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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

Working Group of the Parties

Seventh meeting
Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2019

Report of the Working Group of the Parties on its seventh meeting

Contents

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I. Introduction

1. The seventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) was held on 28 and 29 November 2019 in Geneva.[1]

A. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following Parties to the Protocol: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3. Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia, signatories to the Protocol, attended the meeting.

4. Delegations from Belarus, Canada, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Morocco and Uzbekistan were also present.

5. Also in attendance were representatives of the European Environment Agency, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Mediterranean Action Plan and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

6. Representatives of Aarhus centres and professional, research and academic organizations were also present, as were representatives of international, regional and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), many of whom coordinated their input within the framework of the European ECO-Forum.

B. Organizational matters

7. Ms. Tina Skårman (Sweden), Chair of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, opened the meeting.

8. The Chair informed the Working Group that, with a view to ensuring equal opportunities for English-, French- and Russian-speaking delegations, the meeting would result in a list of decisions and outcomes that would be distributed by email to meeting participants before the close of the meeting and that would be presented verbally by the Chair for adoption, thereby allowing for interpretation. The adopted list of decisions and outcomes would be distributed to participants by email after the meeting and would be incorporated into the meeting report.

9. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the Chair and adopted the agenda for the meeting as set out in document ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/1.

II. Status of ratification of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

10. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Protocol. Since its adoption in 2003, 38 States had become signatories to the instrument and there were currently 36 Parties thereto. The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers had entered into

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[1] Documents for the meeting and other information, including a list of participants, are available online at www.unece.org/index.php?id=50979. Statements and presentations delivered at the meeting that were made available to the secretariat by delegates are also accessible from this web page.

force on 8 October 2009. Since the sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 9 November 2018), no new country had become a Party to the Protocol.[2]

11. The Working Group took note of the report by the secretariat on the status of ratification of the Protocol and encouraged signatories and other interested States to proceed with accession thereto as soon as possible.

III. Designation of national focal points

12. The secretariat presented information on the status of designation of national focal points.[3] The Working Group took note of the report and called on Parties that had not to date designated a focal point, namely, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to proceed to do so without delay.

IV. Promotion and capacity-building

A. Coordination mechanisms and synergies

13. The Chair brought to the attention of delegations the relevant sections of the Report on implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/4), specifically chapters B, on technical assistance, and E, on awareness-raising and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes.

14. The Chair informed the Working Group that the sixth meeting of the Task Force on Access to Information under the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 3 and 4 October 2019) had considered a number of issues and respectively agreed on a number of outcomes[4] that were relevant to the Protocol; in particular, it had:

(a) Called on Parties to ensure an adequate flow of information to public authorities from operators whose activities might significantly affect the environment in case of related imminent threat to human health and the environment and to encourage such operators to cooperate with the public authorities, as appropriate, to ensure that all information was disseminated immediately and without delay to members of the public who might be affected;

(b) Encouraged the use of the established emergency telephone numbers, radio emergency networks, media, including traditional media and social media, online portals and mobile applications used for the routine dissemination of environmental information to provide information to the public in case of emergencies, as appropriate, in accordance with the needs of different users;

(c) Noted that effective implementation of article 3 (8) of the Aarhus Convention was closely linked with the implementation of article 3 (3) of the Protocol on PRTRs and that they were crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 and its target 16.10;

(d) Invited Parties to take additional measures to address the challenges in collecting and sharing the data for environment-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators and to consider the use of data resulting from Earth observation and pollutant release and transfer registers for that purpose, as relevant;

(e) Called on Parties, partner organizations and stakeholders to continue building capacities and providing sufficient resource mobilization to modernizing environmental information systems and promoting their interoperability and accessibility in forms and formats meeting the needs of different users.

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[2] Information on the status of ratifications is available at www.unece.org/env/pp/ratification.html.

[3] A list of national focal points is available at www.unece.org/env/pp/nfp.html.

[4] See report of the Task Force on Access to Information on its sixth meeting (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2020/3), available at https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50574

15.   The Chair further noted that the Task Force had invited national focal points to the Aarhus Convention to liaise with national focal points to the Protocol, in order to provide consolidated comments on the draft update of the Recommendations on electronic information tools.

16.   The Working Group took note of the information provided by the Chair and encouraged national focal points to the Protocol to liaise with national focal points to the Aarhus Convention in their respective countries, so as to contribute to the comments on the Recommendations on electronic information tools being updated under the Aarhus Convention. It also called on Parties to both treaties to consider implementing the Protocol and related provisions of the Aarhus Convention in synergy.

17.   There then followed presentations from OECD, UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan and UNITAR on their PRTR-related activities and projects.

18.   A representative of OECD informed the Working Group about the progress regarding PRTRs and related OECD activities. He highlighted the three focus areas of the OECD Working Group on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers: (a) improving existing PRTRs; (b) enhancing the use of PRTR data; and (c) harmonizing PRTRs. Currently, there was also a focus on assisting countries in the use of the data generated in the context of measuring progress in achieving sustainable development at the national and global levels.

19.   The representative of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan presented developments in relation to the ongoing effort to streamline reporting on the fourth Cycle of National Baseline Budget, a legally binding obligation under article 13 of the Protocol Concerning Land-based Sources of Pollution, and on pollution loads under the Mediterranean Action Plan using PRTRs. The aim was to support the establishment and advancement of national PRTRs in Mediterranean countries. Key areas of project implementation were: the improved coordination with stakeholders and partner organizations, as well as the contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution for PRTR implementation and capacity-building; and the sharing of best practices on the National Baseline Budget and PRTRs. He further pointed to areas of interest, which included the potential role of registers as a valuable source for, for example, establishing links between PRTRs and environmental permits to assist relevant authorities.

20.   A representative of UNITAR provided the Working Group with an update of UNITAR activities since its last meeting. He informed the Group about the successful completion of the Global Environment Facility-funded Global Project on the Implementation of PRTRs as a Tool for Reporting on Persistent Organic Pollutants, Dissemination of Information and Awareness-raising, for which UNEP was the implementing agency. Under the project, PRTR reporting had been successfully tested in Belarus, Cambodia, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Peru and the Republic of Moldova, demonstrating that PRTRs could be a useful tool for supporting Governments in meeting reporting obligations under multilateral environmental agreements. A second project, entitled Strengthening Capacities for Developing a National PRTR in Support of Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management Implementation, had been completed in Mongolia in 2018. Thanks to the Quick Start Programme Trust Fund and UNITAR support, the Ministry of Environment of Mongolia had been able to conduct the first PRTR reporting trial in the country. Furthermore, UNITAR had held regional and national workshops on the use of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals Toolbox, including its PRTR scheme, in Colombia, Indonesia, Peru and Sri Lanka.

21.   The Chair of the International PRTR Coordinating Group[5] presented the Group's work and invited countries and organizations to participate in its activities. At its twelfth meeting (Paris, 15 October 2019), the Group had discussed, among other things:

        (a)   Improving leverage of the existing online PRTR-related websites under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), OECD and UNITAR;

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[5] See www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcgimages/about.html.

(b)   The scope of PRTRs in the context of new developments with regard to use of chemical substances, further harmonization of different PRTR systems and issues of data equivalence;

(c)   The recent update of the PRTR global map, including possibilities to ensure that all international PRTR-related activities were covered by the Coordinating Group, and facilitating the outreach of the Group as an international meeting point regarding such registers.

22.   The Working Group took note of the information provided by the organizations and thanked them and other partner organizations for the support provided in furthering the implementation of PRTR systems, thereby strengthening countries' capacities to accede to the Protocol on PRTRs. The Working Group further took note of the information provided by the Chair of the International PRTR Coordinating Group and invited interested Parties and stakeholders to provide comments on a draft note developed by the Group on major PRTR-related web portals.

23.   Furthermore, the Working Group called upon partner organizations and multilateral environmental agreements to cooperate closely and, where possible, to create synergies to further the implementation of PRTR-related projects. The Working Group also called on Parties, other interested countries and organizations to promote PRTRs as a reporting tool for multilateral environmental agreements dealing with chemicals and pollution and for other relevant multilateral environmental agreements. In addition, the Working Group reiterated its call for:

(a)   Governments to strengthen cooperation between experts dealing with the Protocol on PRTRs and those dealing with the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention), the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan and the UNEP chemicals conventions – namely, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Minamata Convention on Mercury – the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other relevant agreements and programmes, and also those involved in PRTR projects carried out by international organizations, so as to ensure coordination and synergy at the national level;

(b)   Parties and stakeholders to consider implementing the Protocol and the pan-European Shared Environmental Information System in synergy.

B.   Global promotion of the Protocol

24.   Turning to the topic of the global promotion of the Protocol, the Working Group welcomed the joint efforts of ECE and OECD in organizing the third Global Round Table on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Geneva, 7 and 8 November 2018) and their cooperation with UNEP and UNITAR in that regard, and took note of the report on the event (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/3).

25.   The Working Group:

(a)   Reiterated that PRTRs supported the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, Goals 3 (good health and well-being), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 9 (industry innovation and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions);

(b)   Called upon Parties, other interested States and organizations to continue the global promotion of the Protocol, including by making relevant guidance material available in all the official languages of the United Nation;

(c)   Called upon the secretariat and interested States to translate the text of the Protocol into the other official languages of the United Nations.

V. Compliance and reporting mechanism

26.   The Working Group took note of the information provided by the Chair on the status of submission of national implementation reports since the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Budva, Montenegro, 14 and 15 November 2017) and urged Malta and Slovenia to submit their national implementation reports for the 2017 reporting cycle without delay.

27.   Furthermore, the Working Group took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the preparations for the 2021 reporting cycle.

VI. Development of the Protocol

28.   The Chair introduced the item, recalling the mandate provided by the Working Group of the Parties at its previous meeting regarding preparation of the Report on the development of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/6), including a possible approach for revising annexes I, II and III (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/6/Add.1) and a comparative analysis of different international reporting obligations related to annexes I, II and III to the Protocol on PRTRs (PRTR/WG.1/2019/Inf.2). She also highlighted a number of other documents that provided related information, recommendations and possible actions.[6]

29.   To facilitate the consideration of the item, the discussion was divided into two parts: "Towards modern pollutant release and transfer register systems", with presentations by Parties of the relevant initiatives; and "Consideration of the Report on the development of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers".

A. Towards modern pollutant release and transfer register systems

30.   Delegations were invited to share recent initiatives related to article 6 (2) and other provisions of the Protocol.

31.   A representative of the European Union provided participants with an update on the European PRTR. He addressed several key issues, including: whether the European PRTR was still a comprehensive inventory for releases/transfers from large industry; whether the list of pollutants reflected current scientific knowledge; and, how the quality and comparability of PRTR data could be improved. With a view to, for example, identifying top industrial performers for best available techniques reference documents and to normalizing emission data, the European Union had further looked into the improved collection of contextual data, such as data on production volume.

32.   A representative of Sweden shared the work of the Nordic PRTR Group on values for thresholds on reporting of selected pollutants and the capacity thresholds for activities. The presented case study aimed to evaluate thresholds listed under the Protocol's annexes I and II respectively regarding the completeness of reported total pollutant releases. For the evaluation, the study used how countries implemented thresholds in different ways and also used data available for reporting to the Air Convention. The results drew a different picture for different activities and specific pollutants, also depending on local factors in the different participating countries. Based on the results, she concluded that it would seem relevant to consider revision of both capacity and pollutant thresholds for reporting under the Protocol.

33.   A representative of Serbia then presented the Serbian PRTR system, with a focus on the single window approach to industrial reporting chosen by Serbia. Providing industrial

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[6] Related documents also include the Compliance Committee documents: Synthesis report on the implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, annex I to which contains an overview of the progress in implementing the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/10); and Systemic issues concerning the implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers and recommendations on how to address them (ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/6/Add.2).

reporters with a single-entry point of data for reporting to the Government eliminated duplication of reporting and made it easier to report and manage data, reducing the effective reporting burden and costs and other resources related to reporting on pollutant releases. He highlighted that the single window approach also facilitated the implementation of important policy tools, including the "polluter pays" principle and, for example, a special waste streams tax. In addition, he elaborated on the value of efforts related to quality control and enforcement of rules and regulation, including a number of standardized fail-safe measures and the application of a distinct catalogue of fines in case of wrong or incomplete reporting.

34.   Recognizing the importance of modernizing PRTR systems, the Working Group took note of the progressive examples presented by the representatives of the European Union, Sweden and Serbia, which showcased the development of PRTRs by going beyond the minimum requirements of the Protocol. The Working Group expressed its appreciation to the presenters for sharing those valuable experiences and took note of the additional information provided by other participants. Furthermore, the Working Group recognized the usefulness of such activities in showing ways to optimize existing PRTR systems and design new PRTRs that addressed the Protocol's objective of establishing coherent and integrated PRTRs in an efficient manner.

35.   The Working Group requested the Bureau and the secretariat to explore an opportunity for organizing a similar session on developments regarding the modernization of PRTR systems at the next meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol in 2020, as feasible.

B.   Report on the development of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

36.   The Chair made introductory remarks, explaining that, in order to structure the discussion, the Working Group would be invited to consider the Report on the development of the Protocol through: (a) a substantive discussion based on its chapters I–IV and annex; and (b) a discussion on the way forward, based on the report's chapter V and addendum.

37.   Delegations provided a number of comments on the document, including on its structure, substantive aspects and possible future steps. Pursuant to the discussion, the Working Group agreed on the major outcomes summarized below:

        (a)   Taking into account the Report on the development of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/6), including the possible approach for revising annexes I, II and III (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/6/Add.1) and the Comparative analysis of different international reporting obligations related to annexes I, II and III of the Protocol on PRTRs (PRTR/WG.1/2019/Inf.2),

        (b)   Aware that some Parties are interested in information on possible approaches for Parties to develop PRTRs, going beyond the current requirements of the Protocol,

        (c)   Recalling that, pursuant to article 6 (2) of the Protocol, having assessed the experience gained from the development of national pollutant release and transfer registers and the implementation of the Protocol, and taking into account relevant international processes, the Meeting of the Parties shall review the reporting requirements under the Protocol and shall consider specified issues in its further development,

        (d)   Also recalling that, pursuant to article 20 of the Protocol, Parties may propose amendments to the Protocol and that such proposals are to be considered by the Meeting of the Parties, the Working Group:

        (i)   Decided to intensify analytical work on the development of the Protocol, including the review referred to in article 6 (2) of the Protocol and issues referred to in focal area III of the Strategic Plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/1, annex), and to set up an information exchange among Parties and interested stakeholders to further share experience gained in the Protocol's implementation, including implementation challenges and possible approaches for Parties to develop PRTRs going beyond the current requirements of the Protocol. That

analytical work will include the compilation of experiences provided by Parties and interested stakeholders. The information exchange could also cover experience gained in areas identified in paragraph 39 of the Report on the development of the Protocol on PRTRs (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/6). Furthermore, that information exchange – to be organized by the Bureau with the assistance of the secretariat, through contributions – should cover:

- Experience gained in the implementation of the activities specified in annex I to the Protocol and their possible revision,

- Experience gained in the implementation of the pollutants specified in annex II to the Protocol and their possible revision,

- Experience gained in the implementation of the thresholds in annexes I and II and their possible revision,

- A possible inclusion of other relevant aspects, such as information on on-site transfers, storage, the specification of reporting requirements for diffuse sources or the development of criteria for including pollutants under the Protocol,

(ii)   In the light of the information shared, and based on inputs from Parties and interested stakeholders, will draw up a comprehensive report with the assistance of the Bureau,

(iii)   Requested the Bureau to submit the above-mentioned report for the consideration of the Working Group at its eighth meeting, so that the Working Group can recommend to the Meeting of the Parties at its fourth session the adoption of the report as a reference document for Parties.

38.   The Working Group further took note of the:

(a)   Comments provided by the participants on the Report on the development of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers and its addendum (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/6 and Add.1) and requested interested participants to submit possible comments in writing to the secretariat, by 15 December 2019, so as to consider them for the future work on the matter;

(b)   Information provided by the secretariat on the following required editorial revision in the Report on the development of the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/6): the reference symbol for the document Comparative analysis of different international reporting obligations related to annexes I, II and III should be PRTR/WG.1/2019/Inf.2 and not PRTR/WG.1/2019/Inf.1.

VII.   Subregional and national activities: needs and challenges for capacity- building

39.   The Chair introduced the item, recalling that capacity-building remained critically important for promotion of the Protocol to countries with economies in transition and developing countries, and stressed, at the same time, that success in the Protocol's ratification and in establishing PRTRs was also very much dependent on the political will of the decision makers in the countries concerned. To facilitate consideration of the item, it was divided into two parts: presentations by countries on achievements, plans and needs in relation to PRTRs: and presentations by organizations on opportunities they could offer for capacity-building. Pursuant to introductory remarks by the Chair, the secretariat presented key relevant outcomes of previous subregional workshops, surveys and Global Round Tables on PRTRs.

A.   Presentations by countries on achievements, plans and needs

40.   A representative of Kazakhstan informed the participants about progress achieved by the country towards accession to the Protocol on PRTRs. The Draft Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Ratification of 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" had been approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 21 November 2019. The Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources was currently working on the harmonization of national legislation with the requirements of the Protocol. Implementation of a national PRTR was further supported through a UNITAR pilot project,[7] and a set of rules for maintaining the State Register of PRTR had been developed and approved. In 2018, 926 enterprises had submitted data on their pollutant releases that were publicly available on the Unified Environmental Internet resource.[8] He underlined that, given the country's experience of collaboration with other States Members of the United Nations in the framework of the Aarhus Convention, accession to the Protocol would be the logical continuation, strengthening such cooperation on a new subject. In addition, that step would demonstrate the country's readiness to contribute to solving a number of environmental problems.

41.   A representative of the Republic of Moldova shared the country's experience regarding PRTR. She recalled that the general objective regarding PRTRs was the establishment of a register with information on: environmental pollution; emissions of pollutants in air, water and soil and of diffuse sources; transfer of waste and pollutants; and the facilitation of access to information for decision makers, institutions, the private sector and the general public. Currently, the number of reporting facilities was still increasing, with 188 operators registered and reporting to the country's PRTR system in 2018. Currently, work was focused on training staff at the newly created environmental agency and efforts to increase public awareness of the PRTR information system. She further identified key challenges regarding the implementation of PRTR, namely: (a) increasing operators' knowledge of how to report and use the register; (b) improving and updating the electronic version of the register to be used as an informational tool on pollution for the general public; (c) increasing the visibility of the PRTR; and (d) improving the methodologies used for reporting.

42.   A representative of Georgia presented several of the country's positive developments relevant for PRTR, including enhancement of electronic reporting by polluters and improved public access to several areas of emissions reporting systems. For example, the country had introduced a colour code system for air quality and possible sources of air pollutant emissions. The latter had had a positive effect on the usefulness of the system for the public in making use of the data provided by the industry. Current challenges included the need to: update legislation, for example, on water and on industrial emissions; improve easy access to data; and intensify capacity-building for different user groups.

43.   A representative of North Macedonia highlighted a number of the country's achievements. Guidelines to assist reporting on emissions by industry, which also included the need for reporting below the Protocol's threshold, had been developed. In order to educate children and youth and to raise awareness and improve understanding of pollution-related issues among the general public, a "PRTR corner"[9] and a user-friendly brochure had been developed. In that regard, she highlighted the great value of study visits to Germany and Spain for the implementation of the country's PRTR. Current challenges included: limited interest in PRTR data in general; poor reporting by industry; the need for further revision of legislation; the lack of sustainable sources of funding; and insufficient professional capacity of staff in authorities and in industry. Future plans included the development of a new environmental information system that would incorporate the existing PRTR system and allow for the integration of different reporting obligations into a single reporting tool. Furthermore, on-site training sessions for staff at facilities who experienced difficulties in reporting, were planned.

44.   The representative of Morocco reported that his country had established PRTRs in a pilot area of the northern region within the framework of activities related to the implementation of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan; the general objective of which was to set up a pilot industrial emission control system to monitor the discharge of pollutants into

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[7] See http://prtr.unitar.org/site/project/1246.
[8] Available at ecogosfond.kz.
[9] Available at http://ripz.moepp.gov.mk/Content/PrtrCorner.

the Mediterranean Sea. In connection with that project, Morocco had set up two incentive mechanisms for industrialists, namely: the Voluntary Mechanism for Industrial Water Depollution and the Industrial Depollution Fund. Those mechanisms provided financial contributions and technical assistance to industries for the reduction of industrial pollution, in particular liquid and gaseous discharges. Also, several programmes were being implemented to control pollution, including:

(a) The National Annual Environmental Control Programme – launched in 2018 and consisting of controlling polluting industrial units in accordance with regulations and standards in force at the national level;

(b) The Land-based and Marine Pollution Monitoring Programme.

45. Thus, environmental monitoring had provided important information, in terms of domestic wastewater treatment in the two regions concerned through the installation of wastewater treatment stations, which had contributed to the improvement of the quality of marine waters. Regarding industrial emissions, challenges remained to be met from a regulatory, technical and stakeholder awareness point of view.

46. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the presenters and expressed its appreciation to the representatives of Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova, Morocco and North Macedonia for sharing valuable experiences.

B. Presentations by organizations on opportunities for capacity-building

47. There then followed a series of presentations by organizations on projects, tools, expert support and guidance material that they could offer to support the development of new PRTRs, the improvement of existing PRTRs and the promotion of harmonization of PRTRs among different countries.

48. A representative of the European Environment Agency presented the European Neighbourhood Instrument Shared Environmental Information System II East project,[10] as part of the Road map for integrating environmental information in national E-Governance/Open Data processes in Eastern Partnership countries. The countries that participated in that project were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The project's expected results were also key components for building successful PRTRs, and included:

(a) The implementation of regional/international commitments related to environmental reporting, data harmonization and comparability;

(b) Improved capacities in the national administrations to manage and use environmental information to support decision-making through improved tools, information systems and availability of indicators;

(c) Regular reporting on state-of-the-environment and indicator-based assessments in line with European Union and European Environment Agency methodologies.

49. He then highlighted the relevance of using existing synergies between the Shared Environmental Information System principles[11] and obligations and activities under the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs as an effective means of increasing the availability of environmental information and its multiple use by different user groups.

50. In his presentation, a representative of UNITAR highlighted the importance of capacity- building and training on different aspects of PRTR implementation in developing countries and synergies with different instruments as drivers for countries to implement PRTRs, including, for example, the reporting related to other multilateral environmental agreements – such as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

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[10] See https://eni-seis.eionet.europa.eu/east/governance.
[11] Available at www.eea.europa.eu/about-us/what/shared-environmental-information-system-1/shared-environmental-information-system.

Change or the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean – and PRTR implementation as a requirement for OECD membership. He then introduced the UNITAR "six-steps" methodology for implementing PRTRs that comprised the following steps:

(a) Identifying the goals of the national PRTR system;

(b) Assessing the existing infrastructure relevant to a national PRTR;

(c) Designing the key features of a national PRTR system;

(d) Conducting PRTR pilot reporting;

(e) Finalizing the national PRTR proposal;

(f) Organizing a national PRTR implementation workshop to secure policy commitment.

51. In addition, UNITAR also made available a number of resources[12] that facilitated countries' implementation of PRTR systems, such as links to international guidelines, factsheets, videos, a network of international experts and e-learning opportunities.

52. A representative of OECD provided detailed information on the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals Toolbox,[13] which he described as a problem-solving tool for identifying the most appropriate and efficient national actions to address specific chemical management-related problems. The PRTR module of the Toolbox had been developed for setting up new, or improving existing, PRTR systems. Other than the Toolbox, OECD also made available detailed guidance[14] on, for example:

(a) How to involve other ministries and industries;

(b) Which pollutants and sectors to target;

(c) How to estimate releases and transfers;

(d) How to check the quality of reported data.

53. He further invited interested stakeholders to contact the OECD secretariat with possible requests for guidance on specific topics or questions regarding existing guidance.

54. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the presenters and expressed its appreciation to the representatives of the European Environment Agency, UNITAR and OECD for the organizations' important work in providing opportunities for capacity-building.

55. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the efforts undertaken by countries and organizations to promote the establishment of PRTR systems and steps taken towards implementation of and accession to the Protocol;

(b) Invited interested Parties and stakeholders to inform the secretariat of any further assistance required in developing PRTRs;

(c) Called upon Parties and other interested member States to provide support to countries requiring assistance in developing their PRTRs and acceding to the Protocol, either through bilateral assistance or contributions to relevant organizations dealing with capacity-building;

(d) Requested the Bureau and the secretariat to explore an opportunity for organizing a similar session on capacity-building at the next meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol in 2020, as feasible.

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[12] Available at http://prtr.unitar.org/site/resources.
[13] Available at https://iomctoolbox.oecd.org/.
[14] Available at www.oecd.org/chemicalsafety/pollutant-release-transfer-register/.

VIII. Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021, including financial matters

56.   Regarding the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/6/Add.1, decision III/2, annex), the Working Group took note of:

(a)   The report on implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/4);

(b)   The report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the Protocol's work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/5);

(c)   Information provided by the secretariat on the financial resource situation of the secretariat and on recent contributions and pledges.

57.   The Working Group expressed its appreciation for the work done by the secretariat and recognized the difficulties posed by limited and unpredictable funding.

58.   The Working Group also expressed its concern regarding the low number of pledges. Moreover, the Working Group reiterated its call to Parties to strive not to earmark large contributions for specific purpose, in order to facilitate the management of funds for implementation of the work programme in a balanced way.

IX. Preparations for the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol

A. Hosting and preparatory timeline

59.   The Working Group took note of the information provided by the secretariat regarding the outcomes of the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 26–28 June 2019) related to the hosting of and the preparatory timeline for the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, including possible dates for the fourth session, to be held towards mid-October 2021.

60.   The Working Group further:

(a)   Welcomed the preliminary interest expressed by the Government of Georgia in hosting the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs, and requested the secretariat to further liaise with the Government of Georgia on that matter;

(b)   Mandated the Bureau to take the decision on hosting and timing prior to the next meeting of the Working Group, as appropriate, and to report to the Working Group on the topic at its next meeting;

(c)   Took note of the preparatory timeline for the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (PRTR/WG.1/2019/Inf.5).

B. Substantive preparations

61.   Turning to substantive preparations for the fourth session, the Chair introduced the Note on the work programme for 2022–2025 for the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/7) and the Note on future financial arrangements under the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/8), prepared by the Bureau. She also brought to the attention of delegations the fact that, as per previous practice, the Bureau would proceed with preparation of the draft agenda for the fourth session for the next meeting of the Working Group of the Parties. The agenda would normally follow main items of the work programme and be similar to the agenda of the previous session. The Chair also recalled that, as per previous practice, the Bureau might also proceed with preparation of draft elements for the

declaration, in cooperation with the Convention's Bureau, for the next meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

62. Delegations shared their views on the subjects put forward by the Chair. Pursuant to the discussion, the Working Group took note of the:

(a) Note on the work programme for 2022–2025 for the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/7) and requested the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to prepare a draft decision on the work programme for 2022–2025 for the Protocol for the next meeting of the Working Group, in line with the approach and indicative timeline outline in the document;

(b) Note on future financial arrangements under the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/8) and requested the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to prepare a draft decision on the future financial arrangements under the Protocol for the next meeting of the Working Group. The draft decision should include both voluntary and mandatory schemes of contributions and the United Nations scale of assessment, as in the current Note;

(c) Information provided by the Chair regarding the future draft agenda for the fourth session and possible draft elements for the future declaration, and requested the Bureau to prepare a draft agenda and draft elements for the declaration in cooperation with the Convention's Bureau, for its next meeting. The drafts would be distributed to national focal points and stakeholders for comments prior to their finalization for the next meeting of the Working Group.

X. Calendar of meetings

63. The Working Group took note of the meetings planned for 2020.[15]

XI. Adoption of the decisions and outcomes of the meeting

64. The Working Group adopted the decisions and major outcomes presented by the Chair at the meeting (PRTR/WG.1/2019/Inf.7) and requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, to finalize the report incorporating the outcomes and decisions adopted.

65. The Chair then thanked the participants for their contributions and the interpreters and the secretariat for their support and closed the meeting.

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[15] A calendar of meetings for 2020 is available at www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/meetings-and-events.html.