

Statement-Serbia MOP7 –Capacity building

Excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Capacity-building activities related to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Serbia are given the high priority. The country allocates funds to support the relevant projects implemented by non-governmental organizations but also works successfully with international and national partners to continue strengthening capacities in this area.

- Numerous activities were realized through projects implemented during the 2017-2020 period and financial support to projects, aimed at increasing public awareness of the importance of environmental protection, the implementation of specific environmental protection activities, as well as activities aimed at implementing the Aarhus Convention (lectures, seminars, workshops, roundtables, peer education, media campaigns, development of informational-promotional and printed materials, development of websites for the promotion of the environment, film and television creative work, ecological camps, spatial regulation, etc.).

For example, only in 2020, funds in the amount of 424000 euros are planned for the co-financing of environmental protection projects of non-government organizations from the Ministry of Environmental Protection's (MEP) budget. After conducting an open competition for the co-financing of environmental protection projects of non-government organizations, the MEP co-financed 76 projects in the total amount of 424000 euros. The selected projects related to the following areas: nature protection (19 projects); climate change (19 projects); circular economy - environmental entrepreneurship (12 projects); civic activism (26 projects).

- In 2021, after conducting an open competition for the co-financing of non-government organizations, the MEP co-financed 92 projects in the total amount of 593000 euros.

In 2021, in agreement with the MEP the OSCE Mission to Serbia will support the development of an updated Strategy and Action Plan for Implementing the Aarhus Convention, from 2022 until 2030. The SAP will contain an overview of the current legislation, policies and practices, providing guidance to officials at all levels, civil society and interested stakeholders to exercise their legal rights warranted by the Aarhus Convention. In line with the recent progress achieved towards the opening of Chapter 27 of the EU Acquis, the SAP will also outline recommendations for future activities aimed at achieving full transposition and implementation of provisions of Aarhus Convention and related international directives, through legislative, institutional and capacity building activities.

In the Republic of Serbia, there are several priorities for capacity-building on Aarhus convention matters.

There is a lack of administrative capacity (especially in terms of developing environmental legislation) and a lack of human resources at competent environmental institutions. Capacity to implement and enforce legislation needs to be strengthened.

It is necessary to strengthen the role of NGOs to support the Aarhus Convention's implementation. The situation with the Aarhus centers in the Republic of Serbia is similar. Their work is very difficult, and it depends on the available projects' engagement. Staff costs and office maintenance of an Aarhus center are 15000 euros per year and the costs of carrying out the activities and programs are 12000 euros per year. The Aarhus centers in the Republic of

Serbia have great potential for implementing both the requirements of the Aarhus Convention and the PRTR protocol, especially in promoting the PRTR register.

- There exist a small number of cases related to environmental protection in the Republic of Serbia. In Serbia, there are no specialized judges and prosecutors in the field of the environment or specialized environmental units within the judiciary. There is a lack of legal solutions concerning administrative costs and court procedures. It is necessary to adopt legal grounds for appropriate assistance mechanisms to remove or reduce financial and other barriers to access to justice and increase knowledge of environmental legislation across the judiciaries. The Judicial Academy with partner organizations such as the European Institute of Public Administration and the OSCE Mission to Serbia organized trainings for judges and prosecutors on the topic of environmental legislation, but, in light of the present situation, there is a large need for more training and education of the judiciary. The cost of a training for the judges and prosecutors is approximately 5000 euros.

-The Republic of Serbia would greatly benefit from the following activities: environmental education and training; strengthening the knowledge and skills of the citizens to take part in public consultations related to their participation in decision-making processes, and allocation of budget funds to support public participation; boosting the capacity of the NGOs involved in the educational and training activities; supporting formal or informal courses related to public participation in decision-making processes; training the officials and executives at all levels of public administration on how to communicate with general public; and providing support for formal and informal environmental educational programmes, including incentives and tools for public participation.

All the above listed measures and activities should be undertaken and implemented in close collaboration with the NGOs. The swift pursuit and quality delivery of such activities would undoubtedly facilitate the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the Republic of Serbia. We look forward to continue cooperation with partners to implement these activities.