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**Economic Commission for Europe**
**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**
**Eighth meeting**

Geneva, 16 and 18 December 2020

**Report of the Working Group of the Parties on its eighth meeting**
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## I. Introduction

1. The eighth 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 in Geneva, on 16 and 18 December 2020, in hybrid format.<sup>1</sup>

### A. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following Parties to the Protocol: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine 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, Chile, Colombia, Tajikistan and Turkey were also present.

5. Also in attendance were representatives of the European Environment Agency, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, 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. She introduced the proposed draft operating procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making in the eighth meeting of the Protocol's Working Group of the Parties due to extraordinary circumstances as contained in the document ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/12.

8. The Chair also 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 orally 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 of statements by participants. The Working Group then adopted the draft operating procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making in the eighth meeting of the Protocol's Working Group of the Parties due to extraordinary circumstances and the agenda for the meeting as set out in document ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/1.

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<sup>1</sup> Documents for the meeting and other information, including a list of participants, are available online at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/eighth-meeting-working-group-parties-protocol-prtrs>. Statements and presentations delivered at the meeting that were made available to the secretariat by delegates are also accessible from this web page.

## 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 on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers. Since its adoption in 2003, 38 States had become signatories to the instrument and there were currently 38 Parties thereto. The Protocol had entered into force on 8 October 2009. Since the seventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2019), Kazakhstan had become a Party to the Protocol on 24 January 2020 and Italy on 23 November 2020.<sup>2</sup>

11. The Working Group took note of the report by the secretariat on the status of ratification of the Protocol, welcomed Italy and Kazakhstan as new Parties, 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.<sup>3</sup> The Working Group took note of the report and called on Parties that had not to date designated a focal point, namely, Italy, Kazakhstan and the Netherlands, 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 the implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/5), 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 of the International PRTR Coordinating Group<sup>4</sup> presented the Coordinating Group's work and invited countries and organizations to participate in its activities. At its upcoming thirteenth meeting (online, 27 January 2021), the Group would focus on the following topics:

(a) Updating the PRTR global map, including possibilities to ensure that all international PRTR-related activities were covered by the Group;

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

(c) Discussing 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;

(d) Facilitating the outreach of the Group as an international meeting point regarding PRTRs.

15. There then followed presentations from representatives of OECD and UNITAR on their organizations' PRTR-related activities and projects.

16. A representative of OECD informed the Working Group about the integration of PRTR-related work into the OECD Environment, Health and Safety Programme,<sup>5</sup> the main

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<sup>2</sup> Information on the status of ratifications is available at [www.unece.org/env/pp/ratification.html](http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ratification.html).

<sup>3</sup> A list of national focal points is available at [www.unece.org/env/pp/nfp.html](http://www.unece.org/env/pp/nfp.html).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcmimages/about.html](http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcmimages/about.html).

<sup>5</sup> See [www.oecd.org/env/ehs/](http://www.oecd.org/env/ehs/).

objectives of which were to: (a) assist OECD Member countries in their efforts to protect human health and the environment through improving chemical safety and biosafety; (b) make chemical control policies more transparent and efficient and save resources for Government and industry; and (c) prevent unnecessary distortions in the trade of chemicals, chemical products and products of modern biotechnology. He also highlighted the progress made in implementing PRTRs, with only two PRTR systems existing in 1996 compared to 75 countries working on developing their PRTRs in 2016. Turning to the issue of release estimation techniques, he informed the Group about the recently published “Resource Compendium of PRTR Release Estimation Techniques Part II: Summary of Techniques for Non-Point (Diffuse) Source”.<sup>6</sup> The OECD Working Party also explored potential uses of PRTR data for measuring the progress and impact of environmental policies. The work included compiling good practices on the use of PRTR data for local environmental management and evaluating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals by using PRTR data. The latter work was addressed, for example, in an action plan for data analysis,<sup>7</sup> which currently included data on 14 pollutants and from seven PRTR systems.

17. A representative of UNITAR presented key drivers for implementing PRTRs in different regions, which included reporting to relevant multilateral environmental agreements, countries’ membership of OECD, trade agreements requiring establishment of PRTRs and the ratification of the Protocol on PRTRs. UNITAR had developed a 6-step methodology for PRTR implementation and supported countries in implementing PRTRs also with a view to responding to their national needs, such as integration of PRTRs with other national databases, and fostering the endorsement of establishing PRTRs by decision makers. Activities included pilot testing of the national PRTR system and the detailed description of all technical, administrative, institutional and legal elements of a planned national PRTR system in a so-called national PRTR proposal. Current PRTR guidance material<sup>8</sup> was made available to interested stakeholders by UNITAR and included: (a) an updated version of international guidelines; (b) a variety of factsheets; (c) videos and e-learning tools; (d) a network of international experts; and (e) the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals Toolbox for Decision-making in Chemicals Management, including its PRTR scheme.<sup>9</sup>

18. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the above-mentioned 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 also took note of the information provided by the Chair of the International PRTR Coordinating Group and welcomed the Group’s important role in contributing to a more transversal perspective of PRTR development, and expressed its appreciation to Spain for its continued leadership of that significant work.

19. 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 reiterated its call 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:

<sup>6</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), document ENV/JM/MONO(2020)30, Series on Pollutant Release and Transfer registers No. 19 (Paris, 2019). Available at [http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=env/jm/mono\(2020\)30&doclanguage=en](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=env/jm/mono(2020)30&doclanguage=en).

<sup>7</sup> OECD, “On the Use of PRTR Information in Evaluating Progress Towards Meeting the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals: An Action Plan for Analysis and Moving Forward”, document ENV/JM/MONO(2019)33, Series on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers No. 22 (Paris, 2020). Available at [www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/displaydocument/?cote=env/jm/mono\(2019\)33&doclanguage=en](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/displaydocument/?cote=env/jm/mono(2019)33&doclanguage=en).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://prtr.unitar.org/site/home>.

<sup>9</sup> Available at <https://iomtoolbox.oecd.org/>.

(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, 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, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean 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, the Convention on Biological Diversity 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, other interested countries and organizations to consider implementing the Protocol and the pan-European Shared Environmental Information System in synergy.

## **B. Global promotion of the Protocol**

20. Turning to the topic of the global promotion of the Protocol, the Chair recalled that the third Global Round Table on PRTRs (Geneva, 7 and 8 November 2018) had been a key event for the global promotion of the Protocol, for identifying synergies and for exchanging views and experience related to PRTRs. A fourth global event could be held in 2022, for example. She then 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, specifically chapter E on awareness-raising and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes.

21. The Working Group reiterated its call upon:

(a) 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 Nations;

(b) 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**

22. 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 Slovenia to submit its national implementation report for the new 2021 reporting cycle without delay.

23. Furthermore, the Working Group took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the preparations for the 2021 reporting cycle and agreed to assign the Compliance Committee the task of preparing a synthesis report on the basis of national implementation reports.

24. The Working Group further took note of the statements by participants and of the following documents:

(a) Membership of the Compliance Committee (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/3);

(b) Report of the Compliance Committee on its eighth meeting (ECE/MP.PRTR/C.1/2020/2).

## VI. Development of the Protocol

25. The Chair introduced the item, recalling the mandate provided by the Working Group of the Parties at its previous meeting (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/2, paragraph 37) regarding preparation of the Report on the outcomes of the survey on the experiences in implementing the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/4). She also highlighted a number of other documents that provided related information, recommendations and possible actions.<sup>10</sup>

26. 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 relevant initiatives; and “Consideration of the Report on the outcomes of the survey on the experiences in implementing the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers”.

### A. Towards modern pollutant release and transfer register systems

27. Delegations were invited to share recent initiatives related to article 6 (2) and other provisions of the Protocol. Representatives of the European Union, Spain and the secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury showcased ways to optimize existing PRTRs and to design new PRTRs to achieve coherent and integrated systems in an efficient manner. The presentations demonstrated that PRTRs had vast potential to serve as carefully crafted systems that would make information easily accessible to users with different needs, including public authorities, the general population, industry, NGOs and other stakeholders. For example, PRTRs could inform impact assessment of policy measures or evaluation of the effectiveness of some multilateral environmental agreements and other similar instruments.

28. The representative of the European Union presented ongoing work related to the revision of the European PRTR Regulation.<sup>11</sup> He named drivers for that change, which included the European Green Deal and the development of the Protocol on PRTRs as political drivers. He further explained that a possible revision of the Regulation would require undertaking an impact assessment; a process that would cover the potential areas of change for the Regulation. That participative process might look, for example, into the impact of including additional sectors, pollutants and changes of reporting modalities, along with changes that could lead to increased public awareness of a future registry and improved quality, ease and speed of access to data. It might also cover possibilities to contribute to the circular economy and the decarbonization of industry or other topics. He described concrete possibilities for change, including improved alignment with related legislation, and how to address known weaknesses, for example, how to link to real-time data, report on waste transfers and integrate data from releases from diffuse sources. Possibilities also included the introduction of contextual information to normalize data on pollutant releases and to use the reporting scheme not only to cover pollutants but also to make available resource consumption data.

<sup>10</sup> Related documents include the Report on the development of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/6) and the addendum thereto including a possible approach for revising annexes I, II and III (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/6/Add.1), as well as an accompanying document entitled 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) and 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).

<sup>11</sup> Regulation (EC) No 166/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 January 2006 concerning the establishment of a European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register and amending Council Directives 91/689/EEC and 96/61/EC, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 33 (2006), pp. 1–17.

29. A representative of Spain shared the Spanish experience of using PRTRs to meet the reporting requirements under the Minamata Convention on Mercury. There were different ways to facilitate reporting under the Minamata Convention; PRTR systems in particular had a number of strengths that made them efficient in terms of reporting to other instruments such as the Minamata Convention. One challenge was, however, that not all reporting components were fully harmonized between instruments and therefore equivalence needed first to be identified. After showcasing the Spanish PRTR for a search on mercury data, he noted that a key strength of the Protocol on PRTRs and its related PRTR systems was the unique international standards regarding making information available to the public. He then concluded the presentation by highlighting that he had presented the use of PRTRs for reporting to the Minamata Convention as an example, but that other international reporting could also be facilitated and hence benefit from the use of PRTRs as a platform to make information available.

30. A representative of the secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury then presented the control measures introduced through the Minamata Convention. The measures were guided by the three following main objectives: (a) to keep mercury underground; (b) to reduce the use and presence of mercury in the economy, industry and society; and (c) to reduce emissions and releases of mercury to the environment. He then turned to the linkages with the Protocol on PRTRs specifically and highlighted work and cooperation regarding guidance material, such as on the topic of controlling and reducing mercury releases to the environment. He also explained the use of PRTR systems to facilitate the collection and dissemination of information on estimates of annual quantities of mercury and mercury compounds emitted, released or disposed of through human activities as covered in article 18 of the Minamata Convention. The use of PRTR systems and the implementation of the Minamata Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs in synergy was also useful regarding the management of mercury waste, as specified in article 11 of the Convention and effectiveness evaluation, covered under the Convention's article 22. The latter, for example, would rely in part on access to high quality data and related indicators that could help with the impact assessment of policy measures and could be provided through PRTR systems.

31. Recognizing the importance of modernizing PRTR systems, the Working Group took note of the progressive examples presented by the representatives of the European Union and Spain, who had showcased the development of PRTRs by going beyond the minimum requirements of the Protocol, as well as the information provided by the Minamata Convention secretariat. 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.

## **B. Report on the outcomes of the survey on the experiences in implementing the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers**

32. 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 outcomes of the survey on the experiences in implementing the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers through: (a) a substantive discussion based on chapter I. Summary of key survey outcomes; and (b) a discussion on the way forward, based on chapter II. General conclusion, with a focus on section D and the proposal for a draft decision by the European Union and its member States, notably to consider a decision on the development of the Protocol with a view to its adoption at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Geneva, 18–22 October 2021). She also informed delegations about a proposal submitted by the European Environmental Bureau.

33. The Working Group took note of the Report on the outcomes of the survey on the experiences in implementing the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers and considered the submissions by European Union and its member States and by the European Environmental Bureau. The Working Group approved as amended at the meeting a draft



decision on development of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR/WG.1/2020/Inf.5) and mandated the Bureau to finalize it for submission and adoption at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

## **VII. Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021, including financial matters**

34. 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.1/2020/5);

(b) The Report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/6) and of the Note on contributions and pledges received between 1 October and 1 December 2020 (PRTR/WG.1/2020/Inf.1), requesting to revise it after the meeting in the light of the comments received.

35. The Working Group took note of the statements made by participants, expressed its appreciation for the work done by the secretariat and recognized the difficulties posed by limited and unpredictable funding.

36. 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 purposes, in order to facilitate the management of funds for implementation of the work programme in a balanced way.

## **VIII. Preparations for the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol**

37. The Working Group took note of: (a) the information provided by the secretariat regarding the related outcomes of the twenty-fourth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention (Geneva, 28 and 29 October 2020)<sup>12</sup> and the Note on 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 (PRTR/WG.1/2019/Inf.5);<sup>13</sup> and (b) the planned dates for the fourth session, to be held towards mid-October 2021 (21 and 22 October 2021).

38. The Working Group further:

(a) Noted that, due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Georgia could not confirm its commitment to host the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Protocol and the Convention;

(b) Noted the Bureau decision that, in those circumstances, the next session should be held in Geneva, unless any Party would confirm its willingness to host the session;<sup>14</sup>

(c) Mandated the Bureau to take the decision on the hosting and timing and to proceed with the preparations for the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties as planned, and to reassess the situation in spring 2021, as needed.

39. Turning to substantive preparations for the fourth session, the Working Group took note of statements of participants and:

<sup>12</sup> See <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/twenty-fourth-meeting-working-group-parties-aarhus-convention-site>.

<sup>13</sup> Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/seventh-meeting-working-group-parties-protocol-prtrs>.

<sup>14</sup> Report of the eighteenth meeting of the Bureau, para. 4. Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/bureau-protocol-prtrs-18th-meeting>.

(a) Approved as amended at the meeting the draft provisional agenda of the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/7) and mandated the Bureau to finalize the agenda and submit it to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption at its fourth session;

(b) Mandated the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol to finalize the draft declaration on environmental democracy for sustainable inclusive and resilient development (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/11) in cooperation with the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, with a view to its submission for consideration and adoption at the high-level segment;

(c) Approved the draft decision on the work programme for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/8) and mandated the Bureau to finalize it for consideration and adoption at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(d) Approved the draft decision on reporting requirements (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/10) and mandated the Bureau to finalize it for consideration and adoption at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(e) Approved the draft decision on financial arrangements under the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/9), requesting to keep both options for a scheme of contributions (mandatory and voluntary), and mandated the Bureau to finalize it for consideration and adoption at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

## **IX. Subregional and national activities: achievements, needs and challenges for capacity-building**

40. The Chair introduced the item, recalling that capacity-building remained critically important for promotion of the Protocol to countries with developing economies and economies in transition, 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: (a) presentations by countries on achievements, plans and needs in relation to PRTRs; and (b) 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**

41. A representative of Albania gave a presentation on progress in implementing the Protocol in the country. Numerous changes to legislation and the institutional basis had been accompanied by specific measures and projects with support from the European Union and Germany. The projects included: consolidating the environmental monitoring system in Albania; strengthening the capacities of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment for the drafting and implementation of national environmental legislation; and supporting the establishment and advancement of PRTRs in countries in the Western Balkans region and in the Republic of Moldova. One of the strengths of the approach of Albania to implementing PRTRs was the integration of different databases into a single system. This was facilitated through substantive institutional reforms that were implemented in parallel to the PRTR system. It also included that the handling of environmental permits was now under the auspices of the National Environmental Agency. Current challenges for implementation included: the identification of operators with reporting requirements; and the lack of technical capacity within companies to carry out monitoring of emissions and to produce reliable data. The latter challenge was related for instance to the lack of a guide to reporting in Albanian. For 2020, the introduction of online reporting was planned along with an associated awareness-raising campaign. Making data publicly available remained challenging, due, among other things, to current issues regarding technical capacities for reporting good quality data.

42. The representative of Belarus presented activities that had led to the development and implementation of a pilot PRTR system in the country. He highlighted the usefulness of the PRTR pilot phase in understanding how to use PRTRs for meeting other international reporting obligations. Indeed, PRTR was an ideal tool for fulfilling other international reporting requirements, such as those arising from the Minamata Convention on Mercury, and, in the case of the pilot project in Belarus, those regarding releases of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) as regulated under the Stockholm Convention on POPs. Furthermore, seminars for different stakeholder groups had proven to be instrumental to the successful implementation of the pilot. Training groups related to the implementation of the PRTR had been developed respectively for media, NGOs, government bodies and enterprises. Future plans related to the development of PRTR were centred on the preparation and enactment of PRTR-related legislation. The main aim was to accede to the Protocol, which offered Belarus benefits, including the creation of the conditions for the promotion of the principles of “green” economy in the country. Accession would also make it possible to form a new State information resource on emissions to the environment and transport of pollutants in accordance with international standards, as well as to actively participate in international cooperation under the Protocol.

43. The representative of Colombia explained that, when developing a PRTR in Colombia, one key challenge had been the selection of the most appropriate methodologies for the country from among existing examples and guidance material, including, for example: guidance in relation to the achievement of relevant Sustainable Development Goals; OECD guidance material and Council Acts;<sup>15</sup> and guidance and good practice taken from national examples from Canada, Chile, Mexico and the United States of America. The PRTR implementation process had been strongly driven by the plan of Colombia to accede to OECD. During the implementation of the PRTR, issues related to interinstitutional coordination had been addressed through the establishment of a technical working group for PRTR design, implementation and operation and a national advisory committee. The latter body included private sector representatives, academic and scientific institutions, alongside Government entities. Currently, efforts at the level of ministries were focused on having the country’s single registry for environmental information accommodate all the characteristics of a PRTR. A new pilot system, in which with 60 companies and some regional environmental authorities were taking part, had been implemented to get feedback on the planned integrated environmental information platform so as to allow for the improvement of its design prior to the finalization of the national platform. A national PRTR could start working once the required regulation – planned for the end of 2021 – had been issued.

44. A representative of Tajikistan outlined the current situation with regard to PRTRs in the country. Tajikistan had robust environmental legislation, which was currently under review in order to identify where changes were needed and where recommendations could be made to align the nation’s current legal framework with the requirements arising from the Protocol. The representative noted that, although Tajikistan had ratified the Convention and signed the Protocol, the country had yet to ratify the latter instrument. Indeed, an improved legal framework would also facilitate the implementation of the respective requirements under the Aarhus Convention. Furthermore, with the rapid increase in the number of industrial facilities in Tajikistan, one practical challenge in implementing a PRTR was the need to renew the lists of enterprises. For 2021, there were plans to: create a group with qualified experts and hold round-table discussions on recommendations regarding the development of a PRTR that met the requirements of the Protocol in view of ratification thereof by Tajikistan; and to address a number of practical challenges, including by having Government experts travel around the country compiling a list of polluting facilities.

45. The representative of Turkey explained that, since 2005, three projects with an increasing number of participating provinces had been implemented in Turkey. They were part of the quite successful UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan pilot PRTR projects and the European Union Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. As a result, a web-based PRTR

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<sup>15</sup> OECD, Recommendation of the Council on Establishing and Implementing Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs), document OECD/LEGAL/0440, and relevant guidance material. Available at [www.oecd.org/chemicalsafety/pollutant-release-transfer-register/publicationsintheseriesonpollutantreleaseandtransferregisters.htm#New](http://www.oecd.org/chemicalsafety/pollutant-release-transfer-register/publicationsintheseriesonpollutantreleaseandtransferregisters.htm#New).

reporting system had been developed and an electronic inventory established. In addition, a PRTR centre had been established under the aegis of the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization and a national implementation strategy and draft PRTR legislation had been developed, together with guidelines, brochures and educational materials, which had also been used for seminars and workshops on PRTR. One remaining challenge was the absence of legislation and the integration of PRTR with the Turkish e-government system. There were plans to publish PRTR legislation just after the finalization commenting period and to implement said legislation once Turkey had acceded to the European Union. She then turned to planned uses of PRTR data, including the use of such data to facilitate integrated pollution prevention and control efforts and as an integral part of governmental decision-making processes. In addition, the integration of PRTR with data from a continuous monitoring centre was also part of the country's implementation strategy. She added that some industry actors had been supportive of PRTR implementation in Turkey, as it was perceived as a means of demonstrating to other stakeholders the efforts begin made to reduce pollutant releases.

46. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the presenters and expressed its appreciation to the representatives of Albania, Belarus, Colombia, Tajikistan and Turkey 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. The representative of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan presented opportunities for capacity-building, including through a variety of general and specific guidance materials. In that regard, he referred to methodologies for reporting requirements under the Programme for the Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution in the Mediterranean that were similar to those under the Protocol on PRTRs. He also referred to expert groups and bodies that, for example, prepared guidance and other capacity-building materials, including on estimation techniques for releases from agriculture, aquaculture or catchment run-off. Indeed, the linkages between PRTRs and Mediterranean Action Plan national baseline budgets of pollutants tools were strong in terms of the basic reporting requirements for facilities. However, some discrepancies existed. For example, national baseline budgets had additional parameters for reporting and no reporting thresholds. Recent efforts by countries in the Mediterranean region had aimed at shrinking that gap and further harmonizing reporting under the two instruments by matching the list of activities as exactly as possible.

49. The representative of the Minamata Convention on Mercury highlighted the work of several expert groups that prepared guidance materials related to the whole life cycle of mercury and including the reporting of mercury releases to water and land and emissions to air. He also pointed out the benefit of having the financial mechanism of the Minamata Convention as an important resource to help countries implement the Convention. The mechanism was part of the Global Environment Facility and the Specific International Programme. The current, seventh replenishment of the Global Environment Facility foresaw \$206 million for the implementation of the Minamata Convention, while the Specific International Programme gave eligible Parties the opportunity to directly apply for project funding ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000 – supported by donor countries Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America.

50. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the presenters and expressed its appreciation to the representatives of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, and other partner organizations, including the European Environmental Agency, UNITAR and OECD, for their organizations' important work in providing opportunities for capacity-building.

51. The Working Group:

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

(b) Requested the Bureau and the secretariat to explore an opportunity for organizing a similar session on capacity-building at the future meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol.

## **X. Calendar of meetings**

52. The Working Group took note of the meetings planned for 2021.<sup>16</sup>

## **XI. Adoption of the decisions and outcomes of the meeting**

53. Before the adoption of the decisions and outcomes of the meeting, the Chair confirmed the presence of a majority of Parties established through a roll call<sup>17</sup> and concluded that, with more than 19 Parties present, the necessary quorum had been secured.

54. The Working Group took note of the presence of Parties and adopted the decisions and major outcomes presented by the Chair at the meeting (PRTR/WG.1/2020/Inf.2), and requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, to finalize the report incorporating the outcomes and decisions adopted.

55. 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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<sup>16</sup> A calendar of meetings for 2021 is available at <https://unece.org/info/events/unece-meetings-and-events/environmental-policy/public-participation>.

<sup>17</sup> See ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/12, para. 11.