazette No. 697/1993, last amended by Federal Law Gazette No. 87/2009).

63. Annex I to the Aarhus Convention, to which the provisions set forth under Article 6 refer, includes projects which are covered by the EIA and IPPC Directives. Further adaptations to the Convention were made at a Federal level in the area of commercial equipment law by way of the 2005 Amendment to Industrial Law (Federal Law Gazette I No. 85/2005) with regard to the 1994 Trade Act, the Air Pollution Act for Boiler Facilities and the Mineral Resources Act, the 2004 Amendment to the EIA Act 2000 (Federal Law Gazette I No. 153/2004), the Amendment to the Waste Management Act (Federal Law Gazette I No. 155/2004), the Agricultural Amendment Act concerning the Federal Act on Forest and Pastures Usage Rights (Federal Law Gazette I No. 87/2005) and the Immission Control Act in the framework of the 2005 Act adapting the Laws on Environmental Protection (Federal Law Gazette I No. 34/2006).

### **Article 6, paragraph 1**

*Article 6, paragraph 1 (a) and (b)*

64. The projects subject to EIA are listed in Annex I to the EIA Act 2000, which covers not only the projects of Annex I but also those of Annex II to the EIA Directive 85/337/EEC as amended by Directive 2003/35/EC (and thus also those of Annex I to the Convention).

**Article 6, paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 5**

65. The Austrian EIA procedure provides for the repeated information and involvement of the general public. In EIA procedures, the first step towards public participation is taken very early, by publicly announcing the project for at least six weeks in accordance with paragraph 9 of the EIA Act 2000, with every interested citizen or organization having the opportunity to submit comments. A circular published on the website of the BMLFUW points to the fact that project applicants are supposed to do respective public relations work already in the preparations for the application. In addition, there is the option of oral proceedings in accordance with paragraph 16 of the EIA Act 2000, which is to be announced accordingly (also via the Internet).

**Article 6, paragraphs 6 and 7**

66. The information given in Article 6, paragraph 6, of the Convention is subject to the Environmental Impact Statement in accordance with paragraph 6 of the EIA Act 2000, which is to be published for at least six weeks in accordance with paragraph 9. Within this period, anyone is entitled to submit a statement to the responsible authority with regard to the project or to the Environmental Impact Statement.

**Article 6, paragraphs 8 and 9**

67. In accordance with paragraph 17, subparagraph 4, of the EIA Act 2000, the statements received shall be taken into account. The decision, including the measures and the review of the received statements, shall be published without any delay, in accordance with paragraph 17, subparagraph 7, of the EIA Act 2000.

**Article 6, paragraph 10**

68. Modifications of projects are subject to an EIA procedure in accordance with paragraph 3(a) of the EIA Act 2000.

**Article 6, paragraph 11**

69. The Genetic Engineering Act (Federal Law Gazette I No. 510/1994, last amended by Federal Law Gazette I No. 13/2006) transposes into national law, inter alia, the EU Deliberate Release Directive 2001/18/EC and aims at the prevention of harmful impact of genetically modified organisms (GMO) on the environment.

70. According to Decision II/1 of 2005 reached by the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, the Genetic Engineering Act includes provisions on the announcement to and the hearing of the general public in the case of GMO release (paras. 43 and 44) and on the information of the general public on permits granted for bringing the respective substances into circulation (para. 58(a)).

## **XVI.OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 6**

The competent authorities did not provide any information on this issue.

## **XVII.FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 6**

71. On its website, the BMLFUW has published a list of all environmental organizations approved in Austria according to the EIA Act 2000 and also gives information on the application procedure required for obtaining approval (<http://www.umweltnet.at/article/articleview/27824/1/7237>).

72. The Federal Environment Agency consolidates the key information on ongoing and completed EIA procedures in an EIA database and makes it accessible online. Accordingly, a description of the respective project, information on the legal foundations as well on the project status, the opinion of the BMLFUW and information on the documents available in the EIA documentation are accessible to the general public.

## **XVIII.WEBSITE ADDRESSES RELEVANT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 6**

<http://www.umweltnet.at/article/articleview/43742/1/7240/>  
<http://www.umweltbundesamt.at/umweltschutz/uvpsupemas/uvpoesterreich1/uvpdatenbank/>

## **XIX. PRACTICAL AND/OR OTHER PROVISIONS MADE FOR THE PUBLIC TO PARTICIPATE DURING THE PREPARATION OF PLANS AND PROGRAMMES RELATING TO THE ENVIRONMENT PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 7**

73. As regards the EIA, including public participation, also Article 2, paragraph 7, of the Espoo Convention includes a provision encouraging the application of EIA principles also in policies, plans and programmes. The SEA Directive 2001/42/EC implements advanced relevant public participation provisions of the Aarhus Convention for a wide range of plans and programmes. As mentioned under Article 6, the relevant provisions of the Aarhus Convention have been implemented by way of Directive 2003/35/EC for several other plans and programmes (excluding policies) which were not covered by the SEA Directive.

74. Based on the distribution of competences in accordance with the Federal Constitution, in Austria not only the Federal Government, but also the Federal provinces, which have transposed both directives in several relevant Federal and provincial acts, are responsible for the transposition of the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC and the Public Participation Directive 2005/35/EC (and thus also of the relevant provisions of the Convention). Some Federal provinces (e.g. Carinthia, Lower Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, Vorarlberg) have, as an

additional measure, published SEA Guidelines to support the authorities and the general public in applying SEA principles in a way that is in line with the EU and with the Convention.

75. Moreover, several federal acts have been amended with regard to adaptation to the provisions of the Aarhus Convention for the following areas: waste (at the federal level, in particular paragraph 8 and 8(a) of the 2002 Austrian Waste Management Act as amended by Federal Law Gazette I No. 115/2009), noise (Federal Act on the Assessment and Management of Environmental Noise, Federal Law Gazette I No. 60/2005), air (Immission Control Act, as amended by Federal Law Gazette I 2007/70), transport (Federal Act on the Strategic Assessment of Transport, Federal Law Gazette I No. 96/2005), water (Federal Water Act, Federal Law Gazette 1959/215 as amended by Federal Law Gazette I 2006/123). At the provincial level, laws pertaining to the same and other environmental areas are covered as well as the pertinent regional planning legislation.

76. The definition of the term “general public” in Austria is rather generous. Basically, the general public which is to be consulted covers “everyone”. Some laws specify this general public by defining it, e.g. as “...natural and legal persons as well as their associations, organizations or groups, and, in particular, organizations promoting environmental protection ...” (e.g. Regional Planning Act of the Federal province of Vorarlberg, Provincial Legal Gazette No. 29/1996, para. 10(c), subpara. 2).

77. In addition, Austria has provided for SEAs involving voluntary public participation with regard to plans and programmes not covered by the SEA Directive, e.g. for the 2002 Vienna Waste Management Plan or for the SEA development area “Vienna North-East” or the National Strategic Framework Plan in the framework of EU structural funds 2007-2013 (STRAT.AT) and at the level of Local Agenda 21. Moreover, some laws provide for public participation platforms, such as provincial regional planning laws (irrespective of whether SEA is required or not).

## **XX. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PREPARATION OF POLICIES RELATING TO THE ENVIRONMENT PROVIDED PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 7**

78. It can be assumed that the existing Austrian practice and, in particular, the review procedure and the information available on the Internet comply with the relatively general requirements of the Convention as regards the preparation of “policies”. As already mentioned, the promotion of excellent cooperation and decision-making processes involving the State and civil society in matters of public interest accordingly play a key role in Austria. As a relevant example, we could cite the development of the Austrian sustainability strategy which has been drawn up with the cooperation of the interested public and all concerned bodies.

79. To include the general public in decisions which are affecting them is an integral part of a modern concept of politics and administration. In this process, Austria has set the following three priorities: (a) strengthening policy making which is open and close to the citizen in order to improve the quality of democracy, (b) stimulating stakeholders’ responsibility vis-à-vis society, and (b) promoting local/regional sustainable processes.

80. Central activities are:

(a) The existing “public-participation standards” (see also under Art. 3 para 2). should also be regarded as a contribution to the implementation of the Austrian and EU sustainability strategies. To promote sustainable development, citizen participation in policy making should be improved, and administrative bodies should be provided with hands-on support to be able to include the general public efficiently and effectively. The standards could be particularly useful in the preparation of policies, plans, programmes or legal instruments. A practical guideline on the application of the public participation standards was published in 2009.

(b) In 2002, ÖGUT, the Austrian Society for Environment and technology, set up a “participation” strategy group at the instigation of the BMLFUW, made up of members from ministries and authorities as well as NGOs, public participation practitioners and the scientific community. The aim of the “participation” strategy group was to firm up the concept of “participation”, to develop it further and to make it known widely, to heighten the awareness of decision makers from the areas of politics, public administration and business for public participation; to prepare participation strategies for policies relevant for the environment and sustainable development; and to make specific guidelines for action available to practitioners.

(c) The “Public Participation Manual”, which was drawn up by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, ÖGUT, the Austrian Institute for Ecology and Büro Arbter provides for advice for successful public participation, the required framework, the expected costs and successful Austrian case histories.

(d) Over the last years, a website on the subject of participation ([www.partizipation.at](http://www.partizipation.at)) has become an information hub (“one-stop shop”) for public participation.

(e) In the future, more attention shall be paid to e-participation/e-democracy instruments. As mentioned earlier, it is the aim of the Austrian e-government strategy to enable citizens and businesses to handle all public administration procedures electronically, smoothly and swiftly without being required to have specialist knowledge about public responsibilities and technical details. Similarly, there should be enhanced involvement of the population (Internet chats with political decision makers, citizen participation procedures, participation in consultation procedures for draft laws; also electronic participation in elections is to be expected for the future). A task force on e-democracy was set up by the Federal Chancellery. The task force published a position paper on e-democracy and e-participation in Austria in 2008. It worked on an e-democracy strategy for Austria including e-participation principles and on a guideline on the evaluation of e-participation processes, e-participation tools and hints for administrators using web 2.0.

(f) The BMLFUW carried out several public participation processes on the following environment related policies: Austrian Forest Dialogue, Program on Rural Development 2007-2013, Program on Environmentally Sound Agriculture, Children-Health-Action-Plan, River Dialogue, Waste Avoidance and Recycling Strategy, Adaption of the Austrian Climate Strategy, Noise Action Plan, Preparation Process of the Austrian Standards of Public Participation (see also under Art. 3 para 4).

(g) In order to overcome obstacles with public participation at the strategic planning level (policies, plans, programs) the BMLFUW recently commissioned a study on the interfaces between public participation and political decision makers, summing up

experiences and recommendations for good practice.

**OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 7**

The competent authorities did not provide any information on this issue.

**XXI. FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 7**

84. In early December 2007, Austria organized an international UNECE-Aarhus workshop in Sofia on issues relating to Articles 7 and 8 involving experts from the Aarhus and Espoo Conventions. In the workshop, case studies and contexts with regard to both the Espoo Convention and the SEA Protocol, as well as individual experiences, were presented, making a small but specific contribution to better implementation in the UNECE area.

**XXII. WEBSITE ADDRESSES RELEVANT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 7**

<http://www.nachhaltigkeit.at>

<http://www.partizipation.at>

<http://www.digitales.oesterreich.gv.at/>

<http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ppsd.htm>

[http://www.oerok.gv.at/EU\\_Regionalpolitik\\_in\\_Oesterreich/EU\\_Strukturfonds\\_2007\\_2013.htm](http://www.oerok.gv.at/EU_Regionalpolitik_in_Oesterreich/EU_Strukturfonds_2007_2013.htm)

[http://www.nachhaltigkeit.at/LA\\_21.php3](http://www.nachhaltigkeit.at/LA_21.php3)

<http://reference.e-government.gv.at/E-Democracy.981.0.html>

<http://www.strategischeumweltpruefung.at>

SEA websites including information on public participation in SEAs:

<http://www.umweltnet.at/article/archive/7241>

<http://www.strategischeumweltpruefung.at/>

<http://hw.oeaw.ac.at/6631-3>

[http://www.arbter.at/sup/sup\\_b.html](http://www.arbter.at/sup/sup_b.html)

Examples of SEA guidelines used by some Federal provinces:

<http://www.landesplanung.ktn.gv.at>

<http://www.raumordnung-No.e.at/dynamisch/showinfostand.php?id=87>

<http://www.raumordnung-noe.at/uploads/wachau.pdf>

[http://www.salzburg.gv.at/themen/bw/raumplanung/rp1\\_landesplanung/publi\\_haro.htm](http://www.salzburg.gv.at/themen/bw/raumplanung/rp1_landesplanung/publi_haro.htm)

<http://www.raumplanung.steiermark.at/cms/ziel/6860163/DE>

<http://www.tirol.gv.at/fileadmin/www.tirol.gv.at/raumordnung/downloads/roinfo29.pdf>

[http://www.vorarlberg.at/pdf/kurzinfo-120\\_umsetzungder.pdf](http://www.vorarlberg.at/pdf/kurzinfo-120_umsetzungder.pdf)

**XXIII.EFFORTS MADE TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION  
DURING THE PREPARATION BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES OF EXECUTIVE  
REGULATIONS AND OTHER GENERALLY APPLICABLE LEGALLY  
BINDING RULES THAT MAY HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON  
THE ENVIRONMENT PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 8**

85. In Austria, the social partners – i.e. the above mentioned organizations of business and industry, agriculture, employees as well as the national trade union federation, which are partly established by law – play an important role in the representation of interests of the respective groups of society with regard to generally binding legal regulations which have a significant impact on the environment.

86. The Acts on the Incorporation of the Federal Chamber of Commerce of Austria (para. 10), of the Chambers of Labour (para. 93, subpara. 2) as well as of the Chambers of Agriculture (see, for example, para. 8 of the 1991 Carinthian Agricultural Chambers Act) provide that draft laws (as well as implementation rules) shall be submitted to the chambers by the public bodies for the purpose of review before being brought before the legislative body.

87. Where applicable, these representations of interest conduct respective internal consultation procedures for the purpose of opinion-making and submit statements (expert opinions) to the public bodies. It is then the task of these public bodies to recognize the statements and consider them accordingly. In addition, pertinent working committees made up of members of the responsible public bodies and of the social partners do exist in many cases already prior to official review procedures, for example for the purpose of expert discussion of the predrafts of legal instruments. Environmental NGOs are sometimes also part of these internal consultations. Normally they are consulted on environment related laws in the official consultation process.

88. The definitions set forth under Article 2 of the Convention have been implemented to the following extent: for example, the terms of “public” and “public concerned” regarding the interests represented by the respective corporate body with a view to environmental policy are also included in the provisions on review rights. The “public authorities” are partly mentioned in the review rules (see, for example, para. 93 of the Austrian Chamber of Labour Act).

89. Within the individual stakeholder groups provided with review rights, there is no discrimination. According to the legal foundations, membership in the representations of interest/chambers is based on certain circumstances.

90. Moreover, mention has to be made of the fact that a series of plans and programmes covered by the SEA Directive (e.g. in the area of regional planning) are also enacted as ordinances in Austria, i.e. there is public participation in the preparation of executive regulations or there are general and legally binding provisions.

The Austrian public participation standards should also be applied to public participation in legislative processes. They recommend 6-12 weeks as an appropriate consultation period and recommend providing two weeks more when the consultation coincides with vacation periods. They also recommend coming up with a consultation report, where the public can follow-up how the received statements have been taken into account by the responsible administration. By now, this recommendation is, however, not applied comprehensively.



#### **XXIV. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 8**

The competent authorities did not provide any information on this issue.

#### **XXVI. FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 8**

92. The responsible Federal and provincial bodies publish draft laws on their websites (see below). This information also includes a general e-mail address as well as other partners which can be contacted for the submission of statements. Moreover, adequate time limits are provided for. In this process, every received statement is considered. Draft laws and the related received statements are published on the website of the Austrian parliament.

93. Also some of the representations of interest maintain separate consultation websites, such as the Federal Chamber of Commerce.

94. In its capacity as coordinating body of Austrian environmental NGO organizations, Ökobiuro publishes the statements submitted in the framework of national review procedures on its website.

#### **XXV. WEBSITE ADDRESSES RELEVANT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 8**

Examples of websites providing the opportunity to comment on environmental draft laws are:

<http://recht.lebensministerium.at/article/archive/12317>

<http://www.bmwfj.gv.at/Ministerium/Rechtsvorschriften/entwuerfe/Seiten/default.aspx>

[http://www.parlament.gv.at/portal/page?\\_pageid=908,97306&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL&P\\_NR=XXIII](http://www.parlament.gv.at/portal/page?_pageid=908,97306&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&P_NR=XXIII)

[http://portal.wko.at/wk/format\\_detail.wk?AngID=1&StID=320836](http://portal.wko.at/wk/format_detail.wk?AngID=1&StID=320836)

[www.arbeiterkammer.at](http://www.arbeiterkammer.at)

<http://www.oekobuero.at/start.asp?b=443>

#### **XXVIII. LEGISLATIVE, REGULATORY AND OTHER MEASURES IMPLEMENTING THE PROVISIONS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN ARTICLE 9**

##### **Article 9, paragraph 1**

95. Austria has transposed the provisions concerning Article 9, paragraph 1, of the Convention by the legal protection provisions set forth in the Federal Environment Information Act (para. 8) and by way of respective provincial legislation.

According to the Federal Environment Information Act, it is possible to apply for a formal notification with the public authority obliged to provide information against information which has not been provided in time, which has not been provided at all, or which is incomplete. In this formal notification, the body obliged to provide information shall substantiate why no or only incomplete information has been provided. This formal notification can be appealed at the Independent Administrative Tribunal (*Unabhängiger Verwaltungssenat*). In each federal province, there is an Independent Administrative Panel, constituting a court-like authority which is not bound by instructions (see also Art. 4 para 7).

96. Bodies obliged to provide information, which are not authorised to enact formal notifications, shall forward applications for the enactment of formal notifications to the body responsible for expert supervision/to the district administration authority or to refer the applicant to such bodies. Moreover, the Independent Administrative Tribunal can be called in by persons affected by the provision of environmental information (e.g. company owners) provided that such persons feel that their rights have been violated on grounds of the respective information. Basically, the Act Governing General Administrative Procedures shall apply for the decree enactment procedure.

### **Article 9, paragraph 2**

97. The wide range of affected parties covered by paragraph 19 of the EIA Act 2000 ensures that all persons, citizens' groups and environmental organisations possibly affected are entitled to make use of legal remedies – provided that they comply with the legal requirements – and thus have the possibility to have the decision reviewed by the independent Environmental Senate or the Administrative Court (*Verwaltungsgerichtshof*) and/ or the Constitutional Court (*Verfassungsgerichtshof*) with a view to contents as well as to procedures. In Austrian legislation, the following criteria are laid down for the recognition of environmental organisations: they must be organised in the form of a non-profit legal person (*Verein*) or of a foundation which has environmental protection as its main objective, and they must have been legally incorporated as working for environmental protection for at least three years.

### **Article 9, paragraph 3**

98. Austria is of the opinion that the set-up and interpretation of this provision gives a certain leeway to the Parties to the Convention with regard to its implementation, ranging from systems dominated by civil law or administrative law approaches stressing subjective rights up to the complaint procedures involving, for example, an ombudsperson. The Austrian legal system provides for the following instruments for enforcing environmental matters in the implementation of this provision:

(a) Concerning environmental private law, the Austrian Civil Code (ABGB) provides for a set of general and specific rules. In general, anybody who is or fears to be endangered by pollution is entitled to file a lawsuit against the polluter and to seek an injunction. This right to preventive action against pollution detrimental to health has been expressly acknowledged by courts as an integral, innate right of every natural person (Art 16 ABGB), neither requiring participation in administrative proceedings nor ownership of private property in the proximity of the polluter. In addition, private entities in violation of environmental laws may be sued by competitors and special interest groups, since producing goods in violation of such laws is

regarded by courts to be unfair business practice.

(b) Paragraph 364 et seq. of ABGB, the Austrian Civil Code, provide for a basis for a claim for the defence against inadmissible immissions coming from adjacent properties. Neighbours hold the subjective right to prohibit immissions exceeding a certain level. In this context, direct or indirect immissions having an effect from one property to another (e.g. waste water, smell, noise, light and radiation) are deemed as impairments. A special environmental context is established by the provisions on immission control (para. 364, subparas. 2 and 3 of the Austrian Civil Code) and the special provisions on approved plants (para. 364(a) of the Austrian Civil Code). In addition, there are also facts subject to special laws constituting claims for damages representing an explicit relation to the environment: paragraph 26 of the Austrian Water Act, paragraph 53 of the Austrian Forestry Act, paragraph 79(a) et seq. of the Austrian Genetic Engineering Act, and paragraph 11 of the Austrian Nuclear Liability Act;

(c) The most significant share of Austrian provisions on the protection of the environment exists in the area of administrative law, which is firstly dealt with within the hierarchy of the responsible administrative bodies. The application and administration of the laws is organised locally, i.e. via the Federal provinces or the district administration and municipal authorities. Independent Administrative Tribunals (Unabhängige Verwaltungssenate) in the provinces serve as second instance in several matters. After having exhausted the usual two instances procedure, complaints by certain parties can be lodged to the supreme courts, namely the Administrative Court (*Verwaltungsgerichtshof*) and/or the Constitutional Court (*Verfassungsgerichtshof*).

(d) NGOs/ environmental organisations that fulfil certain criteria provided for in national legislation can also apply the rights given to parties in various administrative environment proceedings (most relevant eg EIA, IPPC, Waste Management Act and Industrial Code). The Aarhus Convention allows the establishment of criteria according to national legislation as long as they are reasonable and comply with the principles of the Convention.

(e) In the Federal provinces, Environmental Advocacy Offices i.e. Ombudsmen for the environment were set up as regional bodies representing the cause of environmental protection . It is the task of the Ombudsman for the environment to ensure the protection of the environment in certain administrative procedures (e.g. procedures concerning nature protection or procedures according to the Waste Management Act or the EIA Act 2000). In order to enforce such claims, the Ombudsman for the environment has the position of a party and is authorized to lodge complaints with the Administrative Court with regard to compliance with legal provisions which are relevant for the environment;

(f) In the framework of the implementation of the EU Environmental Liability Directive 2004/35/EC, the Federal Environmental Liability Act (Federal Law Gazette I No. 55/2009; the provinces have in the following adapted their respective legal systems in accordance with the Federal Environmental Liability Act) provides for an environmental complaint, if the public authority fails to take action in the event of environmental damage (to water bodies and soils, provided that human health is affected). If they are affected, natural or legal persons as well as Ombudsmen for the environment and acknowledged environmental organizations are entitled to lodge a written complaint with the district administration authority. The authority shall then

inform the claimant of the due course of action (also if and which prevention and rehabilitation measures have been instructed). It is possible to lodge a complaint with the Independent Administrative Tribunal against unlawful information or information which has not been provided;

(g) A specially established Ombudsperson Board (“Volksanwaltschaft”) investigates claimed or assumed severe administrative deficiencies and thus exerts public control for the benefit of the rule of law and democracy in a way that attracts media attention. Yet the Ombudsperson Board only executes supervising investigation (after the procedure has been completed) and does not represent any party in the procedure per se.

(h) As was shown above, there is a tightly knitted net of measures in place in Austria which grants members of the public access to administrative or judicial procedures in order to challenge acts and omissions contravening provisions of national regulations relating to the environment. However, due to the fact that according to the Austrian Federal Constitutional Law (B-VG), environmental protection is a cross-sectoral issue and therefore part of many different legal acts on national and federal level, a study of the current situation of the implementation of Art. 9 para 3 was commissioned by the BMLFUW. This study from Prof. Schulev-Steindl of the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna, publicly presented in October 2009 and published on the BMLFUW website, confirmed in principle the compliance of the Austrian legal situation with Art. 9 para 3 and provided an overview on potential improvements with regard to this provision. The BMLFUW is currently in the process of assessing the results.

#### **Article 9, paragraph 4**

99. Regarding civil (and criminal) matters at the lowest level about 140 district courts (*Bezirksgerichte*) have been established. Regional Courts (*Landesgerichte*) are functioning as courts of first instance and also as appeal courts for the district courts. Four courts of appeals (*Oberlandesgerichte*) are competent for appeals from cases decided by the regional courts. At the highest level is the Supreme Court for civil and criminal affairs (*Oberster Gerichtshof*).

100. With regard to administrative matters they are firstly addressed within the hierarchy of the administrative bodies. In some cases, Independent Administrative Tribunals (*Unabhängige Verwaltungssenate*) are installed as second instance. Administrative decisions or regulations can only be contested by those persons affected by the decision or regulation in question. Illegal administrative actions, breaches of procedural or material provisions may be appealed to the Administrative Court of last instance (*Verwaltungsgerichtshof*), which exercises a cassational function. Judicial review of the legality of administrative decisions and regulations as well as the constitutionality of laws is reserved to the Constitutional Court (*Verfassungsgerichtshof*). The Constitutional Court has competence to review the legality of administrative regulations and decisions violating fundamental rights.

101.

For matters of EIA the competent authority (provincial government) decides and a special body, the Environmental Senate, which was established at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management acts as the authority of appeal. The Environmental Senate is the relevant superior authority with substantive jurisdiction. The members of the Environmental Senate perform their activities independently and are not bound by instructions. Against decisions of the Environmental Senate, parties may lodge a complaint

with the Constitutional and/or the Administrative Court. In the case of Federal highways and highspeed railway lines the competent authority is the Minister of Transport. Generally the appeal possibility against decisions of Ministers in Austria is to appeal to the Administrative Court and/or the Constitutional Court.

In a landmark decision issued on 30 September 2010, the Administrative Court considerably expanded the parties' access to justice in EIA-procedures concerning infrastructure projects. The Administrative Court held that appeals against decisions by the Minister of Transport concerning highspeed railway lines have to be brought to the Environmental Senate, thus effectively adding a new appellate instance having full jurisdiction. Decisions by the Environmental Senate may then be appealed against before the Administrative Court and/or Constitutional Court. Appealing to the Environment Senate has - by law - an injunctive effect which may only be declined in exceptional cases.

102. As a general principle participation in administrative procedures is free of cost in Austria. Thus, e.g. the EIA and IPPC administrative procedures are cost-free both for neighbours and NGOs. It has to be noted, that the public is neither obliged to employ a lawyer nor to provide technical expertise in the EIA development consent procedure. An existing technical expertise that was commissioned by the competent authority in an EIA procedure has to be countered by another technical expertise only in cases where a neighbour/NGO files a complaint to the Administrative Court to contest the technical expertise (even though this expertise meets all requirements) after having exhausted the previous appeal possibilities (eg Environmental Senate). According to the jurisdiction of the Administrative Court there is no need for another technical expertise in cases where the technical expertises commissioned by administrative authorities were not coherent and consistent.

#### **Article 9, paragraph 5**

103. The Legal Information System of the Republic of Austria (RIS) is a computer-assisted information system on Austrian law, which is coordinated and operated by the Federal Chancellery. The content of RIS covers all legislation on the federal level as well as of the provinces. The case-law was made the third key component of RIS. The databases contain both the legal maxims and the full text of the rulings, inter alia, of the following tribunals: Constitutional Court, Administrative Court, Supreme Court (decisions of civil and criminal law), Independent Administrative Tribunals and the Environmental Senate.

### **OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 9**

102. On the first implementation report certain members of the general public as well as a political party represented in the Austrian Parliament have criticized the existing implementation of Article 9, Paragraph 3, for being not comprehensive enough, in particular with regard to the law enforcement possibilities existing outside the approval procedure and the costs for expert opinions incurred in EIA procedures. Public consultation on the update of the implementation report has shown similar results.

### **XXX. FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 9**

103. Also the instrument of environmental mediation provides a reference to Article 9, Paragraph 3, of the Convention with regard to the inclusion of the concerned public. Environmental mediation is a voluntary and structured procedure in the framework of which all those affected by a project which is relevant for the environment are striving for a joint and durable solution. This process covers mediation procedures with regard to projects laying the emphasis not only on economic and social interests, but also on aspects of environmental protection, quality of life and the development of areas (of unspoiled nature). It is especially about projects subject to environmental law provisions or possibly having an impact on the environment (emissions, consumption of resources, use of areas of unspoiled nature, etc.). The 2000 Austrian EIA Act provides that the public authority shall be entitled to interrupt the approval procedures upon the request of the project applicant in order to enable a mediation procedure. The results of the mediation procedure are submitted to the authority responsible for EIA and can be considered by such authorities in the further stages of the approval procedure as well as in the decision.

104. In the framework of a specific promotion scheme, the BMLFUW supports Ökobüro, which has its primary focus on environmental law and on the Convention. In the framework of the Environmental Legal Service, Ökobüro provides easy-to-understand information on the contents of key environmental legislation and consulting with regard to inquiries coming from citizen initiatives and NGOs. The Justice and Environment project supports activities of the Justice and Environment Network of European NGOs. This cooperation aims at improving the state of the environment by way of better application of European and national environmental legislation.

### **XXXI. WEBSITE ADDRESSES RELEVANT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 9**

<http://www.umwelthanwaltschaft.gv.at/>

<http://www.partizipation.at/umweltmediation.html>

[www.volksanw.gv.at](http://www.volksanw.gv.at)

<http://www.umweltnet.at/article/archive/7239>

<http://www.oekobuero.at/start.asp?b=439>

<http://www.lebensministerium.at/article/articleview/27820/1/7237/>

<http://ris.bka.gv.at/>

### **XXXII. CONTRIBUTION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION TO THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT OF EVERY PERSON OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS TO LIVE IN AN ENVIRONMENT ADEQUATE TO HIS OR HER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

105. The experience of several years made by the current National Focal Point has shown that primarily specialized circles in Austria are familiar with the term and the process of the Aarhus Convention per se.

106. What is apparently more important for implementation is the fact that the Austrian population acts in a very confident way with regard to administration at all levels, claims its rights, wherever necessary, and is obviously very familiar with the key contents of the Convention.

**XXXIII. LEGISLATIVE, REGULATORY AND OTHER MEASURES IMPLEMENTING THE PROVISIONS ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 6BIS AND ANNEX I BIS**

As mentioned under Article 6, paragraph 11, the Genetic Engineering Act (Federal Law Gazette I No. 510/1994, last amended by Federal Law Gazette I No. 13/2006) transposes into national law, inter alia, the EU Deliberate Release Directive 2001/18/EC and aims at the prevention of harmful impact of genetically modified organisms (GMO) on the environment.

According to Decision II/1 of 2005 reached by the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, the Genetic Engineering Act includes provisions on the announcement to and hearing of the general public in the case of GMO release (paras. 43 and 44) and on the information of the general public on permits granted for bringing the respective substances into circulation (para. 58(a)).

There are no exceptions to the public participation procedure concerning the deliberate release of GMOs in the national regulatory framework. Some exceptions exist for the placing on the market. These are, however, in accordance with exceptions granted at the EU level and in compliance with the EU regulatory framework on GMOs.

In order to make available to the public in an adequate, timely and effective manner a summary of the notification introduced to obtain an authorization for the deliberate release or placing on the market, there are provisions in the Genetic Engineering Act (see its Art 43) as well as in the Ordinance on Public Hearings (BGBl. 61, 1997 as amended by Federal Law Gazette 164, 1998).

Provisions to ensure the transparency of decision-making procedures and to provide access to the relevant procedural information to the public including the nature of possible decisions, the public authority responsible for taking the decision, public participation arrangements laid down pursuant to paragraph 1 annex I bis, an indication of the public authority from which relevant information can be obtained and an indication of the public authority to which comments can be submitted and of the time schedule for the transmittal of comments are reflected in the Genetic Engineering Act as well as the Ordinance on Public Hearings (see above).

Provisions to ensure that the arrangements introduced to implement paragraph 1 of annex I bis allow the public to submit, in any appropriate manner, any comments, information, analyses or opinions that it considers relevant to the proposed deliberate release or placing on the market are also reflected in the Genetic Engineering Act as well as the Ordinance on Public Hearings (see above).

Concerning measures to ensure that due account is taken of the outcome of public participation procedures organized pursuant to paragraph 1 of annex I bis, it can be said that results of public hearings are reflected in the decision document by the competent authority.

Austria is a Party to the Aarhus Convention as well as to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biodiversity. The legal implementation as described above ensures a complementary

as well as mutually supportive approach. Requirements made in accordance with the provisions of annex I bis are complementary to and mutually supportive of the Party's national biosafety framework and consistent with the objectives of the Cartagena Protocol.

**XXXIV. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 6bis AND ANNEX I bis**

There are no cases of deliberate releases of GMOs, hence to obstacles could be encountered.

**XXXV. FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 6bis AND ANNEX I bis**

See above: since there are no cases at the national level, there are no statistics.

**XXXVI. WEBSITE ADDRESSES RELEVANT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 6bis**

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.at>

<http://www.gentechnik.gv.at>

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