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Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Working Group of the Parties

First meeting

Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2011

Report of the first meeting of the Working Group of the Parties

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I. Introduction

1. The first meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) was held on 28 and 29 November 2011 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

A. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following Parties to the Protocol: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Union (EU).

3. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following Signatories to the Protocol: Armenia, Georgia, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

4. Delegations from Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan were also present.

5. Also attending were representatives of the international organizations the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In addition, representatives of the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended: "Biosophia" Health, Environmental, Agricultural Development Center NGO (Armenia); Bureau of Environmental Investigation (Ukraine); ECOSCOPE (Azerbaijan); "Greenwomen" Analytical Environmental Agency (Kazakhstan); Independent Ecological Expertise (Kyrgyzstan); "Volgograd Ecopress" Information Centre (Russian Federation); "BLEJAN" environmental, social, business support NGO (Armenia); All Ukrainian NGO "Development and Environment" (Ukraine); Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (Georgia); Centre for Sustainable Production and Consumption (Kazakhstan); International Environmental Association of River Keepers (Eco-TIRAS) (Republic of Moldova); European Environmental Bureau (Belgium); GLOBE Europe (Republic of Moldova); Leo Berg Foundation (Republic of Moldova); and Doctors for Ecology (Republic of Moldova). Many of the NGOs coordinated their input within the framework of the European ECO Forum.

6. Representatives of regional environmental centres, Aarhus Centres and academia also attended.¹

B. Organizational matters

7. Mr. Michel Amand (Belgium), Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs, opened the meeting. The Director of the Environment Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) delivered a welcome address.

¹ Information concerning the meeting, including a list of participants and documentation, is available online from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=25026>.

II. Training on a cost model to support implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

8. The Working Group attended a training session on a cost model to support implementation of the Protocol on PRTRs (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2011/3). The cost model presented was a tool for developing detailed estimates of the magnitude of costs of monitoring emissions (releases) of substances contained in the annex to the Protocol to different environmental media (air, water and land) in order to assist Parties to the Protocol with its implementation. The training described core aspects of that process, including the cost model assumptions and the estimation of cost per substance; aggregate cost per facility; aggregate cost per activity; and aggregate cost per country. An online version of the cost model questionnaire was also described. The Excel version of the cost model was made available to the Working Group on CD-ROM and on the ECE website.²

9. The Working Group welcomed the information provided and agreed that the cost model was a useful tool that should be applied at national level to determine national expenditure on PRTRs. Belarus offered to translate relevant cost model files into Russian to enable greater usage in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

10. The Working Group also agreed that progress in relation to the cost model use be monitored and addressed at the next meeting of the Working Group and that the PRTR cost model be included in the agenda at future subregional workshops on PRTRs, as appropriate.

11. The Working Group requested the secretariat:

(a) To conduct an e-mail survey of National Focal Points to ascertain who paid for the cost of pollutant monitoring in the respective countries;

(b) To send an e-mail to National Focal Points to confirm where the cost model documents were available online, and to describe the two formats of the cost model that were available — i.e., Excel format and SQL Server database format;

(c) To explore opportunities for translation of relevant cost model files into the Russian language.

III. Adoption of the agenda

12. The Working Group adopted its agenda as set out in document ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2011/1. The Working Group took note of the report of the Chair regarding changes in the composition of the Bureau. Mr. Nicholas Obe has been nominated as a new Bureau member from the United Kingdom and as a Vice-Chairperson of the Bureau. Ms. Tina Skårman has been nominated as a new Bureau member from Sweden. Mr. Keir McAndrew attended on behalf of the EU, pending nomination of a new Bureau member by the EU.

IV. Status of ratification of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

13. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Protocol. Since the adoption of the Protocol in 2003, 38 States had become Signatories to the Protocol and

² Available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/treaties/public-participation/protocol-on-prtrs/areas-of-work/envpprttrcb/prtr-cost-model.html>

there were currently 28 Parties. The Protocol had entered into force on 8 October 2009. Since the first session of the Meeting of the Parties to the PRTR Protocol (Geneva, 20–22 April 2010), three States had become parties: Slovenia, on 23 April 2010; the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on 2 November 2010; and Serbia, on 23 November 2011.³

14. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the report by the secretariat on the status of ratification of the Protocol and agreed to encourage Signatories and other interested States to proceed with accession to the Protocol as soon as possible;

(b) Also took note of the report by Serbia, which had ratified the Protocol on 23 November 2011;

(c) Further took note of progress described by delegates towards ratification of the Protocol in Ukraine and Tajikistan (which aimed to complete ratification by the end of 2012), and in Belarus, Armenia, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova (which aimed to complete ratification by the end of 2015).

V. Designation of National Focal Points

15. The Working Group took note of the report prepared by the secretariat on the status of designation of National Focal Points (PRTR/WG.1/2011/Inf.2) and in accordance with the decision of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs at its first session (ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2, para. 32), called upon those Governments which had not designated a focal point to date to proceed with designation as soon as possible.

VI. Promotion and capacity-building

A. Coordination mechanisms

16. With regard to coordination mechanisms to promote the Protocol and build capacity, the Working Group:

(a) Agreed on the importance of building synergies within ECE and with other partners, given the current economic climate;

(b) Took note of the presentation by OECD about PRTR-related activities carried out under the auspices of OECD, including relevant resources such as guidance manuals, technical documents and national PRTR data;⁴

(c) Also took note of the report on the sixth Aarhus Convention Capacity-building Coordination Meeting (ECE/MP.PP/WG-13/Inf.8) and of the report on the sixth meeting of the International Pollutant Release and Transfer Register Coordinating Group (PRTRCG(2011)V/2);

(d) Called upon international organizations to cooperate closely on the implementation of the projects and programmes related to PRTRs;

³ Information on the status of ratifications is available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ratification.html>.

⁴ See www.oecd/env/prtr.

(e) Called upon Governments to strengthen cooperation between experts dealing with the Aarhus Convention and those dealing with PRTRs to ensure coordination at the national level;

(f) Called upon countries to keep international organizations informed of their bilateral PRTR-related cooperation with developing countries and with countries with economies in transition, so as to ensure synergies;

(g) Agreed to consider the possibility to hold a dedicated meeting on capacity-building back to back with meetings of the Working Group, when needed;

(h) Took note of the information that the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic and ECE would develop a concept for the “crosswalk project” (a scoping study of the pollutant-specific and waste-specific approaches to reporting), with a view to developing a more comprehensive project proposal and its eventual submission for funding, and mandated the Bureau to oversee that activity;

(i) Agreed on the holding of a back-to-back meeting with the OECD PRTR Task Force and organizing a joint global round table on PRTRs to take place in 2013 under the auspices of OECD and ECE.

B. Side events

17. The Working Group took note of the reports on the side event at the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011) and on the side event organized during the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Chisinau, 29 June–1 July 2011), and mandated the secretariat and the Bureau to follow up, in cooperation with the Bureau of the Aarhus Convention, on a possible side event at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference), to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012.

C. Subregional workshops

18. With regard to subregional workshops, the Working Group:

(a) Took note of the report on the Workshop on Electronic Information Tools to Support the Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in South-Eastern Europe (ECE/MP.PP/2011/4);

(b) Also took note of the brief by the secretariat on the subregional workshop held in Minsk on 3 and 4 November 2011, requested it to prepare a report on the workshop for the next meeting of the Working Group, and thanked Belarus for hosting the event;

(c) Underlined the importance of capacity-building events for improved knowledge and creating a platform for successful practices in developing PRTRs, and strongly encouraged countries and organizations to use the results and outcomes of the workshops for their relevant activities;

(d) Took note of the proposals by delegations regarding possible future subregional workshops, and mandated the secretariat and the Bureau to follow up on that.

D. Communication strategy, electronic tools and publications

19. Having reviewed the Communication Strategy for the Convention and the Protocol, as well as electronic tools and publications, the Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the Communication Strategy (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.2), and committed to implement it;

(b) Also welcomed the publications, *Your Right to a Healthy Community: A simplified guide to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers* (ECE/MP.PP/8) and *Guidance on Implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers* (ECE/MP.PP/7), and committed to translate them into national languages as soon as possible;

(c) Took note of the report by the secretariat on recent developments regarding the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and the PRTR.net Global Portal, and thanked GRID-Arendal for continuous cooperation on that activity;

(d) Took note of the presentation by the secretariat on the PRTR capacity-building activities database⁵ available from PRTR.net, and reaffirmed its commitment to use it as a tool to exchange information on capacity-building activities;

(e) Took note of the presentation by UNITAR on PRTR:Learn, an interactive website to share knowledge on PRTRs, and requested the secretariat and UNITAR to work closely so as to ensure the effective use of PRTR.net and PRTR Learn.

E. Other relevant activities

20. Concerning other activities of relevance to the Protocol, the Working Group:

(a) Took note of the reports on capacity-building activities (ECE/MP.PP/2011/8), and on the implementation of the work programme for 2009–2011, including in relation to the Strategic Plan 2009–2014 (ECE/MP.PP/2011/9), which had been submitted to the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention at its fourth session, and also took note of reports by individual delegations;

(b) Expressed its appreciation to Spain for its commendable efforts in promoting the Protocol in Latin America, and welcomed Spain's translation and publishing of the PRTR Implementation Guide in Spanish as an in-kind contribution to the Protocol;

(c) Welcomed the interest in PRTRs expressed by Latin American countries reported by UNITAR, and mandated the Bureau and the secretariat to follow up on the promotion of the Protocol in Latin America;

(d) Took note of the proposal by Belarus, which was supported by a number of delegations, on establishing a possible resource centre to support ratification and implementation of the Protocol in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and requested Belarus, in consultation with those countries and interested partners, to prepare a concept note in relation to that activity for consideration by the Bureau and by the Working Group at its next meeting;

⁵ Accessible from <http://www.prtr.net/en/>.

(e) Also took note of the information provided by OECD regarding a number of resource documents available on PRTR.net, which could be utilized for implementation of PRTRs;

(f) Encouraged countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to utilize more existing tools and resources, such as those available via the OECD website, PRTR.net and PRTR:Learn;

(g) Requested that the secretariat facilitate bilateral missions between countries aimed at sharing experiences.

VII. Technical assistance mechanism

21. The Working Group agreed on the importance of technical assistance and took note of the report prepared on the basis of the outcomes of the survey on a technical assistance mechanism conducted by the secretariat (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2011/4). The Working Group discussed the matter and agreed that the establishment of a specific capacity-building fund or mechanism was not required.

22. The Working Group mandated the secretariat to prepare for its next meeting a note describing different modalities of possible technical assistance, including development of joint projects, respecting the following principles:

(a) Existing bodies under the Protocol and capacity-building coordinating mechanisms had proved they were functioning well and should be relied upon;

(b) Further synergies between organizations — in particular ECE, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNITAR, the Global Environment Facility and OECD — should be further strengthened and pursued in a more structured way;

(c) Synergies with other ECE multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) should be explored;

(d) Provision of in-kind contributions and bilateral cooperation, as well as access to free PRTR software, should be promoted.

VIII. Technical assessment of the Protocol's provisions

23. The Working Group agreed that no amendments to the provisions of the Protocol were needed at the present time and that experience needed to be gathered before such a review should take place.

IX. Compliance Committee and reporting mechanism

24. With regard to compliance, the Working Group:

(a) Took note of the report on the first meeting of the Compliance Committee (ECE/MP.PRTR/C.1/2011/2);

(b) Also took note of the report by the secretariat regarding the shortage of resources allocated for translation of documents within United Nations services, and of the related decision of the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention regarding the discontinuation of translation of national implementation reports (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.1, decision IV/4), and requested the secretariat to further examine

and monitor the issue of translation of national implementation reports and to keep the Working Group and the Bureau informed of the developments;

(c) Mandated the secretariat to develop an online reporting tool for the Protocol and the Bureau to oversee that task.

X. Implementation of the work programmes for the Convention and the Protocol during 2010–2011

25. The Working Group took note of the report on the implementation of the Convention's work programme during 2010–2011 (ECE/MP.PP/2011/9) and brief by the secretariat on the implementation of the Protocol's work programme during 2010–2011 (see ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1, decision I/6, annex I, for the Protocol's 2011–2014 work programme). The Working Group also took note of the informal document on recent activities (PRTR/WG.1/2011/Inf.3) and requested the secretariat to report on progress in implementing the Protocol's work programme at its next meeting.

XI. Financial matters

26. The secretariat informed the Working Group about financial matters in relation to the implementation of the above work programmes and presented an informal note on the subject (PRTR/WG.1/2011/Inf.4). In addition, based on the information provided by countries shortly before the meeting, the secretariat informed the Working Group that the contribution of Norway of USD 53,100.16 should be shared between the activities under the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol, and EUR 10,000 of Italy's total contribution of EUR 100,000 should be used for the activities under the Protocol. Norway had also pledged NOK 150,000 for 2012 to be allocated for the activities under the Protocol.

27. The Working Group:

(a) Took note with concern of the above financial situation;

(b) Noted, in particular, the low level of contributions in 2011, and expressed its concern regarding possible implications for activities under the Protocol;

(c) Reiterated the need for prioritizing activities and identifying synergies, and agreed to keep support for electronic information tools for both the Aarhus Convention and the PRTR Protocol under the responsibility of one staff member;

(d) Thanked those Governments and organizations that had contributed to or had pledged to support the implementation of the work programme and called upon Governments to increase their support to the activities under the Protocol;

(e) Agreed to ensure funding as far as possible to support at least the core activities in 2012 to the same level as was provided in 2011.

XII. Calendar of meetings

28. The Working Group agreed to hold its next meeting in the period 19 to 21 November 2012.

XIII. Other business

29. The Working Group took note of the report by the Chair regarding a project proposal, prepared by ECE, aimed at supporting ratification and implementation of the ECE MEAs in Central Asia, as well as the outcomes of an informal meeting of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the ECE MEAs, held on 22 November 2011.

30. The Working Group also took note of the information provided by the Chair regarding a 2011–2012 review of the 2005 ECE reform and how it might affect the Environment subprogramme, including the ECE MEAs. The matter would be discussed at the meeting of the ECE Executive Committee (scheduled for April 2012), during which the Environment subprogramme would be reviewed.

31. The Working Group took note of the fact that no Party had yet indicated interest in hosting the second session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, which was to be held back to back with the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in 2014, and decided to consider that issue at its next meeting.

32. The Working Group agreed that the Bureau would consider at its next meeting whether a strategic plan should be developed for the PRTR Protocol.

XIV. Adoption of decisions and outcomes of the meeting

33. The Working Group adopted the major outcomes and decisions presented by the Chair at the meeting and requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, to finalize the report and incorporate those adopted outcomes and decisions.
