Introduction

The seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP7) to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) convened from Monday, 18 October through Wednesday, 20 October 2021, in Geneva, as did the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (MOPP4) on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) on Friday, 22 October 2021. The Joint High-level Segment under the two treaties was held on Thursday, 21 October 2021. The following is informal coverage of the meetings that summarizes discussions on agenda items considered at MOP7, MOPP4, and their Joint High-level Segment.
Ms. Maia Bitadze, Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, opened the meeting and welcomed participants. She gave an overview of the agenda of the session. The MOP then adopted the provisional agenda for its seventh session (ECE/MP.PP/2021/1), as well as the operating procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making due to extraordinary circumstances (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.1), as amended at the meeting.

Decisions and outcomes included in the List of Key Decisions and Outcomes of MOP7 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.9/Rev.1) were approved and provisionally adopted during the consideration of their respective agenda items at the preparatory and general segments and were then formally adopted during the High-Level Segment on Thursday, 21 October.

Mr. Marco Keiner, Director of the Environment Division at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), in a welcoming address to open the General Segment, said that the MOP had an ambitious agenda, adding that it was heartening to see the Aarhus Convention being used as a model for similar initiatives in other regions. He continued by saying that the high amount of media coverage the Convention received was evidence of its relevance to people in their daily lives.

**Status of ratification of the Convention and the amendment to the Convention**

Regarding the status of ratifications, the Aarhus Convention secretariat informed that there were no new ratifications since 2017, keeping the number of Parties to the Convention at 47. There had been one additional ratification by Albania of the Amendment on Public Participation in Decisions on the Deliberate Release
into the Environment and Placing on the Market of GMOs (GMO Amendment), bringing the number of accessions to 32. One more Party from the following list must ratify the GMO amendment for it to enter into force: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine.

**Outcome**

The Meeting of the Parties took note of the status of ratification of the Convention and its GMO amendment and welcomed the ratification of the GMO amendment by Albania. The Meeting of the Parties welcomed the offer of Austria to continue leading this work area in the next intersessional period.

**Substantive issues**

**Access to information, including electronic information tools**

Ms. Valentina Tapis (Republic of Moldova), Chair of the Task Force on Access to Information, presented the results of the work of the Task Force during the intersessional period, highlighting the issues its work had focused on, which included updating the 2005 Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools to provide public access to environmental information (ECE/MP.PP/2005/2/Add.4).

In consecutive keynote statements, Mr. Chris Steenmans of the European Environment Agency (EEA) said countries across Europe and beyond were encouraged to revise and update their regulatory frameworks and enable technical solutions to improve data access. Mr. Christian Schaible of the European ECO Forum said electronic information tools should not replace traditional tools, adding that there was a need to ensure that new means for information access did not disenfranchise those who did not have good internet access.

**Outcome**

The MOP, inter alia, provisionally adopted draft decision VII/1 on promoting effective access to information (ECE/MP.PP/2021/8) and provisionally adopted draft updated recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools (ECE/MP.PP/2021/20 and ECE/MP.PP/2021/20/Add.1) and welcomed the offer of the Republic of Moldova to continue leading this work area in the next intersessional period.

**Public participation in decision-making**

Ms. Loredana Dall’Ora (Italy), Chair of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making, noted that special attention had been paid to the work of environmental defenders. Conclusions drawn from the work of the Task Force included that there was a need to continue consideration of the issue of emerging technologies during the next intersessional period.

In a keynote statement, Ms. Anke Stock of the European ECO Forum said that the COVID-19 pandemic had showed that the use of digital tools for participation could be an obstacle to effective public participation, but there were also other hindrances and that adequate procedures for public participation on plans and programmes were not in place at the national or European Union level.

**Outcome**
The MOP, *inter alia*, provisionally adopted draft decision VII/2 on promoting effective public participation in decision-making (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.2), and welcomed Italy’s offer to continue leading this work area in the next intersessional period.

**Access to justice**

The statement of Mr. Jan Darpo (Sweden), Chair of the Task force on Access to Justice, was made available online as a text in which he noted the existing challenges to access to justice related to the length of procedures, weak enforcement, and costs. Judge Lorena Çabej of the Supreme Court of Albania shared the experience of her country in the implementation of the Convention, expressing her hope that Albania would be able to contribute to case law guaranteeing access to justice in environmental matters.

Mr. Csaba Kiss of the European ECO Forum said diverse interpretations of the Convention by Parties created uneven situations. More urgently, a number of countries had used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse for restrictive policies, and there was also a rise in the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation. The European Union, Norway, Switzerland, and several NGO participants also spoke.

**Outcome**

The MOP, *inter alia*, provisionally adopted draft decision VII/3 on promoting effective access to justice (ECE/MP.PP/2021/10) and welcomed the offer of Belgium to lead this work area in the next intersessional period. The MOP expressed its appreciation to Sweden for leading this work area and thanked the outgoing Chair of the Task Force.

*Genetically modified organisms*
Mr. Helmut Gaugitsch (Austria), Chair of the Round Table on GMOs, reviewed the work over the intersessional period, detailing the meetings held as well as outlining proposals for future action at the national and multilateral level. As just one more ratification of the GMO amendment was needed before it would enter into force, he expressed hope that another ratification might occur during the next intersessional period.

Ms. Wadzanayi Mandivenyi, Head of the Biosafety Unit of the Secretariat to the Convention on Biological Diversity, said that the Convention on Biological Diversity's upcoming Conference of Parties in 2022 would be an opportune moment to make key decisions related to GMOs.

Ms. Antje Lorch of the European ECO Forum said it was of crucial importance to act now to ensure the principles of the Convention were applied to novel GMOs called “gene-drives” which were designed to spread in the wild, across national borders.

Statements were made by representatives of the European Union, United Kingdom and the European ECO Forum.

**Outcome**

The MOP, *inter alia*, urged Parties whose ratification of the GMO amendment would count towards its entry into force — i.e., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine — to take urgent steps towards ratification of the GMO amendment, and called upon other Parties to ratify the GMO amendment also. It further mandated the Working Group to closely monitor the progress towards the entry into force of the GMO amendment and welcomed Austria’s offer to continue leading this work area in the next intersessional period.

**Procedures and mechanisms facilitating the implementation of the Convention**

**Reporting mechanism**

The Chair presented a summary of the synthesis report on the status of implementation of the Convention, outlining progress made and identifying significant trends, challenges and solutions.

Representatives of the European Union, Malta, the Republic of Moldova, and of the NGOs Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Justice and Environment spoke.

**Outcome**

Among other items, the MOP noted with regret that 40% (19 Parties) of the Parties did not submit their reports by the set deadline. It further urged Parties that had not yet submitted their national implementation reports (Azerbaijan, Malta, the Netherlands, Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan) to do so, and expressed its deep concern that the Republic of Moldova had also still not yet submitted its national implementation report for the fifth reporting cycle— the only country that had not done so — and called upon the Compliance Committee under paragraph 13 (c) of the annex to decision I/7 to consider the ongoing failure by the Republic of Moldova to submit its report for the fifth and sixth
cycles. The MOP provisionally adopted draft decision VII/7 on reporting requirements, as amended at the meeting (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.3).

**Compliance mechanism**

Before proceeding with the agenda item on the compliance mechanism, the Chair invited the MOP to pay tribute to Mr. Veit Koester, the first Chair of the Aarhus Compliance Committee, who passed away at the end of September.

Mr. Jonas Ebbesson, Chair of the Compliance Committee, then reported on the Committee’s work since 2017 and presented statistics on its work, which showed a strong increase in its activity. He underscored the importance of the Committee’s 2020 statement on the application of the Convention during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the subsequent economic recovery phase. The Committee’s efforts to enhance the effectiveness of its procedures as well as higher staffing of the secretariat had helped the Committee move through its caseload faster. Reflecting on the work of the Compliance Committee as he stepped down as Chair, he noted that there was an increasing public awareness of the Committee as well as recognition of its findings in international jurisprudence, such as that of the European Court of Human Rights. The MOP applauded the Chair of the Committee for his service.

Mr. Andriy Andrusyevych for the European ECO Forum made a keynote statement. Interventions were also made by Belarus, Switzerland, Norway, and three more speakers from European ECO Forum. The Chair reminded the MOP that it had already provisionally adopted all compliance decisions during the general segment except the one on Belarus and the one on general issues of compliance. The Chair then presented the three nominations to the Compliance Committee.

**Outcome**

The MOP paid tribute to Mr. Veit Koester, who had passed away in September 2021. It also provisionally adopted draft decisions on compliance by Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Netherlands, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and United Kingdom. It provisionally adopted, as amended at the meeting, a draft decision on compliance by European Union exceptionally deciding, by consensus, to postpone the decision-making on the Committee’s findings and recommendations on communication ACCC/C/2015/128 to the MOP’s next ordinary session to be held in 2025. The MOP stressed that this exceptional decision shall in no way establish a practice under the Convention and requested the Compliance Committee to report to the eighth session on the progress made on the matter by the European Union.

The MOP thanked the outgoing members of the Compliance Committee. The MOP also re-elected by consensus Ms. Áine Ryall, nominated by Ireland, and elected Ms. Eleanor Sharpston, nominated by Luxembourg, and Mr. Thomas Schomerus, nominated by Ökobüro on behalf of European ECO-Forum, as members of the Compliance Committee.
Rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Convention

Austria and Ireland announced their willingness to lead the newly established rapid response mechanism and to provide financial support for its functioning.

The MOP heard a keynote statement by Ms. Mary Lawlor, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. Noting that the establishment of the mandate was timely, she underscored that the mechanism would only be effective if it were implemented in good faith by States who lived up to their commitments in signing up to the decision to create it.

Mr. Yves Lador for European ECO Forum told the MOP that the mechanism could complement existing human rights bodies. Ms. Marianna Bolshakova from the United Nations Environment Programme also spoke, noting that the initiative before the Meeting today is a crucial element of the Convention’s infrastructure and complements the work of the UNEP and other UN agencies. Belarus, the European Union, Norway, Switzerland and European ECO Forum also made interventions.

Outcome

The MOP, inter alia, provisionally adopted draft decision VII/9 on a rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.8), as amended at the meeting. The MOP welcomed the offer of Austria and Ireland to lead the rapid response mechanism and welcomed their offer to provide financial support to the rapid response mechanism for the next intersessional period.

Capacity-building

Ms. Laura Altinger of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) outlined how UNDP had worked with Aarhus Centres in Kyrgyzstan, among other activities. Mr. Christian Melis of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in
Europe said the Aarhus Centres and Public Environmental Information Centres could be instrumental in raising public awareness, supporting national authorities, and facilitating the implementation of other multilateral environmental agreements. Ms. Olga Zakharova of the Aarhus Centre Belarus told the MOP that the holders of environmental information were encouraged to use the definitions contained in the Convention. Speakers from Armenia, European Union, Georgia, and NGOs also took the floor.

**Outcome**

The MOP, *inter alia*, welcomed the work undertaken by partner organizations as presented in the report on capacity-building (ECE/MP.PP/2021/7) and expressed its appreciation to partner organizations for their continued support to the implementation of the Convention.

**Promotion of the Convention and relevant developments and interlinkages**

**Accession to the Convention by States from outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region**

The Chair noted that it was a historic moment for a country outside the UNECE region to accede to the Convention.

In a keynote statement, Mr. Mario Camala (Guinea-Bissau), thanking participants, noted that despite significant advances in the legislative framework of Guinea-Bissau, much remained to be done to adapt it to the objectives foreseen in the Convention. In a subsequent keynote statement, Ms. Francesca Carlsson, speaking for European ECO Forum, congratulated Guinea-Bissau for having completed the process of fulfilling certain legislative requirements before acceding; she urged Uzbekistan and Mongolia, which had each started the
process of accession, to continue their efforts, and expressed hope that other African states and those in the Mediterranean region could also start the process of accession. Speakers from the European Union, Norway, Switzerland and Portugal also spoke in favour of the accession by Guinea-Bissau.

A speaker from the NGO community of Guinea-Bissau said that, with its accession, many African states, particularly those of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), might express interest in becoming Party to the Convention. He also suggested that an environmental awareness campaign would be useful to promote the implementation of the Convention’s objectives, considering Guinea Bissau’s political culture and societal makeup.

**Outcome**

The MOP, *inter alia*, provisionally adopted draft decision VII/10 on accession by Guinea-Bissau to the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2021/21) and welcomed Guinea-Bissau as a new Party to the Aarhus Convention and the first Party from outside the UNECE region to accede to the Aarhus Convention.

**Promotion of the Convention’s principles in international forums**

Ms. Laura Michel (France), Chair of the thematic session on the promotion of the principles of the Convention in international forums (PPIF), reviewed the work on this topic since MOP6. In a subsequent keynote speech, Ms. Piera Laloux of the European Investment Bank (EIB) gave an overview of how, despite the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the Bank had carried out public consultations on its strategic documents. Mr. Sébastien Duyck of the European ECO Forum said it was important to prevent backsliding on public access as a result of restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Representatives of the European Union, Switzerland, United Kingdom and NGOs also spoke.

**Outcome**

The MOP, *inter alia*, provisionally adopted draft decision VII/4 on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums (ECE/MP.PP/2021/11). The MOP thanked the outgoing Chair of the thematic session and welcomed the offer of France to continue leading this work area in the next intersessional period.

**Synergies between the Convention and other relevant multilateral environmental agreements and other partners**

The MOP heard a keynote statement by Mr. Benjamin Schachter of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who outlined a recent Human Rights Council resolution recognizing the human right to a healthy environment, and also noted the establishment of a Special Rapporteur on human rights in the context of climate change. In a subsequent keynote address, Ms. Tatiana Hema of the United Nations Environment Programme described its activities related to Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, noting that translating the Secretary-General’s call to action and promoting further implementation of Principle 10 meant greater integration of those issues in the work of the UN system as a whole. Representatives of Switzerland and European ECO Forum also spoke.

**Outcome**
The MOP, *inter alia*, thanked multilateral environmental agreements and partner organizations for close cooperation with the secretariat on promoting the Convention. It further requested the secretariat to continue pursuing synergy with other treaties, bodies and processes and thanked partners for their cooperation.

**Global and regional developments on issues related to Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development**

Ms. Katinka Weinberger of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific highlighted fundamental challenges in the Asia-Pacific region that hinder environmental protection and sustainable development, including gender imbalances, inequality, and restricted civil space. She noted that a legally binding instrument on access rights in the Asia-Pacific could enable more access to information, justice and participation in environmental matters.

**Outcome**

The MOP, *inter alia*, welcomed efforts by States and civil society in the Asia-Pacific region in this regard and expresses its readiness to support the region in its endeavours. The MOP also welcomed the entry into force of the Escazú Agreement and reiterated the readiness of Parties to support the region in implementing the Agreement’s provisions.

**Update on United Nations Environment Programme initiatives on access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters**

In an update on the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) initiatives on access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters, its representative, Ms. Marianna Bolshakova, referred to a Law and Environment Assistance Platform (UNEP-LEAP) under UNEP’s Montevideo Program, the UNEP’s 1st Global Environmental Rule of Law Report and the recently published Global Assessment of Air Pollution Legislation.

**Outcome**

The MOP took note of the statement by UNEP.

**Programme of work and operation of the Convention**

**Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021**

The secretariat informed the MOP about the contributions and pledges received which, due to their timing, were not included in the report submitted to the MOP.

**Outcome**

The MOP, *inter alia*, took note of the reports on the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021 and on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the Convention’s work programme for 2018–2021. The MOP further took note of the secretariat’s oral report on the recent contributions and pledges for the implementation of the Convention’s work programme for 2018–2021.
Future work programme for 2022-2025

The European Union spoke to support the text of the draft decision on the work programme for 2022-2025. Norway noted that the proposed work programme entailed additional costs, suggesting that increasing the use of digital platforms for the work under the Convention could save travel costs.

**Outcome**

The MOP, *inter alia*, provisionally adopted draft decision VII/5 on the work programme for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/12).

Strategic plan for 2022-2030

The European Union supported the text of the strategic plan as it stood. Norway supported the strategic plan, adding that it was important to highlight the need for effective measures for the protection of environmental defenders. Switzerland welcomed the strategic plan and underscored the importance of the new Special Rapporteur’s mandate. A speaker from European ECO Forum stressed the importance of including a youth dimension in the strategic plan, as youth across the globe were standing up and demanding action, and are disproportionately the most affected group. Two further speakers from European ECO Forum also took the floor.

**Outcome**


Financial arrangements

The European Union, Norway and Switzerland spoke on this item.

**Outcome**

The MOP provisionally adopted draft decision on financial arrangements (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.7), as amended at the meeting.
Report on credentials with regard to the Convention’s Parties

The MOP approved the report on credentials and noted that 42 Parties had submitted credentials, and thus a quorum had been reached.

Election of officers and other members of the Bureau

The MOP thanked the outgoing members of the Bureau and Mr. Jeremy Wates, the outgoing NGO representative to the Bureau. Following this, the MOP then elected by consensus Mr. Aurimas Saladžius (Lithuania) as Chair and Ms. Nino Gokhelashvili (Georgia) and Ms. Nicolette Bouman (Netherlands) as Vice-Chairs. The remaining members of the Bureau, also elected by consensus, were: Ms. Enkelejda Malaj (Albania), Ms. Zsuzsanna Belenyessy (European Union), Ms. Chiara Landini (Italy) and Ms. Alla Loboda (Ukraine). The MOP took note of the appointment by European ECO Forum of Ms. Summer Kern as the new NGO representative to the Bureau.

Date and venue of the eighth ordinary session

The MOP decided to hold its next ordinary session in 2025 and mandated the Working Group of the Parties to consider at its next meeting a possible date and venue for the eighth ordinary session.

Joint High-Level Segment of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs

Following an introduction by Mr. Anders Mankler, State Secretary, Ministry of the Environment (Sweden), the Co-Chair of the Joint High-Level Segment (JHLS), delegates heard a welcome address by Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary of UNECE, who stressed the importance of the Convention and its Protocol in the context of large-scale infrastructure projects and spatial planning. She also recalled the crucial role of the treaties in upholding right to a clean, safe, and sustainable environment. She then delivered a statement on behalf of Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, who welcomed efforts to establish a mechanism to protect environmental defenders under the Convention as an important contribution to his call to Action for Human Rights.
Following the adoption of the **provisional agenda** for the JHLS, the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs approved the report on the **credentials with regard to the Protocol’s Parties**. This was presented by the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs, Ms. Tina Skårman (Sweden) who informed the Meeting that 34 Parties had submitted credentials and thus a quorum for decision-making was reached. The Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs then adopted the **operating procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making** in the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol due to extraordinary circumstances as amended at the meeting (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/CRP.2).

**Thematic session on the role of the Convention and its Protocol in promoting sustainable infrastructure and spatial planning**

The thematic session, chaired by Mr. Anders Mankler, was comprised of two panel discussions, the first of which featured Ms. Anita Pipan, Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the United Nations Office at Geneva, who shared a good practice from her country, where a national spatial plan for a road between two towns had used the Aarhus Convention to redesign the public participation process to find common solutions to citizens’ concerns. Mr. Serik Kozhanyazov, Vice Minister of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan, outlined his country’s new environmental code aimed at ensuring transparency and public participation in large infrastructure projects and spatial planning. He also spoke about a national project named “Zhasyl Kazakhstan” that aimed to integrate the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into State planning processes. Ms. Emmanuelle Lachaussee, Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations Office at Geneva, said her country had identified major benefits from public participation in the field of the environment, including better
ownership of environmental projects by the public and improved quality of environmental decision-making and the final project’s outcomes. Mr. Michal Kiča, State Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment of Slovakia presented his country’s action plan for the implementation of its climate change adaptation strategy. Putting this into practice had showed the importance of coordinating strategic documents and initiatives at the national and local level.

Interventions from the floor started with a speech by Ms. Aleksandra Imsiragic, Assistant Minister of Environment of Serbia, who said her country’s goal was to create the conditions for full implementation of the standards established by the Convention and to harmonize its legislation with that of the European Union.

In summarizing the discussion, the Chair of the JHLS noted that it was crucial to learn from the presentations to face challenges head-on, and to adapt policies for a social justice approach in order to avoid leaving vulnerable populations behind.
GALIT COHEN: Thank you, I’m pleased to be here, delighted to be here. I’m honored to take part in this important meeting and have the opportunity to present my experience in using PPR data to encourage government and public activity to reduce emissions in Haifa.
The **second panel discussion** featured Ms. Galit Cohen, Director General of the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Israel, who gave a presentation on the use of PRTR data to encourage the government and the public to reduce emissions in the Haifa Bay area. One of the key lessons learned was that publishing information of interest to the public helped drive complex policy processes.
Interventions from the floor began with a statement by Ms. Birgit Schwenk of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany, who noted that public participation in building sustainable infrastructure was a crucial element of fostering acceptance of structural change, such as in Germany’s coal-producing regions where a funding programme was active. In light of the 20th anniversary of the Convention, Ms. Martine Rohn, the Head of Europe, Trade and Development Cooperation Section and Deputy Head of International Affairs Division of the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment then called on Parties to acknowledge the Convention’s relevance in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, adding that it was also important for Parties to develop their PRTRs as a tool toward transparency.
Mr. Antonio Hodgers, President of the Department of Territory, State Council of the Republic and Canton of Geneva, Swiss Confederation, described an initiative that involved 30 citizens’ representatives of the population of Geneva to participate in a citizens’ forum, which had drafted a report listing 104 “original and ambitious” measures for ecology.

Mr. Raf Tuts, Director of the Global Solutions Division of UN-Habitat, reviewed his organization’s work in the field of urban and territorial planning, and noted that it was committed to integrating the principles of ecosystem services and nature-based solutions in newly developed infrastructure and spatial plans.

Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development

H.E. Mr. Levan Davitashvili, Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia chaired this item, during which the declaration was adopted by consensus as amended at the meeting (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.4 - ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/CRP.1).

Review and adoption of the decisions of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention

During this item, chaired by the Chair of the MOP to the Aarhus Convention, the MOP formally adopted: (a) by consensus, all decisions taken at the general segment and decision VII/8 on general issues of compliance (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.5) as amended at the meeting; and (b) by a vote, decision VII/8c on compliance by Belarus as amended at the meeting (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.10).
H.E. Mr. Andrei Khudyk, Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus delivered a statement regarding the adoption of decision VI/8 (c) on compliance by Belarus. In his statement the Minister addressed a number of issues, including the measures that Belarus has taken over the years to better implement the Aarhus Convention, stressing that Belarus is providing necessary support to the members of the public and non-governmental organisations working in the field of the environment, and disagrees with the conclusion that the situation is rapidly deteriorating for persons exercising their rights under the Convention.

The MOP to the Aarhus Convention then adopted the major outcomes agreed upon during the meeting (contained in ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.9/Rev.1) and requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair of the MOP, to finalize the report of the seventh session and to incorporate the agreed outcomes and decisions adopted.
Closure of the Joint High-level Segment

In closing remarks, delegations welcomed Guinea-Bissau’s accession to the Convention. They also expressed their gratitude to the Chairs of the High-level Segment for rich discussions and for their guidance through the necessary and complex hybrid format. Delegations then thanked the outgoing Chair of the Convention’s Meeting of the Parties for her competent leadership. The Chair of this item, H.E. Mr. Levan Davitashvili, who chaired this item, expressed his regret that due to the COVID-19 pandemic the meetings could not take place in Georgia. He then expressed his firm belief that while much has been accomplished in furthering environmental democracy by Parties, much more can be done. Furthermore, the Parties have to focus efforts to ensure that the “Aarhus Family” is expanded and become even stronger. He also underlined the importance of applying the principles of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs in more countries around the world and then closed the meeting.

Fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers
The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (MOPP) Ms. Tina Skårman (Sweden), opened the fourth session thanking the delegates for their participation despite the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. She announced the agenda of the session, which was adopted.

**Status of ratification of the Protocol**

The secretariat informed the MOPP about the status of ratification of the Protocol, stating that there were currently 38 Parties. Since the last meeting, Montenegro, Kazakhstan and Italy had become Parties.

The representative of the European Union noted that the Protocol had been ratified by most ECE States, and encouraged all ECE States to become Parties. The representative of Kazakhstan said in 2020 it had become a Party to the Protocol, and had adopted a new environmental standard incorporating it.

**Outcome**

The Meeting of the Parties took note of the status of the ratification of the Protocol and welcomed accession by Kazakhstan and ratifications by Montenegro and Italy, and encouraged Signatories and other interested States to proceed with the accession to the Protocol as soon as possible.

**Promotion and capacity-building**

**Coordination mechanisms and synergies**

The Chair invited the MOPP to consider the report of the third global round table on PRTRs, noting that the information in the report would be useful for countries about to implement the Protocol and those looking to make further use of it.

Mr. Iñigo De Vicente-Mingarro, Chair of the International PRTRs Coordinating Group, said that the open and informal group had the objective of enhancing cooperation. Mr. Jorge Ocaña of UNITAR described the operations of UNITAR over the past four years, noting that its activities had included online training on
the Protocol and the Escazù Agreement and listing its achievements, such as the development by the Republic of Moldova of a national regulation on PRTR in 2018. Mr. Erol Cavus of UNEP described the Mediterranean Action Plan, adopted under the Barcelona Convention, noting that more data collection was needed to achieve the goal of a cleaner Mediterranean Sea, and PRTR systems could play a role in that. Mr. Koki Takaki, a representative of the OECD said a report had recently been published on using PRTR information in achieving progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, and played a video which noted that pollutant release in some countries had been reduced in the last few years. A representative of the European Union also spoke.

**Outcome**

The Chair summarized the conclusions of the agenda item, and the MOPP e.g. mandated a fourth global event and the production of a report, among other decisions.

**Subregional and national activities**

The Chair noted that the Working Group of the Parties addressed the issue of capacity building at its meetings. As for the use of electronic tools at the country level, the representative of the OECD presented the IOMC Toolbox, a problem-solving tool that enables countries to identify the most appropriate, efficient and cost-effective solutions to national chemicals management issues. Ms. Magdolina Tóth Nagy from ECO Forum spoke about the launch of a new project on the enhancement of PRTRs in the Western Balkan countries and the Republic of Moldova, which aimed to support the project countries to develop or upgrade their registers.

The representative of the European Union noted that subregional and national activities were important for the implementation of the Protocol.

**Outcome**

The Chair summarized the discussions under the agenda item, and the MOPP welcomed the accession and ratification by countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and South-Eastern Europe, and called upon those countries to demonstrate substantial progress in establishing PRTRs, and encouraged other countries in these subregions to follow their example.

**Reporting and compliance mechanisms**

**Reporting mechanism**
The Chair introduced the relevant documents concerning the agenda item on the reporting mechanism, including draft decision IV/1 on reporting requirements. Mr. Juan Luis Martin Ortega, Chair of the Protocol’s Compliance Committee, then recalled that MOPP3 had asked the Committee to prepare for MOPP4 a synthesis report of the third reporting cycle in order to provide a strategic overview of major trends and challenges. He then presented key findings from the report (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/10).

**Outcome**

The Chair summarized the discussion under the agenda item, and the MOPP adopted, as amended, decision IV/1 on reporting requirements (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/CRP.3). MOP urged Parties that did not submit their national implementation reports, Lithuania and Montenegro, to do so by latest 15 November 2021.

**Compliance mechanism**

Mr. Ortega reported on the Committee’s activities since MOPP3 (Budva, Montenegro, 15 September 2017). Noting that there were no submissions by Parties or referrals by the secretariat, he reported that one communication from the public had been received since the previous session, which the Committee had determined to be preliminarily admissible. He noted that the Compliance Committee stood ready to provide advisory support, such as workshops and training for national experts.

**Election of members of the Compliance Committee**

The Chair listed the candidates, Ms. Rodica Iordanov (Republic of Moldova) and Ms. Tina Janjatovic (Serbia), noting that one seat remained vacant. The representative of the European Union thanked the outgoing members and supported both new candidates.

**Outcome**

The MOPP thanked the Committee for the work done and the outgoing members of the Committee for their service. The MOPP then elected the two new Committee members by consensus: Ms. Rodica Iordanov (Republic of Moldova) and Ms. Tina Janjatovic (Serbia).
**Development of the Protocol**

The European Union spoke in support of the adoption of draft decision IV/2 on the development of the Protocol. Switzerland considered it critically important to modernize the Protocol and welcomed the Bureau’s report on the outcomes of the survey, which would ensure that the Protocol remained an up-to-date instrument for transparency. A representative of European ECO-Forum said many improvements could be implemented right away by Parties, expressing hopes for an extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties to swiftly approve any proposed amendments to the Protocol. Kazakhstan supported the initiative for developing the Protocol and thanked OECD and UNITAR for their technical assistance, as well as national experts and NGOs. The United Kingdom thanked the Bureau and secretariat for their work and looked forward to participating in future discussions on the topic.

**Outcome**

The Chair summarized the conclusions under the agenda item and the MOPP adopted draft decision IV/2 on the development of the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/14).

**Programme of work and operation of the Protocol**

**Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021**
The Chair referred to the report on the implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/8) and of the Report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the Protocol’s work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/9). The secretariat listed the additional contributions and pledges received after the report’s preparation. The European Union thanked the secretariat for the reports; the comprehensive assessment kept the work on track and promoted the work of the Protocol at the international level. The European ECO Forum thanked all who supported the work of the secretariat and acknowledged the common goals to be achieved in the intersessional period. The Chair summarized conclusions under the agenda item and invited the MOPP to review the implementation of the Protocol’s current work programme (ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/6/Add.1, decision III/2, annex) on the basis of reports prepared by the secretariat.

**Outcome**

The MOPP warmly thanked Parties for their financial and in-kind contributions and expressed great appreciation to in kind-contributions provided by partner organisations; and expressed its appreciation for the work done by the secretariat and recognized the difficulties posed by limited and unpredictable funding.

**Future work programme for 2022–2025**

The MOPP considered draft decision IV/3 on the Protocol’s work programme for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/13). The European Union supported the proposed decision and recognized that the Protocol plays an important role in supporting Parties to implement the many Sustainable Development Goals. European ECO Forum proposed an amendment to the draft decision whereby attention would be paid to possible ways forward. The Chair explained that there were several rounds of open-ended consultations on the draft decision among Parties and stakeholders with ample opportunities to comment the draft. Based on the comments received, the Working Group finalised and approved the draft at its latest meeting. Thus, the suggestion would be included in the report, but no amendments will be introduced at this stage.

**Outcome**

The Chair summarized the discussion and the MOPP then adopted the decision IV/3 on the Protocol’s work programme for 2022–2025.
Financial arrangements

Regarding draft decision IV/4 on financial arrangements under the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/11), the Chair indicated that the major issues for the Parties’ consideration was whether the contributions should be mandatory or voluntary, and whether the United Nations scale of contributions should be taken into account. Switzerland advocated for a sustainable and predictable financial mechanism under the Convention and the Protocol and supported an arrangement based on an equitable sharing of the burden. The European Union supported a financial scheme with voluntary contributions and added that no contributing party should pay less than 1 000 dollars per year. The United Kingdom viewed the voluntary scheme as the most suitable option. Switzerland said that though no agreement could be reached at the moment, it was important that the option to discuss financial arrangements remain on the agenda for the next MOPP.

Outcome

The Chair summarized the discussion as being in favour of a voluntary scheme of contributions, with an increase in the level of the minimum sum of contributions to 1000 dollars, also noting that the issue would be added for discussion at MOPPS5. The MOPP then adopted decision IV/4 on financial arrangements, as amended at the meeting (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/CRP.4).

Election of officers and other members of the Bureau

The Chair read the list of the candidates nominated for election to the Bureau.

Outcome

The MOPP thanked the outgoing members of the Bureau. MOPP had elected, by consensus, Mr. Tone Kvasič (Slovenia) as Chair and Ms. Enkeleda Shkurti
(Albania) and Mr. Alex Radway (European Union) as Vice-Chairs. It also elected, by consensus, Ms. Marie-Rose van den Hende (Belgium), Mr. Eduard Hlavatý (Czechia), Ms. Teresa Palomar (Spain) and Mr. Bohdan Papusha (Ukraine) as members of the Bureau. It also took note of the appointment by the European ECO Forum of Mr. Christian Schaible (NGO) as the NGO representative to attend the meetings of the Bureau as an observer invited by the Bureau.

**Date and venue of the fifth ordinary session**

The Chair noted that to date, there had been no proposal from any Party to host the next MOPP in 2025. The Chair summarized the discussion on the item and the MOPP mandated the Working Group to consider at its next meeting a possible date and venue for its fifth ordinary session.

**Review and adoption of decisions**

The Chair read the decisions and major outcomes item by item, and the MOPP adopted the list of major outcomes and decisions.

In closing, the Chair thanked all participants for their presence, both online and in person. The past week showed that despite challenging circumstances, the opportunity to share views with other Parties, States, civil society and the private sector remained fruitful and valuable. Delegations thanked the Chair for her skilled leadership and the secretariat for their work and congratulated them on successfully running a hybrid meeting.

The Chair then closed the meeting.

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