WORKSHOP ON ELECTRONIC INFORMATION TOOLS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AARHUS CONVENTION IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

November 25-26, 2010
Skopje, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Organised by

The secretariat of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)

in cooperation with

the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe

INFORMATION NOTE

I. Objectives

1. The aim of the workshop is to foster the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the subregion by promoting the use of Electronic Information Tools (EIT) in the subregion of South-Eastern Europe (SEE). It will bring together public officials (policy makers and IT specialists) as well as the non-governmental organisations (NGO) community in order to learn about the most up-to-date applications and good practice examples of using e-tools and to exchange experiences.

2. The objectives of the workshop are to:

(a) Build capacities on the use of EIT when implementing Aarhus Convention requirements, for those authorities responsible of
   a. providing access to environmental information,
   b. issuing permits and licenses that affect the environment and are therefore subject to public participation procedures,
   c. adopting environmental plans, programmes and policies, and
   d. providing access to justice in environmental issues.

(b) Promote the implementation of existing good practices and recommendations.
(c) Facilitate the exchange of experiences.
(d) Provide responses to specific and practical implementation questions, and
(e) Train participants or offer expertise on how to use and contribute to the Aarhus Clearinghouse mechanism.

3. The Workshop is targeted at the SEE subregion. However, experts from national and local authorities and non-governmental organizations from other UNECE Member States may also
participate. It is expected that relevant authorities with political and technical responsibilities, as well as representatives of civil society and EIT experts from participating countries would share information, learn from each other and discuss solutions to existing deficiencies in relation to use of EIT.

II. Background

4. Recognizing the importance of developing electronic information tools for a better implementation of the Aarhus Convention obligations, the Parties at their third meeting (11–13 June 2008, Riga), encouraged countries to use the full potential of information and communications technology (ICT) as a means to significantly improve the involvement of the public in environmental decision-making. The Aarhus Convention Work programme for 2009-2011 (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add. 17) foresees under activity V, organizing workshops and activities for implementing recommendations on the more effective use of EIT and facilitating information flow on good practices.

5. Following previously organized subregional and thematic workshops, it was decided to hold the following EIT Workshop in SEE as this subregion lags behind as regards the development and use of EIT in the implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

6. The workshop is organised in cooperation of the Ministry of Environmental and Physical Planning of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (hereafter referred to as REC). The REC prepared the survey “Collection of innovative and good practice approaches in the use of electronic tools to implement the Aarhus Convention” identifies and analyses existing good practices in the field of e-information, e-participation and e-justice. (See at: http://archive.rec.org/REC/Programs/PublicParticipation/cases_collection).

7. The findings of the survey will be used as a valuable background information source for the Workshop. Carefully selected cases/mechanisms will be presented by their creators, and therefore the existing information could reach and be helpful to those authorities and NGO representatives who wish to explore the opportunities offered by electronic information technologies, and also for those who are interested in gathering information and experiences in order to set up similar systems.

III. Provisional programme

8. Using an interactive format of presentations, debates, discussions and hands-on trainings, the workshop is expected to provide a comprehensive guidance to new technological challenges and available interactive devices to foster the implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

9. The Workshop will consist of the following sessions:
   - **Session 1 – Setting the scene**
     i. Presentation on general benefits to use E-Tools to foster access to information, public participation and access to justice: practical examples under different pillars, including PRTR example
   - **Session 2 – Access to information**
     i. How to establish the flow of information under the institutional framework to feed the website
ii. How to create metainfo systems in order to help people requesting information
iii. Tips to create a website that is regularly and easily updated
iv. How to create persona-led infosystems
v. Tools to allow easy and low cost management of contents
vi. How to deal with e-information requests when there are legal procedures for ordinary written procedures; i.e.: register of e-requests

- **Session 3 – Public participation**
  i. How to set up national e-participation platforms in order to hold electronic dialogues between authorities and citizens,
  ii. How to combined e-participation and social networking platforms.
  iii. What to bear in mind when an e-participation takes place.
  iv. How to combine the e-procedure with the ordinary procedure: challenges and positive aspects.
  v. How to provide capacity building to users and civil servants
  vi. How to make sure that everyone entitle to participate can have e-access to the procedure
  vii. How to make the participation procedure user-friendly
  viii. How to take into account outcomes of the e-participation procedure and how to better inform about decision/s made by the authority responsible

- **Session 4 – Access to justice**
  i. Free online jurisprudence data basis and benefits for accessing access to justice
  ii. Examples of how to keep the public informed on their Aarhus rights
  iii. Examples of how administrative decisions are also made available on line to providing the public and promoters knowledge on how responsible authorities deal with issuing permissions, licenses or authorisations

- **Session 5 – Pollutant Releases and Transfer Registers systems**
- **Session 6 – Hands on training on Aarhus Clearinghouse mechanism**
  i. Working practical session on the Aarhus Clearinghouse and the national nodes: how to use the Aarhus Clearinghouse to seek information and how to become a national node and publish information on the Clearinghouse.

A more detailed programme will be provided on due time.

IV. **Background documentation and workshop outputs**

The background material for the workshop will be made available on the UNECE website: [http://www.unece.org/env/pp/electronictools.htm](http://www.unece.org/env/pp/electronictools.htm). Participants are welcomed to make available at the workshop other relevant material.

10. After the Workshop the following outputs will be provided:

   (a) Handouts of cases presented during the workshop.
   (b) Guidance on how to contribute to the Aarhus Clearinghouse.
   (c) A summary report with main conclusions.

V. **Practical information**
1. **Working hours, languages of the meeting**

11. The Workshop will start at 9.30 a.m. on 25th of November 2010 and end at 4.00 pm on 26 of November 2010. The Workshop will be conducted in English.

12. Lunches and refreshments during short breaks at the morning and afternoon sessions will be provided free of charge for participants. A reception dinner will be also organised for all participants.

2. **Necessary equipment**

14. Participants are required to take with them their personal laptops as part of the workshop is organised as a hands-on training with the computer.

2. **Meeting venue – (NEW meeting venue!)**

15. The workshop will take place in Skopje at the Hotel Tim’s “Orce Nikolov” 120 Skopje. Tel. + 389 2 3237 650.

3. **Registration**

16. Each participant should complete a registration form (see annex) and send it to the REC (e-mail: ktingas@rec.org) as soon as possible, but not later than 12.11.2010.

4. **Financial assistance**

17. Limited funds are available to assist participants from countries in SEE, whose work has a direct relevance to the activity, as follows: (a) experts from the authorities from countries with economies in transition, (b) NGO experts.

18. Financial support covers the travel costs, accommodation and meal and is available for two governmental experts per each eligible country. Priority will be given to: (a) ICT policy making experts (b) IT technical experts.

19. Requests for financial support should be indicated in the registration form and sent to the REC, Ms. Kaidi Tingas (e-mail: ktingas@rec.org), before 12.11.2010. Procedure of financial support will be communicated directly to the eligible participants.

5. **Travel to Skopje**

20. We expect participants whose travel is funded by UNECE to travel to Skopje as follows:
   a. Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia by plane.
   b. Participants from Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia by car or bus.

21. Please book your air travel by using your own travel agent. In case you need help please turn for assistance to Ms. Kaidi Tingas (e-mail: ktingas@rec.org).

Local transport to the hotel
22. The host country is planning to provide a shuttle service for participants from airports to hotels and from hotels to the workshop venue. More detailed information regarding the shuttle service will be sent to participants by e-mail at a later stage.

6. Accommodation

23. The organizers will make block hotel booking. At this regard, further detailed information will be sent to participants at a later stage.

24. All participants shall settle their bills directly with the management of the hotel, including any additional charges (laundry, room service, bar bills, telephone calls etc.).

7. Visas

25. Visa is not required to enter into the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

8. Currency and money

26. The currency is the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is Denar (MKD). Up-to-date exchange rates are available at http://coinmill.com/MKD_calculator.html

If needed you can buy local currency at exchange desks in the airport. Currency exchange is also available at automatic teller machines (with a credit card) and at exchange offices.

9. Insurance

27. Please make sure that you have adequate individual health, accident and travel risk insurance cover, they will not be covered by the organisers.

10. Further information and contacts

28. Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Kaidi Tingas, phone: +36 26 4504 000, mob. phone: +36 203 682 430, e-mail: ktingas@rec.org

29. Up-to-date information, the registration form and relevant material will be made available on the following website in due course: http://www.unece.org/env/pp/electronictools.htm