

## **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

### **Working Group of the Parties**

#### **Fifteenth meeting**

Geneva, 3–5 September 2012

Item 4 (d) of the provisional agenda

#### **Procedures and mechanisms: capacity-building and awareness-raising**

### **REPORT ON THE SEVENTH AARHUS CONVENTION CAPACITY- BUILDING COORDINATION MEETING\***

Palais des Nations, Geneva  
15 June 2012

#### **Introduction**

1. The objective of the meeting was to discuss the progress in capacity-building activities related to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), the Protocol on Pollution Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) and Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development<sup>1</sup> (Rio Declaration) in the light of the outcomes of the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Chisinau, 29 June – 1 July 2012).

2. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Ella Behlyarova, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Aarhus Convention Secretariat. UNECE also provides the secretariat services for the capacity building coordination. The representatives of the following partner organizations were present at the meeting: Ms. Barbara Ruis, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); Ms. Vera Barrantes and Ms. Roshni Dave, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR); Ms. Esra Buttanni, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); Mr. Adam Daniel Nagy, European Commission; Ms. Mara Silina, European Environmental Bureau (EEB)/European ECO Forum; Mr. Nikolai Denisov, Zoi Environment Network (Zoi); Ms. Magdolna Toth Nagy, Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC CEE); Ms. Nune Harutyunyan, Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC Caucasus).

3. Also present at the meeting was Ms. Aida Iskoyan, the national focal point from Armenia.

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\* The document was not formally edited.

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=78&ArticleID=1163>.

4. Ms. Tatyana Shakyrova, a representative of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), was not able to attend the meeting, but submitted a written note on CAREC activities in support of the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the PRTR Protocol.

5. The following documents served as a basis for the discussion: Decision III/8 on the Strategic Plan 2009-2014 (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.16)<sup>2</sup>, decisions on the work programme for 2012-2014 (IV/6), on access to justice (IV/2), on access to information (IV/1) and on reporting requirements (IV/4) that were adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its fourth session (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.1)<sup>3</sup>, report on the implementation of the work programme for 2009–2011, including in relation to the Strategic Plan 2009–2014 (ECE/MP.PP/2011/9)<sup>4</sup>, synthesis report on the status of implementation of the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2011/7)<sup>5</sup>, report on capacity-building activities (ECE/MP.PP/2011/8)<sup>6</sup> and report of the Compliance Committee to the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.PP/2011/11)<sup>7</sup>.

6. The Aarhus Convention secretariat informed that in accordance with the Convention's Work Programme 2012-2014 it organises and oversees capacity-building activities at the regional and subregional levels. Capacity-building activities at the national level were expected to be supported by partner organisations.

#### **I. Access to justice**

7. The Aarhus Convention secretariat drew participants' attention to the fact that objectives I/10, I/11 and III/6 of the Strategic Plan 2009-2014 related to ensuring effective access for the public to administrative or judicial review, building the capacity of legal professional to exercise their responsibilities in accordance with the Convention, establishing non-restrictive criteria for standing and removing or reducing financial and other barriers in access to justice remain the most challenging to implement. Therefore the objectives are unlikely to be accomplished by each Party by 2014. In the current Convention's work programme for 2012–2014, access to justice was given particular priority.

8. The participants were informed that at its fifth meeting (Geneva, 13 and 14 June 2012), the Task Force on Access to Justice decided to proceed with a study on the issue of standing in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It also mandated the secretariat, in collaboration with partner organizations, to explore the possibility of launching a comprehensive study on standing, costs and remedies focusing on the countries in the South-Eastern Europe in 2013. The studies can serve as background material for dialogue at the national level on access to justice with all relevant stakeholders as well as for capacity-building activities and other actions aiming to ensure full implementation of the Convention. They are expected to contribute to the accomplishment of the relevant objectives of the Strategic plan.

9. The OSCE informed that it supported, jointly with the Aarhus Convention secretariat, the organization of the subregional Central Asian meeting "Implementing the Aarhus Convention today: paving the way to a better environment and governance tomorrow"<sup>8</sup>, which took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 22 and 23 May 2012. The

<sup>2</sup> Available at: [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop3/ODS/ece\\_mp\\_pp\\_2008\\_2\\_add\\_16\\_e\\_StPl.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop3/ODS/ece_mp_pp_2008_2_add_16_e_StPl.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Available at: [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece\\_mp\\_pp\\_2011\\_2\\_add.1\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece_mp_pp_2011_2_add.1_eng.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Available at: [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece\\_mp\\_pp\\_2011\\_9\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece_mp_pp_2011_9_eng.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Available at: [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece\\_mp\\_pp\\_2011\\_7\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece_mp_pp_2011_7_eng.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Available at: [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece\\_mp\\_pp\\_2011\\_8\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece_mp_pp_2011_8_eng.pdf);

<sup>7</sup> Available at: [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece\\_mp\\_pp\\_2011\\_11\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece_mp_pp_2011_11_eng.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> For additional information, please visit: <http://www.unece.org/centralasianmeeting2012.html> .

event brought together representatives of high-level judiciary from the Central Asian countries and Mongolia. The meeting was followed by the subregional coordination meeting of Aarhus Centres in Central Asia, held in Almaty on 24 May 2012. The activities related to the area of access to justice were also discussed at the second subregional coordination meeting of Aarhus Centres in South-East Europe organized by the OSCE in Sarajevo on 5-6 December 2011. The OSCE proposed to continue using Aarhus Centres as nodes for capacity-building activities.

10. REC CEE reported on a series of one-day round-table meetings organized for judges, prosecutors, public authorities, legal experts and non-governmental organizations in six South-Eastern European countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (United Nations administered region)<sup>9</sup>, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) between December 2011 and July 2012. The meetings aimed to build capacities for the implementation of the access to justice pillar of the Aarhus Convention and discuss which are the biggest barriers and about their possible removal. Also, six one-day trainings were held for NGOs on making them aware of their access to justice rights and opportunities, in the same countries. Case studies and other material were provided to the participants in English and national languages that would be made available online. The projects are funded by Finland, via the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) initiative and by Germany. The organization is implementing a 3-year programme to strengthen civil society in Belarus and the Republic of Moldova supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and among others plans to implement trainings with modules on access to justice and public participation. Grants for civil society organizations will also be offered to support public participation in decision-making.

11. The EU informed that training activities for judges were launched in 2008 and 12 workshops for judges were organized with the focus on injunctive relief. Participants were also expected to solve case studies. The methodology is similar to the one used by REC CEE and the modules are publicly available and can be used by national judicial training institutes in other countries. The European Commission has also supported a project in Ukraine on implementation of the Aarhus and Espoo Conventions. The participants of the meeting were encouraged to submit project proposals related to the Aarhus Convention and the PRTR Protocol under LIFE+, the financial instrument for the environment<sup>10</sup>.

12. REC Caucasus highlighted the importance of raising awareness among local communities about their environmental procedural rights to enable them to address their environmental concerns effectively.

13. The European ECO Forum pointed out that funding constraints do not allow it to initiate large scale capacity-building activities in this area. At the same time, it is about to finalize a collection of environmental cases brought to courts by non-governmental organizations, which will contribute to the case law database under the Task Force on Access to Justice. It finalized a project for the Adriatic Sea subregion and prepared a handbook for media on how to report on cases.

14. UNEP underlined the importance of involving public interest lawyers in capacity-building activities in this area. REC CEE supported the idea that it can be a distinct capacity-building project focused on this matter and proposed to involve the

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<sup>9</sup> See Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

<sup>10</sup> Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/lifeplus.htm>.

association of public interest lawyers in this regard and address this issue by the Task Force on Access to Justice.

## II. Access to information

15. The Aarhus Convention secretariat informed that decision IV/1 provided a mandate to the newly established Task Force on Access to Information. Pilot projects and capacity-building activities at the subregional and national level are expected to be supported by partners. In addition to the activities related to the electronic information tools, the upcoming activities in this area include workshops dedicated to the exchange of information and best practices in promoting the accessibility of environmental information held by the private sector and training on online reporting system taking into account decision IV/4 on reporting requirements with the revised reporting format. The secretariat invited partner organizations to support these activities.

16. It was noted that objective I/7 of the Strategic Plan 2009-2014 calls for improved access to environmental information through establishing systems to collect environmental information, including environment-related health information, public registers and information centres as well as electronic databases and national nodes in accordance with decision II/3<sup>11</sup>. Although progress was made by the Parties in accomplishing the objective, more targeted activities, in particular regarding product information, accessibility of environmental information held by the private sector, environment-related health information and functioning of national information nodes, are required.

17. The OSCE provided an overview of the Aarhus Centres including the within the framework of the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative and highlighted Aarhus Centres' activities in the "access to information" pillar. While some Aarhus centres provide health-related information, this has not been done systematically or on regular basis. Most Aarhus Centres have a website but their structures and contents vary depending on the agreement with the respective Government. The participants agreed that more specific guidance regarding the types of environmental information to be made available on websites of the Aarhus Centres, provided in decision II/3<sup>12</sup>, will be useful.

18. Zoi informed about several directions of their work in the area of access to environmental information, namely: (a) increasing accessibility of environmental information on transboundary river basins and geographic information systems in urban areas; (b) participating in projects related to shared environmental information system (SEIS) supported by the European Environmental Agency and in cooperation with the UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment; and (c) promoting PRTRs. It pointed out that the Republic of Moldova sets a good example of practice sharing information related to the area of water and health (e.g. the report of the Republic of Moldova<sup>13</sup> prepared with support of UNEP and Zoi for the fifth Ministerial conference on Environment and Health held in Parma, Italy from 10 to 12 March 2010).

19. The EU reported about recent communication from the European Commission "Improving the delivery of benefits from EU environment measures:

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2005/pp/ece/ece.mp.pp.2005.2.add.4.e.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Available at: <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2005/pp/ece/ece.mp.pp.2005.2.add.4.e.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Available at: [http://www.mediu.gov.md/images/documente/starea\\_mediului/rapoarte/nationale/p5\\_Raport\\_Parma\\_en.pdf](http://www.mediu.gov.md/images/documente/starea_mediului/rapoarte/nationale/p5_Raport_Parma_en.pdf).

building confidence through better knowledge and responsiveness” (COM(2012) 95 Final)<sup>14</sup>. The document is knowledge-based and relates to inspection and complaint handling. A review of the Seveso II Directive 96/82/EC<sup>15</sup> has been concluded providing for new provisions to ensure active dissemination of information.

20. UNITAR and UNEP informed about their activities in promoting Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20). UNEP also mentioned the recent developments with regard to the “Access for All” initiative launched at the Eye on Earth Summit in December 2011<sup>16</sup> and the Information and Knowledge Management porthole (InforMEA)<sup>17</sup>, which provides a common engine to search decisions, news, focal points and calendar for major MEAs. The two latter initiatives were joined by the Aarhus Convention secretariat.

21. REC CEE informed that it developed a project proposal within the “Access for All” initiative “Building bridges among regions” that will initiate capacity-building and experience-sharing among authorities and actors from the UNECE and other regions on the implementation of three pillars of the Aarhus Convention and the PRTR Protocol, as well as on Principle 10, and invited the EEB, UNECE and other partner organizations to cooperate on this matter.

22. CAREC highlighted that the new “AWARE” project<sup>18</sup> to be implemented in 2012-2014, will not only raise awareness of the public regarding environmental issues, but also provide information on how those issues can be addressed. For example, it relates to possible solutions on how to organize a vast array of already collected environmental data and information in a coherent and integrated system for environmental information based on access, sharing and interoperability, such as SEIS. This activity aims to improve the accessibility of environmental information in Central Asia and by the providing information about SEIS, CAREC assist to the Central Asia countries in regularizing reporting process on environmental matters.

23. The European ECO Forum informed that it involved its network to disseminate as much information as possible and was working on updating its website to serve as a resource tool.

24. The Aarhus Convention Secretariat highlighted that future relevant activities under the Aarhus Convention, PRTR Protocol and those related to SEIS should be implemented in synergies, as appropriate.

25. The partner organizations were invited to facilitate the implementation of the Strategic Plan at the national level through: (a) providing assistance to the Parties in improving access to environment-related health information and (b) training on online reporting system at the national level.

### **III. Public participation in decision-making**

26. The Aarhus Convention secretariat updated on the recent activities of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making and highlighted that two issues should be addressed in capacity building activities at the national level, namely organizing effective public hearings and providing training to the governmental

<sup>14</sup> Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52012DC0095:EN:NOT>.

<sup>15</sup> Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/seveso/review.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> For more information, please visit: <http://eyeonearthsummit.org/>.

<sup>17</sup> Available at: <http://informea.org/>.

<sup>18</sup> Additional information on the project is available at: [http://www.carecnet.org/programs\\_and\\_projects/mezhprogrammaya-deyatelnost/povyshenie-osvedomlennosti-po-naibolee-problemnym-ekologicheskim-voprosam-v-centralnoj-azii/](http://www.carecnet.org/programs_and_projects/mezhprogrammaya-deyatelnost/povyshenie-osvedomlennosti-po-naibolee-problemnym-ekologicheskim-voprosam-v-centralnoj-azii/) (in Russian).

officials in arranging for public participation during the preparation of plans, programmes, policies or legal acts relating to the environment (see objective I.9 of the Strategic Plan 2009-2014).

27. REC CEE provided insights into two projects in the South-Eastern European region which is funded by Finland under the ENVSEC initiative and by Germany in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (United Nations administered region)<sup>19</sup>, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where a decision-making process is underway at the very early stage, and those involved in running the process are invited for a 2-days interactive training, including but not limited to public hearings. A practical tool kit is expected to be ready by the end of the year in English and in national languages to assist in the implementation of public participation procedures. REC CEE promotes the integration of the public participation requirements existing in different sectoral activities, e.g. in the nuclear area, climate change, water management, etc. REC CEE will organize a European workshop on “Public Participation Approaches in Radioactive Waste Disposal (IPPA)” in Szentendre, Hungary on 20-22 September 2012, which will discuss also a synthesis report on the practical implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the project countries (Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) in the field, outlining the future perspectives. The project aims at raising awareness of nuclear authorities about their obligations under the Aarhus Convention. In another Interreg IVC project on Water Scarcity and Drought (Water Co-Re), REC CEE is developing a short guide which will include a chapter on good practices of access to information and public participation in decision-making. In the project, an e-learning module is also prepared for authorities to assist developing action plans on drought management using communication and public participation practices in line with the Aarhus Convention.

28. CAREC informed that their capacity-development activities closely linked to public participation in decision-making on environmental issues. One of the good examples is project “Central Asian Leadership Programme on Environment and Sustainable Development” (CALPESD)<sup>20</sup>, designed for emerging leaders and professionals from governments and private sector and aimed to provide a comprehensive assessment of sustainability issues in the context of global challenges and needs and priorities for the Central Asian countries. Third Central Asian Leadership Programme on Environment for Sustainable Development (CALPESD) will take place in Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan on 17-28 September 2012 in cooperation and with support of UNEP, Government of Norway, Asian Institute of Technology, UNEP Regional Resource Centre for Asia and Pacific, and Kazakhstani Business Council for Sustainable Development (KBCSD). The programme will be attended by more than 25 participants from the Central Asian countries.

29. The OSCE confirmed the active involvement of Aarhus centres in promoting this pillar of the Convention, highlighting that their role varies from country to country (e.g. from being an organizer of public hearings to providing rather a platform for a discussion). The OSCE also launched a programme CASE (Civic Action for Security and Environment)<sup>21</sup> that aims to strengthen civil society efforts through small grants for environmental projects. The programme is currently being implemented in

<sup>19</sup> See Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

<sup>20</sup> Additional information is available at: <http://www.carecnet.org/2012/08/13/the-3-rd-central-asian-leadership-programme-on-environment-for-sustainable-development/?lang=en>.

<sup>21</sup> For more information, please visit: [www.osce.org/eea/70997](http://www.osce.org/eea/70997).

Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan and have supported several projects of nongovernmental organizations in the field of environment and security. CASE programme works hand in hand with the Aarhus Centres in respective countries.

30. The participants were informed by the Aarhus Convention Secretariat about a future project to be implemented in Belarus under the ENVSEC initiative, and by the EU about a project in Ukraine. Both projects include public participation component.

#### **IV. Genetically modified organisms**

31. The Aarhus Convention secretariat brought to the attention of the partner organizations objective II.3 of the Strategic Plan 2009-2014 to have the amendment to the Convention on public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and the placing on the market of genetically modified organisms<sup>22</sup> (GMO amendment) entered into force by 2009, and pointed out that the objective has not been implemented so far. Only five ratifications (acceptance or approvals) to be made by the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, France, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Ukraine, are missing.

32. The Aarhus Convention secretariat further informed that a round table dedicated to the practical implementation of the GMO amendment and the exchange of information on good practices with regard to GMO-related issues within the Convention's framework is scheduled for late 2013 back-to-back with the second meeting of the Task Force on Access to Information. It also proposed to explore the possibility to pursue capacity-building projects related to this area of work under the ENVSEC initiative.

33. The European ECO Forum had prepared a publication in English and Russian, which provide a comparison of the provisions of the GMO amendment and the Cartagena Protocol. It highlighted the importance of raising awareness in countries supporting the shift of the focus from the safety of GMOs themselves to public participation in decision-making and access to information with regard to activities related to GMOs. More work on this issue is foreseen at national level.

34. REC Caucasus proposed that this issue can be addressed in the project related to aquabiodiversity that is being implemented in Georgia in close cooperation with a national focal point of the Convention on Biological Diversity and can be reflected in the recommendations to be prepared as the project outcome.

35. The partner organizations were encouraged to promote the GMO Amendment and Lucca Guidelines on access to information, public participation and access to justice with respect to genetically modified organisms<sup>23</sup> through their respective activities, in particular, at national and subregional levels.

#### **V. Public Participation in International Forums**

36. The Aarhus Convention secretariat informed that a thematic session on the promotion of the principles of the Convention in international forums will be organized at the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 3-5 September 2012). Decision IV/3 adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its fourth

<sup>22</sup> Available online at: <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2005/pp/ece/ece.mp.pp.2005.2.add.2.e.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/documents/gmoguidelinesenglish.pdf>.

session encouraged to continue outreach to interested international forums in a focused way, e.g. through trainings, workshops, learning centres and other platforms.

37. It was noted that only a few countries involve non-governmental organisations in preparations of the country's position for negotiations or in official delegations. However, there is a demand to change this practice at the national level due to the growing criticism from the public of such positions or decisions that were taken without public consultations.

38. UNEP highlighted a challenge in following the provisions of the Almaty Guidelines<sup>24</sup> to promote public participation in the international forums at the global level. However, it was noted that the public participation in international forums derives from Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration which has universal nature.

39. The partner organizations were encouraged: (a) to assist Governments in involving the public in order to provide effectively its input to the Government's position to international forums, and (b) to support the application of the Almaty Guidelines in the international forums in which they are involved.

## **VI. National action plans and national-level profiles**

40. The Aarhus Convention Secretariat drew attention to the fact that the achievement of objectives I.1 and I.5 of the Strategic Plan 2009-2014 aiming to ensure that each Party has a clear, transparent and consistent framework for the implementation of all provisions of the Convention and that public authorities at all levels and in all relevant sectors of government are aware of the obligations under the Convention still remains challenging.

41. The participants supported the view that the Parties should be encouraged to prepare a multistakeholder action plan for the Convention's implementation through the wide public consultations. This initiative could be an outcome of capacity-building projects at the national level. The action plans will encourage the implementation of the Convention and will facilitate preparation of a national implementation report, thereby contributing to the fulfilment of the above objectives. REC CEE reported about their assistance in preparing several action plans for South-Eastern Europe.

42. Participants noted at the same time that there was very little progress in developing national-level profiles and that there is no demand to continue their development in the UNECE region. It seems that the Parties prefer to devote resources to developing and implementing of action plans and/or to follow up on the implementation of the Convention's Compliance Committee recommendations rather than to initiate and keep under review national-level profiles.

43. The participants highlighted the importance of incorporating the gender perspective into capacity-building activities. The OSCE informed about publishing guidelines for practitioners on "Gender mainstreaming in Aarhus Activities" which was distributed to Aarhus centres and other organisations.

## **VII. Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers**

44. The Aarhus Convention secretariat recalled that the main global capacity-building coordination framework for the PRTR Protocol was the International PRTR

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<sup>24</sup> Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principle of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums are available online at: <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2005/pp/ece/ece.mp.pp.2005.2.add.5.e.pdf>.

Coordination Group<sup>25</sup>. Its latest meeting took place in Paris on 6 October 2011 and the next meeting will take place on 12 September (afternoon) 2012 in Paris, back to back with the meeting of the OECD Task Force on PRTRs.

45. The secretariat informed that it plans to organize a subregional workshop in South-Eastern Europe to promote the Protocol in Spring 2013, and called for cooperation with partner organizations.

46. The Aarhus Convention secretariat also provided an update about the preparation of an assessment of countries' capacity-building needs, which will be considered in detail at the second meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the PRTR Protocol (Geneva, 20-21 November 2012).

47. Regarding the training material, the Aarhus Convention secretariat informed about the availability of the Guidance on Implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PP/7) in English, French, Russian and Spanish<sup>26</sup> and the free software provided by Germany and the European Environmental Agency<sup>27</sup>, which can be used for the development of PRTRs in countries.

48. Zoi informed about its plans on the PRTR project in Belarus supported under ENVSEC initiative, which will be implemented in cooperation with the Aarhus Convention secretariat. REC CEE provided an update on PRTR-related activities in six countries of the South-Eastern Europe, including capacity building workshops, training activities, pilot projects and the development of guidance documents at the national level. The activities are funded by Finland via the ENVSEC initiative and Germany by the above mentioned projects.

49. UNITAR provided an update on the PRTRs component within the project related to persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and projects in Central American countries calling for cooperation with partner organizations. It also reported on a number of projects in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. It furthermore informed about updating its guidance document on PRTR design, which is expected to be a finalized draft in October 2012, as well as a module of online reporting system which would include toxins and POPs<sup>28</sup>.

50. The OSCE informed on the ongoing work of the OSCE Centre in Astana in creation of a pilot PRTR and review of national legislation for compliance in close cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the National Aarhus Centre. The partners admitted a good progress in Kazakhstan with regard to developing capacity of the country in joining and implementing the PRTR Protocol.

51. The European ECO Forum follows the development and the current revisions of the e-PRTR at the European Union level. It is going to update the first publication on the subject matter in early 2013.

52. The OSCE highlighted the relevance of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative<sup>29</sup> and the work of the OSCE Centre in Astana, in this respect. Participants noted that it might be useful to consider cooperation with the Extractive

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<sup>25</sup> For more information, please visit: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcgimages/about.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Available at: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr.guidancedev.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Available at: <https://svn.eionet.europa.eu/repositories/EPTRTR/trunk/>.

<sup>28</sup> Additional information is available at: <http://www.unitar.org/cwm/prtr>.

<sup>29</sup> Additional information is available at: <http://eiti.org/>.

Industries Transparency Initiative for relevant activities related to the Protocol and also to the Convention.

## **VII Major outcomes of the meeting**

53. The participants agreed on the following:

### **Access to justice**

(a) to involve public interest lawyers in their relevant capacity-building activities;

(b) to cooperate on a possible comprehensive study on standing, remedies and costs in the South-Eastern European countries in 2013, as appropriate.

### **Access to information**

(a) to strengthen, subject to the availability of the resources, the assistance to the Parties in improving access to environment-related health information and establishing national nodes in accordance with decision II/3;

(b) to explore the ways of cooperation in organization of the workshops dedicated to the exchange of information and best practices in promoting the accessibility of environmental information held by the private sector and training on online reporting system at the national level;

(c) to address, through the work of the Task Force on Access to Information, a more specific guidance regarding the types of environmental information to be made available on websites of Aarhus Centres as provided in decision II/3.

### **Public participation in decision-making**

(a) to include in relevant capacity-building projects a component on a model of effective public hearings and a component on providing trainings to the governmental officials in arranging for public participation during the preparation of plans, programmes, policies or legal acts relating to the environment.

### **Public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and the placing on the market of genetically modified organisms**

(a) to promote the relevant provisions of the Aarhus Convention, GMO amendment and Lucca Guidelines on access to information, public participation and access to justice with respect to genetically modified organisms within the on-going and new capacity-building projects;

(b) to explore possible cooperation under the ENVSEC initiative in order to raise awareness and build capacities in this area.

### **Public participation in international forums**

(a) to assist Governments in involving the public in order to provide effectively the public's input to the Government's position to international forums;

(b) to support the application of the Almaty Guidelines in the international forums in which the partner organisations are involved.

### **PRTR Protocol**

(a) to consider the possibility for cooperation on the subregional workshop for the South-Eastern European countries;

(b) to promote the Protocol through the relevant activities.

**Capacity-building coordination framework**

(a) to explore the possibility of using the LIFE+ instrument by partner organizations to apply for new capacity-building projects;

(b) to upload regularly the available training material and information on capacity-building and awareness-raising projects on the Aarhus Clearinghouse and PRTR.net;

(c) to update regularly the matrix on capacity-building projects related to the Aarhus Convention and PRTR Protocol annexed to the report on capacity-building activities (ECE/MP.PP/2011/8)<sup>30</sup>.

**Other issues**

(a) to promote the development and adoption by the Parties of national action plans as an outcome of the relevant capacity-building projects;

(b) to encourage the relevant Parties to the Aarhus Convention to support the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and seek the ways to cooperate with this initiative, as appropriate.



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<sup>30</sup> Available online at: [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece\\_mp.pp\\_2011\\_8\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop4/Documents/ece_mp.pp_2011_8_eng.pdf).