

## Agenda Item 1 - Opening Statement of NGOs European ECO Forum

STATEMENT BY EMMA PAGLIARUSCO, YOUTH AND ENVIRONMENT EUROPE, AT THE 10TH AARHUS TASK FORCE ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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Dear Chair, dear Delegates, dear Colleagues,

On behalf of Eco-Forum, I would like to highlight some of the significant issues that will be further discussed during our meeting.

To begin with, this is the first time that a youth-led environmental organization participates in an Aarhus Task Force on Public Participation. We welcome the development achieved and will consider this as a valuable starting point to create a stronger interdisciplinary participation in environmental decision-making, both at national and international level.

This 10th Task Force on Public Participation takes place in a complex setting for the UNECE region and beyond: Russia's aggression in Ukraine; the energy crisis; the effects of COVID 19 pandemic; and on top of this the increasingly threatening human induced climate change.

The length of these disruptive events have induced many decision-makers to adopt a "short-term", "emergency mindset" when addressing these problems, in which procedural human rights such as public participation in decision-making are more easily overlooked.

But this Task Force also takes place when plans to react to the multi-level crisis have to be implemented: among others, the war recovery in Ukraine and the RePowerEU, which risk to be adopted lacking adequate assessment and risk prevention measures. The above mentioned emergencies do not have to be an excuse to undermine the role of civil society in environmental decision-making, which is on the contrary essential. In Ukraine, for example, civil society organizations are stressing that recovery from war should take into account sustainable development principles, in order to balance the public interests with the environment.

Undermining public participation leads to declining trust in politics and governments; chronic and lasting uncertainty; growing inequality; mis- and disinformation; potential alienation and anti-social outcomes.

The results are only worse social and environmental damages targeting especially persons and groups living in vulnerable and marginalized situations and whose participation in decision making is already hardly exercised. In this regard, we recall the outcomes of the 9th Task Force: these categories' accessibility to public participation is not an option; and further work on addressing them is needed.

To conclude, we call your attention, dear Delegates, to the fact that possible solutions and propositive approaches do exist, some of which will be presented here by my colleagues.

We expect meaningful consideration of the contribution of the civil society; as well as responsibility in implementing the outcomes of this 10th Task Force on Public Participation.

I thank you and I wish you all a fruitful meeting.