



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Joint High-level Segment of the 7th session of the MoP to the Aarhus Convention and the 4th session of the MoP to the Protocol on PRTR

21 October 2021

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Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address the Joint High-level Segment of 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 on Pollutant Release and Transfer registers. I would like to express my appreciation to the Aarhus Convention Secretariat for the successful organization of this event under the circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. I would also like to congratulate on the Twentieth Anniversary since the entry into force of the Convention and on the adoption of the *Draft Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development*.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as the world's largest regional security organization, recognizes a close connection between the environment and security. Strengthening co-operation on environmental issues as part of a broader effort to prevent conflict, build mutual confidence and promote good neighbourly relations, is a key element of the OSCE's commitment to promoting good environmental governance among its participating States. In this framework, we highly value the ongoing fruitful collaboration with UNECE in implementing Multilateral Environmental Agreements - including the Aarhus Convention.

One of the most effective tools promoted by the OSCE to achieve sustainable development and to support the implementation of the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention are the Aarhus Centres. Since 2002, the Centres serve as a platform to engage citizens, governments and the private sector in addressing environmental challenges, in raising public awareness on environmental issues, in disseminating environmental information, and in helping citizens exercise their rights on environmental matters.

As the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol can have an important role in improving infrastructure development and spatial planning, I would like to highlight the involvement of the Aarhus Centres in promoting public participation under environmental assessment procedures. In particular, many Aarhus Centres are engaged in supporting the implementation of the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, showing the close interlinkage between different Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

The OSCE also supports its 57 participating States in enhancing connectivity, particularly in Central Asia, the Caspian Sea Region, and Eastern Europe. Many infrastructure projects are underway to improve trade and transport in these regions. We believe that the obligations under the Aarhus Convention in terms of transparency and public participation in decision-making processes and spatial planning, including in the transboundary context, are a crucial factor to achieve sustainable connectivity.

In conclusion, allow me to assure you that the OSCE remains strongly committed in supporting the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol, and in continuing our cooperation with the UNECE.