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

Working Group of the Parties**Twenty-fifth meeting**

Geneva, 3 May and 7 and 8 June 2021

Item 9 (k) of the provisional agenda

**Preparations for the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties:
agenda of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties****Draft provisional agenda of the seventh session of the
Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention*****Prepared by the Bureau***Summary*

The present document contains a draft outline of an agenda for the seventh 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, as well as a proposal for the organization of the work of the session. As the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention will be held back-to-back with the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, the Bureau of the Protocol was also consulted on the proposed organization of work (see section II below), prior to its consideration by the Working Group at its twenty-fourth meeting (Geneva (online), 1–3 July and Geneva (hybrid) 28 and 29 October 2020).

The present document was prepared in accordance with the work programme for 2018–2021 (see ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/5, annex I, work area XI) adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention at its sixth session (Budva, Montenegro, 11–14 September 2017).

The Working Group considered the draft elements of the provisional agenda of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2020/10) at its twenty-fourth meeting. At the October session of the twenty-fourth meeting, Georgia announced that it had to withdraw its commitment to host the session due to financial challenges linked to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This issue is reflected in chapter I of the present document. Comments received

* This document was scheduled for publication after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.



prior to and at the twenty-fourth meeting demonstrated a general support to the agenda and did not imply any substantive revisions; therefore, no other changes were introduced.

The present document is submitted to the Working Group at its twenty-fifth meeting (Geneva (online), 3 May and Geneva (hybrid) 7 and 8 June 2021) for consideration, approval and subsequent submission to the Meeting of the Parties.

The Bureau of the Protocol submitted the provisional agenda for the fourth session to the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol at its eighth meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 16 and 18 December 2020). The Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol approved the provisional agenda for the fourth session and submitted it to the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol.

I. Dates and venue

1. Pursuant to the outcomes of the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 26–28 June 2019), the seventh 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) and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers will be held back-to-back. Considering also a timeline for preparing documents, in particular, decisions on compliance matter, the events are being planned for the week of 18 October 2021. Georgia expressed preliminary interest in hosting the events. At the October session of the twenty-fourth meeting of the Working Group, Georgia announced that it had to withdraw its commitment to host the sessions due to financial challenges linked to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Bureau held consultations on the matter and agreed that, under the circumstances, the above-mentioned session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention should be held in Geneva, unless any Party would confirm its willingness to host the event. The Bureau also agreed to proceed with the preparations for the session as planned and reassess the situation in spring 2021, as needed,¹ with an eye on possible alternative ways to hold an in-person or a hybrid meeting. Comments received prior to and at the twenty-fourth meeting demonstrated general support for the agenda and did not imply any substantive revisions.

II. Organization of work

2. The proposed allocation of time for the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers and the associated meetings are set out in the table below.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Convention/Protocol body</i>
Sunday, 17 October (full day)	Convention Compliance Committee (could continue in parallel with the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, as required)
Sunday, 17 October (3–5 p.m.)	Convention Bureau
Monday, 18 October (9 a.m.–1 p.m. and 3–5.30 p.m.)	Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (preparatory segment) ^a
Tuesday, 19 October (10 a.m.–1 p.m. and 3–6 p.m.)	Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (general segment)
Wednesday, 20 October (10 a.m.–1 p.m. and 3–6 p.m.)	Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (general segment)
Thursday, 21 October (10 a.m.–1 p.m. and 3–6 p.m.)	Joint high-level segment of the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers ^b
Friday, 22 October (10 a.m.–1 p.m. and 3–6 p.m.)	Fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (general segment)

¹ See document ACF-47, Report of the Bureau on its forty-seventh meeting. Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/bureau-aarhus-convention-47th-meeting>.

^a The purpose of the preparatory segment is to finalize any pending documents that may be required. Late afternoon/evening is reserved for the finalization and translation of possible revised documents, as well as for possible coordination meetings.

^b Subject to the decision of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol, a thematic high-level segment could be organized jointly by both Meetings of the Parties. If there is no high-level segment, the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers could take place on Thursday, 21 October.

III. Substantive elements of the agenda

3. For the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, it is suggested that: (a) the agenda should, in general, be similar to the agenda of the sixth session (Budva, Montenegro, 11–14 September 2017); (b) the agenda should cover all substantive areas of work under the Convention; and (c) discussions should address good practices, achievements, lessons learned, challenges and obstacles in relation to implementing the Convention. Representatives of Governments and stakeholders could be invited to deliver keynote addresses under specific agenda items, as was done at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

4. Should Parties decide to hold a high-level segment, they may wish to consider organizing a thematic session on a subject that would both attract high-level participation and be linked to emerging issues in a global context. The focus of the session could, for example, be on the role of the Convention and its Protocol in sustainable infrastructure and spatial planning.²

5. Spatial planning and large-scale infrastructure projects have a substantial impact on the lives of thousands of people across countries and regions. Such projects create new opportunities for employment, travel and general economic growth. At the same time, they have immense influence on ecosystems and people's health and well-being. They often lead to the generation of considerable environmental pressures, for example, from greenhouse gases, wastes and other forms of pollution, and to the reshaping of green open space and agricultural land. Furthermore, they can intensively modify natural habitats and have an impact on biodiversity. These projects are commonly opposed by people concerned about their potential impact on the environment. Too often, such opposition can lead to people living under the threat of harassment or even in fear of their life. It is therefore critical to ensure that environmental and social concerns are fully considered and addressed from the outset of spatial planning and of the initial conception of a project, as well as in connection with lifetime extensions and changes to operating conditions.

6. The above-mentioned themes would allow Parties and stakeholders to touch upon a number of issues that were identified through the work of the Convention and the Protocol as being critical, namely: (a) transparency and effective and inclusive public participation in decision-making on policies and projects related to large infrastructure and spatial planning, including across borders; (b) how pollutant release and transfer registers could assist sustainable planning and health policies through, for example, the map-based visualization of registered sources of pollutant releases, which can help to identify the most suitable location for infrastructure projects, as well as the need and potential for strengthening their operating conditions, with a view to preventing or at least minimizing potential risks for the environment and health; and (c) the rule of law in this context.

7. The above-mentioned subjects are closely linked to the implementation of a number of regional and global initiatives and commitments, in particular: United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 4/5 on sustainable infrastructure (UNEP/EA.4/Res.5), which recognizes infrastructure's centrality to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 4/19 on mineral resource governance (UNEP/EA.4/Res.19), which addresses such issues as environmental, human rights- and conflict-related risks in mining; the new European Green Deal,³ which recognizes

² The Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 3–5 November 2021) will consider "sustainable infrastructure" as one of its major themes.

³ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en.

the importance of “smart infrastructure” and “zero pollution” within a circular economy; decisions taken under the auspices of the Convention on Biological Diversity calling for urgent action to, for example, secure and conserve the planet’s variety of life;⁴ and pledges regarding climate resilient infrastructure made under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Furthermore, Human Rights Council resolutions 37/8 on human rights and the environment (A/HRC/RES/37/8), 40/11 recognizing the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development (A/HRC/RES/40/11) and 42/21 on protection of the rights of workers exposed to hazardous substances and wastes (A/HRC/RES/42/21) have direct relevance to the above-mentioned subjects. Moreover, given that the vast majority of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and to the Protocol are involved in the Belt and Road Initiative,⁵ the discussions will also be highly relevant for this far-reaching infrastructure project.

8. Lastly, the subjects are applicable to the implementation of a number of Sustainable Development Goals. In addition to Goal 16, these include: Goal 3 (Good health and well-being), Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), Goal 13 (Climate action) and Goal 15 (Life on land). Furthermore, considering its continuing importance, the issue of environmental defenders would also be addressed as a separate topic. A concise (no longer than two-and-a-half pages), theme-specific joint declaration (i.e. with the Parties to the Protocol) could be developed for consideration by high-level officials at the segment.

9. Thus, the agenda of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention could include the following items:

Preparatory segment

1. Opening of the preparatory segment.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Finalization of pending documents.

General segment

4. Opening of the general segment.
5. Status of ratification of the Convention and of the amendment to the Convention.
6. Substantive issues:
 - (a) Access to information, including electronic information tools;
 - (b) Public participation in decision-making;
 - (c) Access to justice;
 - (d) Genetically modified organisms.
7. Procedures and mechanisms facilitating the implementation of the Convention:
 - (a) Reporting mechanism;
 - (b) Compliance mechanism;
 - (c) Capacity-building.
8. Promotion of the Convention and relevant developments and interlinkages:
 - (a) Accession to the Convention by States from outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region;

⁴ See www.cbd.int/nbsap/.

⁵ See www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/tag/belt-and-road-initiative/; and www.china-un.ch/eng/zywjyh/t1675564.htm.

- (b) Promotion of the Convention's principles;
 - (c) Synergies between the Convention and other relevant multilateral environmental agreements and processes;
 - (d) Global and regional developments on issues related to Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development;
 - (e) Update on United Nations Environment Programme initiatives on access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters.
- 9. Programme of work and operation of the Convention:
 - (a) Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021;
 - (b) Future work programme for 2022–2025;
 - (c) Strategic Plan for 2022–2030;
 - (d) Financial arrangements.
 - 10. Report on credentials with regard to the Parties to the Convention.
 - 11. Election of officers and other members of the Bureau.
 - 12. Date and venue of the eighth ordinary meeting.
 - 13. Any other business.

Joint High-level Segment (subject to the decision of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol)

- 1. Opening.
 - 2. Report on credentials with regard to the Parties to the Protocol.
 - 3. Thematic session.
 - 4. Discussion and adoption of the Declaration.
 - 5. Review and adoption of the Convention's decisions by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention.
 - 6. Closure of the Joint High-level Segment.
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