

**THIRTY-FIFTH MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE MEETING  
OF THE PARTIES TO THE  
CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PUBLIC  
PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCESS TO  
JUSTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (AARHUS  
CONVENTION)**

3 March 2015, Geneva

**REPORT OF THE MEETING<sup>1</sup>**

**ATTENDANCE**

*Bureau members:* Ms. Maia Bitadze (Georgia, Chair), Mr. Lukas Pokorny (Czech Republic, Vice-Chair; participated through audiolink), Ms. Beate Berglund Ekeberg (Norway, Vice-Chair), Mr. Philip Ramet (France), Mr. Edwin Koning (Netherlands), Ms. Gordana Petkovic (Serbia).

*Observers:* Mr. Jeremy Wates (NGO observer, European Environmental Bureau representing European ECO Forum).

*Apologies:* Adrian Panciuc (Republic of Moldova).

**I. OPENING AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

1. Ms. Berglund Ekeberg, Vice-Chair, opened the meeting, welcomed the new members of the Bureau and outlined the main objectives of the meeting, namely: (a) election of the new Chair, following the resignation of Ms Nino Sharashidze (Georgia); (b) review of the implementation of the current work programme and future planned activities; (c) financial matters and (d) preparation of the 19th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.
2. The secretariat introduced its staff and provided information regarding the human resources situation.
3. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the Vice-Chair and the secretariat and adopted the provisional agenda for the meeting.

**II. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR**

4. Pursuant to the nomination by the Government of Georgia and in accordance with Rule 22 (para. 7) of the Rules of Procedure, the Bureau elected Ms. Maia Bitadze as new Chair of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, to replace Ms Nino Sharashidze.

**III. STATUS OF RATIFICATION OF THE CONVENTION, ITS  
PROTOCOL AND THE AMENDMENT**

5. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat regarding the status of ratification of the Convention, its Protocol on PRTRs and the amendment<sup>2</sup>.
6. The Chair informed the Bureau that Georgia is expected to complete the ratification of the GMO amendment by the end of 2015.
7. Mr. Ramet informed the Bureau that the process of ratification of the GMO amendment by France is ongoing and that it has been delayed due to national parliamentary procedures.
8. Ms. Petkovic, informed the Bureau that national laws regarding GMOs are currently under review in Serbia in order to be brought in line with EU regulations. She further informed the

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<sup>1</sup> This document was not formally edited.

<sup>2</sup> Information available online at <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ratification.html>

Bureau that the checklist prepared by the secretariat in collaboration with the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, is currently being used as guidance for future ratification of the GMO amendment.

9. The secretariat provided information regarding the obstacles that Parties are facing in their efforts to ratify the GMO amendment. It underlined that for most countries with economies in transition the major challenges are lack of expertise and technical capacity.

10. The Bureau expressed its concern over the failure of Parties to ratify timely the GMO amendment. In this regard it requested the secretariat to send a letter to the Ministers of Environment of those countries whose ratification counts towards entry into force of the GMO amendment, namely Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, France, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Ukraine. In addition, the Bureau agreed that bilateral assistance should be offered to countries with economies in transition in order to develop the necessary capacities that will facilitate ratification of the GMO amendment.

#### **IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORK PROGRAMMES FOR 2012-2014 AND 2015-2017, INCLUDING FINANCIAL MATTERS**

11. The Bureau took note of the reports prepared by the secretariat regarding the implementation of the work programmes for 2012-2014 and 2015-2017, including on contributions and expenditures, and requested the secretariat to update them, as required, and submit them to the upcoming meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to be held in June 2015.

12. The Bureau discussed the recent judgement of the European Court of Justice of 13 January 2015 regarding the appeal cases of Council of the European Union and European Commission v Stichting Natuur en Milieu and Pesticide Action Network Europe and Council of the European Union and Others v Vereniging Milieudefensie and Stichting Stop Luchtverontreiniging Utrecht. It noted the importance of the issue and recognised that it might require Parties' attention at the upcoming meetings of the Task Force on Access to Justice and the Working Group of the Parties to be held in June 2015.

13. The Bureau took note of the information provided by Ms. Berglund Ekeberg, Vice-Chair, with regard to the fifth informal meeting between representatives of the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and the Committee on Environmental Policy, held on 27 October 2014 in Geneva<sup>3</sup>. The Bureau recognized the importance of promoting synergies with activities under other programmes and multilateral environmental agreements and noted at the same time that this work would require dedication of more staff resources. The Bureau also agreed to suggest to other Chairs that an NGO observer should participate in these informal meetings.

#### **V. FUTURE FUNDING OF THE CONVENTION**

14. Pursuant to decision V/7 on financial arrangements adopted by Parties at their fifth session, the Bureau agreed on a draft proposal on estimation of operational costs needed for the effective functioning of the Convention and requested the secretariat to proceed with its editing and submission to Working Group of the Parties.

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<sup>3</sup> Chair's summary of the fifth informal meeting of the Chairs/Vice-Chairs of the UNECE MEAs and Committee on Environmental Policy held on 27 October 2014, available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/informal-networks.html>

15. The Bureau took note of the document and of the information provided by the secretariat regarding a proposal by senior management of ECE on the future funding of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements.

16. The secretariat informed the Bureau that, as of 2016, funding of one administrative staff member by the 13% programme support costs, levied from the trust funds of the ECE Environment Division, will be discontinued. Bureau expressed its strong concern in this regard.

#### **VI. AGENDA OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE PARTIES**

17. The Bureau agreed on the provisional agenda of the nineteenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (17-19 June 2015) and requested the secretariat to finalise it for submission to the Working Group of the Parties.

#### **VII. PROMOTION OF THE CONVENTION AND ITS PRINCIPLES**

18. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat and other participants regarding the promotion of the Convention and its principles in other regions and in international fora.

#### **VIII. CALENDAR OF THE FUTURE MEETINGS**

19. The Bureau took note of the tentative calendar of meetings scheduled until the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

#### **IX. OTHER BUSINESS**

20. The Bureau took note of the following documents submitted by the European Union and its Member States for the Bureau's consideration:

(a) Contribution by the EU and its Member States to the draft protocol for processing communications pending determination of preliminary admissibility and recommended format for communications by the Compliance Committee;

(b) Proposals for amendments by the EU and its Member States to the draft protocol for processing communications pending determination of preliminary admissibility;

(c) Proposals for amendments by the EU and its Member States to the recommended format for communications.

21. The Bureau agreed that it will be more appropriate for the Compliance Committee to review the suggested comments and respond to the EU and its Member States accordingly.

22. The Bureau agreed to tentatively schedule its next meeting on 19 June 2015 in Geneva, back-to-back with the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

#### **X. CLOSING**

23. The Chair thanked the Bureau for constructive work and the secretariat for its support, and closed the meeting.