



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 March 2016

Original: English

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

Twentieth meeting

Geneva, 15–17 June 2016

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

**Implementation of work programme for 2015–2017,
including financial matters**

Report on the implementation of the work programme for 2015–2017

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present report was prepared in accordance with the work programme for 2015–2017 adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters at its fifth session (Maastricht, the Netherlands 30 June–1 July 2014) (see ECE/MP.PP/2014/2/Add.1, decision V/6, annex I, item X). It provides an overview of the status of implementation of the Convention's work programme for 2015–2017 for the period 6 March 2015 to 1 March 2016. Information on the implementation of the current work programme up to 5 March 2015 can be found in the implementation progress report (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2015/5) submitted to the Working Group of the Parties at its nineteenth meeting (Geneva, 17–19 June 2015).



Introduction

1. The present document provides an overview of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) for 2015–2017 (ECE/MP.PP/2014/2/Add.1, decision V/6, annex I) from 6 March 2015 to 1 March 2016 (the reporting period). The information herein complements information provided in the report on the implementation of the work programme for 2015–2017 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2015/5) submitted to the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention at its nineteenth meeting (Geneva, 17–19 June 2015). Only some activities related to access to information, capacity-building and awareness-raising regarding the Convention's Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) are included; a report on the implementation of the work programmes for the Protocol for 2011–2014 and 2015–2017 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2015/3) was submitted to the fourth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol (Madrid, 26 November 2015).

2. In implementing the work programme, the secretariat made strenuous efforts to avoid duplication of work and the inefficient use of resources through pursuing synergies with activities under other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) multilateral environmental agreements, United Nations agencies and other partners. This required spending more time on the preparatory phase of activities to ensure proper consultations with the chairs of the respective subsidiary bodies and partner organizations. Furthermore, the secretariat extended the use of, and is planning to further continue using, electronic tools (e.g., e-mail consultations; web-based, video and phone conferences; online databases; and the clearinghouse mechanism), with a view to rendering its activities more resource and time efficient.

I. Substantive issues

A. Access to information, including electronic information tools, the clearinghouse mechanism and PRTR.net

3. In the reporting period numerous activities were focused on improving public access to environmental information and its active dissemination to the public, including through electronic information tools.

4. At its fourth meeting (Geneva, 8–10 December 2015),¹ the Task Force on Access to Information continued its discussion on a number of issues, including the scope of information, its quality and associated costs. It also took stock of good practices and challenges in the application of certain restrictions on access to environmental information in accordance with the Convention's provisions, and exchanged information on the recent trends in the dissemination of environmental information through electronic information tools and the further development of the Aarhus Clearinghouse and national nodes.

5. In consultation with the Chair of the Task Force, the secretariat finalized and distributed a questionnaire to Parties in February 2016 as part of a survey to monitor progress in the implementation of the recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools to provide public access to environmental information (ECE/MP.PP/2005/2/Add.4, annex), adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its second session (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 25–27 May 2005).

¹ Meeting documents and other information on meetings of the Task Force are available from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=39258#/>.

6. The secretariat has continued managing the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy² and the PRTR.net global portal.³ The two portals were used in the reporting period to facilitate the collection, dissemination and exchange of information related to national implementation of the Convention and relevant global and regional developments regarding implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (Rio Declaration), as well as information regarding pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs). In addition, the secretariat has started preparations for upgrading these two websites to make them more appealing and user-friendly, by integrating new technologies, web features and search options.

7. The secretariat also continued to maintain and populate a jurisprudence database accessible through the Convention's web page and the Aarhus Clearinghouse. The database promotes the exchange of jurisprudence concerning the Convention and facilitates the work on access to justice. It includes decisions issued by courts of law or other bodies that make reference to the Convention or its principles, and includes summaries in English and decisions in the original language and in English, when available. The database includes case summaries in Russian as well. To date, there are more than 90 cases in the database. Maintaining the jurisprudence database is an ongoing activity.

8. The secretariat also contributed to the work of other international forums dealing with access to environmental information and electronic information tools. For instance, a number of inputs related to the development of the Shared Environmental Information System across the pan-European region were provided, including for consideration by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy at its special session (Geneva, 23–25 February 2016).

9. The secretariat also provided a number of inputs for documents produced by the Conference of European Statisticians, raising awareness about the relevance of the Convention and the Protocol with regard to the production of official statistics in environmental matters.

10. In addition, the secretariat contributed a summary of the Convention's and Protocol's activities for inclusion in the report on the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society.

B. Public participation in decision-making

11. With regard to the implementation of activities related to participation in decision-making during the reporting period, the *Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters* (Maastricht Recommendations) were issued as a publication in English, French and Russian.⁴ Hard copies have been distributed to national focal points and stakeholders.

12. At the sixth meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making (Geneva, 10–11 February 2016)⁵ participants discussed good practices and the main challenges to effective public participation with a focus on: (a) identification and notification of the public concerned; (b) early public participation; and (c) decisions on proposed activities not listed in annex I to the Convention, in accordance with article 6,

² See <http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>.

³ See <http://www.prtr.net/>.

⁴ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.II.E.7, available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/publications/maastricht_recommendations.

⁵ Meeting documents and other information concerning the sixth meeting of the Task Force are available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/ppdm6.html#.

paragraph 1 (b), of the Convention. The meeting also helped to share experiences in the use of the Maastricht Recommendations. A survey was organized prior to the meeting in order to facilitate the discussion on this item. In addition, participants discussed challenges and shared experiences with regard to different aspects of public participation in energy-related planning.

13. A call for case studies on public participation in environmental decision-making is ongoing and an online compendium of the case studies has been populated.⁶

C. Access to justice

14. At its eighth meeting, the Task Force on Access to Justice (Geneva, 15–17 June 2015) focused on substantive issues, such as the scope of review, costs and remedies under the Convention.⁷ Delegates also deliberated on quantitative data provided in 2014 national implementation reports in relation to the practical application of the provisions of article 9 of the Convention (access to justice). Furthermore, delegates shared their experience in carrying out multi-stakeholder dialogues with a view to removing barriers to access to justice. The Task Force meeting was preceded by a special session for judges dedicated to the promotion of judicial networking in the pan-European region.

15. In addition, the study on the possibilities for non-governmental organizations to claim damages on behalf of the environment has been finalized and made available online.⁸

16. The secretariat also carried out a study on the scope of review in selected countries of South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The key findings of the study will be presented to the Task Force at its ninth meeting (Geneva, 13–15 June 2016).

D. Genetically modified organisms

17. Bilateral collaboration with the secretariat of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity dedicated to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is ongoing. Pursuant to the conclusions of the joint Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity round table on GMOs (Geneva, 16–17 October 2013), the two treaty secretariats jointly prepared a checklist of key measures required for ratification and implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety with regard to its article 23 in the context of living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms (LMOs/GMOs).⁹ The checklist was circulated to national focal points of the two treaties and stakeholders for comments through two rounds of consultations held in 2014 and 2015. The finalized checklist, taking into account the comments received, has been made available to Parties to both instruments and stakeholders for their information and use. Furthermore, the two secretariats have finalized a joint note summarizing sources of available technical assistance, tools and materials with regard to implementation of the two legal instruments and their LMO/GMO requirements in relation to article 23. To further promote the Aarhus Convention's provisions in this area, the secretariat provided input to the two training modules on access to information and on

⁶ See Aarhus Good Practices, <https://www2.unece.org/aarhus-good-practices/>.

⁷ Meeting documents and other information on the meeting of the Task Force are available from http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=36725#.

⁸ See http://www.unece.org/env/pp/tfaj/analytical_studies.html.

⁹ Meeting documents and other information on this work area are available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/gmos.html>.

public participation in decision-making concerning LMOs being developed by the Convention on Biological Diversity secretariat.

18. During the reporting period, Georgia ratified the amendment to the Aarhus Convention regarding public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMO amendment). Four more Parties from among the following list must ratify the GMO amendment for it to enter into force: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, France, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Ukraine. These Parties were repeatedly called upon to take serious steps towards ratification and to provide the secretariat with a written explanation regarding the status of the ratification process in their countries. Following the mandate of the Meeting of the Parties, the Working Group of the Parties is expected to monitor closely the progress towards the entry into force of the GMO amendment and Parties and partner organizations are called upon to offer assistance in ratifying it.

II. Procedures and mechanisms

A. Compliance mechanism

19. With respect to the membership of the Compliance Committee, following the resignation of Ms. Zhandaeva the Bureau appointed Ms. Áine Ryall as the member of the Committee for the remainder of Ms. Zhandaeva's term. At its forty-ninth meeting (Geneva, 30 June–3 July 2015), after inviting Parties and observers participating in the session for their views, the Committee considered Ms. Ryall's appointment in closed session and approved her appointment to the Committee.

20. Turning to implementation of compliance-related tasks, since 5 March 2015 the Compliance Committee has held its forty-eighth, forty-ninth, fiftieth and fifty-first meetings.¹⁰ It adopted findings on four communications from the public and draft findings on five communications are to be agreed and adopted through the Committee's electronic decision-making procedure. Between 1 March 2015 and 1 March 2016 the Compliance Committee received 8 new communications (as compared with the previous period, during which it received 28). In addition, the Committee received one submission by a Party concerning another Party's compliance and, in accordance with the procedure set out in paragraph 53 of the report of the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.PP/2014/2), one request from a Party for advice or assistance. The secretariat made no referrals during the reporting period. Of the 21 communications considered for preliminary admissibility between 1 March 2015 and 1 March 2016, the Committee determined 17 to be preliminarily admissible and 4 to be preliminarily inadmissible. The Committee currently has 46 pending cases, consisting of 43 pending communications, 1 pending request from the Meeting of the Parties, 1 pending request from a Party for advice or assistance and 1 pending submission.

21. In addition, since the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties, the Committee has followed up on the implementation of decisions V/9a-n concerning compliance by Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, the European Union, Germany, Kazakhstan, Romania, Spain, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As indicated in its report to the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties, in the 2015–2017 intersessional period the Committee is taking a

¹⁰ Meeting documents and other information on the work of the Compliance Committee are available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ccmeetings.html>.

more structured approach to its follow-up on decisions of the Meeting of the Parties on compliance by individual Parties. Following the submission in late 2015 by the Parties concerned of their second progress reports on the implementation of decisions V/9a-n, the Committee is preparing its draft second progress reviews of those progress reports, taking into account any comments received from communicants and observers. The Committee will discuss the progress made in implementing decisions V/9a-n in open and closed session at its fifty-second meeting (Geneva, 8–11 March 2015), after which time the Committee's first progress reviews will be sent to the Parties concerned, the communicants and registered observers. The Committee agreed on several further draft findings at its virtual meeting on 12 February 2015.

22. The Compliance Committee is continuing its work on revising the guide to the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee.¹¹ In the context of this revision, and in response to calls by Parties at the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties for greater transparency regarding the procedure for new communications, at its fifty-first meeting (Geneva, 15–18 December 2015) the Committee agreed its procedure on new communications and instructed the secretariat to post this section of the Compliance Committee guide on the web page for communications for the reference of Parties and members of the public.¹²

23. At its fifty-first meeting, the Committee also discussed the use of electronic tools in its working methods, and in particular the possibilities for increasing its use of audio and web conferencing to facilitate the efficient management of its caseload. It agreed to expand its use of audio and web conferencing with respect to its preparation of draft findings in closed session and to continue to offer Parties and observers the possibility to use these tools to take part in its open sessions on the preliminary admissibility of communications and on the follow-up to Meeting of the Parties' decisions on compliance. It agreed, however, that, e.g., web-based, video and phone conferences were not appropriate for the hearing of a communication or submission, and representatives of the Party concerned and communicant were expected to attend the hearing of each communication or submission in person.

B. Capacity-building activities

24. In addition to capacity-building activities mentioned under other areas of work to build synergies and enhance coordination with partners, during the reporting period the secretariat continuously maintained close cooperation with United Nations partner agencies and other international organizations, including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).¹³ The secretariat also continued its work on the implementation of the outcomes of the ninth Aarhus Convention Capacity-building Coordination meeting (Geneva, 25 February 2015).¹⁴ In particular, the secretariat is expected, in consultation with the partners, to finalize and distribute in 2016 a questionnaire on capacity-building among national focal points for the Convention in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia with a view to identifying the needs for future activities.

¹¹ The *Guidance Document on the Aarhus Convention Compliance Mechanism* is available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/cc.html>.

¹² See <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/cc/com.html>.

¹³ Additional information on this area of work is available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/oa.html>.

¹⁴ See <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=38025#/>.

25. The secretariat took part in the Aarhus Centres annual meeting (Vienna, 3–4 June 2015), highlighting the main focus of the activities under the Convention in the current intersessional period and the potential role of Aarhus Centres in their implementation.

26. The secretariat promoted the Protocol on PRTRs at the UNITAR inception workshop for its “Global Project on the Implementation of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR) as a tool for Persistent Organic Pollutants (POP) reporting, dissemination and awareness raising” (Madrid, 26–28 November 2015).

27. The secretariat also continued providing substantive support to the implementation of the project under the umbrella of the Environment and Security initiative on the promotion of the Convention and its Protocol in Belarus. This included a presentation on the Protocol on PRTRs via Skype at a technical meeting with representatives from industry and the local authorities (Grodno, Belarus, 23 June 2015).

C. Reporting mechanism

28. Following the failure of Portugal, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkmenistan to submit their national implementation reports for the 2014 reporting cycle by the deadlines set by the Meeting of the Parties, these Parties were invited to submit their reports by 1 October 2014. As of 15 February 2016, only the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has not yet submitted its report for the 2014 reporting cycle; however, in the meantime, that Party has submitted its national implementation report for the 2011 reporting cycle.¹⁵

III. Promotional activities

A. Awareness-raising and promotion of the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

29. The secretariat has participated in conferences, seminars, workshops and other events in various countries to promote and raise awareness about the Convention and its Protocol at the international level. The secretariat took part in a meeting of experts convened by the Access Initiative and the World Resources Institute to discuss and refine a draft set of indicators, to be known as the Aarhus Index, to test the legal transposition and practical implementation of the Aarhus Convention (Dublin, 13–14 July 2015). Other meetings and events at which promotional and awareness-raising activities were carried out include a meeting with the representatives of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (Geneva, 8 September 2015) and a presentation on the Convention at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (Geneva, 30 October 2015).

30. The secretariat provided input regarding the Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs to the Sixth Global Environment Outlook Regional Assessment report for the European region, prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and ECE with the support of the European Environment Agency and in close collaboration with partner institutions and individual experts.

31. The secretariat also provided input regarding the Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs to the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes for

¹⁵ For more information, see the synthesis report on the status of implementation of the Convention, available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/mop5_docs.html (“category II” documents).

his annual report to the Human Rights Council on the right to access information throughout the life cycle of hazardous substances and wastes. Furthermore, the Aarhus secretariat took part in the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur organized within the framework of the thirtieth session of the Human Right Council (Geneva, 16 September 2015) and a panel discussion at the side event “Right to information on hazardous substances and wastes” (Geneva, 18 September 2015), raising awareness about both the Convention and the Protocol.¹⁶

32. The ECE Executive Secretary promoted the Convention and its Protocol together with other ECE instruments at the fourth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (Geneva, 28 September–2 October 2015).¹⁷

33. The secretariat further promoted the Convention and its Protocol at a side event on the margins of the chemicals management conference on “Occupational exposures: Experiences on advancing a more sustainable management of chemicals” (Geneva, 30 September 2015). At that event the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes also highlighted the importance of access to information for workers.

34. In addition to the English version, the printed Chinese-language¹⁸ version of the *Aarhus Convention: An Implementation Guide*¹⁹ was made available in 2014. The final text version of the Russian translation has also been made available online. The French version of the Implementation Guide is currently being translated. The promotional brochure “Protecting your environment: The power is in your hands”, addressing the general public interested in the Aarhus Convention and its provisions, was published in Arabic. After the finalization of the Chinese version, this brochure will be available in all six official languages of the United Nations.²⁰

35. The secretariat also promoted the Convention and the Protocol through various reports and articles prepared under the auspices of ECE and partner organizations. In addition, the secretariat continued an enhanced outreach exercise, distributing materials about the Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs to national focal points, Aarhus Centres, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions in the ECE region.

B. Promotion of the Almaty Guidelines and other interlinkages with relevant international bodies and processes

36. In connection with work programme items on implementing the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums (Almaty Guidelines), the nineteenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties in June 2015 featured a thematic session on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention

¹⁶ More information can be found from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/ToxicWastes/Pages/Righttoinformation.aspx>.

¹⁷ More information is available from http://www.saicm.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=534&Itemid=696.

¹⁸ The Chinese translation was provided within the framework of the European Union-China Environmental Governance Project.

¹⁹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.II.E.3. The Implementation Guide is available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/implementation_guide.html.

²⁰ The brochure is also available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/publications/the_power_is_in_your_hands.html.

in international forums.²¹ The session focused primarily on the promotion of public participation in the lead-up to and during the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Paris, 30 November–11 December 2015). In addition, participants considered stakeholder engagement in the UNEP processes. Other issues for discussion included the promotion of the universal application of the Aarhus Convention's principles in international trade negotiations, as well as the promotion of the principles of the Convention through developing, implementing and monitoring implementation of the future Sustainable Development Goals.

37. During the reporting period the secretariat continued supporting efforts to promote the principles of the Convention in various international forums, working with other United Nations bodies, in particular, UNEP, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme; other environmental treaty bodies, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; and other international organizations, inter alia, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, OECD, OSCE and the World Bank,

38. The secretariat participated in the 2015 International Financial Institutions' Working Group meeting on information disclosure and stakeholder engagement (Luxembourg, 29 October 2015) in order to promote awareness among those institutions of the Aarhus Convention's contributions to international law on good environmental governance, and in particular the concrete Aarhus Convention products that could be of assistance in their operations.

39. The secretariat also participated in the European Union enlargement and integration action workshop "Public participation and transparency in the implementation of energy policies" (Belgrade, 25–26 February 2016) in order to promote awareness of the Aarhus Convention's requirements regarding public participation in energy-related areas, the role of Aarhus Convention task forces and concrete Aarhus Convention products that could assist officials in ensuring effective public participation in energy-related areas.

40. In accordance with paragraph 7 (b) of decision V/4, and at the request of the UNFCCC secretariat, the Aarhus secretariat provided expert advisory assistance to the UNFCCC secretariat with respect to observer engagement at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris. The secretariat also took part in the consultation processes regarding the UNEP access-to-information policy and the World Bank's proposed new environmental and social framework. Requests by international forums for advisory support from the Aarhus secretariat are noticeably increasing, though it is not always able to respond fully due to its limited capacity.

41. The secretariat also provided input on promoting the principles of the Convention in international forums for the round table "Climate change and response strategies in the context of sustainable development of the Republic of Belarus" (Minsk, 24 April 2015), which looked at the country's contribution to the preparations for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris.

42. Also in an advisory capacity, the secretariat continued to support ongoing initiatives to implement principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, namely: (a) the Advisory Group on International Environmental Governance for the project on the promotion of the Guidelines for the Development of National Legislation on Access to Information, Public Participation

²¹ Meeting documents and other information on the meeting are available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/wgp19#/>. Additional information regarding public participation in international forums is available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ppif.html>.

and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Bali Guidelines), led by UNEP; and (b) the “Access for All” initiative, launched at the Eye on Earth Summit in December 2011 and led by the World Resources Institute, which seeks to provide a platform for global promotion of Principle 10. In addition, the secretariat provides ongoing advice to various professional, academic or non-governmental institutions and associations upon request.

43. The secretariat has provided ongoing advisory support upon request to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and designated focal points for the initiative on a possible regional convention on access rights in Latin America and the Caribbean.

44. In the light of the ongoing discussion by Parties to the ECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) to strengthen that Convention’s public participation provisions, the Aarhus Convention secretariat has been closely cooperating with the Industrial Accidents Convention secretariat in its work on this issue.

45. The secretariat also provided an ongoing substantive support to the preparations for the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

C. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities

46. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities during the reporting period was mainly conducted by the governing body and its subsidiary bodies during regular meetings of those bodies.

47. At its nineteenth meeting the Working Group of the Parties reviewed implementation of the current work programme and discussed a number of items, including progress achieved in promoting access to information, public participation and access to justice. The Bureau held its thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh meetings in Geneva, on 19 June 2015 and on 25 and 26 February 2016, respectively.

48. Representatives of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements continued to liaise at informal meetings to exchange information on priorities under the agreements and to identify and discuss possible areas of cooperation and synergy in the light of recent and future key developments in the area of the environment. At the most recent meetings in Geneva, on 13 April and 26 October 2015, the secretariat and the Chairs of the governing bodies of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol all participated.²² Activities under the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs were presented at the twenty-first session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, 27–30 October 2015) by the Chairs of the two governing bodies.

49. During the reporting period the status of the Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs with regard to accession, ratification or approval has remained unchanged: as of 29 February 2016, the Convention has 47 Parties and the Protocol on PRTRs has 33 Parties. After the ratification of Georgia, the GMO amendment to the Aarhus Convention now has 29 Parties. The parliament of Ukraine approved the law on the ratification of the Protocol on PRTRs. Ukraine will become the thirty-fourth Party to the Protocol when the law enters into force on the ninetieth day after it deposits its instrument of ratification

²² Chair’s summaries of the meetings, which include a list of participants, are available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/informal-networks.html>.