Aarhus Convention

19th Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (WGP 19)
(Geneva, 17-19 June 2015)

Agenda item 7(b): Future funding of the Convention

Draft estimation of the operational costs needed for the effective functioning of the Convention

- Contribution by the EU and its Member States -

agreed through informal silence procedure on 11 June 2015

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the Bureau and the secretariat for the Draft estimation of the operational costs (hereafter – Draft estimation) needed for the effective functioning of the Convention, which is a useful starting point on which further work can proceed.

The Draft estimation is a constructive text which can help us to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, predictability and budget discipline of the Convention. In this respect, we wish to make the following substantive comments on the Draft estimation:

1. The overall position of the EU and its Member States on the work programme for 2015-2017 remains unchanged with regard to the activities under the Convention as adopted by the Fifth Meeting of the Parties in Maastricht, the Netherlands, in 2014.

2. We support that an indicative allocation of the resources for the planned activities under the Convention and their subsequent costs, which are subject to annual review, are put forward for further discussion within the Working Group of the Parties. We would like to draw attention to the challenge of how to make the best possible allocation of existing funds to match actual operational costs. This would require allowing the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau some extent of flexibility with a view to ensure a balanced and full implementation of the approved work programme.

3. We would like to encourage further discussion with regard to the operational costs identified for each of the activities under the Convention’s current work programme. Nevertheless, some clarification from the Secretariat is needed as regards the breakdown of operational costs and other costs. This also applies to the methodology used for cost estimation. In the meantime, we would point out that in view of progressive budgetary constraints on the Parties, we intend to maintain close cooperation with the secretariat and the Bureau. The aim is to develop new approaches
towards what should be achieved under the Convention, whilst taking into account the actual funds available.

4. With regard to the forthcoming work programme for the next term (2018-2020) and the budget thereof, we would like to point out that the objective of Paragraph 10 of the 2014 Decision V/7 on financial arrangements is to ensure that, when preparing the draft work programme and budget for the next financial term (2018-2020), there should be a clear match between the activities and costs foreseen in the work programme and the financial resources that are estimated to be available to implement it, irrespective of the applicable financial scheme for contributions.

5. To this end, we have identified the following types of costs and activities that should be considered when preparing the work programme for 2018-2020:

   (i) Operational costs of activities which are required by the Convention (i.e. "operational costs needed" in terms of decision V/7). These only concern those mandatory costs required in the Convention, such as meetings of Parties (Article 10) and relevant secretariat staff costs (Article 12).

   (ii) Costs which are not mandatory (i.e., not required by the Convention) and which are, thus, "subject to the availability of resources" in terms of decision V/7. These costs may be further divided into at least two sub-categories:

      (a) Costs of those “core activities” which are not mandatory under the Convention but which have been agreed by the Parties in the light of available funds. These costs may cover the meetings of subsidiary bodies; task forces; the clearing house mechanism; staff costs related to these activities; possible consultancy fees; etc. Although these costs are not mandatory, they would also be included, together with the mandatory costs, in the "core budget" for implementation of the work programme, providing that they can be covered by available resources.

      (b) Costs of activities which may be supported by one or several Parties, in their capacity as donors and in accordance with their own policy priorities. Such activities could comprise technical assistance and capacity building activities and could be set out in a separate technical assistance programme. This would be covered by contributions to a separate trust fund (e.g. "technical assistance trust fund"). A separate trust fund or the same one as for the technical assistance could also cover possible financial support for the participation of countries with economies in transition at the Meetings of the Parties and, in some cases, at the meetings of subsidiary bodies. These costs should not be included in the work programme under "core budget".

6. We note that the projected costs associated with the compliance mechanism are considerably higher than for the other activities. The EU and its Member States realise that the high costs are also related to the high volume of cases processed by the Compliance Committee. In this respect we welcome the steps taken by the Committee in accordance with the Decision V/9 to ensure due process for Parties and
communicants in respect of communications from the public. We encourage the reduction of some of these costs by, e.g., making better use of the available audio and video-conferencing technology.

7. The EU and its Member States submit that we need an early identification of the various types of costs. This will allow the Parties to hold an informed discussion on which core activities should be included in the budget of the next work programme. Therefore we request the secretariat to examine, in consultation with the Bureau, the different types of costs with a view to the preparation of a “core budget” to be agreed by the Parties for the implementation of the work programme for 2018-2020. The issues to be examined should include the number, duration and venue of the meetings of the Convention’s bodies as well as adequate representation of the Parties at the meetings.

8. With regard to Decision V/6 on the work programme for 2015-2017 as adopted in Maastricht, the Netherlands, on 30 June and 1 July 2014 and its fourth paragraph, we would draw attention to the encouragement given to every Party under the Convention to make financial contributions, possibly not earmarked, to the Convention’s Trust Fund for the timely and effective implementation of the work programme. This will facilitate the timely and effective implementation of priority activities of the work programme for 2015-2017.

9. The EU and its Member States express their concern regarding the expected discontinuation, as of 2016, of funding of one administrative staff member by the 13% programme support costs, levied from the trust funds of the ECE Environment Division. We request written clarification from the responsible United Nations body on this matter.

10. Furthermore, and without prejudice to the current funding scheme of the Convention, this work should be carried out also considering the respective efforts of the UNECE Secretariat for all the UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), as explained in the document on "Secretariats to ECE multilateral environmental agreements — the way forward". This initiative aims to improve the link between, on the one hand, activities to be undertaken and costs to be covered and, on the other hand, funds available in predictable budgets.

11. With a view to acquiring a common understanding on what could be achieved under the Convention when budgets are particularly limited, the EU and its Member States are ready to work with other Parties in order to assist the Bureau and the secretariat in taking this matter forward. The aim is to draft an effective and sound work programme for 2018-2020 to be adopted by the next Meeting of the Parties. The EU and its Member States are also ready to work with others with the aim to find together concrete solutions.