



Economic Commission for Europe
**Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
 Access to Information, Public Participation
 in Decision-making and Access to Justice
 in Environmental Matters**
Seventh session

Geneva, 18–20 October 2021

Report of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties
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I. Introduction

1. The seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties 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, from 18 to 20 October 2021. The session was organized back-to-back with the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (22 October 2021). A Joint High-level Segment of the two bodies was held on 21 October 2021.¹ Due to restrictions associated with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the meeting was held in a hybrid format, combining online and in-person participation. A roll call to establish the presence of Parties participating only remotely for the purpose of decision-making was held on 21 October, concluding that the necessary quorum had been secured with more than 24 Parties present.

A. Attendance

2. The seventh session was attended by delegations from the following Parties to the Convention: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, European Union, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3. Delegations from Canada, Guinea-Bissau, Jordan and Uzbekistan also attended.

4. From the United Nations system, representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan and the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and the World Health Organization were present. Other international organizations represented at the meeting included the Council of Europe, the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Nuclear Energy Agency and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

5. Representatives of the judiciary, Aarhus Centres, international financial institutions and the private sector, professional, research and academic institutions were also present, as were representatives of international, regional and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), many of whom coordinated their input within the framework of the European ECO-Forum.

B. Organizational matters

6. The seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention was split into a preparatory (18 October), a general (19 and 20 October) and a joint high-level segment (21 October), the latter being held jointly with the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. In order to reach consensus, at the Chair's request, informal consultations were held during the session to deal with the following draft decisions: VII/8 (c) on compliance by Belarus; VII/8 (f) on compliance by the European Union; VII/8 on general issues of compliance; and VII/9 on a rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Aarhus Convention. During the preparatory segment, the Meeting of the Parties considered: the draft decisions on compliance matters; the bracketed text in the draft decisions on financial

¹ Documents for the meeting, list of participants, reports by chairs and the texts of statements, where provided by delegates, are available at https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/Aarhus_Convention_MoP7.

arrangements and on a rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Convention; factual amendments to the draft decisions on reporting requirements and on public participation in decision-making; and proposed amendments to the draft Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development. Consideration of items during the preparatory, general and high-level segments is summarized in the present report in accordance with their thematic focus. All decisions provisionally adopted during the general segment along with the other decisions and major outcomes presented at the meeting were forwarded to and formally adopted at the Joint High-level Segment²; the formal closure of the seventh session also took place during the Joint High-level Segment. In order to ensure equal opportunities for English-, French- and Russian-speaking delegations and reduce paper use, a list of decisions and outcomes adopted at the session was made available to delegations electronically and was read out by the Chair, allowing for interpretation, prior to adoption. The adopted outcomes have been incorporated into the present report. For practical reasons, the adopted decisions are being issued in an addendum to the present report (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1).

II. Opening of the session

7. In her opening remarks to the preparatory segment, the Chair praised Parties for agreeing on an ambitious and rich agenda despite COVID-19 pandemic-related challenges. She took that agreement as proof of the commitment of Parties and stakeholders to environmental protection and public rights. In that context, she referred to Human Rights Council resolution 48/13 on the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.³

8. In his introductory address during the general segment, the Director of the Environment Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) thanked Parties and interested countries, partner organizations, NGOs and people in the region for their continuous commitment to promoting environmental democracy. Despite the challenges remaining, the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol had already brought about tangible results in terms of enhancing access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters in many countries in the region. The expected accession of Guinea-Bissau to the Convention was an example of the recognition of the importance of the Convention and its Protocol beyond the ECE region and promised to offer new perspectives and experiences from different parts of the world on ways to further promote environmental democracy.

9. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties outlined the main items for discussion, explained the meeting format and formally opened the seventh session on 18 October 2021. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the information provided by the Chair and the secretariat and adopted its agenda for the session as set out in document ECE/MP.PP/2021/1. It also took note of the statements by the representatives of the European Union, Norway, Switzerland and the European ECO-Forum and adopted the operating procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making in the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention due to extraordinary circumstances (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.1), as amended at the meeting.

III. Status of ratification of the Convention and the amendment to the Convention

10. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification with respect to the Convention and the amendment on public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms. Since the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Budva, Montenegro, 11–14 September 2017), the

² See also report of the Joint High-level Segment (ECE/MP.PP/2021/16–ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/2).

³ A/HRC/RES/48/13.

number of Parties to the Convention had remained unchanged at 47. During the same period, the number of Parties to the amendment had risen from 31 to 32, owing to the ratification thereof by Albania on 3 September 2020.⁴

11. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the status of ratification of the Convention and its amendment and welcomed the ratification of the amendment by Albania.

IV. Substantive issues

A. Access to information, including electronic information tools

12. The Chair of the Task Force on Access to Information reported on the Task Force's activities since the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties, including the outcomes of its meetings and of a thematic session on access to information under the auspices of the Working Group of the Parties.⁵ The Task Force and EEA had also organized a joint workshop on widening access to open data for the environment. A highlight of the intersessional period had been the update of the Recommendations on Electronic Information Tools, which had aimed to enhance knowledge-sharing and technology transfer to bridge the digital divide.

13. A representative of EEA delivered a keynote statement, noting joint activities with the Task Force to improve data governance, and identify and implement a technical infrastructure and electronic tools to improve data access and exchange. He also stressed the need to respond to the global data revolution, leading to a growing volume and diversity of data and also pushing towards the usage of new methods and technologies.

14. A representative of the European ECO-Forum made a keynote statement noting the importance of quality and useability of accessible data for various purposes.

15. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the report of the Chair of the Task Force on Access to Information and thanked the speakers for their keynote statements. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the Task Force for the work done and the Chair for her skilled leadership. It expressed its appreciation to the Republic of Moldova for chairing the Task Force and welcomed its offer to continue leading that work area in the next intersessional period.

16. The Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted draft decision VII/1 on promoting effective access to information (ECE/MP.PP/2021/8) and the 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).

B. Public participation in decision-making

17. The Chair of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making reported on the activities of the Task Force since the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties, including outcomes of its meetings and of a thematic session under the auspices of the Working Group of the Parties.⁶ The Task Force continued to provide an important platform for experts from Governments, civil society and other stakeholders to exchange good practices, examine systemic and specific challenges and identify common priorities.

18. Italy announced its willingness to continue leading the Task Force during the next intersessional period.

19. In a keynote statement, a representative of the European ECO-Forum expressed concern about the impact of government responses to the pandemic, in particular on procedural rights of public participation in decision-making – leading to public hearings

⁴ See https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVII-13&chapter=27&clang=_en.

⁵ See <https://unece.org/env/pp/tfai-background-and-meetings>.

⁶ See <https://unece.org/env/pp/aarhus-convention/tfppdm>.

being cancelled, postponed or moved online. She stressed the importance of effective public participation in preparing environment-related national or regional plans or programmes.

20. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the report by the Chair of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making and thanked the speaker for her keynote statement. It also took note of the statements by the representatives of Italy and the European ECO-Forum.

21. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the Task Force for the work done and its Chair for her skilled leadership. It expressed its appreciation to Italy for chairing the Task Force and welcomed its offer to continue leading the work area in the next intersessional period.

22. The Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted draft decision VII/2 on promoting effective public participation in decision-making (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.2), as amended at the meeting.

C. Access to justice

23. The Chair of the Task Force on Access to Justice reported on Task Force activities since the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties,⁷ including the outcomes of its meetings, of a judicial colloquium and of a thematic session on access to justice under the auspices of the Working Group of the Parties.⁸ The Task Force addressed a number of topics, including access to justice in information cases and in cases relating to: air quality; public interest litigation in environmental matters; and various experiences in implementing multi-stakeholder dialogues, e-justice and capacity-building initiatives.

24. In a keynote statement on access to justice, a judge from the Supreme Court of Albania illustrated how the Supreme Court had directly applied provisions of the Convention in recent judgments on environmental cases and hence developed the groundwork for adjudication for the lower courts.

25. A representative of the European ECO-Forum delivered a keynote statement, noting that a European Union directive on general access to justice was required and pointing out challenges to effective access to justice, such as the pandemic or the growing number of strategic lawsuits against public participation.

26. In the following discussion, statements were made by representatives of several Parties, including the European Union, Norway and Switzerland, and the European ECO-Forum. In addition to reporting on recent national activities, speakers stressed a number of points, such as the critical importance of access to justice in contributing to the protection of human rights defenders, including those addressing environmental issues, and the successful implementation of a number of Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16.

27. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the report by the Chair of the Task Force on Access to Justice and thanked the speakers for their keynote statements. It also took note of statements by the representatives of the European Union, Norway, Switzerland and the European ECO-Forum.

28. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the Task Force for the work done during the intersessional period and its outgoing Chair for his skilled leadership. It expressed its appreciation to Sweden for chairing the Task Force and welcomed the offer of Belgium to lead the work area in the next intersessional period. The Meeting of the Parties welcomed Mr. Luc Lavrysen, the new Chair of the Task Force on Access to Justice.

29. The Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted draft decision VII/3 on promoting effective access to justice (ECE/MP.PP/2021/10).

⁷ Owing to connection problems, the Chair was not able to deliver the statement, but submitted his written report, available at https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/Aarhus_Convention_MoP7 (tab “Statements, comments and reports”).

⁸ See <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/tfaj/meetings.html>.

D. Genetically modified organisms

30. The Chair of the third joint Round Table on Public Awareness, Access to Information and Public Participation regarding living modified organisms (LMOs)/genetically modified organisms (Geneva, 16–18 December 2019), organized under the auspices of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Cartagena Protocol), reported on the event and other activities related to GMOs since the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties.⁹ Outcomes of the round table for the way forward included: (i) continuing to strengthen coordination and cooperation between national focal points of both the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol; (ii) mainstreaming biosafety, including public awareness, education and participation regarding LMO/GMO matters, into different sectors and policies; and (iii) strengthening expertise and institutional capacity of authorities dealing with biosafety matters through, for example, capacity-building activities, including on new developments in the field of LMOs/GMOs, such as gene drive techniques or synthetic biology.

31. A representative of the Convention on Biological Diversity secretariat stressed in her keynote statement how the joint activities had helped to better promote public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs/GMOs. That work included contributions to several joint meetings and thematic sessions, as well as the completion of the *Pocket Guide promoting effective access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms*¹⁰ – an informal training and learning tool prepared on the basis of experiences shared by Parties to and stakeholders of the Cartagena Protocol and the Aarhus Convention.

32. In her keynote statement, a representative of the European ECO-Forum stressed the need for targeted support for Parties to build their legal and risk assessment capacity, for existing and emerging types of GMOs (e.g., gene editing, gene drive), as well as for effective access to information and public participation in GMO-related decision-making.

33. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the report by the Chair of the third joint Round Table on Public Awareness, Access to Information and Public Participation, thanking him for the work done and for his skilled leadership. It also thanked speakers for their keynote statements. The Meeting of the Parties welcomed the effective cooperation between the secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and requested that said cooperation be continued in the next intersessional period, including through the organization of a joint event.

34. The Meeting of the Parties urged those 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 amendment and called upon other Parties to ratify the GMO amendment. The Meeting of the Parties mandated the Working Group of the Parties to monitor closely the progress of the entry into force of the GMO amendment, and called upon Parties and partner organizations to offer bilateral assistance, capacity-building and technical support to Parties whose ratification of the GMO amendment would count towards its entry into force.

35. Additionally, the Meeting of the Parties requested the secretariat to ensure that, once the GMO amendment entered into force, the amended text of the Convention would be processed, translated and published by the United Nations services and made available in the six official languages of the United Nations without recourse to additional extrabudgetary resources.

36. A representative of Armenia reported that work to ratify the GMO amendment was ongoing, including the development of legislation on biosafety and the adoption of a law on

⁹ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/gmos>.

¹⁰ Available at <https://unece.org/environment/documents/2021/12/pocket-guide-promoting-effective-access-information-and-public> .

GMOs in 2020, and their alignment with the respective provisions of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Aarhus Convention.

37. Representatives of the European Union and of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland called upon those countries whose ratifications were needed for the entry into force of the GMO amendment to ratify it as soon as possible, as well as upon the other Parties who had yet to ratify it to do so. A representative of the European ECO-Forum stressed the importance of Parties ratifying the GMO amendment including the original term “participation” in national legislation as used in the amendment, instead of the term “consultation”, as those terms were not interchangeable.

38. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the statements by the representatives of the European Union, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European ECO-Forum. It thanked Austria for its leadership in the area of work and welcomed its offer to continue leading the work area in the next intersessional period.

E. Geneva Declaration

39. The Meeting of the Parties took note of statements by the representatives of Belarus, the European Union, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, approved the draft Declaration (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.4–ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/CRP.1), as amended at the meeting, and forwarded it to the High-level Segment for adoption.

V. Procedures and mechanisms facilitating the implementation of the Convention

A. Reporting mechanism

40. The Chair presented major outcomes of the synthesis report on the status of implementation of the Convention, prepared on the basis of the national implementation reports submitted by Parties for the sixth reporting cycle (2017–2020) (ECE/MP.PP/2021/6).

41. Representatives of Malta and of the Republic of Moldova updated the Meeting of the Parties on the status of preparation of their national implementation reports and expressed regret at the delay in submitting them, noting that the reports would soon be submitted to the secretariat. Statements were also made by representatives of the European Union and the European ECO-Forum.

42. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the information provided in national implementation reports submitted by Parties and the synthesis report prepared by the secretariat. It also took note of reports prepared by stakeholders, the information provided by the Chair and statements by the speakers.¹¹

43. The Meeting of the Parties recognized the need for the timely submission of national implementation reports in order to ensure the good quality of the synthesis report and its timely submission for translation, noting with regret that 40 per cent of Parties (19 Parties) had not submitted their reports by the set deadline.

44. The Meeting of the Parties urged Parties that had not yet submitted their national implementation reports – i.e. Azerbaijan, Malta, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan – to do so by 1 December 2021 at the latest, and in the required format.

45. The Meeting of the Parties 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

¹¹ National implementation reports are available at <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/national-reports/reports>, reports by stakeholders are available at <https://unece.org/2021-reports-international-regional-and-non-governmental-organizations>.

paragraph 13 (c) of the annex to decision I/7 (ECE/MP.PP/2/Add.8) to consider the ongoing failure by the Republic of Moldova to submit its reports for the fifth and sixth cycles.

46. The Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted draft decision VII/7 on reporting requirements (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.3), as amended at the meeting.

B. Compliance mechanism

Decisions and reports on compliance

47. Before proceeding with the agenda item, the Chair shared the sad news that Mr. Veit Koester, one of the leading negotiators of the Convention and the first Chair of its Compliance Committee, had passed away at the end of September. He had played a crucial role in setting up the Committee's work. The Chair honoured him as an outstanding environmental lawyer. To pay tribute to Mr. Koester, the Meeting of the Parties observed one minute of silence.

48. The Chair of the Compliance Committee presented the Committee's reports on procedural matters (ECE/MP.PP/2021/44) and on general issues of compliance (ECE/MP.PP/2021/45). The Meeting of the Parties welcomed the reports and thanked the Chair and other Compliance Committee members for their work in the intersessional period. The Meeting of the Parties also considered 14 reports by the Committee concerning its follow-up with individual Parties regarding the decisions adopted, and requests made, by the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session concerning those Parties' compliance (ECE/MP.PP/2021/46–ECE/MP.PP/2021/51, ECE/MP.PP/2021/53, ECE/MP.PP/2021/55–ECE/MP.PP/2021/61), and two reports by the Committee regarding its follow-up with individual Parties concerning the findings and recommendations regarding those Parties' compliance adopted since the sixth session (ECE/MP.PP/2021/52 and ECE/MP.PP/2021/54).

49. A representative of the European ECO-Forum made a keynote statement paying tribute to the Committee's work and commitment during the intersessional period. However, he expressed concern that the length of case consideration remained a challenge and that some Parties remained in non-compliance for too long. He underlined the fact that the principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment must be observed at all stages of the compliance review process so that all Parties were treated equally and called on the Meeting of the Parties to be a champion for environmental defenders. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the keynote speaker for his statement.

50. The Chair turned to the draft decisions on compliance prepared by the Bureau based on the findings and recommendations adopted by the Compliance Committee. She reminded Parties that it was an established practice that all findings of non-compliance by the Committee, as presented in draft decisions, were to be endorsed by the Meeting of the Parties.

51. The Meeting of the Parties considered draft decision VII/8 on general issues of compliance (ECE/MP.PP/2021/23) and draft decisions VII/8a–s (ECE/MP.PP/2017/24–42) concerning compliance by individual Parties (namely, respectively, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, the European Union, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland).

52. The Meeting of the Parties could not reach consensus on draft decision VII/8 on general issues of compliance (ECE/MP.PP/2021/23) and on draft decision VII/8c on compliance by Belarus (ECE/MP.PP/2021/26) during the preparatory and general segments and accordingly forwarded them for consideration at the High-level Segment.

53. The Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted the following draft decisions at the general segment, taking note of the statements by the following Parties and NGOs also speaking on behalf of the European ECO-Forum:

(a) Draft decision VII/8a on compliance by Armenia (ECE/MP.PP/2021/24), taking note of the statement by Armenia and information provided by the Chair of the Compliance Committee;

- (b) Draft decision VII/8b on compliance by Austria (ECE/MP.PP/2021/25), taking note of the statement by Ökobüro;
- (c) Draft decision VII/8d on compliance by Bulgaria (ECE/MP.PP/2021/27), taking note of the statements by Bulgaria and ClientEarth;
- (d) Draft decision VII/8e on compliance by Czechia (ECE/MP.PP/2021/28), taking note of the statement by Ökobüro;
- (e) Draft decision VII/8g on compliance by Germany (ECE/MP.PP/2021/30);
- (f) Draft decision VII/8h on compliance by Hungary (ECE/MP.PP/2021/31);
- (g) Draft decision VII/8i on compliance by Ireland (ECE/MP.PP/2021/32), taking note of the statement by Ireland;
- (h) Draft decision VII/8j on compliance by Italy (ECE/MP.PP/2021/33);
- (i) Draft decision VII/8k on compliance by Kazakhstan (ECE/MP.PP/2021/34);
- (j) Draft decision VII/8l on compliance by Lithuania (ECE/MP.PP/2021/35), taking note of the statement by Lithuania;
- (k) Draft decision VII/8m on compliance by the Netherlands (ECE/MP.PP/2021/36);
- (l) Draft decision VII/8n on compliance by the Republic of Moldova (ECE/MP.PP/2021/37), taking note of the statements by the Republic of Moldova and Eco-TIRAS;
- (m) Draft decision VII/8o on compliance by Romania (ECE/MP.PP/2021/38);
- (n) Draft decision VII/8p on compliance by Spain (ECE/MP.PP/2021/39), taking note of the statement by Spain and information provided by the Chair to the Compliance Committee;
- (o) Draft decision VII/8q on compliance by Turkmenistan (ECE/MP.PP/2021/40), taking note of the statements by Turkmenistan and Eco-TIRAS;
- (p) Draft decision VII/8r on compliance by Ukraine (ECE/MP.PP/2021/41);
- (q) Draft decision VII/8s on compliance by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (ECE/MP.PP/2021/42), taking note of the statements by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Environment Links UK.

Draft decision VII/8f on compliance by the European Union

54. Concerning draft decision VII/8f on compliance by the European Union (ECE/MP.PP/2021/29), a representative of the European Union proposed several amendments to the draft decision regarding the Committee's findings and recommendations on communication ACCC/C/2015/128 concerning access to justice to challenge decisions on State aid measures taken by the European Commission. He provided explanations regarding the European Union proposal, referring in particular to the specificity of the European Union legal system. The proposal was followed by interventions from several Parties, the communicants of communications ACCC/C/2008/32, ACCC/C/2010/54 and ACCC/C/2015/128 and several NGOs also representing the European ECO-Forum. None of the speakers supported the European Union proposal.

55. Delegations were not convinced by the arguments of the European Union. On the contrary, delegations considered that the European Union proposal and the accompanying explanations had not been legally substantiated and that it challenged the principle of equal treatment of all Parties.

56. In an effort to reach consensus, the Meeting of the Parties agreed that the discussion on the decision on compliance by the European Union with regard to the Committee's findings and recommendation on communication ACCC/C/2015/128 only would be postponed until the next ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties. Several Parties however expressed their great concern and reluctance to deviate, as an exceptional measure

for that particular case only, from the long-standing and consistent practice of adopting decisions at each ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties endorsing all of the findings issued by the Compliance Committee during the intersessional period regarding non-compliance by individual Parties. A number of statements highlighted that the agreement to postpone consideration of the decision with regard to communication ACCC/C/2015/128 was exceptional and therefore would not create a precedent for any future decision-making concerning a Party's compliance.

57. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the following statements by representatives of Norway, Switzerland and the European ECO-Forum and agreed to reflect the statements in the session's report:

(a) *Norway:*

Norway continues to support the long-standing and consistent practice of the Meeting of the Parties to endorse the findings of the Compliance Committee, to recommend to the Party concerned to take actions in accordance with the Committee's recommendations and to request the Committee to follow up on their implementation by the Parties concerned. The aim of this practice is to ensure that the Committee's role is respected and the rights and obligations under the Convention are fulfilled. The compliance mechanism of the Aarhus Convention is one of the strongest and most efficient among the mechanisms of environmental conventions. We should avoid actions that could weaken it and thus the rights provided by the Convention. If, in exceptional circumstances, the Meeting of the Parties is considering deviating from this practice, it should therefore be very carefully considered whether that is warranted and desirable, taking into account both the interest of the Parties, the Convention, its bodies and mechanisms and – not least – those depending on the rights of the Convention. The willingness of the Party concerned by the Committee's findings and recommendations to follow them up even if it, in an exceptional case, has requested time to analyse the implications and assess the options available, is important in this regard. The European Union has demonstrated that it remains committed to ensuring that it respects its international obligations under the Aarhus Convention and that it will follow up on the Compliance Committee's findings and recommendations even if it, in an exceptional case, has requested time to analyse the implications and assess the options available, and therefore was not willing to accept the obligation to follow up immediately. We note that the European Union, also with regard to this case, expresses such commitments and that it sets itself a time limit to do so and to come forward with measures, as appropriate, before the next session of the Meeting of the Parties in the light of the obligations of the European Union and its Member States under the Aarhus Convention and taking into account the rules of European Union law concerning State aid. We believe in the importance of making every effort to reach decisions by consensus and to avoid voting. Norway therefore believes that postponement of the part of the draft decision concerning case ACCC/C/2015/128 would be the best option. This is an exceptional circumstance and it should not set a precedent for any future decision-making. We do expect the European Union to follow up on its commitments, and the Compliance Committee should be requested to review the follow-up by the European Union on the matter and to report to the Meeting of the Parties accordingly. This should be reflected in the meeting report.

(b) *Switzerland:*

Switzerland is convinced that the Aarhus Convention is a strong and credible instrument, especially through its highly respected Compliance Committee, and that all Parties should respect their obligations under the Convention and the Committee's decisions. Therefore, Switzerland supports the long-standing practice of the Meeting of the Parties to endorse the conclusions of the Compliance Committee. We are very concerned that the role of the Committee and the efficiency of the Convention will otherwise be weakened. In this context, Switzerland underlines the necessity to endorse the Committee's decisions and stresses that postponing the decision-making on the Committee's findings and recommendations must not establish a new practice under the Convention.

In a spirit of compromise, Switzerland agrees to postpone the decision on communication ACCC/C/2015/128. However, Switzerland requests that explanatory remarks be included in the meeting report to ensure that the postponement of this decision is exceptional and shall in no way create a precedent or establish a new practice under the Convention.

(c) *European ECO-Forum*

The European ECO-Forum condemns the position taken by the European Union, leaving no choice to the Meeting of the Parties but to postpone the endorsement of the Committee's findings as regards case ACCC/C/2015/128. It recalls with concern the similarly deplorable position the European Union took at the sixth session to postpone endorsement of the findings on communication ACCC/C/2008/32. In particular in view of this repetition, the European ECO Forum emphasizes that the European Union is a Party to the Convention like all other Parties and, as such, must abide by its duties under international law.

The European ECO-Forum's youth organization further particularly deplores this lack of respect for the rule of law, as it endangers the environmental democracy rights that are crucial to challenge the European Union's continued failure to adequately address the climate and biodiversity crisis, with grave consequences for the rights of younger generations. The European ECO-Forum therefore calls upon all Parties to the Convention to ensure that this decision remains exceptional and does not establish a practice under the Convention.

58. Concluding its discussion, the Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted draft decision VII/8f concerning compliance by the European Union, as amended at the meeting (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.6/Rev.1), and agreed to include the following text in the session's report:

In a spirit of reaching consensus, the Meeting of the Parties exceptionally decided, by consensus, to postpone the decision-making on the Committee's findings and recommendations on communication ACCC/C/2015/128 (European Union)¹² to the next ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties to be held in 2025. The Meeting of the Parties stresses that this exceptional decision shall in no way establish a practice under the Convention. The Meeting of the Parties also requested the Compliance Committee to review any developments that have taken place regarding the matter and to report to the Meeting of the Parties accordingly.

59. In that context, the Party concerned stated that it reaffirmed its commitment to implement its obligations under the Convention.

Draft decision VII/8c on compliance by Belarus

60. The Chair reminded Parties that, after the Bureau had finalized and submitted draft decision VII/8c concerning compliance by Belarus to the Meeting of the Parties, NGO Ecohome, the communicant of communication ACCC/C/2014/102 (Belarus), had informed the Compliance Committee that the Ministry of Justice had commenced proceedings before the Supreme Court of the Party concerned to liquidate Ecohome. The Committee had requested the Party concerned to explain why liquidation proceedings had been commenced against the communicant and to immediately reconsider any steps intended to silence a communicant exercising its rights in conformity with the Convention. The Supreme Court had, however, proceeded to liquidate Ecohome. In the light of the communicant's liquidation, the Committee had prepared a supplementary report containing recommendations concerning the matter (ECE/MP.PP/2021/61). In the light of the supplementary report, and considering the gravity of the event, the Bureau had submitted to the Meeting of the Parties a proposal to amend draft decision VII/8c in line with the Committee's recommendations.

61. The representative of Belarus said that the country disagreed with the Committee's procedure in preparing the supplementary report and requested the Meeting of the Parties not to consider the supplementary report or the Bureau's proposal but to focus its deliberations

¹² ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2021/21.

on draft decision VII/8c (ECE/MP.PP/2021/26). The representatives of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan spoke in support of the request of the representative of Belarus. The representatives of European Union and its member States, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland spoke in support of the Bureau proposal. The representatives of several NGOs, speaking on behalf of the European ECO-Forum, also supported the Bureau proposal. The Chair of the Compliance Committee provided clarification regarding the Committee's procedure to prepare its supplementary report.

62. Considering that delegations had strong disagreements on the matter, the Chair requested interested delegations to hold consultations with the aim of reaching a consensus. As all efforts to reach a consensus had been exhausted and no agreement had been reached during the High-level Segment, the Meeting of the Parties proceeded with voting according to rule 35 (2) of the rules of procedure (ECE/MP.PP/2/Add.2, annex) and paragraphs 17 and 18 of the operating procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making in the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention due to extraordinary circumstances (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.1). The European Union stated that, according to article 11 (2) of the Convention, it would exercise its right to vote with the number of votes equal to the number of its member States that were Parties to the Convention (i.e. 27 votes). Decision VII/8c, as amended (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.10), was thereafter adopted by 34 votes to 4 (1 abstention) at the High-level Segment. Representatives of Belarus made statements underlining the country's disagreement with the decision taken by the Meeting of the Parties.¹³

Draft decision VII/8 on general issues of compliance

63. After further deliberation at the High-level Segment, draft decision VII/8 on general issues of compliance, as amended, was adopted by consensus at the High-level Segment (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.5). Representatives of several Parties, including Belarus, the European Union, Norway and Switzerland, and of the European ECO-Forum, made statements regarding the decision.

Election of the members of the Compliance Committee

64. The Meeting of the Parties re-elected by consensus Ms. Áine Ryall (Ireland), nominated by Ireland. It also elected by consensus Ms. Eleanor Sharpston (Luxembourg), nominated by Luxembourg, and Mr. Thomas Schomerus (Germany), nominated by Ökobüro on behalf of the European ECO-Forum (NGO), as new members of the Compliance Committee.

C. Rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Convention

65. The Chair introduced the agenda item on the establishment of a rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Convention.

66. The representatives of Austria and Ireland delivered statements stressing the importance of a rapid response mechanism, offering to lead the work area and expressing their commitment to the funding of the work area. Furthermore, the representative of Austria informed the participants that, as needed, Ms. Teresa Weber would be ready to chair or moderate discussions or sessions on environmental defenders to share good practices, lessons learned and other experiences during meetings of the Working Group of the Parties or Task Forces.

67. The Meeting of the Parties welcomed the offer of Austria and Ireland to lead the newly established rapid response mechanism and to provide financial support thereto for the next intersessional period.

¹³ See also report of the Joint High-level Segment (ECE/MP.PP/2021/16–ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/2).

68. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders welcomed the timely creation of a rapid response mechanism and expressed willingness to work with and support it in any way. She expressed concern at increasing reports of attacks on environmental defenders in Europe and Central Asia. She noted that the mechanism would only be effective if implemented in good faith by States and when States lived up to their commitments in signing up for the decision in question.

69. A representative of the European ECO-Forum described the new mechanism as an important step and stressed its usefulness in avoiding infringements of article 3 (8); a preventive approach, which would allow for action to be taken quickly, before situations deteriorated, and in a spirit of cooperation and facilitation.

70. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the speakers for their keynote statements.

71. Statements were also made by the representatives of the European Union, Norway, Switzerland, the European ECO-Forum and UNEP, noting, among other things, that the new mechanism: could provide for more rapid protection of environmental defenders; contributed to setting a high standard for the protection of the rights of environmental human rights defenders internationally; and could complement the work that UNEP and other United Nations agencies were carrying out.

72. The Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted draft decision VII/9 on a rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Aarhus Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.8), as amended at the meeting. Through that decision, the Meeting of the Parties decided to hold its extraordinary session in 2022 to elect the independent Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders. The representative of Belarus made a statement in that regard and the Meeting of the Parties decided to include the following text in the report of its seventh session to reflect said statement: "Belarus reserves its position that it may not recognize the candidature of a special rapporteur not elected through consensus."

73. The representative of the European ECO-Forum noted in that regard that the Convention's rules of procedure applied to all Parties, and that was fundamental to the international law of treaties, ensuring the integrity of process.

74. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the statements made.

D. Capacity-building

75. The Chair turned to the report on capacity-building (ECE/MP.PP/2021/7 and AC/MOP-7/Inf.3). She stressed the important role of partner organizations in assisting in the Convention's promotion and implementation at the local, national and subregional levels. Their involvement remained crucial also for the next intersessional period. She also reiterated the importance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Capacity-building activities could benefit from and, at the same time, strengthen a nexus approach between different clusters. She encouraged national focal points of Parties that provided development assistance to work closely with the representatives of the public authorities responsible for development assistance programmes in order to address capacity-building needs regarding the Convention.

76. A representative of the United Nations Development Programme shared examples of cooperation with Aarhus Centres on turning the application of the Aarhus Convention principles into practical activities in countries, for example, in Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Serbia.

77. A representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe spoke about main activities to support the Convention's implementation through the operation of its network of Aarhus Centres in 16 countries in the region. He stressed that Aarhus Centres acted as a bridge between citizens and authorities, turning the Convention's principles into concrete action on the ground.

78. A representative of an Aarhus Centre in Belarus shared experience in collecting environmental information from about 30 ministries and departments and consolidating it in

a register. She explained how the corresponding information request had turned into an awareness-raising activity and promoted the Aarhus Convention among public authorities.

79. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the speakers for their keynote statements and took note of the information provided by the representatives of Armenia, the European Union, Georgia and the European ECO-Forum on capacity-building activities to promote implementation of the Convention.

80. The Meeting of the Parties welcomed the work undertaken by partner organizations as presented in the report on capacity-building and expressed its appreciation to partner organizations for their continued support to the Convention's implementation. It requested the secretariat to continue servicing the capacity-building coordination mechanism and encouraged Convention national focal points to support assistance programmes that address capacity-building needs regarding the Aarhus Convention and Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (Rio Declaration).

81. The Meeting of the Parties reiterated its call to Parties to: continue reaching out to authorities responsible for development assistance and technical cooperation to explore the possibility of integrating the Convention into those programmes as a critical enabler for sustainable development; liaise with officials supporting the work related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework to ensure that the Framework addressed needs related to the Convention's implementation and paid special attention to the nexus approach to environment, human rights and good governance.

VI. Promotion of the Convention and relevant developments and interlinkages

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

82. The Chair opened the agenda item, noting the historic accession to the Convention of the first country from outside the ECE region. She recalled that, following the formal interest of Guinea-Bissau to accede to the Convention, the country, in consultation with the secretariat, had been taking steps in accordance with decision IV/5 regarding the accession of non-ECE member States (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.1). A formal note on the expression of intention by Guinea-Bissau to accede to the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2020/12) had been submitted by the secretariat to the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention at its twenty-fourth meeting (Geneva, 1–3 July and 28 and 29 October 2020).

83. A representative of Guinea-Bissau reiterated his country's commitment to accede to the Convention. He stressed the intention of Guinea-Bissau to protect the right to a healthy environment and to implement the Convention's provisions.

84. A representative of the European ECO-Forum congratulated Guinea-Bissau on having fulfilled certain legislative requirements prior to accession. Moreover, she urged Uzbekistan and Mongolia, which had started the accession process, to continue their efforts, and expressed the hope that other African States and those in the Mediterranean region could also start processes of accession. Representatives of the European Union, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland welcomed the accession of Guinea-Bissau to the Convention.

85. A representative of the NGO community in Guinea-Bissau stated that many African States, particularly those of the Economic Community of West African States, might express interest in becoming Parties to the Convention. He also suggested that an environmental awareness campaign could help promote implementation of the Convention in the country.

86. The secretariat reported that there had been no other requests for accession received from other non-ECE member States. The secretariat invited Parties with representations in non-ECE countries to promote, as possible and feasible, the Convention and its Protocol.

87. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the representatives of Guinea-Bissau and the European ECO-Forum, for their keynote statements and took note of the statements made by other speakers.

88. The Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted draft decision VII/10 on accession by Guinea-Bissau to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (ECE/MP.PP/2021/21) and welcomed Guinea-Bissau as a new Party to the Convention, the first Party from outside the ECE region to accede to the Convention.

89. The Meeting of the Parties: took note of the information provided by delegations on activities relating to the promotion of accession to the Convention by States from outside the ECE region; called upon Parties, donors, international financial institutions, international organizations and other stakeholders to support the implementation of the Convention in the new Parties; and called upon Parties and stakeholders to promote the Convention in other countries and encourage those countries to explore accession to the Convention.

B. Promotion of the Convention's principles

90. The Chair of the thematic sessions on the promotion of the Convention's principles in international forums held within the framework of the meetings of the Working Group of the Parties, reported on activities in the intersessional period, including on the outcomes of the four thematic sessions.¹⁴ She noted that noticeable progress had been achieved by many Parties and international forums. That had been demonstrated through the good practices shared at the meetings and through surveys. At the same time, a number of challenges remained in relation to both international forums that had been regularly reviewed (e.g., the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, international financial institutions) and new forums brought to Parties' attention (e.g., the International Civil Aviation Organization). A particular issue raised was a lack of regulation of geoengineering technology at the international level, as there was no international forum dedicated to the topic.

91. A representative of the European Investment Bank, in a keynote statement, shared the Bank's experience in carrying out public consultations on its policies and frameworks in virtual format due to pandemic-related restrictions. She also outlined activities related to proactive publishing of environmental information, for example, project-related environmental and social data sheets, environmental studies and annual carbon action data, and to maintaining the Bank's public register.

92. A representative of the European ECO-Forum also made a keynote statement, noting that the constraints associated with the pandemic had reshaped the practical modalities of public participation in international forums and encouraged Parties to return to in-person meetings. He also called upon Parties to use human rights-related obligations to strengthen environmental democracy. He highlighted the recent recognition of a universal right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the establishment of the Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights in the context of climate change as the result of steady commitment on the part of a handful of Parties.

93. The Meeting of the Parties thanked speakers for their keynote statements and took note of statements by representatives of the European Union, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European ECO-Forum in the following discussion. The representative of France announced the nomination of Ms. Marie-Hélène Sa Vilas Boas as the new Chair of the thematic session.

94. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the report by the outgoing Chair of the thematic sessions on public participation in international forums and thanked her for the work done and for her skilled leadership. It thanked France for its leadership in that area of work and welcomed its offer to continue leading the work area in the next intersessional period.

¹⁴ More information on meetings of the Working Group is available at www.unece.org/env/pp/wgp.html.

The Meeting of the Parties welcomed Ms. Marie-Hélène Sa Vilas Boas, the new Chair of the thematic session on public participation in international forums.

95. The Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted draft decision VII/4 on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums (ECE/MP.PP/2021/11).

C. Synergies between the Convention and other relevant multilateral environmental agreements and organizations

96. A representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights illustrated important interlinkages between the Aarhus Convention and corresponding obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in the environmental context. In particular, the reference to the right to a healthy environment in the Aarhus Convention served as a stepping stone for the universal recognition of a healthy, clean and sustainable environment as a human right by the Human Rights Council.¹⁵ Further work would focus on several activities, such as supporting the recently established mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, developing United Nations system guidance for the protection of environmental human rights defenders, implementing Human Rights Council resolution 40/11 on recognizing the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development,¹⁶ promoting the rights of children, youth and future generations to a healthy environment and furthering participation of civil society.

97. A representative of the secretariat of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan and the Barcelona Convention outlined opportunities for synergies with the work under the Aarhus Convention, such as on compliance matters and on supporting Parties in modernization and digitalization of environmental information systems, making the best use of pollutant release and transfer registers and promoting public participation. The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016–2025 encouraged Parties to the Barcelona Convention to accede to the Aarhus Convention, and a project to draft a “Mediterranean Accession Agenda” for the Aarhus Convention had recently been launched in that regard.

98. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the speakers for their keynote statements. It took note of the statements by the representatives of Switzerland and the European ECO-Forum delivered in the following discussion.

99. The Meeting of the Parties thanked multilateral environmental agreements and partner organizations for their close cooperation with the secretariat on promoting relevant provisions of the Convention and requested the secretariat to continue pursuing synergy with other treaties, bodies and processes and thanked partners for cooperation.

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

100. A representative of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific made a keynote statement on the particular relevance of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration for the Asia-Pacific region and the challenges that hindered environmental protection and sustainable development in the region. She noted that the Aarhus Convention is the global benchmark for effective safeguarding of environmental rights and that the region was also learning from its experience and from the recent Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) and its inception strategies.

101. The Meeting of the Parties welcomed the entry into force of the Escazú Agreement and reiterated the readiness of Parties to support the Latin American and Caribbean region in

¹⁵ A/HRC/RES/48/13.

¹⁶ A/HRC/RES/40/11.

implementing that instrument. It thanked the speaker for her keynote statement and took note of the information on the regional developments and future actions on promoting Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration in the Asia-Pacific region and benefits from learning from the experience on the Aarhus Convention. The Meeting of the Parties further welcomed the efforts of States and civil society in the Asia-Pacific region in that regard and expressed its readiness to support the region in its endeavours.

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

102. A representative of UNEP presented the Programme's initiatives related to the Aarhus Convention pillars, including: the launch of a Law and Environment Assistance Platform;¹⁷ the publication of *Environmental Rule of Law: First Global Report*¹⁸ and *Regulating Air Quality: The first global assessment of air pollution legislation*;¹⁹ the development of a database of public interest law clinics and organizations offering legal assistance to environmental defenders in all regions²⁰; and the launch of a Global Judicial Portal²¹, which provided judges and the environmental law community with access to legal information and jurisprudence. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the statement made.

VII. Programme of work and operation of the Convention

A. Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021

103. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the report on the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/3); the report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the Convention's work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/4); and the secretariat's oral report on contributions and pledges for the implementation of the Convention's work programme for 2018–2021, which were not included in the report to the Meeting of the Parties (AC/MOP-7/Inf.6-PRTR/MOP-4/Inf.4). It expressed appreciation for the work done by the secretariat and recognized the difficulties posed by the limited and unpredictable funding.

B. Future work programme

104. The Chair invited the Meeting of the Parties to consider draft decision VII/5 on the work programme for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/12). The Meeting of the Parties reiterated its request that documents for meetings of governing and subsidiary Convention bodies (e.g., reports of the task forces; on capacity-building and on GMO round tables), as required, be processed, translated and published by the United Nations services and be made available in the three official languages of ECE without recourse to additional extrabudgetary resources. Similarly, it requested that any required publications in accordance with activities under the Convention's work programme be processed and translated by United Nations services into the three official languages of ECE and publications be processed and translated by United Nations services into all six official United Nations languages without recourse to additional extrabudgetary resources and be made available in electronic and hard copy forms.

105. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the statements by the representatives of the European Union and Norway confirming their intention to continue with the same level of

¹⁷ Available at <https://leap.unep.org/>.

¹⁸ Nairobi, 2019.

¹⁹ Nairobi, 2021.

²⁰ <https://environmentallegalprotection.informea.org/>.

²¹ <https://judicialportal.informea.org/jurisprudence/>.

contribution as in the 2018–2021 intersessional period for the implementation of the new Convention’s work programme.

106. The Meeting of the Parties provisionally adopted draft decision VII/5 on the work programme for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/12).

C. Strategic Plan for 2022-2030

107. The Chair invited the Meeting of the Parties to consider draft decision VII/11 on the Strategic Plan for 2022–2030 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/22). The Meeting of the Parties took note of the statements by the representatives of the European Union, Norway, Switzerland and the European ECO-Forum and provisionally adopted draft decision VII/11 on the Strategic Plan for 2022–2030 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/22).

D. Financial arrangements

108. The Chair recalled that the Working Group of the Parties had revised and approved the draft decision on financial matters at its twenty-fifth meeting (Geneva, 3 May and 7 and 8 June 2021). The Working Group had not, however, been able to reach a consensus at that meeting on several parts of the text of the draft decision, specifically regarding: (a) the scheme of contributions (e.g., mandatory, recommendatory or voluntary); (b) the use of the United Nations scale of assessments; and (c) an increase in the minimum level of contributions from \$500 to \$1,000.²²

109. A representative of the European Union made statement supporting a voluntary scheme of contributions. Representatives of Norway and Switzerland made statements expressing regret that there was insufficient support for establishing a mandatory scheme of contributions at the current time. Representatives of the European Union, Georgia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland expressed their support for raising the annual minimum contribution to the Convention to \$1,000.

110. The Meeting of the Parties took note of the statements made and provisionally adopted draft decision VII/6 on financial arrangements under the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.7), as amended at the meeting.

VIII. Report on credentials

111. The Meeting of the Parties approved the report on credentials presented by Ms. Beate Berglund Ekeberg, the Vice-Chair of the Bureau, noting that there was a quorum for the purposes of elections and the adoption of decisions. In total, 42 Parties had submitted their credentials. While it was noted that eight credentials were not originals, the representatives of the Bureau recommended to the Meeting to accept them, subject to subsequent submission of duly signed originals to the Secretary.

IX. Election of officers and other members of the Bureau

112. In accordance with rule 18 of the rules of procedure, the Meeting of the Parties elected by consensus Mr. Aurimas Saladžius (Lithuania) as Chair and Ms. Nino Gokheshvili (Georgia) and Ms. Nicolette Bouman (Netherlands) as Vice-Chairs from among the representatives of the Parties present at the meeting. The Meeting of the Parties also elected by consensus the following members of the Bureau from among the representatives of the Parties in accordance with rule 22 (1) (b): Ms. Enkelejda Malaj (Albania); Ms. Zsuzsanna Belenyessy (European Union); Ms. Chiara Landini (Italy) and Ms. Alla Loboda (Ukraine). It took note of the appointment by the European ECO-Forum of Ms. Summer Kern to attend the meetings of the Bureau as an observer, in accordance with rule 22 (2) and (4).

²² ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2021/2, para. 75.

X. Date and venue of the eighth ordinary session

113. The Meeting of the Parties 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.

XI. Decisions of the Meeting of the Parties

114. Based on the discussions under the preceding agenda items, the Meeting of the Parties formally adopted the following decisions by consensus:

(a) Decision VII/1 on promoting effective access to information (ECE/MP.PP/2021/8) with the updated recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools (ECE/MP.PP/2021/20 and ECE/MP.PP/2021/20/Add.1);

(b) Decision VII/2 on promoting effective public participation in decision-making, as amended at the meeting (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.2);

(c) Decision VII/3 on promoting effective access to justice (ECE/MP.PP/2021/10);

(d) Decision VII/4 on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums (ECE/MP.PP/2021/11);

(e) Decision VII/5 on the work programme for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/12);

(f) Decision VII/6 on financial arrangements under the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.7), as amended at the meeting;

(g) Decision VII/7 on reporting requirements (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.3), as amended at the meeting;

(h) Decision VII/8 on general issues of compliance (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.5), as amended at the meeting;

(i) Decision VII/8a on compliance by Armenia (ECE/MP.PP/2021/24);

(j) Decision VII/8b on compliance by Austria (ECE/MP.PP/2021/25);

(k) Decision VII/8d on compliance by Bulgaria (ECE/MP.PP/2021/27);

(l) Decision VII/8e on compliance by Czechia (ECE/MP.PP/2021/28);

(m) Decision VII/8f on compliance by the European Union (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.6/Rev.1), as amended at the meeting;

(n) Decision VII/8g on compliance by Germany (ECE/MP.PP/2021/30);

(o) Decision VII/8h on compliance by Hungary (ECE/MP.PP/2021/31);

(p) Decision VII/8i on compliance by Ireland (ECE/MP.PP/2021/32);

(q) Decision VII/8j on compliance by Italy (ECE/MP.PP/2021/33);

(r) Decision VII/8k on compliance by Kazakhstan (ECE/MP.PP/2021/34);

(s) Decision VII/8l on compliance by Lithuania (ECE/MP.PP/2021/35);

(t) Decision VII/8m on compliance by the Netherlands (ECE/MP.PP/2021/36);

(u) Decision VII/8n on compliance by the Republic of Moldova (ECE/MP.PP/2021/37);

(v) Decision VII/8o on compliance by Romania (ECE/MP.PP/2021/38);

(w) Decision VII/8p on compliance by Spain (ECE/MP.PP/2021/39);

(x) Decision VII/8q on compliance by Turkmenistan (ECE/MP.PP/2021/40);

(y) Decision VII/8r on compliance by Ukraine (ECE/MP.PP/2021/41);

(z) Decision VII/8s on compliance by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (ECE/MP.PP/2021/42);

(aa) Decision VII/9 on a rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.8), as amended at the meeting;

(bb) Decision VII/10 on accession by Guinea-Bissau to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (ECE/MP.PP/2021/21);

(cc) Decision VII/11 on the Strategic Plan for 2022–2030 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/22).

115. The Meeting of the Parties formally adopted decision VII/8c on compliance by Belarus (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.10), as amended at the meeting, by a vote during the High-level Segment.

116. The Meeting of the Parties adopted the other major outcomes presented at the meeting as contained in the list of key outcomes and decisions (ECE/MP.PP/2021/CRP.9/Rev.1) and requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties, to finalize the report on the seventh session and to incorporate therein the adopted outcomes and decisions.

XII. Closure of the session

117. The Chair thanked the participants for their contributions, the interpreters and the secretariat for their support and closed the seventh session.
