



## **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

### **27<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention Geneva, 26-28 June 2023**

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Distinguished Participants,  
Dear Colleagues,

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is pleased to attend the 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Aarhus Convention's Working Group of the Parties and expresses its appreciation to the UNECE for its organization.

The OSCE comprehensive approach to security recognizes the contribution of environmental co-operation and good environmental governance in strengthening stability and peace among its 57 participating States. These principles, among those that identify the Organization as a unique platform to address security-related challenges, lie at the core of the daily work of the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities.

The same principles sustain the longstanding collaboration established between the OSCE and the UNECE, focused in particular on supporting participating States in the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements such as the Aarhus Convention.

Nowadays, the Aarhus Centres represent one of the most effective tools promoted by the OSCE to assist governments in implementing the three pillars of the Convention, and at the same time to assist citizens in exercising their rights to access information, participate in the decision-making process and access to justice in environmental matters.

However, the Aarhus Centres are more than simple entities engaged in implementing the Aarhus Convention: they are powerful supporters of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as effective promoters of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, such as the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, and the Water Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

Aware of their importance, the OSCE is currently implementing a three-year project aimed to ensure the sustainability of the Aarhus Centres, so to facilitate their role in promoting good environmental governance and contributing thus to enhance sustainable economic development, reduce environmental risks, and improve human well-being and social equity in the OSCE region. The project encompasses three main components: (1) upgrade technical and managerial skills of Aarhus Centres' staff, including fundraising and project development competencies; (2) facilitate the

establishment of strategic partnerships with national and local institutions, international organizations, academia, private sector and other key stakeholders; (3) establish new tools to facilitate knowledge sharing, networking, communication and participation in environmental democracy.

Through this project, the OSCE also intends to help the Aarhus Centres to adapt to the new realities on the ground following the global COVID-19 pandemic and to compete to an ever more limited pool of funds reprioritized for recovery.

The OSCE also continues to implement the project on “Stakeholder Engagement in Uranium Legacy Remediation in Central Asia” (funded by the EU Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation) in collaboration with UNDP, where Aarhus Centres support public engagement and awareness-raising activities.

Among other activities in this sector, each year the OSCE hosts the Aarhus Centres Annual Meeting that brings together representatives of the Aarhus Centres, National Focal Points to the Aarhus Convention, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations, international organizations and OSCE field operations. The purposes of the meeting are to discuss and improve the involvement of the Centres in promoting good environmental governance in various fields, to share experiences and lessons learnt from their work, as well as to identify new priorities. The 2023 edition of the Annual Meeting will take place on 18 and 19 October in Dushanbe (Tajikistan), with a focus on the role of the Aarhus Centres in promoting public participation in environmental decision-making. Other sessions will be devoted to the work of the Centres in the sectors of green economy and hazardous waste management.

With regard to the recent international roundtable “Aarhus Convention: Effective Public Participation for Good Governance, Healthy Environment and Sustainable Development” conducted in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) on 1-2 June 2023, the OSCE was pleased to contribute to its organization together with the UNECE, UNDP, GIZ and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of Uzbekistan. This successful event promoted better understanding of benefits and opportunities offered by the Convention as an effective tool for supporting the countries in achieving good governance, healthy environment and sustainable development. In this framework, the OSCE conducted a session dedicated to the operation of the Aarhus Centres, during which representatives from different countries in Central Asia and South Caucasus presented their Centres’ activities. Following the interest expressed by Uzbek authorities to accessing the Aarhus Convention and establishing Aarhus Centres in the country, the OSCE assures its readiness to support Uzbekistan in defining institutional and operational set-up of Aarhus Centres, in collaboration with the OSCE Field Operation in Tashkent.

Confirming the strong commitment of the OSCE in promoting the implementation of the Aarhus Convention among its participating States and in strengthening the fruitful collaboration with the UNECE, I thank you for your attention and wish you a productive continuation of the meeting.