

4th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the PRTR Protocol (MOPP 4)
(Geneva, Switzerland, hybrid format, 21-22 October 2021)

Statements by the EU and its Member States

Agenda item 1: Opening of the general segment and adoption of the agenda

Good morning, Madam Chair, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I am speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. This is our first intervention at this session and I would like to take the opportunity to sincerely thank the Secretariat for all the excellent work done so far. 20 years of the Aarhus Convention and 12 years of the PRTR Protocol have shown the merit of putting in place two international instruments necessary for environmental protection. At the same time, both instruments provide a good base for more effective environmental and also climate action in the future. In addition, pollutant release and transfer registers contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and their specific targets and this should be further explored. We would like to thank the Bureau and the Secretariat for the preparation and timely submission of comprehensive meeting documents, as well as for organising the Meeting of the Parties under such challenging circumstances. The EU and its Member States can accept the proposed agenda as it stands.

With respect to the operating procedures, we would like to thank you for the revised version so that the quorum can be established on both, on the basis of physical representation as well as via roll-call and not exclusively on the basis of parties physically present in Geneva. However, we would just like to stress that this position does not constitute a precedent for future meetings in the framework of UNECE under Covid-19 conditions.

Agenda item 2: Status of ratification of the Protocol

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the Secretariat for the information on the status of ratification, acceptance, approval and accession with respect to the Protocol.

The Protocol has been ratified by most UNECE Member States. We encourage the remaining Signatories to the Protocol and other interested States to ratify the Protocol in the near future in order to become Parties to the Protocol.

Agenda item 3: Promotion and capacity-building

(a) Coordination mechanisms and synergies

The EU and its Member States believe that synergies with other organisations and parties are important as they enhance public access to information on global environmental issues and facilitate public participation in environmental decision-making.

In this respect, we strongly support PRTR related coordination activities carried out, in particular, with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), as well as other organisations. This provides great opportunities and enables cooperation to find new perspectives and areas for improvement and for further development of the Protocol.

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the Secretariat and the OECD for the Report of the third Global Round Table on the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Register. We believe that the report is very important and useful not only for participating countries and stakeholders, but also for the countries that are in the process of establishing PRTRs.

(b) Sub regional and national activities

The EU and its Member States believe that subregional and national activities are important for the proper implementation and further development of the Protocol. Examples of modernisation of PRTRs, similarities with other reporting requirements, like the Minamata Convention, as well as some countries' achievements in establishing PRTRs, presented in the previous meetings, make us aware of some of the remaining challenges.

PRTR-related activities, like the development of guidance materials, capacity building and other activities to support countries in developing PRTRs are also very beneficial. The EU and its Member States are committed to organising, as well as participating in relevant regional activities.

Agenda item 4: Reporting and compliance mechanisms

(a) Reporting mechanism

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the Bureau for the preparation of the draft decision on reporting requirements, approved by the Working Group at its eighth meeting.

Recognising the importance of having clear guidance, the EU and its Member States welcome the draft decision on reporting requirements, also as amended now to reflect the current status. In particular, the sections on timely submission of implementation reports, with encouragement to the Parties to start the preparation of the reports sufficiently in advance, and through a public, consultative and transparent process, are considered to be of utmost importance for achieving the Protocol's objectives.

(b) Compliance mechanism

First of all, the EU and its Member States would like to thank the outgoing members of the Compliance Committee for their contributions. We would also like to thank the Parties which have submitted nominees. We can support both candidates for the Compliance Committee. We thank them for their availability and wish them fruitful experiences in this role.

Agenda item 5: Development of the Protocol

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the Bureau and the Working Group of the Parties for the preparation of a draft decision on the development of the Protocol. We support its adoption.

We recognise the importance of decisions related to the development of the Protocol adopted by the Working Group at its seventh and eight meetings, and we are aware that some parties are interested to develop pollutant release and transfer registers going beyond the current requirements of the Protocol. We look forward to actively engaging in this process and to develop the Protocol in a way that will allow for its best application, suitability and use.

Agenda item 6: Programme of work and operation of the Protocol

(a) Implementation of the work programme 2018-2021

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the Secretariat for the report on the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021 and on related contributions and expenditures. In our view, this comprehensive assessment contributes to keeping the implementation of the work programme on track, increases public awareness and promotes the objectives of the Protocol at international level.

(b) Future work programme for 2022-2025

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the Secretariat and the Bureau for the preparation of the draft decision on the work programme for 2022–2025 for the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers. We can support the proposed decision.

We would like to thank the Secretariat and the Bureau for the detailed work programme, which will contribute to increase public awareness and promote the objectives of the Convention and its Protocol at international level. We recognise that the Protocol plays an important role in supporting Parties in implementing a number of Sustainable Development Goals.

(c) Financial arrangements

The EU and its Member States recognise the necessity of ensuring the predictability and sustainability of funding, and appreciate efforts made to explore new possibilities for providing adequate funding under the Protocol. However, the EU and its Member States are not in a position to support Option A and will therefore support Option B for a financial scheme with voluntary contributions. The EU considers that the likely benefits associated with fixed contributions can be largely offset by the flexibility of working with voluntary contributions.

As regards the minimum annual contribution, we reiterate that no contributing Party should pay less than 1000 USD in a given calendar year since, below this threshold, the total expenses incurred will surpass the revenues. With such a minimum contribution, the Protocol would follow the established practice within the framework of other ECE Conventions and Protocols.

Agenda item 7: Election of officers and other members of the Bureau

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the outgoing members for their work and commitment to the process. We would also like to thank all Parties which submitted nominations and would like to congratulate all newly elected members of the Bureau.

Agenda item 11: Closure of the meeting

Thank you Madam Chair. I would like to extend our warm thanks to you and to the Secretariat for running this meeting in a very smooth and structured manner.

The EU and its Member States would in general like to thank the UNECE Secretariat for hosting MOP 7 of the Aarhus Convention, the Joint High-Level Segment and MOPP 4 of the PRTR Protocol. As we all know, these are challenging times and organising any international meeting has many unpredictable elements and dimensions. The past week showed that despite challenging circumstances, the discussions and opportunities to exchange views and share experiences with all delegates and stakeholders, including civil society organisations and the private sector, were as valuable and fruitful as always.

We are convinced that best practices of the implementation of the Protocol, as identified in the national implementation reports, will benefit all those concerned by the Protocol. We also believe that the Protocol will develop in a way that will benefit different stakeholders in the wider society.

We would like to thank all the participants and congratulate the Representatives of the Parties for the adoption of the Geneva Declaration and the very important decisions that will allow continuity of the work done so far and further promote the PRTR Protocol.

We are looking forward to meeting you all again in the near future.

Thank you very much for your attention.
