

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. Martine Rohn, Deputy Head International Affairs Division, Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

As we celebrate 20 years of achievements since the entry into force of the Aarhus Convention, let me acknowledge the chance, and responsibility, that we all have, as Parties, to have such strong instruments in defence of the environment.

The effective implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the PRTR Protocol is key to improve infrastructure development and spatial planning. The Aarhus Convention is of highest relevance regarding big infrastructure projects like the Belt and Road Initiative, but also in the context of the Covid crisis.

Infrastructure is indeed a **priority candidate for quick economy recovery and job creation**. It is at the heart of many recovery agendas. But **investments need to be directed toward sustainable infrastructure** to meet the SDGs and the Paris Agreement and to avoid lock-in to carbon and resource intensive pathways.

The **public sector is typically the first investor in infrastructure**. It is central to ensure the right **framework conditions for sustainability and for leveraging private investment**. For the recovery to be green and to make sure it works for jobs, income and growth, it is **crucial for countries to apply high environmental standards**, give access to information and promote public participation in the development of these projects. **The Aarhus Convention serves as an excellent model at the global level and we also welcome the entry into force of the Escazu Agreement this year.**

Closely linked to infrastructure is the **question of resource extraction**, as large infrastructure projects require huge amount of resources such as sand, gravel, metals and minerals, whose demand is expected to grow considerably. This poses **challenges for all countries, whether they extract resources or not like Switzerland**, as we are all dependent on mineral resources. It is essential to **involve all stakeholders** along the value chain – from miners, to traders, investors, producers, consumers as well as residents. **Here again the Aarhus Convention has a key role to play.**

Furthermore existing policy instruments become more impactful if their **data and knowledge are integrated**. PRTRs data collection are crucial in **supporting transparency and sustainability with regard to infrastructure projects**. In order to cover specific requirements further development and integration of PRTRs with information from other sectors such as health, economy and infrastructure will be necessary. Therefore, it is essential to take **concrete steps with regard to the development of**

the PRTR Protocol and thus assure that it will continue to serve as up to date tools in the service of transparency.

Switzerland welcome the Geneva Declaration's commitment to promote environmental democracy, as essential prerequisites for improving infrastructure development and spatial planning in the region.

In this context, let me recall that **the next “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 2022)** will have sustainable Infrastructure as main theme : it will be a unique political opportunity to show the effectiveness of the Aarhus Convention and the PRTR Protocol. **The Convention and the Protocol are on the ride and we should use this momentum to give them a new impetus for the 20 years to come, during which so many environmental challenges are to be overcome!**