

Twenty-eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

Geneva, 2-4 July 2024

By Olga Ponizova, Eco-Accord on behalf of European ECO-Forum

Item 5. Public participation in international fora

Thank you, Chair

I would like to express our concerns related to public participation problems in some international processes indirectly related to climate and energy issues.

1) WTO 13th Ministerial Conference

We are concerned that at the last WTO conference (Abu Dhabi, March, 2004) we could see unannounced and unprecedented removal of civil society's rights to freedom of speech. NGOs had problems distributing informational flyers, handing papers to reporters, displaying banners, taking photos of actions, taking actions in areas where delegates could see and other restrictions. We hope that WTO members/Aarhus Convention parties will make appropriate decisions so NGOs can participate in these fora freely and effectively.

2) Plastic Treaty negotiations

NGOs are actively involved in the preparation of the Plastic Treaty, we do appreciate this. However, at the current stage of preparation to the forthcoming intersessional work of the International Negotiations Committee we face severely restricting public participation.

Number of all observers limited to 12 members per working group. In order to take into account, the various aspects of such a complex problem, a wide range of NGO experts and representatives of vulnerable groups such as workers, women, children and youth, indigenous people need to be involved.

3) UNECE Process on Education or Sustainable Development.

We regret that large NGO networks cannot participate in UNECE Steering committee meeting on ESD this May due to a lack of financial resources. For example, the European ECO-Forum is a coalition of 273 NGOs from the entire ECE region who first put forward the idea of developing a UNECE Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, and then actively participated in its implementation – however our representatives could not participate in the Steering Committee meeting, as the meeting was in person only. Therefore, we propose to continue to hold such kind of events in a hybrid format.

4) UNEP financial support to government-organized organizations under the title of NGOs

We are grateful that financial support can be provided for NGOs for participation in international events. However, we are concerned that there are cases where financial support for the participation of NGOs in international fora is provided to government-organized organizations.

For example, a representative of the Regional Environmental Center Caucasus received support from UNEP for participation in INC-4 on Plastic Treaty. This is an organization created by the decision of the Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in Sofia in 1995, its founders are the European Union and the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia – so they are not an NGO at all. We really hope that this practice will not be repeated in the future.

Thank you for your attention.