

Intervention at Aarhus WGP-24 by Jeremy Wates on behalf of the European ECO Forum

Agenda Item 6: Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021, including financial matters

We would like to thank the secretariat for putting these very comprehensive reports together. We have a question about the report on contributions and pledges. The data that is included in that report presumably almost entirely pre-dates the COVID pandemic. There must be a concern that the economic impact of the pandemic could also affect the availability of funding for the Aarhus Convention.

On the positive side, we have seen national governments and the EU putting together stimulus and recovery packages on an unprecedented scale, providing an opportunity to steer our societies on a better course than the pre-COVID business as usual. Many voices, including the UN Secretary General, have said we need to 'build back better'. And just yesterday, the EU, in its opening statement, said that "the Aarhus community should focus on a green, sustainable, transformative, participatory and socially inclusive recovery, converting the challenge into an opportunity for an even more sustainable, and resilient" future or society. We very much welcome that statement.

And in that spirit, we hope that when we come to discuss the future work programme and its financing in October, Aarhus Parties will take the long view and recognise that the pandemic provides a reason to invest more, not less, in a greener future – in the case of the EU, being guided by the European Green Deal – and furthermore, that Aarhus is a key tool for doing that. The need for additional staff resources for the compliance mechanism is particularly urgent and the case for that has been well outlined by the Compliance Committee's Chair this morning.

So we would appeal to those representing Aarhus Parties here today to do your best in your internal discussions in your governments to ensure that sufficient funding is available for the future work under the Convention. Finally, we would like to ask the secretariat if it has already received feedback from Parties concerning the implications of the pandemic on their contributions to the Convention's finances.