



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) commends the UNECE Secretariat to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters for the organization of the 28th Meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, and expresses its appreciation for its dedication in promoting the principles of this relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreement.

The contribution of environmental co-operation and good environmental governance to stability and peace lies at the core of the OSCE comprehensive approach to security. These guiding principles, strengthened by the common propensity to promote environmental democracy, justice and sustainability, constitute the foundations of the longstanding and fruitful collaboration between OSCE and UNECE.

Since its adoption in 1998, the OSCE recognized the role of the Aarhus Convention in building trust and confidence within and among countries, and therefore supported its participating States in the ratification and implementation of the three pillars of the Convention. A few years later, in 2002, the OSCE promoted the establishment of the first Aarhus Centre in Armenia and today, after over 20 years, we count more than 50 Aarhus Centres in different Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia that assist the governments in implementing the Aarhus Convention and assists the citizens in understanding and exercising their rights as brought by the Convention.

In 2023, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities launched a three-year project aimed to ensure the sustainability of the Aarhus Centres to strengthen their capacities and competencies to promote good environmental governance and to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thanks to the financial contributions of the project's donors, such as Germany and Italy, several activities have already been completed and others are in the pipeline. The OSCE is particularly proud of the development of a Communications and

Visibility strategy aimed at increasing Aarhus Centres' credibility and visibility, of the creation of an E-learning course on fundraising, crowdfunding and financial sustainability, and of the capacity development programme that strengthened Aarhus Centres' skills in several fields as environmental legislation, green economy, sustainable development, public relations, and others.

Through this project, the OSCE also intends to strengthen gender equity in environmental governance and to support the elaboration of National Implementation Reports in targeted countries.

The Aarhus Centres also represents valuable partners in the implementation of other OSCE initiatives, such as 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 the Centres supported public engagement and awareness-raising activities. Furthermore, the Aarhus Centres in Tajikistan are involved in an awareness-raising campaign on the benefit of the use of renewable energy in a rural context.

It is also worth noting the experience of the Aarhus Centres in the organization and conduction of public hearings and public consultations, which make them well-positioned to support the implementation of other international treaties such as the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment.

To highlight the valuable contribution made by the Centres to the implementation of the Convention, every year the OSCE hosts the Aarhus Centres Annual Meeting that brings together representatives of the Aarhus Centres, National Focal Points to the Aarhus Convention, representatives of civil society and international organizations. Last year's meeting was convened in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, where the participants had the opportunity to discuss on the importance of promoting public participation in environmental decision-making, as well as on the contribution of the Centres in the sectors of green economy and hazardous waste management.

The 2024 Aarhus Centres Annual Meeting will take place on 15 and 16 October in Belgrade, Serbia, focusing on the involvement of young women and men in the activities of the Centres and on the integration of youth perspective in environmental governance.

The OSCE remains committed to supporting the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and to continuing the collaboration with UNECE and other international actors, with the aim to promote the Convention's guiding principles leading to a democratic, just and inclusive society.