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Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Compliance Committee

Eighth meeting

Geneva (online), 30 and 31 March 2020

Report of the Compliance Committee on its eighth meeting

Introduction

1. The eighth meeting of the Compliance Committee under the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) took place in virtual format, on 30 and 31 March 2020. All nine Committee members were present at the meeting: Mr. Merab Barbakadze (Georgia); Mr. Nicolas Encausse (France); Mr. Akos Fehervary (Hungary); Ms. Nataša Kacic-Bartulovic (Croatia); Mr. Fritz Kroiss (Austria); Mr. Juan Luis Martin Ortega (Spain) (Chair); Mr. Gor Movsisyan (Armenia) (Vice-Chair); Ms. Azemine Shakiri (North Macedonia); and Mr. Dmytro Skrylnikov (Ukraine).

I. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

2. Mr. Juan Luis Martin Ortega (Chair) opened the meeting and the Compliance Committee adopted its agenda, as set out in document ECE/MP.PRTR/C.1/2020/1.

II. Relevant developments since the previous meeting of the Committee

3. The Committee took note of the information provided by the secretariat regarding the provisional venue and dates for the fourth session of the Protocol's Meeting of the Parties, scheduled to take place in Tbilisi in the week of 18 October 2021, with the tenth meeting of the Committee planned to take place back-to-back with the fourth session of the Meeting of Parties.



III. Submissions, referrals and communications

4. The secretariat reported that there had been no submissions, referrals or communications since the Committee's seventh meeting (Geneva, 1 and 2 April 2019). The Committee took note of the information provided by the secretariat.

IV. National pollutant release and transfer registers in the European Union member States

5. The Committee considered draft findings prepared by Mr. Skrylnikov, appointed curator by the Committee at its seventh meeting to further explore the issue of whether European Union member States that were Parties to the Protocol were required thereunder to introduce their own national pollutant release and transfer registers to supplement what was done at the European Union level¹.

6. Through its deliberations, the Committee addressed a number of issues, such as which Parties were possibly concerned by the subject matter and the distribution of responsibilities and roles between them and the European Union in implementing the Protocol's provisions. The Committee also discussed issues related to compliance with and implementation of specific provisions of the Protocol in that context, including general provisions (article 3), core elements of a pollutant release and transfer register (PRTR) (article 4), design and structure (article 5), reporting cycle (article 8), public access to information (article 11) and public participation in the development of national PRTRs (article 13). Some of the issues discussed, such as the possible impact of lack of availability of PRTRs in the national language(s) on user-friendliness and accessibility of information, or Parties striving to achieve convergence among different national PRTRs, were noted as relevant across several of the above-mentioned provisions.

7. The Committee agreed that it required more information in order to further explore the issue regarding the need for European Union member States Parties to the Protocol to introduce national PRTRs. To that end, taking into consideration the related information provided by Finland in its 2017 national implementation report, the Committee agreed to send questions to Finland in order to further clarify the matter. It was agreed that the questions and the accompanying letter will be sent by the Committee's Chair on behalf of the Committee to the Party's national focal point and made available on the Committee's website.

V. Development of the Protocol

8. The secretariat reported on the outcomes of the discussions on the development of the Protocol held at the seventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2019). Parties to the Protocol had shared experiences on ongoing work on the development of PRTR systems in different countries, including with regard to the European-PRTR, the Nordic PRTR and the PRTR in Serbia. In order to improve sharing of experiences on the subject matter, the Working Group agreed to organize a survey – subsequently carried out in early 2020 – among Parties and interested stakeholders. The outcomes of the survey were currently being used by the Bureau to draw up a report aimed at summarizing those experiences for consideration by the Working Group at its eighth meeting (Geneva, 16 and 17 December 2020).

¹ See ECE/MP.PRTR/C.1/2019/2: <https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/meetings-and-events/public-participation/2019/seventh-compliance-committee-under-the-prtr-protocol/seventh-compliance-committee-under-the-prtr-protocol.html>

9. The Committee took note of the outcomes of the seventh meeting of the Protocol's Working Group of the Parties regarding the development of the Protocol.²

VI. Preparation of the synthesis report

10. The Committee considered its plans regarding preparation of the synthesis report for the 2021 reporting cycle, including preliminary timeline and distribution of tasks among the Committee's members. The plans implied, as for the preparation of the previous reports, that each member of the Committee would be responsible for preparing inputs on specific issues from the national implementation reports. The Chair would liaise with Committee members on the preparation of the individual chapters and thereafter compile them into one consolidated document, ensuring consistency throughout the text. It was expected that the Committee's work would mostly be done through email or bilateral discussions. Thereafter, there would be a meeting for the final discussion and agreement on the text. The secretariat would assist the Committee in its work.

VII. Adoption of the outcomes of the meeting

11. The Committee adopted the meeting's outcomes as presented by the Chair at the meeting and requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, to finalize the report and incorporate the adopted outcomes.

² See ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/2: <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/meetings-and-events/public-participation/2019/seventh-meeting-of-the-working-group-of-the-parties-to-the-protocol-on-prtrs/seventh-meeting-of-the-working-group-of-the-parties-to-the-protocol-on-prtrs.html>.