

**Agenda item 2: War in Ukraine and implementation of the Convention**  
**28<sup>th</sup> Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention**  
**Geneva, 2-4 July 2024**

I wish to firstly acknowledge that many positive changes have occurred in Ukraine despite the war the Russian aggressors have been waging.

Thus, I wish to highlight the transparency and stakeholder involvement in formulating and implementing Ukraine's green recovery and reconstruction. For example, in 2023 there was a spike in cooperation between civil society organizations and local authorities on specific post-war recovery projects. This is an excellent development as the need for civil society involvement is critically important throughout all stages of recovery and rebuilding.

In this regard we stress that transparency and public participation in international processes should be at the core of any next steps, that international partners need to demonstrate leadership and goodwill in ensuring such principles of governance. This is particularly key as regards financial institutions, where our experience has been mixed, involving at times non-transparent engagement with the public.

The Aarhus Convention can help here. It can contribute to the adherence of the principles of participatory democracy and the promise to "build back better and greener". To achieve this, we need consolidation of all stakeholder efforts. That is fundamental. We need to recognize that we have a common goal.

The challenges that Ukraine is facing now are enormous. Its Ministry of Environment regularly issues newsletters in which they try to report on the damage inflicted on Ukraine's nature, its rivers, lands, air, infrastructure. But even trying to make these calculations is a challenge. One where we can collectively support Ukraine through expertise in these challenging times. But we can and must do far, far more. Because Ukraine is Europe, and I see no future for Europe without Ukraine.

Ukraine and its people are facing unimaginable challenges. And they are standing up to them, proving their leadership. It is truly humbling. My colleagues in Ukraine are doing incredible work under the most horrific and unimaginable circumstances, from bunkers, basements, or for those who lack either, simply from hallways, away from windows. Truly humbling.

Finally, I would like to highlight the efforts of my colleagues to promote Ukraine's adoption of the GMO amendment. I realize that in these challenging times this may not have priority at the highest levels of government. Yet I must encourage, urge your government to take the final step. Ratify the GMO amendment. In doing so you would be the last Party needed to trigger that provision. To bring it into being. You would therefore be a leader. Confirm what you are already doing. Being leaders in our common Europe and beyond. Being a bold force for the rule of law, for environmental democracy. And you would not be alone. We support you, we welcome you.