

**Statement by the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) at the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Task Force on Access to Justice  
February 27 and 28, 2018, Geneva**

**Agenda item 4(c): Promoting capacity building, awareness raising and cooperation**

My name is Jela Bilandzija. I have joined the Regional Environmental Center (REC) in January this year at the position Head of Environmental Governance Unit and I will serve as the REC's new contact point in this Task Force. I am very glad to get to know all of you and I look forward to our future cooperation.

Under agenda item 4(c), during this reporting period the REC has provided comprehensive support to the countries of South Eastern Europe (SEE) to establish sub-regional cooperation between CSOs, the judiciary and environmental institutions responsible for access to justice matters, with the aim of further reducing the major gaps regarding access to justice under the Aarhus Convention.

Judges, legal professionals and representatives of other environmental institutions have received information on how access to justice is ensured in EU and other countries. Case studies have been presented, illustrating how major gaps and difficulties in the implementation of access to justice have been addressed, and solutions for the removal or reduction of barriers have been discussed.

Representatives of CSOs have been given guidance on strategies and methods for using administrative and court procedures and other avenues of legal recourse in environmental matters under the third pillar of the Aarhus Convention and national legislation. Major difficulties and gaps in the implementation of access to justice rights have also been addressed.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia took part in project activities.

The initiative was implemented in the framework of the project "Better Access to Justice in South Eastern Europe", funded by the German Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety through the Advisory Assistance Programme for Environmental Protection in the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and Other Countries Neighbouring the European Union (AAP). It was supervised by the German Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt, UBA).

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

Globally, the REC has been actively engaged in drafting a regional instrument on access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, by providing comments and advice. The REC was also involved in the formulation of Article 9 of this instrument, which, for the first time, introduces human rights defenders in environmental matters. This initiative was implemented in the framework of the “Building Bridges between Regions” project, funded by the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea of Italy.

The REC is committed to further exploring the possibilities for building the capacities of stakeholders, and to providing continued support to national and regional initiatives in the area of Aarhus Convention implementation.

On behalf of the REC, I would like to thank the donor community, partner countries and UNECE for making these initiatives possible.