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LANDMARK MEETING OF AARHUS CONVENTION WELCOMES GLOBAL ACCESSION



Marking a decade since the entry into force of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), the Meeting of the Parties to the

Convention last week adopted a decision encouraging the accession by States outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region and a simplified procedure for doing so — thus encouraging the propagation of the important and unique protections offered by this international environmental rights treaty on a fully global scale.

The move is widely recognized as a timely one: in a message delivered to the session, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon noted that the Aarhus Convention “is more important than ever”. The “treaty’s powerful twin protections for the environment and human rights can help us respond to many challenges facing our world, from climate change and the loss of biodiversity to air and water pollution. And the Convention’s critical focus on involving the public is helping to keep Governments accountable,” the Secretary-General stressed.

A letter from Mongolia stating its interest in acceding to the Convention, which arrived during the meeting, further underlines the timeliness of the decision to encourage wider membership.

The event featured a High-level Segment on the role of the Aarhus Convention in promoting sustainable development,

chaired by Mr. Gheorghe Salaru, Minister of Environment of the Republic of Moldova. Ministers, high-level officials, representatives from non-governmental organizations and international organizations debated the Convention’s successes and failures to advance sustainable development in the UNECE region, and the Convention’s role in inspiring the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) for delivery on Principle 10 beyond the region. Although the Convention has now been in force for a decade, its principles go back much further, to Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, which was adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit by 172 Governments.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Parties adopted the Chisinau Declaration as a lead-up to the Rio+20 Conference to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, thus bringing one of the fruits of the Rio Declaration back to the city in which it was born. Parties offered to share their experience with all countries that wish to join the Aarhus family or to replicate its achievements. The Parties consider that the preparations for Rio+20 and its deliberations should serve as a model of how to implement Rio Principle 10 and that the participants in the Rio+20 Conference take into account the Aarhus principles in their consideration of the institutional framework for sustainable development to be adopted there. In particular, citizens should be invited to participate in defining and implementing green economy programmes and in choosing the most appropriate road maps to sustainability.

Parties also called for the Convention to continue the work (led by France) in promoting the Convention in international forums and building synergies with other conventions and international organizations involved in environmental matters. □

For further information, please visit: www.unece.org/env/pp or contact the secretariat at: public.participation@unece.org.

MEETING OF THE UNECE TEAM OF SPECIALISTS ON INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY GENEVA, 7-8 JULY 2011

Experts from national intellectual property offices and ministries, international organizations, research institutions and the business community will meet in Geneva on 7-8 July to discuss how to raise awareness about these benefits in the UNECE region, with a special focus on countries with economies in transition.



The above benefits of IP are not automatic. Even when a good IP framework is in place, its effectiveness will depend a great deal on how it is used by companies, entrepreneurs, and research organizations, and whether it is being respected by consumers. Throughout the UNECE region, IP makes less of a positive impact than could be the case because:

- small and medium-sized companies are not aware of how they can use IP to build innovative businesses,
- researchers at universities do not sufficiently understand why their research results may need to be protected by IP before they can be turned into commercially successful innovation,
- consumers do not fully understand how, by buying counterfeit products, they are undermining innovative businesses.

An effective and balanced intellectual property (IP) regime increases national wealth and benefits consumers by stimulating research and investment into new technologies and innovative products, and by enabling the transfer of technology, including between countries at different stages of economic development.

Much is already being done in the UNECE region to tackle the problem, but the results vary considerably. For the countries of the region to be able to harness the full benefits of an effective and balanced IP system, it is critical to evaluate current awareness raising policies, practices and campaigns and for countries to learn from each other.

The 5th Annual Session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Intellectual Property will bring together international experts involved in IP awareness raising from throughout

the UNECE region to exchange experiences, discuss what works and what does not, and identify priorities for future capacity-building activities in this area.

This event contributes to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal 8 "Develop a global partnership for development", which, inter alia, calls for the United Nations to work in cooperation with the private sector to make available the benefits of new technologies." □

For more information, please contact visit: <http://www.unece.org/ceci/ip.html> or contact Ralph Heinrich at: ralph.heinrich@unece.org.

UNECE LAUNCHES 2ND ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF GEORGIA

The Ministry of Environment Protection (MEP) of Georgia and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) launched the 2nd Environmental Performance Review (EPR) of Georgia on 24 June in Tbilisi.

The event, which was opened by Mr George Khachidze, Minister of Environment Protection, gathered representatives from key governmental and state institutions, NGOs and donors. Numerous Ministries were represented including those of Economy and Sustainable Development; Finance; Agriculture; Energy and Natural Resources; Regional Development and Infrastructure; Foreign Affairs; Internal Affairs; Health, Labour and Social Affairs; and the Security Council of Georgia. Numerous NGOs were also represented, including REC Caucasus; Green Alternative; the Green Movement; Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia; and Aarhus Centre Georgia. Other national and international stakeholders also participated, including OSCE ENVSEC, GIZ, USAID, IUCN, CENN, and Tbilisi State University.

The Minister of Environment Protection, Mr. George Khachidze, Ms. Nino Tkilava, Head of Department of Environmental Policy and International Relations of MEP Georgia, Mr. Tornike Phulariani, Head of Environmental Policy Division of MEP Georgia, Mr. Antoine Nunes, EPR

Programme Leader, and Mr. George Georgiadis, EPR Project Coordinator held presentations on the different aspects of the 2nd EPR Report of Georgia.



The Report issued a set of forty-one specific recommendations that relate to actions Georgia needs to implement in order to improve its state of environment and to create the necessary preconditions for a more effective integration of the goals of sustainable development into its sectoral policies. The Government of Georgia officially approved the recommendations and these will be integrated into the national environmental protection policy, thus contributing significantly to the improvement of environmental management and the further integration of environmental and economic concerns. □

The EPR of Georgia can be found in English at: <http://www.unece.org/env/epr/publications.html> For more information on the EPR Programme, please visit: <http://www.unece.org/env/epr/welcome.htm>.

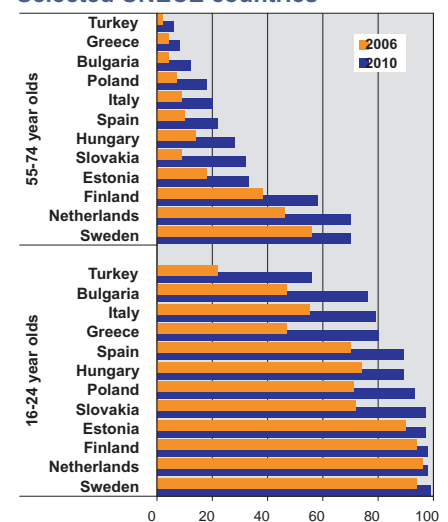
DECREASING DIVERGENCE IN INTERNET USE AMONG EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

In 2010, internet use still varied largely among European countries. However, use grew steadily across all age categories in all countries compared to 2006, which has led to some reduction in the digital gap¹ amongst countries. The divergence between countries is smallest among 16 to 24 year-olds whereas in the age-group of 55 to 74 the divergence has actually widened.

Internet use is highest in northern Europe². In the Netherlands and Sweden, nearly 90 per cent of all persons between 16 and 74 are accessing internet on a weekly basis. Among 16 to 24 year-olds, the level is close to 100 per cent and among 55 to 74 year-olds, 70 per cent. On the other hand, in Greece and Turkey, less than 10 per cent of persons aged 55 to 74 access internet on a weekly basis. The difference between women and men has decreased in the past five years and in some countries women use the internet even more frequently than men do. In nearly all countries where data are available, there is virtually no difference between men and women in the younger age groups.

Internet use is monitored in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. It improves access to information, provides opportunities for bringing education within reach of all, improves job preparedness and new economic opportunities and can prevent social exclusion. Making the benefits of new technologies available to all, especially information and communication, is one of the targets identified for Goal 8 "Developing a global partnership for development". □

Weekly internet use in 2006³ and 2010, age groups 16-24 and 55-74. Selected UNECE countries



Source: UNECE Gender database <http://w3.unece.org/pxweb/>.

1/Measured as percentage point difference with the average of the five countries with the highest use: Iceland, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden

2/Data availability on internet usage in Caucasus and Central Asia is very scarce; available data show far lower levels of internet usage and larger differences between males and females.

3/Turkey refers to 2005

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