

Fifth Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Aarhus Convention

Monday, 30 June 2014, Maastricht

Substantive Issues – Agenda Item 4d) Genetically Modified Organisms

Statement by Austria

Austria has a long history in engaging with issues of GMOs and biosafety. As some of you may know, Austria's national policy is to refrain from cultivating GMOs on its territory and we thus have detailed GMO legislation also reflecting the public opinion. This experience and knowledge, amongst others, led Austria to chairing the GMO Task Force as well as the Working Group on GMOs. These processes resulted in the development of the Lucca Guidelines in 2002 as well as of the Almaty Amendment on GMOs to the Aarhus Convention in 2005.

Due to our long-standing interest in the Convention particularly in the GMO area Austria had again the honour of chairing a joint roundtable on access to information, public participation and access to justice regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms. The roundtable took place on 16/17 October 2013 in Geneva under the auspices of the UNECE Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). As chair of the roundtable I have the honour and pleasure to briefly report the main outcomes to the MOP.

This roundtable was an event in a series of preceding events in Cologne in May 2008 as well as in Nagoya in October 2010, which had been chaired by Austria as well. The guidelines and legally binding provisions on GMOs in the framework of the Aarhus Convention as well as the successful interplay with the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety are remarkable achievements in this particularly relevant area of biosafety and public involvement and thus built the basis for the discussions at the roundtable.

The roundtable was attended by a number of Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol, as well as from intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. During the roundtable sharing of knowledge, good practices and lessons-learned on all three pillars of the Aarhus Convention (public information, public participation, access to justice) in the LMO/GMO area could be successfully accomplished. The interplay with the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and its program of work under public awareness and public participation (article 23) played a strong and inspiring role in the discussions.

The report of the roundtable contains the main conclusions calling for increased efforts from all stakeholders to raise awareness and to promote public participation concerning LMOs/GMOs. Compared to the two previous events the report of this roundtable contains recommendations for very concrete direct and practical implementation, both at the national and international level.

As a way forward at a national level *inter alia* the following recommendations were made:

- More coordination/cooperation more between Aarhus and Cartagena Focal Points
- Ratification and implementation of the GMO amendment under the Aarhus Convention
- Implementation of the Cartagena Program of Work on public awareness and public participation
- Mainstreaming issues on public information and public participation into broader processes on biodiversity, environment and sustainable development
- Collecting and disseminating raw data and testing methods for LMOs/GMOs through the Biosafety Clearing House
- Promoting access to justice (legal implementation, show available opportunities, prohibit extra costs)

As a way forward at the multilateral level *inter alia* the following recommendations were made:

- Secretariats and subsidiary bodies of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol should continue to cooperate, *inter alia* by developing
 - a checklist of key measures for ratifying and implementing the two instruments
 - a toolkit for implementation
- Encouraging bilateral assistance and capacity building
- Mainstreaming the Aarhus Convention and Art 23 of the Cartagena Protocol into process concerning biodiversity, environment and sustainable development

I would like to stress that the discussions at the roundtable were very constructive, focused and results-oriented. I would like to thank all the speakers and participants for their dedicated input to the roundtable as well as to the Aarhus Convention Secretariat for their efficient and experienced organization as well as the assistance during and after the event. It was my pleasure to work with all of you!

My personal assessment is that the roundtable has proved to be a very important milestone in the further practical development and implementation of mechanisms for the public involvement in the area of GMOs and biosafety.

Thank you, Mr./Madame Chair.