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

Compliance Committee

Fifty-eighth meeting

Budva, Montenegro, 10–13 September 2017

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

Communications from members of the public

Findings and recommendations with regard to communication ACCC/C/2013/92 concerning compliance by Germany

Adopted by the Compliance Committee on 18 June 2017*

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	2
II. Summary of facts, evidence and issues	3
A. Legal framework.....	3
B. Facts.....	5
C. Domestic remedies.....	8
D. Substantive issues	8
III. Consideration and evaluation by the Committee.....	13
IV. Conclusions	17

* This document was submitted late owing to additional time required for its finalization.

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I. Introduction

1. On 24 June 2013, a member of the public, Ms. Brigitte Artmann (the communicant), submitted a communication to the Compliance Committee under the Convention on Access to Information Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) alleging the failure of Germany to comply with its obligations under articles 1, 3, 4 and 6 of the Convention with respect to the opportunities provided to the public in Germany to participate in a transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure concerning the proposed construction of two third generation nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point C.¹
2. At its forty-second meeting (Geneva, 24–27 September 2013), the Committee determined on a preliminary basis that the communication was admissible.
3. Pursuant to paragraph 22 of the annex to decision I/7 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, the communication was forwarded to the Party concerned on 17 December 2013.
4. The Party concerned provided its response to the allegations on 15 May 2014.
5. The Committee held a hearing to discuss the substance of the communication at its forty-sixth meeting (Geneva, 22–25 September 2014), with the participation of representatives of the communicant and the Party concerned. At the same meeting, the Committee confirmed the admissibility of the communication. During the discussion, the Committee put a number of questions to both the communicant and the Party concerned and invited them to respond in writing after the meeting.
6. The communicant and the Party concerned submitted their replies to the Committee's questions on 4 December 2014 and 27 January 2015, respectively. On 14 February 2015, the communicant provided comments on the reply by the Party concerned to the Committee's questions, and on 5 March 2015 the Party concerned commented on the communicant's comments.
7. The Committee agreed its draft findings at its virtual meeting on 13 September 2016, completing the draft through its electronic decision-making procedure on 18 November 2016. In accordance with paragraph 34 of the annex to decision I/7, the draft findings were then forwarded for comments to the Party concerned and the communicant on 18 November 2016. Both were invited to provide comments by 16 November 2016.
8. On 21 November 2016, the Party concerned requested an extension to provide its comments on the draft findings. By email of 25 November 2016, the Committee granted both parties an extension until 20 January 2017. The communicant provided her comments on 24 November 2016 and the Party concerned on 20 January 2017. On 25 January 2017, the communicant provided some additional comments regarding the comments of the Party concerned.
9. On 9 May 2017, the Party concerned provided some additional information. On 18 May 2017, the communicant provided comments on the additional information provided by the Party concerned.

¹ Documents concerning this communication, including correspondence between the Committee, the communicant and the Party concerned, are available on a dedicated page of the Committee's website (<http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/aarhus-convention/tfwg/envppcc/envppcccom/acccc201392-germany.html>).

10. After taking into account the parties' comments on the draft findings and the additional information provided by the Party concerned and communicant on 9 and 18 May 2017, respectively, the Committee prepared revised draft findings and completed them through its electronic decision-making procedure on 2 June 2017. In accordance with paragraph 34 of the annex to decision I/7, the revised draft findings were then forwarded on that date to the Party concerned and the communicant for their comments by 13 June 2017.

11. The communicant and the Party concerned provided comments on 12 and 13 June, respectively. On 16 June 2017, the communicant provided some additional comments regarding the comments of the Party concerned.

12. After taking into account the comments received, the Committee proceeded to finalize its findings in closed session. It made some minor amendments in the light of the comments received and agreed that no other changes to its findings were necessary. The Committee then adopted its findings through its electronic decision-making procedure on 18 June 2017 and agreed that they should be published as an official pre-session document for its fifty-eighth meeting. It requested the secretariat to send the findings to the Party concerned and the communicant.

II. Summary of facts, evidence and issues²

A. Legal framework

International and European Union legal framework

13. The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention)³ and the European Union Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (EIA Directive)⁴ govern the conduct of transboundary environmental impact assessments for the Party concerned.

14. Article 3, paragraph 1, of the Espoo Convention provides:

For a proposed activity listed in Appendix I that is likely to cause a significant adverse transboundary impact, the Party of origin shall, for the purposes of ensuring adequate and effective consultations under Article 5, notify any Party which it considers may be an affected Party as early as possible and no later than when informing its own public about that proposed activity.

15. Article 3, paragraph 7, of the Espoo Convention addresses the rights of a potentially affected Party when no notification has taken place:

When a Party considers that it would be affected by a significant adverse transboundary impact of a proposed activity listed in Appendix I, and when no notification has taken place in accordance with paragraph 1 of this Article, the concerned Parties shall, at the request of the affected Party, exchange sufficient information for the purposes of holding discussions on whether there is likely to be a

² This section summarizes only the main facts, evidence and issues considered to be relevant to the question of compliance, as presented to and considered by the Committee.

³ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1989, No. 34028. Available from http://www.unece.org/env/eia/about/eia_text.html.

⁴ Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, O.J. (L 26), pp. 1–21, as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014, O.J. (L 124), pp. 1–18.

significant adverse transboundary impact. If those Parties agree that there is likely to be a significant adverse transboundary impact, the provisions of this Convention shall apply accordingly. If those Parties cannot agree whether there is likely to be a significant adverse transboundary impact, any such Party may submit that question to an inquiry commission in accordance with the provisions of Appendix IV to advise on the likelihood of significant adverse transboundary impact, unless they agree on another method of settling this question.

16. Article 2, paragraph 6, and article 3, paragraph 8, of the Espoo Convention address public participation in the transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure. Article 2, paragraph 6, states that:

The Party of origin shall provide, in accordance with the provisions of this Convention, an opportunity to the public in the areas likely to be affected to participate in relevant environmental impact assessment procedures regarding proposed activities and shall ensure that the opportunity provided to the public of the affected Party is equivalent to that provided to the public of the Party of origin.

- Article 3, paragraph 8, states that:

The concerned Parties shall ensure that the public of the affected Party in the areas likely to be affected be informed of, and be provided with possibilities for making comments or objections on, the proposed activity, and for the transmittal of these comments or objections to the competent authority of the Party of origin, either directly to this authority or, where appropriate, through the Party of origin.

17. A similar approach is taken in article 7 of the EIA Directive, which provides:

1. Where a Member State is aware that a project is likely to have significant effects on the environment in another Member State or where a Member State likely to be significantly affected so requests, the Member State in whose territory the project is intended to be carried out shall send to the affected Member State as soon as possible and no later than when informing its own public, *inter alia*:

- (a) A description of the project, together with any available information on its possible transboundary impact;
- (b) Information on the nature of the decision which may be taken.

The Member State in whose territory the project is intended to be carried out shall give the other Member State a reasonable time in which to indicate whether it wishes to participate in the environmental decision-making procedures referred to in Article 2(2), and may include the information referred to in paragraph 2 of this Article.

2. If a Member State which receives information pursuant to paragraph 1 indicates that it intends to participate in the environmental decision-making procedures referred to in Article 2(2), the Member State in whose territory the project is intended to be carried out shall, if it has not already done so, send to the affected Member State the information required to be given pursuant to Article 6(2) and made available pursuant to points (a) and (b) of Article 6(3).

3. The Member States concerned, each insofar as it is concerned, shall also:

- (a) Arrange for the information referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2 to be made available, within a reasonable time, to the authorities referred to in Article 6 (1) and the public concerned in the territory of the Member State likely to be significantly affected; and

(b) Ensure that the authorities referred to in Article 6(1) and the public concerned are given an opportunity, before development consent for the project is granted, to forward their opinion within a reasonable time on the information supplied to the competent authority in the Member State in whose territory the project is intended to be carried out.

4. The Member States concerned shall enter into consultations regarding, *inter alia*, the potential transboundary effects of the project and the measures envisaged to reduce or eliminate such effects and shall agree on a reasonable time- frame for the duration of the consultation period.

Such consultations may be conducted through an appropriate joint body.

5. The detailed arrangements for implementing paragraphs 1 to 4 of this Article, including the establishment of time-frames for consultations, shall be determined by the Member States concerned, on the basis of the arrangements and time-frames referred to in Article 6(5) to (7), and shall be such as to enable the public concerned in the territory of the affected Member State to participate effectively in the environmental decision-making procedures referred to in Article 2(2) for the project.

18. Article 37 of the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community⁵ (Euratom Treaty) states that every member of the European Union is required to inform the European Commission of plans to dispose of radioactive substances.

National legal framework

19. In the Party concerned, the above international and European Union requirements are implemented through the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (EIA Act). Section 9 (b) of the EIA Act addresses the participation of the Party concerned in transboundary environmental impact assessments for foreign projects. In the case of a transboundary environmental impact assessment, the responsible German authority, after receiving notification, evaluates whether the participation of Germany in the approval procedure in the Party of origin is necessary. The German authority may request an environmental impact assessment procedure if Germany, as a Party potentially affected by a project in another country, was not previously involved.⁶

B. Facts

20. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland plans to build and operate two new nuclear reactors of the European Pressurized Reactors type at Hinkley Point, a coastal headland in Somerset, south-west England, and the location of an existing nuclear power plant. The project to build the new reactors is known as Hinkley Point C. The two new reactors are to be built and operated by NNB Generation Company Limited.

21. The United Kingdom conducted an assessment as to whether the project required a transboundary environmental impact assessment in accordance with the Espoo Convention and article 7 of the EIA Directive. On 11 April 2011, the United Kingdom concluded that the “proposed development is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment in another [European Economic Area] State”.⁷ Prior to taking the decision to approve the construction, the United Kingdom authorities carried out a national-level environmental

⁵ Consolidated version, O.J. (C 327), pp. 1-107.

⁶ Party’s response to communication, pp. 8-9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, annex 1, pp. 5-6.

impact assessment, but in line with the above assessment no transboundary environmental impact assessment process was carried out.

22. On 9 August 2011, in accordance with article 37 of the Euratom Treaty, the United Kingdom submitted to the European Commission “general data” relating to the plan for the disposal of radioactive waste arising from the two reactors proposed for Hinkley Point C. On 3 February 2012, the European Commission issued its opinion under article 37 of the Euratom Treaty.⁸ It concluded that the implementation of the plan for the disposal of radioactive waste was not liable to result in a radioactive contamination of the water, soil or airspace of another member State that would be significant from the point of view of health.

23. In letters of 8 October and 16 November 2012, the United Kingdom granted Austria the opportunity to comment on the proposed activity.⁹ The opportunity was granted following a request from the Austrian Government under the Espoo Convention after the national environmental impact assessment process in the United Kingdom had been completed. The letter of the United Kingdom to Austria of 16 November 2012 stated, *inter alia*:

Under the Planning Act, we expect to be reaching a decision on development consent in relation to the Hinkley Point C project within three months of receiving a report from the Planning Inspectorate on EDF’s application on or before 21 December 2012. I would be grateful if you could bear that timetable in mind in directing any comments Austria wishes to make.¹⁰

24. As a result of the request of Austria under the Espoo Convention, the public in Austria was given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making on the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant until 5 March 2013.¹¹ This was after the national environmental impact assessment process had been completed by the United Kingdom.

25. In February 2013, the public in Germany was informed by members of the public in Austria of the existence of the environmental impact assessment procedure for Hinkley Point C.

26. On 21 February 2013, the letters of 8 October and 16 November 2012 from the United Kingdom to Austria were made available to the Party concerned at the latter’s request, following a question by a member of the German parliament to the German Government during parliamentary question time regarding nuclear projects in other countries, including Hinkley Point C.

27. On 25 February 2013, a petition was sent by the communicant and other members of the public in Germany jointly by email to the NNB Generation Company Limited and the European Commission Directorate-General for Environment, protesting against the proposed construction of the two new reactors at Hinkley Point C and requesting to participate in the environmental impact assessment process on the basis of the Aarhus and Espoo Conventions and the EIA Directive.

⁸ Commission opinion of 3 February 2012 relating to the plan for the disposal of radioactive waste arising from the two EPR reactors on the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, located in Somerset, United Kingdom, O.J. (C 33), pp. 1-2. See Party’s response to communication, annex 4.

⁹ Party’s response to communication, annexes 2 and 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, annex 3.

¹¹ Response of United Kingdom to communication ACCC/C/2013/91 concerning its compliance, para. 28. Available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/aarhus-convention/tfwg/envppcc/envppcccom/acccc201391-united-kingdom.html>.

28. On 28 February 2013, the communicant sent an email to the Federal Minister for Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety of Germany (Federal Minister for Environment) requesting that the public of the Party concerned be given the opportunity to participate in an environmental impact assessment on Hinkley Point C. The communicant's email, inter alia, stated:

Hereby I demand public participating on EIA Hinkley Point C.

I want you hereby, as representative of the public ... demand quickly initiate an EIA procedure in Germany!

Germany would have had to be notified to this EIA process. If Britain did not do this by itself, so the [Ministry] should have urged

Formally, the public can be given an opportunity to express an opinion, because formally the matter is not quite finished: Austria has — AFTER the EIA process in the [United Kingdom] has actually already come to an end last year — got a kind of “after-period”.

It is in the German Government's responsibility to demand a transboundary EIA procedure.¹²

29. The communicant enclosed the petition referred to in paragraph 27 above to her email.

30. On 19 March 2013, the decision approving the proposed construction of Hinkley Point C was taken.

31. On 27 March 2013, the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (German Environment Ministry) replied to the communicant's letter of 28 February 2013, refusing the communicant's request that Germany initiate a transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure on the basis that both the United Kingdom and the European Commission had concluded that the Hinkley Point C project would have no serious impact on neighbouring States. The German Environment Ministry's reply in particular informed the communicant that the European Commission, in its opinion under the Euratom Treaty (see para. 22 above), had concluded that, both in normal operation and in the event of an accident, the plan for the disposal of radioactive waste from the two reactors at the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant was not liable to result in a radioactive contamination of the water, soil or airspace of another member State that would be significant from the point of view of health. The German Environment Ministry's reply concluded by stating that Germany saw no reason to doubt the United Kingdom and the European Commission's evaluations.

32. On 10 April 2013, the European Commission informed the communicant and others that their petition of 25 February 2013 (see para. 27 above) had been registered as a formal complaint.

33. On 24 April 2013, the communicant wrote to the European Commission claiming that, by failing to ensure opportunities for the public in Germany to participate in the decision-making on Hinkley Point C, the United Kingdom and Germany had violated the Aarhus and Espoo Conventions and the EIA Directive.

34. On 31 May 2013, the European Commission wrote to the communicant to inform her that it saw no grounds on which to open an infringement action against the United

¹² Communication, annex 2.

Kingdom and Germany as she had requested and that it therefore proposed to close her complaint.

35. At its twenty-eighth session (Geneva, 10–12 September 2013), the Implementation Committee under the Espoo Convention (Espoo Implementation Committee) began its consideration of information provided by a German Member of Parliament and Friends of the Irish Environment, an Irish non-governmental organization, regarding the planned construction of Hinkley Point C by the United Kingdom. The Espoo Implementation Committee considered, among other issues, whether or not a notification of other Parties to the Espoo Convention, including Germany, was required with regard to the project. In its findings adopted at its thirty-fifth session (Geneva, 15–17 March 2016), the Espoo Implementation Committee found that:

The characteristics of the activity and its location warrant the conclusion that a significant adverse transboundary impact cannot be excluded in case of a major accident, an accident beyond design basis or a disaster. The Committee also finds that, as a consequence of its conclusion concerning the likely significant adverse transboundary impact, the United Kingdom is in non-compliance with its obligations under article 2, paragraph 4, and article 3, paragraph 1, of the Convention.¹³

36. On 21 December 2016, following the recommendations of the Espoo Implementation Committee, the United Kingdom wrote to the Party concerned seeking its opinion whether notification was still useful at the current stage of the development of Hinkley Point C.

37. By letter of 9 March 2017, the Party concerned replied to the United Kingdom, noting the interest of the German public in nuclear plants in the vicinity of Germany and stating that it considered that notification under the Espoo Convention would still be useful at the current stage of the development of Hinkley Point C in order to provide an opportunity for the authorities and the public of other Parties to the Convention to comment on the project.

C. Domestic remedies

38. No domestic remedies were used by the communicant.¹⁴ She did, however, complain to the European Commission on 24 April 2013. This complaint was dismissed by letter of 31 May 2013 (see paras. 33 and 34 above).

D. Substantive issues

39. The communicant alleges that the Party concerned failed to identify the public in Germany as being among the public concerned and therefore did not provide it with opportunities to participate in a transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure concerning the proposed construction of two nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point C. For these reasons, the communicant alleges that the Party concerned fails to comply with articles 1, 3, 4 and 6 of the Convention.

¹³ ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2016/2, annex, para. 66.

¹⁴ Communication, p. 2.

Admissibility

40. The Party concerned submits the communication should be considered to be inadmissible. The Party concerned asserts that it has not violated any of its obligations resulting from the Aarhus Convention. The matter deals with a decision-making process that did not take place in Germany and in which German authorities were not to make any decisions concerning the approval of the proposed activity. The Party concerned did not influence or limit the participation of the German public in the participation procedure in the United Kingdom in any way.¹⁵

41. The Party concerned submits that, to the extent that the core issue is whether the German authorities should have requested the United Kingdom to carry out a transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure, only the provisions of the Espoo Convention are relevant to that decision. In this regard, the Espoo Convention, as the dedicated convention on transboundary environmental impact assessment, takes precedence over the Aarhus Convention. It submits that, for the decision in question, the Espoo Implementation Committee was thus responsible.

42. The Party concerned submits that, in the light of the above, the communication should be found inadmissible on the grounds of being manifestly unreasonable under paragraph 20 of the annex to decision I/7.

Article 1

43. The communicant alleges that the lack of inclusion of the public of Germany in the decision-making on Hinkley Point C infringes article 1 of the Convention.¹⁶

44. The Party concerned refutes the communicant's allegations. It submits that article 1 lays out the basic goals of the Convention and that a right to the implementation of public participation in a specific case cannot be derived in isolation from this provision.¹⁷

Article 3, paragraph 1

45. The communicant alleges that the Party concerned is in breach of article 3, paragraph 1, of the Convention by failing to take the "necessary measures" and "proper enforcement measures" required by that provision.

46. The Party concerned refutes the communicant's allegations. It asserts that it has implemented the requirements of the Convention in its national law and applies them.¹⁸ In support of its allegations, the Party refers the Committee to its national implementation report submitted to the secretariat of the Convention in December 2013.

Article 3, paragraph 2

47. The communicant alleges that the Party concerned is in breach of article 3, paragraph 2, of the Convention for failing to "facilitate participation" as required by that provision.

48. The Party concerned refutes the communicant's allegations. The Party concerned submits that the request of the communicant was mainly that the Party concerned should have requested a transboundary environmental impact assessment under the Espoo

¹⁵ Party's response to communication, p. 6.

¹⁶ Communication, p. 3.

¹⁷ Party's response to communication, p. 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

Convention, and thus was at best indirectly a question of the right to participation in the sense of the Aarhus Convention.¹⁹

49. The Party concerned submits, moreover, that article 3, paragraph 2, could only apply if its competent authorities had failed to provide any support or guidance at all to the public, in particular to the communicant, in the current case. It states that it did, however, respond to the complainant's letter of 28 February 2013 and provide guidance, and that its response was also clear and comprehensible, providing adequate support and guidance, and more could not be required of its authorities.²⁰

50. The Party concerned states that, after the legally incontestable decision not to submit a request under the Espoo Convention had been made, it was not possible for the Party concerned to give more support than that provided in its letter of 27 March 2013. It submits that its obligation under article 3, paragraph 2, of the Aarhus Convention to "endeavour to ensure" support and provide guidance was not violated.²¹

Article 3, paragraph 9

51. The communicant alleges that the public in Germany was not identified by the relevant authorities of the United Kingdom and the Party concerned as being among the public concerned in the case of a "beyond design base accident" and was therefore discriminated against.²² For these reasons, the communicant alleges that the Party concerned fails to comply with article 3, paragraph 9, of the Convention.

52. The Party concerned refutes the communicant's allegations. It states that the process of public participation took place in the United Kingdom. The fact that the public in Austria was involved in addition to the public of the United Kingdom was due to a separate request for participation by Austria. As Germany did not request it, the Party considers that it cannot be accountable for it in any way.²³

Article 4, paragraph 7

53. The communicant alleges that the relevant ministry of the United Kingdom should have told the public and the natural persons who signed the submission lists, in written form, why their submissions were refused. For these reasons it alleges a violation of article 4, paragraph 7.²⁴

54. The Party concerned refutes the communicant's allegations. First, it questions whether this allegation is also directed against Germany, as the communication does not make that clear.

55. Moreover, the Party concerned submits that in the letter sent to the Federal Minister for Environment on 28 February 2013, the communicant did not request access to environmental information available to Germany, as provided for by article 4. The Party concerned asserts that the communicant only requested the Federal Government to ensure that the United Kingdom conduct a transboundary environmental impact assessment in which the German public could be involved and the German Environment Ministry responded to this request on 27 March 2013.²⁵ The Party concerned submits no potential

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Communication, p. 5.

²³ Party's response to communication, p. 14.

²⁴ Communication, p. 4

²⁵ Party's response to communication, p. 14.

violation of article 4, paragraph 7, of the Convention has been presented by the communicant.

Article 6

56. The communicant alleges that the Party concerned did not provide the public concerned in Germany with opportunities to participate in a transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure. For this reason, it alleges that the Party fails to comply with article 6, paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7, of the Convention.

57. The Party concerned submits, as a preliminary point, that there can be no violation of the Aarhus Convention by failure to demand a transboundary environmental impact assessment process. The Party concerned considers that if neither the Party of origin nor the potentially affected Party deem that a specific case requires the implementation of a transboundary environmental impact assessment, this is an inter-State process governed by the Espoo Convention and there is no ground to apply the provisions of the Aarhus Convention to this inter-State process.²⁶ If a specific case requires the implementation of a transboundary environmental impact assessment under the Espoo Convention, then both the Espoo Convention and the procedural guarantees of the Aarhus Convention apply. However, if neither the Party of origin nor the potentially affected Party deem that a specific case requires the implementation of a transboundary environmental impact assessment, there are no grounds to apply the provisions of the Aarhus Convention to this inter-State process governed by the Espoo Convention.

58. In support of its allegations, the Party concerned refers to *The Aarhus Convention: An Implementation Guide*²⁷ (Aarhus Convention Implementation Guide) and the Committee's findings on communication ACCC/C/2008/24 concerning Spain in which the Committee found that the decision by a contracting Party for or against the necessity of an environmental impact assessment cannot be considered a failure to comply with article 6 of the Convention.²⁸

Article 6, paragraph 1

59. The communicant alleges that nuclear power plants are expressly referred to in annex I to the Aarhus Convention and thus the decision-making on the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant is subject to article 6, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

60. The Party concerned refutes any allegation by the communicant that it has breached its obligations under article 6, paragraph 1. It asserts that article 6, paragraph 1, does not apply in the current case because there was no decision-making procedure in which German authorities would have had to decide on the approval of a concrete project at issue.²⁹

Article 6, paragraph 2

61. The communicant alleges that the German Environment Ministry should have requested relevant information from the United Kingdom authorities and made it available to the public concerned in Germany.³⁰ The communicant alleges that the Party concerned therefore fails to comply with article 6, paragraph 2, of the Convention.

²⁶ Party's response to communication, p. 10.

²⁷ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.II.E.3, pp. 46-47.

²⁸ Party's response to communication, p. 10, referring to ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2009/8/Add.1, para. 82.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁰ Communication, pp. 1-2.

62. The Party concerned refutes the communicant's allegations. It asserts that article 6, paragraph 2, is based on article 6, paragraph 1, and that if no decision-making procedure within the meaning of article 6, paragraph 1, is being implemented in Germany there can be no violation of article 6, paragraph 2.³¹

Article 6, paragraph 4

63. The communicant alleges that the Party concerned failed to ensure public participation when all options were open as required by article 6, paragraph 4.

64. The Party concerned refutes this allegation. The Party submits that since there was no decision-making procedure within the meaning of article 6, paragraph 1, in Germany in this case, there can be no violation of article 6, paragraph 4.³²

Article 6, paragraph 5

65. The communicant alleges that the Party concerned should have encouraged the prospective applicants (e.g., NNB Generation Company Limited and the United Kingdom Government) to identify the public concerned, including the public that might be affected in case of a "beyond design base accident". For this reason, the communicant alleges that the Party concerned fails to comply with article 6, paragraph 5, of the Convention.

66. The Party concerned refutes the communicant's allegations. It asserts that this article expressly refers to "prospective applicants" and considers that it cannot have violated this regulation because at the time of the communicant's letter of 28 February 2013 it was no longer a question of a prospective authorization procedure, rather the authorization process in the United Kingdom was already very advanced and completed shortly thereafter.³³

67. Moreover, the Party concerned submits that as there was no German decision-making process within the meaning of article 6, paragraph 1, there can be no violation of article 6, paragraph 5.³⁴

Article 6, paragraph 6

68. The communicant alleges that, by its refusal to invoke the Espoo Convention and to require a transboundary environmental impact assessment, the German authorities de facto refused access to all information relevant to the decision-making.³⁵ For these reasons, the communicant alleges that the Party concerned failed to comply with article 6, paragraph 6, of the Convention.

69. The Party concerned refutes the communicant's allegations. First, it states that German authorities had no documents to provide.³⁶ Secondly, the Party concerned submits that because there was no German decision-making process within the meaning of article 6, paragraph 1, there can be no violation of article 6, paragraph 6.³⁷

³¹ Party's response to communication, p. 16.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁵ Communication, p. 2.

³⁶ Party's response to communication, p. 17.

³⁷ Ibid.

Article 6, paragraph 7

70. The communicant alleges that, by its refusal to invoke the Espoo Convention and to require a transboundary environmental impact assessment, the German authorities blocked the possibilities for the public concerned to submit its comments, information, analyses and opinions.³⁸ For these reasons, the communicant alleges that the Party concerned fails to comply with article 6, paragraph 7, of the Convention.

71. The Party concerned refutes the communicant's allegations. First, the Party concerned notes that the communicant does not charge Germany with a direct violation of article 6, paragraph 7, but rather solely critiques the Government's failure to take advantage of its rights resulting from the Espoo Convention. The Party considers therefore that the allegation of a violation of the Aarhus Convention would be only an indirect consequence.³⁹

72. Furthermore, the Party concerned asserts that the population of a country potentially affected by the project may be entitled to participation rights under the Aarhus Convention concerning the decision-making process in the foreign country itself, regardless of the implementation of a transboundary environmental impact assessment as provided for by the Espoo Convention. The Party considers those rights are not affected by whether the potentially affected country calls for a transboundary environmental impact assessment or not.⁴⁰

III. Consideration and evaluation by the Committee

73. Germany deposited its instrument of ratification of the Convention on 15 January 2007, meaning that the Convention entered into force for Germany on 15 April 2007, i.e., 90 days after the date of deposit of the instrument of ratification.

Admissibility

74. The Party concerned submits the communication should be considered to be inadmissible for being manifestly unreasonable under paragraph 20 of the annex to decision I/7 because it deals with a decision-making process that did not take place in Germany and in which German authorities were not to make any decisions concerning the approval of the proposed activity. The Committee observes that the allegations made in the communication concern not only article 6 of the Convention but also provisions of articles 3 and 4 of the Convention. Bearing in mind the wide scope of the obligations contained in these provisions, while taking into account the view of the Party concerned in its comments on the draft findings, the Committee does not consider the communication to be manifestly unreasonable under paragraph 20 of the annex to decision I/7.

75. The Party concerned further alleges that the communicant's claims are governed by the Espoo Convention and that therefore the Espoo Convention takes precedence over the Aarhus Convention in the present case. The Committee disagrees with the Party concerned. The communicant alleges breaches of specific provisions of the Aarhus Convention, and the Committee examines only these alleged breaches — and not any alleged breaches of the Espoo Convention — in the present findings.

³⁸ Communication, p. 2.

³⁹ Party's response to communication, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Scope of considerations

76. In accordance with its practice, the Committee generally does not consider new information submitted after the completion of its draft findings unless the information is of fundamental importance to its findings. The events described in paragraphs 36 and 37 above postdate the Committee's draft findings. In this case, the Committee considers that the letter of 9 March 2017 from the Party concerned (see para. 37 above) constitutes a new development of fundamental importance and the Committee therefore takes it into account.

Article 6

77. Given that the main allegations in the communication concern article 6 of the Convention, the Committee examines compliance with that provision first. As a preliminary point, the Committee notes that a nuclear power station is an activity referred to in item 1 of annex I to the Convention and therefore the requirements of article 6 apply to the decision-making to permit the construction of the two new nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point C.

78. The next question is whether, with respect to the decision-making to permit Hinkley Point C, article 6 bestows obligations on the authorities of the Party concerned. On this point, the Committee recalls its findings on communication ACCC/C/2012/71 (Czechia) in which it stressed that "whether in a domestic or transboundary context, the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the public participation procedure complies with the requirements of article 6 lies with the competent authorities of the Party of origin".⁴¹

79. It is common ground between the Party concerned and communicant that the authorities competent to take the decision to permit the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant are those of the United Kingdom and not Germany. Furthermore, there was no transboundary procedure under the Espoo Convention or EIA Directive within which the German authorities were required to carry out tasks under the joint responsibility of the "concerned Parties" (i.e., the Party of origin and the affected Party).

80. Accordingly, the Committee finds that article 6 does not impose any obligations on the Party concerned with respect to the decision-making to permit the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant. The Committee therefore finds that the Party concerned did not fail to comply with article 6 of the Convention.

Article 1

81. With respect to the communicant's allegation that the lack of inclusion of the public in Germany on the decision-making to permit Hinkley Point C amounts to a breach of article 1 by the Party concerned, the Committee concurs with the submission by the Party concerned that a right to public participation in the decision-making to permit the specific activity of Hinkley Point C cannot be derived in isolation from article 1 of the Convention. The Committee thus finds this allegation to be unsubstantiated.

Article 3, paragraph 1

82. Regarding the communicant's allegation that the Party concerned is in breach of article 3, paragraph 1, of the Convention by failing to take the "necessary measures" and "proper enforcement measures" required by that provision, the Committee finds that the communicant has not provided sufficient evidence to substantiate her allegation.

⁴¹ ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2017/3, para. 69.

Article 3, paragraph 2

83. With respect to the communicant's allegation under article 3, paragraph 2, of the Convention, the Committee must first determine whether the obligation to "endeavour to ensure that officials assist and provide guidance to the public ... in facilitating participation in decision-making" applies also to decision-making procedures outside the Party concerned and for which authorities of the Party concerned are not competent to take decisions.

84. There is nothing in the wording of article 3, paragraph 2, or elsewhere in the Convention to imply that the obligation to "endeavour to ensure that officials assist and provide guidance to the public ... in facilitating participation in decision-making" applies only with respect to the authorities competent to take a decision under articles 6, 7 or 8 of the Convention. Likewise, there is nothing in its wording to imply that the obligation applies only with respect to decision-making procedures inside the Party concerned. Rather, it is apparent to the Committee that the provisions in article 3 contain a number of obligations (such as those in article 3, paragraphs 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8) that stand alone as well as complement the other articles of the Convention. Moreover, in the light of the eighth preambular paragraph to the Convention, which was invoked by the Party concerned in its comments of 15 April 2014, it is clear to the Committee that this obligation must be seen in the context of rights of the public under the Convention generally. In this regard, the Committee notes that the twenty-third preambular paragraph to the Aarhus Convention specifically refers to various United Nations Economic Commission for Europe instruments, including the Espoo Convention, which envisage public participation in decision-making in the transboundary context. The Committee considers that in doing so, the Convention's preamble recognizes the importance of including the public concerned across borders in relevant decision-making.⁴²

85. With respect to the claim by the Party concerned that article 3, paragraph 6, of the Convention gives precedence to the Espoo Convention,⁴³ the Committee stresses that article 3, paragraph 6, of the Convention requires that there be no derogation from existing rights of the public — not the rights of Parties under any international agreements — and it therefore cannot be interpreted as giving precedence to any right of the Party concerned under the Espoo Convention. The same facts trigger different obligations under the different domestic or international legal instruments. While indeed under the Espoo Convention it is within the discretion of the potentially affected Party to decide whether or not to reply positively to the notification and enter into the transboundary procedure, the Party is free to have domestic criteria and procedures instructing its decision in this respect. Bearing in mind the role of transboundary procedures in ensuring the participation of the public concerned on both sides of the borders in the relevant decision-making, it seems inconceivable to the Committee for the Parties to the Aarhus Convention to exclude such procedures from the ambit of the obligation to "endeavour to ensure that officials assist and provide guidance to the public ... in facilitating participation in decision-making".

86. In the light of the above, it is clear to the Committee that the obligation on the Party concerned to "endeavour to ensure that officials assist and provide guidance to the public ... in facilitating participation in decision-making" applies also to decision-making procedures outside the Party concerned where authorities of the Party concerned are not competent to take decisions.

⁴² See also Aarhus Convention Implementation Guide, p. 37.

⁴³ Party's response to communication, p. 6.

87. For the avoidance of doubt, the Committee points out that this means that both the Party of origin and the affected Party have obligations under article 3, paragraph 2, to endeavour to ensure that their officials assist and provide guidance to the public concerned of the affected Party to facilitate their participation in the relevant decision-making. Obviously, it is the obligations of the affected Party (i.e., Germany) that are the focus of the present case.

88. Article 3, paragraph 2, of the Convention requires that each Party “shall endeavour” to ensure that officials and authorities assist and provide guidance to the public in facilitating participation in decision-making. While this is an obligation of effort, rather than of the result, nevertheless the efforts taken may be subject to due diligence scrutiny. Moreover, while the obligation to “endeavour to ensure”, just like all other obligations in the Convention, is addressed to the Party concerned, the Committee may examine in specific cases whether a public authority or an official, as a representative of the Party concerned, took the efforts needed to meet the requirement of this provision.⁴⁴

89. In cases concerning ultrahazardous activities, such as nuclear power plants, it is clear to the Committee that, generally speaking, the possible adverse effects in case of an accident can reach far beyond State borders and over vast areas and regions.⁴⁵ The obligation to take efforts to ensure that officials facilitate the public’s participation in decision-making concerning these activities, being activities invariably of wide public concern, must be seen in this context.

90. While the Committee considers that the obligation in article 3, paragraph 2, of the Aarhus Convention to “endeavour to ensure that officials assist and provide guidance to the public ... in facilitating participation in decision-making” should not be interpreted as requiring a Party to necessarily always use all of the rights and competences that it has under international or national law with respect to a decision-making procedure in another country, a level of effort appropriate to the actions open to it in the particular context is required. For instance, whether or not a Party should facilitate the participation of its public, if its public so requests, by itself requesting to enter into a transboundary procedure under applicable international or European Union regimes may differ depending on whether the Party was formally notified or not.

91. In the case of a formal notification from another country, the Committee considers that when deciding whether to enter into a transboundary procedure under applicable international or European Union regimes, a mere awareness by the Party of a strong interest of its own public in the outcome of the decision-making subject to the environmental impact assessment procedure is a relevant consideration to be taken into account, even without a clear request from its public, when deciding whether to enter into the transboundary procedure in order to facilitate the participation of its public in that decision-making.

92. In the present case, the Party concerned was not notified by the United Kingdom about the decision-making for Hinkley Point C prior to the grant of development consent. Moreover, the Party concerned was requested by the communicant to initiate a transboundary procedure only at the very end of February 2013, when the domestic

⁴⁴ See, for instance, the Committee findings on communications ACCC/C/2008/23 (United Kingdom) (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2010/6/Add.1), para. 54; ACCC/C/2008/30 (Republic of Moldova) (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2009/6/Add.3), para 39; ACCC/C/2009/38 (United Kingdom) (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2011/2/Add.10), para, 68; and ACCC/C/2010/51 (Romania) (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2014/12), paras. 75-77.

⁴⁵ See Committee’s findings on communication ACCC/C/2012/71 (Czechia) (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2017/3), para. 74.

environmental impact assessment procedure in the United Kingdom had already been completed and, as further clarified in its comments on the draft findings, the Party concerned was aware, in the light of the letters provided by Austria (see paras. 23 and 26 above), that the United Kingdom had to take the decision within the ensuing three weeks.⁴⁶ While these letters were annexed to its response to the communication, it was only through the comments of the Party concerned on the draft findings that the Committee's attention was drawn to the fact that, under the United Kingdom Planning Act, the development consent indeed had to be granted by no later than 19 March 2013.

93. The Party concerned has not disputed that the interest of the German public in decision-making regarding construction of nuclear power plants, including Hinkley Point C, was well known to the German authorities. If the communicant's request of 28 February 2013 was not received so close to the date when the decision on Hinkley Point C was required to be taken under United Kingdom law, the Committee considers that, given that the Party concerned was aware (not least owing to the petition sent on 25 February 2013) of the strong interest of members of its public in the decision-making on Hinkley Point C, it would have been obliged by article 3, paragraph 2, of the Convention to at least enquire with the United Kingdom what could be done to facilitate the participation of the German public in the decision-making. If, as a result of those efforts, it ultimately became clear that nothing further to facilitate the participation of the German public could be done, the refusal by the Party concerned of Ms. Artmann's request should have clearly demonstrated that due account had been taken of her concerns and not only of the views of the authorities. Moreover, at a minimum it should have provided the links to where the relevant information and contact details concerning the national public participation procedure could be found on the United Kingdom website.

94. However, taking into account that the obligation in article 3, paragraph 2, of the Convention is to "endeavour to ensure" rather than "to ensure", and bearing in mind the factual circumstances of the case, in particular the awareness of the Party concerned that the decision on the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant was required to be taken in less than three weeks, and noting the fact that the Party concerned has subsequently informed the United Kingdom that it wishes to be notified for the purposes of a transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure under the Espoo Convention that will include the opportunity for the German public to comment on the project (see para. 37 above), the Committee does not find the Party concerned to be in non-compliance with article 3, paragraph 2, in this case.

Article 3, paragraph 9

95. The communicant alleges that the Party concerned discriminated against the public in Germany under article 3, paragraph 9, of the Convention because the public in Germany was not identified by the relevant authorities of the United Kingdom and the Party concerned as being among the public concerned in the case of a "beyond design base accident".⁴⁷ The communicant bases her allegation on the fact that, in contrast to the public in Germany, the public in Austria were entitled to participate in the decision-making on Hinkley Point C. The Committee considers that the communicant has not shown how the fact that the public concerned in Austria was entitled to participate in a decision-making procedure carried out by United Kingdom authorities can amount to discrimination by Germany. The Committee notes that the involvement of the public in Austria was due to a request from Austria to the United Kingdom. The fact that the public in Germany, as

⁴⁶ Comments by Party concerned on Committee's draft findings, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Communication, p. 5.

opposed to the public in Austria, did not therefore have the possibility to participate in the decision-making regarding Hinkley Point C, and that the German authorities, as opposed to the Austrian authorities, did not make use of their right to initiate the transboundary procedure under the Espoo Convention or otherwise, does not amount to discrimination by the German authorities against the public in Germany in favour of the public in Austria. The Committee thus finds that the Party concerned is not in non-compliance with article 3, paragraph 9, of the Convention in this case.

Article 4, paragraph 7

96. Regarding the communicant's allegation that the Party concerned breached article 4, paragraph 7, of the Convention because the United Kingdom should have told the public and the natural persons who signed the submission lists, in written form, why their submissions were refused, the Committee notes that the communicant's allegation is expressly made against the United Kingdom, which is not a party to the communication.⁴⁸ Moreover, the communicant has provided no evidence that she at any time requested the above information from the Party concerned.⁴⁹ The Committee thus finds the allegation concerning article 4, paragraph 7, of the Convention to be unsubstantiated.

IV. Conclusions

97. Taking into account that the obligation in article 3, paragraph 2, of the Convention is to "endeavour to ensure" rather than "to ensure", and bearing in mind the factual circumstances of the case, in particular the awareness of the Party concerned that the decision on the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant was required to be taken in less than three weeks, and noting the fact that the Party concerned has subsequently informed the United Kingdom that it wishes to be notified for the purposes of a transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure under the Espoo Convention that will include the opportunity for the public to comment on the project (see para. 37 above), the Committee does not find the Party concerned to be in non-compliance with article 3, paragraph 2, in this case.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.