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POUR L'EUROPEЕВРОПЕЙСКАЯ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ  
КОМИССИЯECONOMIC 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

**Task Force on Access to Information**

**Fourth meeting**

Geneva, 8-10 December 2015

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**Approval of the key outcomes of the meeting**

**Key outcomes<sup>1</sup>**

As agreed by the Task Force on Access to Information at its fourth meeting

**1. Opening and adoption of the agenda**

1. The Task Force adopted its agenda for the meeting as set out in document AC/TF.AI-4/Inf.1.

**2. Environmental information: improving public access**

(a) Scope of environmental information and its provision by different public authorities

2. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experience, lessons learned and challenges shared by the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes and speakers from the Netherlands, Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information of Ireland, European Investment Bank and European ECO Forum;

(b) Highlighted the importance of capacity building and other measures that could assist different public authorities, especially at the local level, to make environmental information publicly accessible in a transparent and effective way and encouraged Parties and stakeholders to exchange information about such measures;

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

(c) Encouraged Parties and stakeholders to take further steps and strengthen cooperation for advancing public access to information relating to the quality of the environment and emissions into the environment, hazardous substances and wastes, decision-making in environmental matters and environment-related product information as identified by the speakers.

(b) Quality of environmental information

3. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experience, lessons learned and challenges shared by the speakers from the United Kingdom and NGO “Green Dossier”;

(b) Noted the positive role of open data initiatives and social media in improving the quality of environmental information;

(c) Reiterated the importance of practical measures ensuring public access to up to date, accurate and comparable environmental information and suggested that release of such information through the internet should be accompanied, as appropriate, by information on data source, date of its production or update, information on production and verification methodology, validation methods and interpretation data.

(c) Associate costs

4. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the experience, lessons learned and challenges shared by the speaker from the Republic of Moldova;

(b) Encouraged Parties to continue their efforts, as appropriate, to remove any financial barriers in public access to environmental information;

(c) Invited Parties and stakeholders to address the issue of charges for supplying environmental information upon request in their capacity building and awareness raising activities for different public authorities dealing with the public access to environmental information.

### **3. The application of certain restrictions on access to environmental information in accordance with the Convention’s provisions**

5. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the positive developments, lessons learned and challenges shared by the speakers from Albania, Denmark, European Union, Italy, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, European Investment Bank, Transparency International, Justice and the Environment, Catalan Circle for Business, European Chemical Industry Council, EuropaBio, OECD Nuclear Energy Agency and Leuphana University and by Bulgaria in the written statement;

(b) Welcomed the initiatives of the Parties and stakeholders to widen open access to environmental information;

(c) Highlighted the importance of clear and predictable legal framework to ensure the legitimate application of the restrictions in public access to environmental information;

- (d) Reiterated the importance of maximum disclosure of information on emissions from all sources and of the exchange of practice on the interpretation of the scope of such information;
- (e) Reiterated that each request related to the exempted information should be considered on a case-by-case basis exploring the option of separating out the remainder of the environmental information without prejudice to the confidentiality in accordance with article 4, paragraph 6, of the Convention;
- (f) Reiterated the importance of capacity building and other practical measures on the legitimate application of the restrictions under the Convention;
- (g) Invited Parties to provide more detailed information on the implementation of Convention's article 4, paragraph 4, through national implementation reports of the next reporting cycle, including with regard to the scope of information on emissions into the environment.

#### **4. Effective dissemination of environmental information**

##### 6. The Task Force:

- (a) Took note of the innovative practices, lessons learned and challenges as highlighted by the speakers from Austria, Belarus, Slovakia, European Environment Agency and Coastal and Marine Union;
- (b) Welcomed further steps taken by the Parties and stakeholders in advancing e-Government, Open Data and other similar initiatives and recognized the benefits of exchanging of experience on this matter;
- (c) Took note of the information on the upgrade of the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy;
- (d) Strongly encouraged Parties to introduce Rich Site Summary (RSS) or other Application Programming Interface (APIs) feeds for news or other resources of the national nodes that are compatible with the requirements of the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy as to enable harvesting these resources for the Clearinghouse;
- (e) Took note of the revised questionnaire to monitor the progress in the implementation of the Recommendations of the Meeting of the Parties on electronic information tools (Decision II/3) (AC/TF.AI-4/Inf.3) and agreed to provide final comments by 10 January 2016;
- (f) Requested the secretariat in consultation with the Chair to update as necessary and circulate the questionnaire to collect the updated information and to report at the fifth meeting of the Task Force on the results of the survey;
- (g) Encouraged Parties to take part in the survey to monitor the progress in the implementation of the Recommendations of the Meeting of the Parties on electronic information tools (Decision II/3).

## **5. Priority areas for action on emerging and systemic issues**

### 7. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the information on emerging and systemic issues as provided by speakers from Armenia, Austria, European Union and the UNECE Statistical and Environment Divisions;

(b) Noted that furthering public access to environmental information would contribute to implementation of a number of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and targets and invited Parties to promote widely the relevance of implementation of the first pillar of the Convention to achieving SDGs;

(c) Took note of the information with respect to preparations for the Eighth EfE Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016) and, in this regard, stressed the importance of ensuring the public online access to up-to-date air quality data and to environmental information in the context of green economy;

(d) Stressed the importance of the involvement of national statistical offices in the work under the Convention and effective cooperation between different public authorities dealing with access to environmental information and call for effective engagement of non-governmental organizations, Aarhus Centres and other stakeholders in such cooperation.

## **6. Activities under other international forums**

### 8. The Task Force:

(a) Took note of the information provided by the representatives of the GEO (Group on Earth Observations), OECD Nuclear Energy Agency and UNECE Transport, Health and Environment pan-European programme secretariats and welcomed their efforts to widen public access to environmental information;

(b) Called upon national focal points of different international forums dealing with access to environmental information and promoting use of electronic information tools to facilitate information sharing and effective cooperation at the national level.

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