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It's just happened ...

Environmental rights treaty body pushes forward environmental democracy agenda

The 2nd meeting of Parties to the Aarhus Convention* was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 25-27 May. In his message to the meeting, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan highlighted the way in which the Convention's principles 'empowered citizens to hold governments accountable and to play a greater role in promoting more sustainable forms of development.' He welcomed the active participation of civil society organizations in the Aarhus processes, stating that their involvement would ensure that the Convention remains a living, evolving instrument." The Meeting adopted decisions aimed at breathing new life into the global environmental democracy movement. Among its key outcomes were:

- Adoption of an amendment to the Convention extending the rights of the public to participate in decision-making on genetically modified organisms (GMOs).
- Adoption of Guidelines on how Parties should apply the principles of the Aarhus Convention in other international environment-related forums.
- The Meeting reviewed the first set of national reports on implementation to see whether and how the goals of the Convention are applied in practice.

* *Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters*



*Chairperson Aitkul Samakova,
Minister of Environmental
Protection of Kazakhstan, and
UNECE Executive Secretary
Brigita Schmögnerová*

■ In the first test of the Convention's compliance mechanism, the findings of its Compliance Committee that three countries -- Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Kazakhstan -- had failed to comply with certain provisions of the Convention were upheld by the Parties.

■ Adoption of recommendations on electronic information tools to increase public access to environmental information.

■ Parties pledged their support for the drawing up of appropriate regional instruments on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in other regions, as well as extending an invitation to States outside the UNECE region to accede to the Convention.

The high-level session opened with a panel on "Successes, failures and lessons learned: key challenges in implementing the Convention". Participants debated ways to overcome political, institutional and

cultural barriers to the successful application of the Convention and the role of civil society in promoting its implementation.

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Trade Committee

The Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development held its 9th session on 23-27 May, including an open Executive Forum on "After Fifteen Years of Market Reforms in Transition Economies: New Challenges and Perspectives for the Industrial Sector". While significant progress has been made towards a market economy, the costs have been high and the region is still suffering from depressed output levels, deep pockets of poverty and a decline in socio-economic well-being. The region also faces the challenge of increased competition from a number of low-wage, technologically advanced countries. Thus it is crucial to exploit the window of

opportunity that has opened to the countries of the region in order to:

- Promote a diversification of the economy by investing in the training and infrastructure that are needed to promote a knowledge-based economy;
- Retain and consolidate existing competitive advantage in specific sectors;
- Undertake policy actions to support the potential of small and medium-sized enterprises, which constitute more than 90% of the industrial sector in many of the countries.

Not an official record - For information only

The Committee also organized a policy segment on «Trade Facilitation in the WTO Context» in which participants highlighted the important role that UN/CEFACT standards could play in the current WTO negotiations, especially as regards Articles V,

VIII and X of the GATT 1994 which contain provisions on goods in transit, fees and formalities for imports and exports, and transparency issues.

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Exports of chamomile leaves or licorice root – a future source of income for poor rural areas in Armenia?



Medicinal plants are not a frequent theme for UNECE meetings, but on 19-21 May some 35 Armenian and Georgian growers, traders and experts gathered in Yerevan for a 3-day workshop on collection, cultivation and marketing of such products. The workshop was the conclusion of a UNECE project following up on a recommendation

in a 2000 Environmental Performance Review of Armenia.

The countries of South Caucasus have a very rich flora including many important medicinal plants. While it is important to avoid damaging the biodiversity of the mountain range, the flora could still be a basis for sustainable income in poor rural areas. Cultivation of medicinal plants is an option that does not threaten biodiversity. Some producers already successfully deliver products to the West, but in small quantities. The workshop could lead to new agreements and a development of medicinal plant production in Armenia and

Georgia. The old traditions in the region to make tea of dried wild plants are an opportunity for marketing.

One obvious difficulty is the long transport distances to markets in the West. Representatives of Italian and German companies and other experts from the West made presentations on how foreign markets could be accessed, and during a field day they met with Armenian producers. The experts stressed the importance of having the different chains in the production under control to ensure quality. The application of Good Agricultural Practice and organic certification of the collection and production of plant material are other important tools for getting market access.

The workshop was arranged in collaboration with the NGO EcoGlobe, the Ministry of Agriculture of Armenia and UNDP Yerevan. The Italian Government and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation provided the funding.

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Coming up soon ...

- 31 May-3 June Working Party on Pollution and Energy
- 1 June Meeting on the Belgrade Assessment Report
- 2-3 June Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

Facts and figures:

Consumer price index, total
Selected South-East Europe and CIS countries
(Year-on-year change, per cent)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2004				2005 Q1
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
South-East Europe									
Albania	3.1	5.3	2.5	2.8	3.9	2.8	2.5	2.1	2.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.8	0.9	0.2	-0.4	0.9	-0.5	-1.1	-1.1	0.9
Bulgaria	7.4	5.8	2.3	6.1	6.4	6.7	6.6	4.7	3.8
Croatia	3.7	1.7	1.8	2.1	1.8	2.3	1.9	2.3	3.0
Romania	34.5	22.5	15.4	11.9	13.6	12.3	11.8	9.9	8.8
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	5.2	2.3	1.1	-0.6	1.9	-0.5	-1.6	-2.3	-2.5
Turkey	54.0	45.5	25.0	10.7	14.0	9.6	9.2	9.9	8.9
Serbia and Montenegro	90.4	19.3	9.6	10.4	8.2	9.7	11.5	12.2	15.3
CIS									
Armenia	3.2	1.0	4.7	6.9	7.8	7.3	8.3	4.2	4.3
Azerbaijan	1.5	2.8	2.1	6.7	5.5	6.3	5.2	9.7	13.2
Belarus	61.4	42.8	28.5	18.3	22.4	19.7	17.0	14.6	12.4
Georgia	4.6	5.7	4.9	5.6	5.9	4.8	5.4	6.3	9.4
Kazakhstan	8.5	6.0	6.6	7.1	6.7	6.9	7.6	7.2	7.2
Kyrgyzstan	6.9	2.1	3.1	4.1	5.3	2.9	5.6	2.6	3.1
Republic of Moldova	9.8	5.3	11.7	12.5	14.6	13.0	11.1	11.6	13.1
Russian Federation	21.6	16.0	13.6	11.0	10.8	10.3	11.1	11.6	12.9
Tajikistan	38.6	12.2	16.3	7.2	8.5	5.7	8.6	6.0	6.0
Ukraine	12.0	0.8	5.2	9.0	7.4	7.4	9.6	11.8	13.5

Source: UNECE Statistical Database, compiled from Eurostat, OECD and national sources.

Note: Annual rates show changes, over the previous year, of annual averages of monthly fixed-base consumer price indices.

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