

**JOINT HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE AARHUS CONVENTION
AND ITS PROTOCOL ON PRTR**



REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

S T A T E M E N T

**Goran Trivan
Minister of Environmental Protection**

Montenegro, Budva, 14 September 2017

Excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Republic of Serbia as a Party to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR Protocol), as well as on my own behalf, I am honored to address this meeting and especially highlight the importance of the above multilateral environmental agreements and their promotion at international, regional and national levels.

Serbia has just established a separate Ministry of Environmental Protection, thereby attaching great importance to environmental issues and addressing them at the institutional level. We believe that this is not enough. We wish to invite all the countries from our region to actively and intensely cooperate towards achieving common goals.

Joint work and synergy between multilateral environmental agreements is a significant step forward that will help to avoid duplication of effort, inefficient use of available resources and management at different levels. We recognize the considerable benefits of coordinated action and close cooperation.

National reporting on the implementation under the UNEP/UNECE multilateral environmental agreements represents an excellent instrument for monitoring the implementation of the objectives pursued.

Therefore, it is particularly important to identify indicators for monitoring sustainable development goals, report on their achievement and monitor progress itself. In this respect, Serbia recognizes the importance of taking part in the proposed project to analyse the UNECE Environmental Performance Review recommendations related to sustainable development goals and prepare national policies/action plans in this field.

The role of the Ministry of Environmental Protection is to ensure effective coordination, cooperation and communication among all relevant stakeholders, i.e. competent authorities, industries associations, civil society and the general public, with a view to reducing pollution. The industry should be made aware of the benefits of investment in cleaner production and technologies, which would considerably reduce generation of hazardous industrial waste and emission of pollutants into the environmental media.

One of the most important objectives, and a means to protect the environment, is to promote the environmental democracy, access to environmental information, public participation and access to justice. Serbia implemented numerous activities in this regard.

To strengthen civil society participation, including environmental NGOs, the Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia allocates budgetary resources for co-financing projects implemented by civil society organizations, which partly contributes to raising environmental awareness (through information, promotion activities, publishing, festivals, campaigns, environmental exhibitions, etc.), for generating more knowledge of certain topics through informal training activities (seminars, professional meetings, etc.), and finally, for the implementation of projects aimed at solving individual environmental problems.

Representatives of civil society organizations have participated in numerous conferences, meetings and workshops organized by the Ministry whereas representatives of the Ministry have joined numerous meetings and events organized by civil society organizations. Intensive cooperation

between representatives of public authorities and civil society organizations contributed to achieving environmental objectives. The establishment of five Aarhus Centres throughout Serbia was a step to ensure that the representatives of local authorities, town officials and volunteers provide the interested members of the public with advice on how to request information, facilitate citizen participation in decision-making and ensure access to justice in environmental matters.

We believe that neither a powerful nor a just country can exist without a strong civil society. In 2018, we will increase financial allocations for civil society organizations.

A key national institution for providing and coordinating access to environmental information is the Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) that established a national environmental information system and its subsystem – the National Registry of Pollution Sources (NRPS), as a registry of information and data on environment pollution sources, and also the National Metaregister for Environmental Information, i.e Ecoregister.

SEPA is one of the first organisations in Serbia initiating implementation of “open data” concept, thus creating its own open data portal providing direct access to the data on air, water and soil quality. Since 2011 Serbia has submitted data to the European PRTR register on a voluntary basis. Serbia adjusted the national reporting system so that the PRTR data could be used for reporting under the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). PRTR information system was developed in 2012 and GIS system in 2016. This made all data available to the public through Serbian Environmental Protection Agency internet portal, which is in accordance with the Aarhus Convention.

To ensure successful implementation of the third Pillar of the Aarhus Convention, numerous training activities related to legal instruments for the protection of the environment through civil and criminal law were organized for the judiciary. The activities aimed at improving the knowledge of legal practitioners, recent law graduates and environmental civil society organizations about enforcing environmental laws.

However, for raising the awareness of public and state bodies about the importance of international obligations stemming from the Aarhus Convention, adequate programs need to be implemented. Public awareness regarding the right to free access to environmental information needs to be continuously strengthened, while the programmes and activities should also focus on raising the awareness of decision makers and the public, at strengthening public participation in decision-making, at facilitating public involvement, at the exchange of public information concerning procedures for participation through simple forms of communication.

Acknowledging the fact that successful implementation of our goals will largely depend on the sources and mechanisms of financing, we believe it is necessary to secure equal access to both global, as well as regional sources of finance. Therefore, finding new and innovative funding sources, building public-private partnerships, and providing government incentives, are among the issues that remain open and that need to be addressed within the UN system.

Recognizing the importance of the issues raised during this meeting, the Republic of Serbia would like to express support for the adoption of the Budva Declaration.

Thank you.