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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

First meeting of the Signatories to
the Convention on Access to Information,
Public Participation in Decision-making and
Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
(Chishinau, Republic of Moldova, 19 - 21 April 1999)

PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE MEETING

to be held at the Palais de la République, Chishinau,
starting at 10 a.m. on Monday, 19 April 1999

1. Adoption of the agenda.
2. Election of officers.
3. Post-Aarhus activities to promote the Convention's ratification and implementation pending its entry into force.
4. Practical application of the Convention - sharing experience, need for capacity building.
5. Preparations for the first meeting of the Parties.
6. Work-plan (CEP/WG.5/1999/3) and financing of activities under the Convention.
7. Other business.
8. Closing of the first meeting.

Explanatory notes to the provisional agenda

In their Resolution on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (ECE/CEP/43/Add.1/Rev.1) adopted at the fourth Ministerial Conference Environment for Europe, held in Aarhus, Denmark, on 23-25 June 1998, the Signatories to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters decided, inter alia, to

"Resolve to strive for the entry into force of the Convention as soon as possible and to seek to apply the Convention to the maximum extent possible pending its entry into force, and to continue to cooperate in gradually developing policies and strategies related to matters within the scope of this Convention;"

"Emphasize that, besides Governments, parliaments, regional and local authorities and non-governmental organizations also have a key role to play at the national, regional and local level in the implementation of the Convention;"

"Recognize that the successful application of the Convention is linked to adequate administrative and additional financial resources being made available to support and maintain the initiatives necessary to achieve this goal and call upon Governments to make voluntary financial contributions to this process so that sufficient financial means are available to carry out the programme of activities of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy related to the Convention;"

"Request the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy actively to promote and keep under review the process of ratification of the Convention pending its entry into force by, inter alia:

(a) Establishing the Meeting of the Signatories to the Convention, open to all members of ECE and to observers, to identify activities that need to be undertaken pending the entry into force of the Convention, to report to the Committee on progress made in respect of the ratification of the Convention; and to prepare for the first meeting of the Parties;

(b) Giving full recognition to the activities identified by the Meeting of the Signatories within the Committee's work programme and when the Committee considers the allocation of ECE resources provided for the environment;

(c) Encouraging Governments to make voluntary contributions to ensure that sufficient resources are available to support these activities;"

"Consider that, pending the entry into force of the Convention, the necessary authority should be given to ECE and its Executive Secretary to provide for a sufficient secretariat and, in the framework of the existing budgetary structure, for appropriate financial means;"

"Urge the Parties at their first meeting or as soon as possible thereafter to establish effective compliance arrangements in accordance with article 15 of the Convention;"

"Commend the international organizations and non-governmental organizations, in particular environmental organizations, for their active and constructive participation in the development of the Convention and recommend that they should be allowed to participate in the same spirit in the Meeting of the Signatories and its activities to the extent possible, based on a provisional application of the provisions of article 10, paragraphs 2 (c), 4 and 5, of the Convention;"

"Recognize the importance of the application of the provisions of the Convention to deliberate releases of genetically modified organisms into the environment, and request the Parties, at their first meeting, to further develop the application of the Convention by means of inter alia more precise provisions, taking into account the work done under the Convention on Biological Diversity which is developing a protocol on biosafety".

In their Ministerial Declaration (ECE/CEP/41, para. 40, annex II), Ministers stated, inter alia: "We regard the Aarhus Convention, which provides recognition for citizens' rights in relation to the environment, as a significant step forward both for the environment and for democracy. We encourage all non-signatory States to take appropriate steps to become Parties to the Convention". The Ministers declared also their commitment to strengthening lines of communication between governments and NGOs, including in international forums.

In the light of the above considerations, the Committee on Environmental Policy agreed that its goal was for the Convention to enter into force in the year 2000 and it decided to convene the Meeting of the Signatories to the Convention during the first half of 1999 (ECE/CEP/63, para. 14).

Item 1: Adoption of the agenda

In accordance with the Commission's Rules of Procedure, the first item on the provisional agenda is the adoption of the agenda.

Item 2: Election of officers

In accordance with the Commission's Rules of Procedure and established practice, the Meeting is expected to elect a chairperson and a vice-chairperson.

Item 3: Post-Aarhus activities to promote the Convention's ratification and implementation of the Convention pending its entry into force

Delegations are expected to inform the Meeting of activities and steps taken by their Governments to ratify the Convention in order to strive for its entry into force in the year 2000, in line with the target set by the Committee on Environmental Policy. International organizations, institutions and representatives of relevant sectors of society (including parliamentarians, local authorities, business and NGO communities) have also been invited, at the request of the Committee on Environmental Policy, to inform the Meeting of their activities to promote the Convention's implementation and early entry into force, and of relevant ongoing multilateral and bilateral activities, as well as of the financial support available from different sources.

Item 4: Practical application of the Convention - sharing experience, need for capacity building

The Meeting will discuss practical arrangements made to apply provisions of the Convention. It is expected that delegations will wish to share their experience, in particular in relation to issues where obligations are described in general terms and countries are required to establish practical arrangements, for example the dissemination of information through electronic means, providing necessary product information, public participation in decision-making concerning deliberate releases of genetically modified organism and public participation concerning plans, programme and policies. Possible needs of assistance for capacity building in this context may also be discussed.

Item 5: Preparations for the first meeting of the Parties

The Meeting will discuss issues for consideration by the Parties to the Convention at their first meeting. In particular, the Meeting may wish to discuss: the rules of procedure (see art.10, para.2 (h), of the Convention), pollution inventories or registers referred to in article 5, paragraph 9 (see also Art.10, para.2 (i)), arrangements for a review of compliance (see art.15), and the further development of the application of the Convention to deliberate releases of genetically modified organisms (as required by the relevant paragraph of the Resolution). To facilitate the discussion on draft rules of procedure at the second meeting of the Signatories, the Meeting may

wish to request the secretariat to prepare, in the light of relevant experience gained in other ECE environmental conventions, preliminary draft rules of procedure.

Item 6: Work-plan and financing of activities under the Convention

The Meeting will be invited to discuss future activities related to the Convention's implementation and, the facilitation of its early entry into force, and to agree upon a work-plan for adoption by the Committee on Environmental Policy. To facilitate the discussion, the secretariat will circulate a preliminary draft work-plan (CEP/WG.5/1999/3). The Meeting will also discuss the resources needed for the activities under the Convention. Representatives of countries and donor institutions will be invited to make pledges to this end.

Item 7: Other business

At the time of writing, the secretariat had no points to propose under this item.

Item 8: Closing of the first meeting

The Chairperson will sum up the major decisions taken at the first meeting. The Bureau, with the assistance of the secretariat, will draw up the report.