

Brussels, 2 July 2026
(OR. en)

11465/26

ENV 898
DEVGEN 125
RELEX 945
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INFORMATION NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)

Thirtieth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (WGP 30)
(Geneva, 24–26 June 2026)

- Statements by the EU and its Member States

Delegations will find in the Annex, for information, a compilation of statements by the EU and its Member States delivered during the 30th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (WGP 30).

Aarhus Convention

Thirtieth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (WGP 30)

(Geneva, 24 – 26 June 2026)

– Statements by the EU and its Member States –

Agenda item 1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

Good morning, Chair, distinguished colleagues,

It is an honor to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States at the thirtieth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention).

As this is my first intervention, allow me to convey our sincere appreciation to the Secretariat for its thorough preparation and continued professionalism, as well as the Bureau and the Working Group members who contributed significantly for the document preparation. We also extend our gratitude to the interpreters, whose work is indispensable to the effectiveness and inclusiveness of our deliberations.

As we reconvene, it is essential to reaffirm the enduring importance and concrete impact of the Convention. At the same time, we must be clear-eyed about the significant geopolitical, economic, and social pressures shaping our current environment. These pressures inevitably affect our work under the Aarhus Convention. Yet the European Union and its Member States remain unwavering in their commitment to upholding and advancing the principles and obligations of the Convention. We are determined to ensure that this framework continues to deliver meaningful results, even in challenging times.

We look forward to a focused, constructive, and results-oriented session.

With regards to the agenda, the European Union and its Member States support it as proposed.

Thank you Chair.

Agenda item 2. Status of ratification

EU and its Member states welcome the Secretariat's overview of the current status of ratification, acceptance, approval and accession to the Aarhus Convention, its amendment, and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers.

We take note of the progress achieved to date and appreciate the efforts undertaken by Parties and the Secretariat to promote wider participation in these instruments. In particular, we acknowledge that the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers has been ratified by the majority of UNECE member States, reflecting a strong and shared commitment to transparency, public access to environmental information and improved environmental governance.

At the same time, we note that a number of Signatories have not yet ratified the Protocol. We therefore encourage the remaining Signatories, as well as other interested States, to take the necessary steps to ratify, accept or accede to the Protocol at the earliest opportunity and become full Parties. Wider participation will further strengthen the effectiveness, visibility and impact of the PRTR Protocol across the region.

We also invite delegations to continue sharing information on recent or anticipated developments with regard to ratification and accession, as such exchanges contribute to mutual learning and momentum under the Convention and its instruments.

We take note of the developments reported and look forward to continued progress ahead of the next meeting.

Thank you, Chair.

Agenda item 3. Substantive issues

EU and its Member states express their appreciation for the Task Force's work on promoting effective access to information in line with Decisions VII/1 and VIII/1, particularly regarding the modernization of electronic information tools to meet the targets of SDG 16.10 and the Global Digital Compact. We commend the continuous upgrades to the Aarhus Clearinghouse and its specialized databases—including the new library for children and youth and the Compliance Committee case law database—which remain vital for the transparent collection and dissemination of environmental data.

The EU and its Member States welcome this thematic session on access to information and thank Switzerland for Chairing the Task Force.

We welcome the outcomes of the thematic session that further explored how artificial intelligence and risk-modelling can assist collection and active dissemination of environmental information.

The effective use of new technologies should be a central element of discussions on access to information during this intersessional period. Particular attention should be given to how these tools can strengthen capacity, reduce administrative burdens, and support the fast, secure and reliable dissemination of environmental information.

We therefore welcome further initiatives by the Chair of the Task Force in this direction.

Item 3(b). Public participation in decision-making

The EU and its Member States express their sincere appreciation to Italy for continuing the work undertaken by the Task Force and thank the Chair of the Task Force for the information provided. EU & MSs wish to express their appreciation for all the work carried out under the thematic area of public participation in decision-making, which remains fundamental to the implementation of the Convention. We particularly value how these activities align with and support global commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals—specifically target 16.7—and the Declaration on Future Generations under the Pact for the Future initiative. We commend the Task Force's ongoing efforts to populate the Aarhus Clearinghouse with diverse case studies and its successful promotion of participatory principles in related fields, such as the Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation. Looking ahead, we remain committed to collaborating and look forward to continuing sharing best practices and lessons learned to ensure responsive, inclusive, and representative environmental decision-making at all levels.

Item 3(c). Genetically modified organisms

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity for their continued cooperation and joint efforts in this work area. We welcome and support their collaborative work in promoting the available tools under the two Conventions and in strengthening capacity-building, including through activities contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant international commitments. In this regard, the EU and its Member States encourage the full use of the jointly developed guidance and training materials and continued sharing of experience and good practices through the Biosafety Clearing-House and the Aarhus Clearinghouse, which remain practical platforms for information exchange.

The EU and its Member States take note of the information provided by the secretariat on the activities undertaken and those planned going forward. Looking ahead, we support the development of a clear and prioritized workplan for this work area and encourage Parties, as appropriate, to develop and implement comprehensive national action plans to further strengthen implementation of the Convention in the context of GMOs, drawing on existing guidance and tools and taking into account relevant commitments under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

We further welcome the accession of Croatia to the GMO amendment on the 10 June 2026. We invite Parties that have not yet done so to follow the example set by Croatia and deposit their instruments of acceptance accordingly.

Agenda item 4. Procedures and mechanisms

The European Union and its Member States thank the Chair of the Compliance Committee and the Secretariat for the comprehensive information provided on the outcomes of the Committee's recent meetings and other relevant developments since the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

We take note with appreciation of the Compliance Committee's first and second virtual ordinary meetings held in February and June 2026 and of the continued efforts undertaken by the Committee to fulfil its mandate in a transparent, impartial and participatory manner, notwithstanding the significant growth in its caseload and the constraints posed by the current resource situation. EU and its Member States have submitted their comments and suggestions and are grateful that these have been taken into account and look forward to seeing the practical implementation of the chair's proposals. We welcome the progress reported on the consideration of communications from members of the public, follow-up to decisions and requests of the Meeting of the Parties, and requests for advice and assistance. We also acknowledge the Committee's ongoing work regarding referrals by the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders, including the open and inclusive process to develop a clear and operational procedure for considering such referrals. We value the emphasis placed on transparency, procedural clarity and due process, as well as the opportunity provided to Parties and stakeholders to contribute to this work.

We underline the need to ensure that both the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and the work of the Compliance Committee are supported by adequate, predictable and sustainable resources. In this context, we have carefully taken note of the Chair's reflections on possible ways to address the significant increase in the Committee's workload. We acknowledge the steps already taken by the Committee to align its working arrangements with available resources, while preserving the quality and integrity of its work. We also welcome the Committee's efforts to support greater engagement by Parties and to enhance awareness and understanding of its findings, advice and procedures, including through improved communication tools and more accessible information products.

We appreciate the Committee's continued commitment to addressing these challenges through a transparent and participatory process and will give due consideration to how these issues may be addressed collectively in line with the decisions and guidance of the Meeting of the Parties. The European Union and its Member States take note of the information provided and reiterate their strong support for the independent, effective and well-functioning Compliance Committee as a cornerstone of the Aarhus Convention.

The EU and its Member States, understand that the compliance committee took initial steps within the limits of the applicable MOP Decisions . Should after further reflections, more steps be necessary, Parties should remain open to revising existing MoP decisions or adopting new ones in order to ensure that the Mechanism is effective, coherent and fit for purpose. In order to safeguard the effectiveness and sustainability of the Committee's work, the EU+MS invite the Committee to clarify the admissibility criteria applicable to referrals. The Committee should retain sufficient procedural tools to dismiss referrals that do not meet urgency or admissibility requirements.

The EU and its MSs take note of the proposal by the Chair of the Compliance Committee to reduce the engagement of the Compliance Committee during the follow up procedure of MoP decision on Compliance Cases. At the same time, understanding and closing existing compliance cases should be a priority of Parties and Compliance Committee. We understand that should the complexity of the case require feedback, the Compliance Committee will facilitate dialogues with the Parties similar to the procedure during past intersessional periods.

Thank you, Chair.

(ii) Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders

The European Union and its Member States wish to express their appreciation and support for the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders, Mr. Michel Forst, following his re-election at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties. We welcome the comprehensive overview of activities presented in the Report on the implementation of the work programmes 2022–2025 and 2026–2029, which illustrates the important and demanding nature of this mandate.

The EU and its Member States also note the organisation of the First European Forum on Environmental Human Rights Defenders, held on 3 and 4 June at the premises of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and co-organised by the Aarhus Convention secretariat and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. We thank the Special Rapporteur for his engagement in the Forum, which provided opportunity to discuss the persistent challenges faced by civil society, including strategic litigation aimed at suppressing public participation.

We also commend efforts by public authorities and private actors to resolve situations brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur. In this regard, we welcome the practice described in paragraph 47 of the report on complaints received and activities undertaken by the Special Rapporteur concerning the closure of complaints. The swift and transparent closure of complaints where the alleged penalisation, persecution or harassment has ceased, or has been addressed through domestic remedies, including mediation agreements, can serve as an important incentive for constructive engagement and good practice.

The Forum was also a reminder that efforts to protect civil society in Europe must continue. The EU and its Member States acknowledge the need for the Special Rapporteur to prioritise complaints on the basis of his assessment of the protection needs of the victim or victims. In line with paragraph 19 of decision VIII/9, we also encourage the Special Rapporteur to focus his efforts on complaints concerning acts occurring in the territories of the Parties.

Item 4(b). Capacity-building and awareness-raising

The EU and its Member States thank the Secretariat for its continued capacity-building efforts, as outlined in the Report on the implementation of the work programmes.

We particularly commend the Secretariat's work to foster synergies with other United Nations agencies, multilateral environmental agreements and international forums, as well as its engagement with Parties to the Barcelona Convention.

Agenda item 4(c). Reporting mechanism

The EU and its Member States thank the Secretariat and the Bureau for the update on the status of submission of national implementation reports since the 8th session of the Meeting of the Parties. We urge those Parties who have not yet submitted their national implementation reports to do so.

Agenda item 5. Implementation of the work programmes for 2022–2025 and for 2026–2029, including financial matters

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the Secretariat for providing the Report on the implementation of the work programmes for 2022–2025 and for 2026–2029, the Report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the Convention’s work programmes for 2022–2025 and for 2026–2029 and the Note on contributions and pledges received for the Convention and the Protocol as of 10 June 2026.

We appreciate the strenuous efforts made by the Secretariat to organise the 8th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and associated side events, and to ensure effective implementation of the Convention’s objectives, while avoiding duplication of work and ensuring efficient use of resources. We also value the Secretariat’s continued pursuit of synergies and cooperation with other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) multilateral environmental agreements, United Nations agencies, and other partners.

The EU and its Member States deeply appreciate the Secretariat’s dedication and the considerable efforts undertaken to ensure the smooth and stable functioning of the Convention. Lastly, we’d like to highlight parallel discussions regarding budgetary concerns and the review of the Compliance Mechanism in light of Decision VIII/8 Paragraph 3. We expect these issues to be taken adequately into account when implementing the work programme for 2026 – 2029.

Agenda item 6. Matters arising from the outcomes of the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties

The EU and its Member States thank the Bureau and the secretariat for preparing the note on the process to gather experiences in engaging with the compliance mechanism, and for circulating it in good time ahead of this meeting. We appreciate the effort to structure an open and participatory process, as mandated by the Meeting of the Parties, and we welcome the intention for the Working Group of the Parties to serve as the main forum for this important exchange.

We consider that the overall approach proposed, combining a structured survey with staged discussions at upcoming meetings of this Working Group, can provide a useful basis for a systematic, inclusive and evidence-informed reflection on how Parties and stakeholders experience engagement with the compliance mechanism. We also consider the indicative timeline suggested by the Bureau to be appropriate, notably in allowing time for consultations across constituencies and for meaningful input at each step of the process.

On the proposed questionnaire, the EU and its Member States would like to underline the importance of ensuring that the structure and content of the survey are sufficiently comprehensive to capture experiences fully and to identify practical areas for improvement. While we understand the proposed structure around the main areas of work of the Compliance Committee, we see value in complementing this approach with space to address cross-cutting themes, recurring issues and practical dilemmas that Parties may encounter in compliance cases under the Convention.

In this regard, we believe it would be helpful for the questionnaire to explicitly enable reflections on aspects such as experiences relating to the three pillars of the Convention, including any recurring challenges observed across pillars; the role of national jurisprudence and of the Court of Justice of the European Union, where relevant, in the implementation and interpretation of obligations linked to the Convention; Parties' engagement in the context of draft advice and draft decisions on compliance, including timing, modalities and opportunities for constructive exchange; and the possible and timely involvement of Parties in the preparation of draft decisions on general issues of compliance, where such work is underway.

We would therefore appreciate clarification on the planned process for developing the questionnaire, including whether the scope and formulation of the questions will be subject to consultation with Parties and stakeholders before finalization. In our view, a transparent and participatory consultation on the draft questionnaire will be essential to ensure both quality and buy-in, and to make sure that the survey outcomes are meaningful and actionable.

The EU and its Member States also consider it important that the questionnaire is accompanied by sufficient background information. We would welcome a clear overview of the instruments governing the compliance mechanism, as well as information on the resource implications associated with the different stages of the mechanism for the Convention bodies. This would support informed, consistent and practical responses to the survey, and would also help situate the discussion within the broader context of the increasing workload and resource constraints faced under the Convention framework. Allow me to also use this statement to react to the United Kingdom. The EU and its Member States support the points made by the United Kingdom. This includes support to including a possible draft decision to potentially revisiting existing decisions, such as Decision I/7, if required, and this does not prejudice the outcomes of this process. In closing, the EU and its Member States reaffirm our strong commitment to supporting an effective, credible and well-functioning compliance mechanism. We look forward to engaging constructively in the process under the Working Group's oversight, and we stand ready to provide further input as the questionnaire is developed and the process moves forward.

Thank you, Chair.

Agenda item 6(b). Organization of work under the Convention in the light of the lack of resources

The European Union and its Member States thank the Bureau and the Secretariat for preparing this comprehensive Note and for providing the opportunity for Parties to submit comments. We acknowledge the financial challenges the implementation of the current work programme is faced with.

In light of these developments and to safeguard the balanced implementation of the 2026–2029 work programme, the EU and MSs generally support the proposed approach outlined in the Note, but would at the same time like to suggest that replacing Task Forces with thematic sessions of the Working Group should remain a short-term solution, and that further discussions should be employed on how Task Forces could in a more pragmatic and restructured way support the ongoing work of the Working Group and the Meeting of the Parties.

In conclusion, the EU and its Member States urge all Parties to honor their long-term commitments, address outstanding unpaid contributions, and provide multi-year or increased regular contributions before October 1st each year to restore predictability. We must collectively ensure that the lack of resources does not compromise the implementation of the Convention.

With regards to the outcomes of the contact group, the EU and its Member States ask the Secretariat to provide the WGP with an estimation of the resources saved for each point at their earliest possibility. Additionally, the EU and its Member States would like the outcomes either of the contact group or of this session to reflect the suggestions to:

- a request to the Bureau to take into account the wishes of parties to review the way the Task Forces are organised going forward.

We would further ask the secretariat in future expenditure reports to clarify further costs associated with the work under Article 3(8).

In addition to the observations in the statement, we have also submitted some drafting suggestions on the outcomes to the Secretariat.

Thank you Chair.

Agenda item 6(c). Possible future Strategic Plan

The European Union and its Member States thank the Bureau for preparing the note on a possible future Strategic Plan for 2031–2039.

We acknowledge the Bureau’s assessment, including the findings of the midterm review of the current Strategic Plan (2022–2030), and the resource constraints faced by Parties and the secretariat. In this context, the EU and its Member States take note of the Bureau’s conclusion that there is no immediate need to initiate the development of a fully new Strategic Plan during the current intersessional period.

At the same time, we consider that continuity and strategic guidance beyond 2030 remain important. Therefore, the EU and its Member States suggest exploring a targeted, proportionate approach, such as a limited update or extension of the current Strategic Plan, with a view to preparing a draft for possible adoption at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP-9). This would allow Parties to build on existing priorities and lessons learned while avoiding unnecessary administrative burden.

We also underline that further reflections will be needed at a later stage on how any future strategic planning could better address the relationship between the Convention’s procedural rights and Parties’ capacity to respond effectively to urgent and evolving policy challenges, including, inter alia, the transition away from fossil fuels and broader resilience considerations.

We see value in continuing the discussion on strategic planning at the thirty-first meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, including taking into account the outcomes of recent experience-sharing on engagement with the Convention's compliance mechanism.
We look forward to engaging constructively with all Parties on this matter.
Thank you Chair.

***Important Note:** Due to the information provided by the Secretariat on the administrative and resource implications of extending or modestly updating the current Strategic Plan, the EU position was revised (as agreed at the EU Coordination meeting 25 June 2026) to extend the existing Strategic Plan to 2031–2039, with the hope that available resources will be found at a later stage to implement the relevant activities.*

Agenda Item 7. Promotion of the Convention and other relevant developments and interlinkages

The EU and its Member States take note of the secretariat's continued advisory support to Parties and non-Parties and, importantly, of the consultations with countries of the Mediterranean region interested in possibly acceding to the Aarhus Convention, including the cooperation with the secretariat of the Barcelona Convention and other partners for this purpose.

In this context, the EU and its Member States encourage continued engagement with interested non-UNECE States, including through practical guidance, peer exchange and capacity-building partnerships, making full use of the Convention's existing tools and networks. We note that the Aarhus Clearinghouse continues to serve as a platform for dissemination and exchange, including on opportunities and resources relevant for capacity-building and outreach. The EU and its Member States remain supportive of efforts that help interested countries better understand the institutional and legislative steps required for accession and effective implementation

We also take note of the current status of participation. Continued promotion and awareness-raising remain essential to maintain momentum for expanding the reach of the Convention where there is clear interest and added value.

The EU and its Member States thank the secretariat for the activities undertaken. We encourage the continued strategic focus on synergies, quality outreach and support for interested non-UNECE States, including in the Mediterranean region, as a practical pathway towards broader uptake of the Convention's principles.

Item 8. Thematic session on the promotion of the principles of the Convention in international forums

The EU and its Member States thank Luxembourg for the work done on promoting the Convention and its principles, raise awareness, and build interlinkages with relevant international bodies and processes. We strongly support this work, including the application of the Almaty Guidelines in international forums, and we value the Secretariat's emphasis on synergies through coordinated engagement across the UN system, other multilateral environmental agreements and relevant international organisations.

We particularly welcome the practical outreach and cooperation reflected in recent activities, including cross-treaty and cross-partner initiatives on early warning, pollution remediation and environmental liability; targeted awareness-raising such as training on the Convention and the PRTR Protocol in the context of sustainable marine governance; and strengthened exchanges with other regional and global processes, including on chemicals, pollution and disaster risk reduction. The EU and its Member States welcome the Secretariat's continued efforts and reiterate our support for using electronic and hybrid formats where appropriate to broaden participation and ensure cost-effective awareness-raising.

We'd like to highlight the efforts undertaken by the Secretariat and the Chair to build a Panel with so many prominent guests. Thank you to all panellists, and especially to the Executive Secretary of the Minamata Convention, the representative of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention Secretariat, the Executive Secretary of the INC on Plastic Pollution, the representative of the GFC who took time from their busy agenda to be here today. The invaluable information they shared with us today help us break down the silos in which we too often operate in our respective Convention. The identification and development of synergies between the UN Conventions is of crucial importance since they contribute to a more efficient and effective implementation.

On behalf of the EU and Member States, we would like express our deep sadness for the sudden loss of Tessa Goverse, long-time UNEP colleague and Head of the Interim Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution. We offer our sincere condolences to her loved ones, friends and colleagues"

Thank you Chair.

Agenda item 3. Substantive issues (continued)

Item 3(d). Thematic session on access to justice

The EU and its Member States express would like to express their thanks to Belgium for continuing the work undertaken in the framework of the Task Force on Access to Justice, and thank the Chair for facilitating this important exchange.

The Meeting of the Parties clarified in Decision VIII/3 that access to justice in relation to environmental crimes and environmental damage remains a matter requiring continued attention. We therefore welcome the facilitation of the dedicated thematic session.

The EU and its Member States remain committed to promoting and ensuring adequate access to justice in environmental matters as a central pillar of environmental governance and accountability. We look forward to discussing this issue further during this intersessional period.

Agenda item 10. Adoption of outcomes

The European Union and its Member States would like to express their sincere appreciation to the Chair for the effective stewardship of this meeting, and to the Secretariat for the excellent preparation and organization of this thirtieth session of the Working Group of the Parties.

We also thank all Parties, observers, chairs of subsidiary bodies and speakers for their valuable contributions, which have enabled substantive, constructive and forward-looking discussions across a wide range of issues central to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. We also extend our sincere thanks to the interpreters, whose indispensable work has ensured that our discussions were inclusive, effective and accessible to all delegations.

Over the past days, we have reaffirmed the continued relevance and strength of the Convention as a cornerstone of environmental democracy, ensuring access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice. These principles remain essential, particularly in the context of increasingly complex and evolving environmental, social and economic challenges.

The EU and its Member States welcome the progress achieved across the work programme, including in the areas of access to information, public participation and access to justice, as well as the important work of the Compliance Committee and the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders.

At the same time, our discussions have highlighted a number of key challenges that require continued attention, notably the increasing workload under the Convention, the need to ensure adequate and sustainable resources, and the importance of maintaining a balanced and effective implementation of all areas of work.

We also welcome the constructive exchanges on improving engagement with the compliance mechanism, and we look forward to contributing actively to the forthcoming process, including the development of the questionnaire and the continued discussions under this Working Group. Indeed, we believe this process to be a central outcome of this meeting that will facilitate future discussions on how to keep the implementation of the Convention balanced and effective.

Furthermore, we welcome continued efforts to promote the Convention and its principles beyond the UNECE region, and we support ongoing outreach and cooperation with interested countries and international processes.

Chair,

As we conclude this meeting, the European Union and its Member States reaffirm their strong and unwavering commitment to the Aarhus Convention and its full and effective implementation. We'd like to reiterate and reassure that we expect the survey and possible draft decisions for consideration by the next MoP, to aim at improving the procedures of Compliance Mechanism and facilitate better implementation of the Convention's obligations.

We remain ready to engage constructively with all Parties and stakeholders in the period ahead to further strengthen environmental democracy and ensure that the Convention continues to respond effectively to present and future challenges.

We look forward to our continued cooperation and to the next meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

Thank you, Chair.
