



**Statements from the delegation of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) at the 5<sup>th</sup> session 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), 30 June and 1 July 2014, Maastricht, the Netherlands**

**Agenda item 4(b) Public participation in decision-making**

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) would like to thank the host county for organising the event. We also would like to express appreciation for the work of the Task Force, the Task Force Chair and Ireland for the support of the Task Force. REC strongly supports the decision no. V/2 and recommends to use the main product of the Task Force "*Maastricht Recommendations on public participation in Environmental Decision-making*" widely by governments, NGOs and other stakeholders. This is a very useful guidance which provides practical advice on details how to implement the Articles 6, 7 and 8, as well as for the implementation of the Article 6 bis, the GMO amendment.

We also support that the scope of the decision-making when it comes to public participation should be interpreted as broad as possible, including areas, which have potentially significant environmental impacts and where the decision-making authorities are not always from the environmental field. For example the energy field, including nuclear issues and renewables, the climate change related decisions, as well as the decision-making on chemicals and emerging new technologies.

In addition to Article 6, the Article 7 and Article 8 should get more attention as they are dealing with strategic decisions and define what is happening in longer term in these areas. They also define the framework where Article 6 type decision-making is possible to be carried out.

REC offers further assistance for capacity building on public participation issues both for the authorities and NGOs. I would like to highlight some of our most recent work.

- *The Capacity Building to Put the Aarhus Convention into Action and Support the Development of PRTR Systems*" supported by the German Environmental Ministry/Environmental Agency and a parallel project funded by Finland via ENVSEC initiative had been recently finalised in South Eastern European countries. The projects aimed to improve the quality of participatory processes in environmental decision making; reduce the barriers to access to justice; and support the ratification and implementation of PRTRs. As of PP component the activities included the pilot projects where the capacities of officials responsible for public participation in environmental decision making were build and the skills and knowledge of CSOs to be meaningfully involved to the decision-making



processes were increased. The brand new public participation manual in several South Eastern European languages is available electronically on REC website.

- SIDA funded project called *SECTOR* increases the implementation capacities of environmental CSOs in Belarus and Moldova in order to encourage them to become important drivers of the community, to strengthen their role and improve their knowledge, skills, capacities, infrastructure and viability, as well as their involvement in decision-making on environmental and sustainable development issues. The project has (1) organisational viability component to build up viable and strong environmental non-governmental organisations, (2) capacity building component to increase the knowledge of CSOs on various horizontal (public participation, access to justice, lobbying, watch-dogging, etc.) and thematic (green economy, environmentally friendly consumption, etc.) issues, (3) grant component, containing topical cooperation grants between Belarus and Moldova, national and local grants in both countries and viability grants which directly invests into the organisations themselves. In addition to the mentioned activities also (4) the Green Steps educational toolkit will be published in Belarus to raise awareness about sustainable lifestyles and the positive difference that citizens can make in their everyday lives.
  
- *Promoting the participatory approaches on radioactive waste management and other nuclear related decisions* (series of European roundtables on AC and nuclear, several FP7 projects).
  
- *Environmental Protection of International River Basins Project (EPIRB)*: the REC assists with developing Stakeholder Involvement Strategies and in implementing the access to information and public participation requirements of Water Framework Directive and Aarhus Convention in pilot basins, in 6 EECCA countries.