

**Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs**

Joint High-level Segment, 21 October 2021, Geneva

Agenda item 3: Thematic session on the role of the Convention and its Protocol in promoting sustainable infrastructure and spatial planning

Statement by Ms. Aleksandra Imsiragic, Assistant Minister of Environment, Serbia

Excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure and honor to address this meeting on behalf of the Republic of Serbia as a Party to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTR.

Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in practice is a complex process that requires the synchronized action of the various subjects and stakeholders which are included in the environmental protection systems, as well as the more consistent reform of the public administration and the society as a whole. This is especially due to the fact that all three groups of standards established by the Aarhus Convention go beyond the responsibility and the competences of a single ministry and are also relevant for the various issues related to the functioning of the public administration as a whole, the functioning of the judiciary and legislative authorities, the processes of building and strengthening the democratic institutions, strengthening the rule of law, the realization of human rights. Our goal is to create the conditions for full implementation of the standards established by the Aarhus Convention as well as to provide the full harmonization of the national legislation with the legislation of the European Union.

According to national legislation, the strategic environmental impact assessment is developed for certain plans, programs in the domain of spatial and urban planning, agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, energy, industry, traffic, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, infrastructure systems, protection of natural and cultural resources, flora and fauna and is an integral part of the plan and program. Public participation is an integral part of the decision-making process.

Pursuant to the provisions of the Law on Planning and Construction, the Law on the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment and other relevant regulations, during the period 2017-2021 there were public reviews held for 43 draft spatial plans for special purpose areas and reports on the strategic environmental impact assessment of spatial plans for special purpose areas such as:

-The Draft Spatial Plan for the special purpose area for the construction of Kolubara B thermal power plant and the Report on the strategic environmental impact assessment of the Spatial Plan;

- Draft Amendments to the Spatial Plan for the special purpose area of the coal basin “Kostolac” and the Report on the strategic environmental impact assessment of the Spatial Plan;

- Draft Amendments to the Spatial Plan for the special purpose area of the infrastructure corridor Niš - Border of Bulgaria and the Report on the strategic environmental impact assessment of the Spatial Plan;

The Draft Spatial Plan for the special purpose area of the infrastructure corridor of the Belgrade-Niš railway track and the Report on the strategic environmental impact assessment of the Spatial Plan, etc.

The advertising and presentation for public review of these draft spatial plans and SEIA reports is under the competence of the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, in cooperation with local self-government public authorities competent for urban and spatial planning affairs. The draft spatial plans and SEIA reports were presented for public review during the advertised periods in daily newspapers, as well as on the websites of the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure and local self-government units that are within the scope of the spatial plan. All further information on the place of presentation, as well as required explanations, could be obtained in the services tasked with urban and spatial planning affairs in the local self-government units. Public presentations of the draft spatial plans and SEIA reports were held at the seats of local self-government units encompassed by the spatial plans. Natural and legal persons could submit their objections to the draft spatial plans and SEIA reports for the duration of public review to the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure. At the same time, opinions were collected during the public review from interested public, public authorities, organizations and the public. Upon the completion of public review, public sessions of the Commission for the implementation of the procedure of public review of the draft spatial plans of the special purpose area and SEIA reports were held in the seats of local self-government units encompassed by the spatial plans, deliberating on the objections of natural and legal persons submitted during the public review. During the public sessions, natural and legal persons could publicly elaborate on their objections.

In the significant number of cases, the Ministry of Environmental Protection conducted the exchange of information on transboundary impact of plans and programmes on the environment where implementation of plans and programmes may have significant adverse effects on the environment in another state, or when the state whose environment could be significantly threatened requests so. Ministry of Environmental Protection inform the authorities, organisations and public concerned in the public consultation process about the received information relating to transboundary impact of the proposed plans and programmes of another state.

Challenge related to public participation in decision-making procedure is insufficient public participation due to being uninformed, uninterested or late inclusion in the procedure after the deadlines for the right to complaint have expired.

At the end, few informations about implementation of PRTR protocol in Serbia which is conducted in Serbian Environmental Protection Agency. They started with PRTR register in 2008, in 2010 Serbia ratified PRTR protocol and start reporting EEA on voluntary bases. Today, our PRTR register not covers only obligations under the PRTR protocol, but has been extended to obligations under a number of EU directives related to air and water emissions, waste generation and management, VOC, PCB and many others. In 2021, over 30 thousand annual and over 140 thousand daily and periodical reports were submitted in our information system.

What separates the PRTR register in Serbia from register from other countries is the collection of pollution charges in accordance with the "Polluter Pays" Principle - the polluter pays a pollution charge when its activities cause a burden on the environment. Using data from the PRTR register, charges for 2019 were collected in the amount of around 53 thousand Euros.

Thank you for your attention!