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Regional training on the Promotion of the Aarhus Convention in the whole of the Mediterranean

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TRAINING REPORT

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v.1	HE-4-REG Training report	Anastasia Roniotes Summer Kern	Anis Ismail Michael Scoullos

WATER AND ENVIRONMENT SUPPORT IN THE ENI SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD REGION

The "Water and Environment Support (WES) in the ENI Neighborhood South Region" project is a regional technical support project funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI South). WES aims to protect the natural resources in the Mediterranean context and to improve the management of scarce water resources in the region. WES mainly aims to solve the problems linked to pollution prevention and the rational use of water.

WES builds on previous similar regional projects funded by the European Union (Horizon 2020 CB/MEP, SWIM SM, SWIM-H2020 SM) and strives to create a supportive environment and increase the capacity of all stakeholders in the partner countries (PCs).

The WES Project Countries are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. However, in order to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of EU funding or to promote regional cooperation, the eligibility of specific actions can be extended to neighboring countries in the Southern Neighborhood region.

DISCLAIMER:

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the WES Project and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
COMPSUD	Circle of Mediterranean Parliamentarians for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
ENI	European Neighborhood Instrument
FDD	Foundation Discussion Document (FDD) for the Mediterranean Accession Agenda to the Aarhus Convention
FPs	Focal Points
MAAAC	Mediterranean Accession Agenda to the Aarhus Convention
MEPIELAN	Mediterranean Programme for International Environmental Law and Negotiation
MIO-ECSDE	Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development
MSSD	Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
NKE	Non-Key Expert
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PA-UfM	Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean
PCs	Partner Countries
P2P	Peer-to-Peer
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP/MAP	United Nations Environment Program/Mediterranean Action Plan
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
WES	Water and Environment Support

1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The **Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters** is widely accepted to be the leading example of implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration. Apart from engaging the public, accession to the Convention, could facilitate the design and implementation of green economy programmes, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its Sustainable Development Goals, the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) of the Barcelona Convention system, the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, the UfM's 2030GreenerMed Agenda, and a series of national strategies and policies. Being a Party to the Convention significantly contributes to countries' efforts to promote citizen-centered and environmentally sound policies. Currently, 12 Mediterranean countries are already Parties to the Aarhus Convention (54,5%) (*more details are provided in Annex 10.4*).

The Mediterranean Commission of Sustainable Development (MCSD) and the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2016-2025) encourages all Mediterranean countries to accede to the Aarhus Convention and promotes a relevant flagship initiative. Similarly, the UfM works toward the reinforcement of mechanisms for stakeholder's participation and engagement. Many Mediterranean governments are inspired by the Aarhus Convention in trying to improve environmental governance and mobilize citizens organizations in becoming constructive allies in dealing with the accumulated environmental and sustainability problems (*more details are provided in Annex 10.4*).

With the support of MIO-ECSDE and the EU LIFE Programme, a desk study, including literature review and interviews, was conducted by MEPIELAN in 2021-2022, resulting in a "Foundation Discussion Document (FDD) for the Mediterranean Accession Agenda to the Aarhus Convention" (discussion paper) and a Summary for Decision Makers. Furthermore, a side event at the 9th Environment for Europe Conference held in Cyprus (5-7 October 2022) served to launch the FDD documents to the public for the first time, communicate these significant efforts for the development of a "Mediterranean Accession Agenda" to the Aarhus Convention. Over the summer of 2023, a first draft of the **Mediterranean Accession Agenda to the Aarhus Convention (MAAAC)** was authored by WES with the contribution of the UNECE Aarhus Convention secretariat. The MAAAC provides all the information needed for a country to prepare and eventually put in motion the mechanisms needed to accede to the Aarhus Convention. The draft was shared with the major regional institutions in the Mediterranean, the WES Focal Points, the Peers following WES activity HE-4-P2P, the EU Delegations in the WES Partner Countries, for comments and reflections. A second draft incorporating the collected inputs was presented at the WES Regional Training on the promotion of the Aarhus Convention in the whole of the Mediterranean on 14-15 November 2023 in Athens.

1.1 RATIONALE OF THIS REGIONAL TRAINING

In its efforts to promote Environmental Governance in the Mediterranean by encouraging the accession to and implementation of the Aarhus Convention, WES has joined forces with the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat, the Secretariat of the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention Secretariat,

the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the Circle of Mediterranean Parliamentarians for Sustainable Development (COMPSUD), the Energy, Environment and Water Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM) and the MEPIELAN Centre.

Through a WES Peer-to-Peer process that started with a 2-day on-line meeting in March 2023 and the 2-day regional training that took place on 14-15 November 2023, in Athens, Greece (with live streaming), this regional WES activity provides technical assistance and networking opportunities and strengthens the capacities of the WES Partner Countries to be able to effectively prepare and eventually (if they so wish) put in motion the mechanisms needed to accede to the Aarhus Convention.

The present document reports specifically on the 2-day WES Regional Training.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING

The overall aim of this activity was to promote Environmental Governance in the region by encouraging the accession to and implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the Mediterranean countries and promote stakeholder engagement. WES aims to contribute to the MSSD target of having five more Mediterranean countries joining the Convention by 2025.

The main purpose of this 2-day regional training was to strengthen the implementation capacity of public authorities, country experts and NGOs on the main pillars of the Aarhus Convention:

- Access to Information
- Public participation in decision-making
- Access to Justice

as well as on the application of the principles of the Aarhus Convention in international decision-making.

3 EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE TRAINING

By participating in the training, national authorities and other stakeholders:

- gained deeper knowledge and learned about the Aarhus Convention and its provisions;
- strengthened their implementation capacity on the main pillars of the Aarhus Convention;
- shared knowledge among themselves on common challenges and solutions related to environmental governance;
- got valuable insights from the experience of various Aarhus Convention Parties and obtained an understanding of how the Convention's pillars are implemented in their countries;
- reinforced a regional network of peers in relation to environmental governance.

In general, the expected results were met to a satisfactory degree as the report will show in the following sections.

4 ELEMENTS OF THE TRAINING IMPLEMENTATION

No. of presentations on examples/case studies (sharing of experiences, good practices, etc.)	5	Malta, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Cyprus, Greece
No. of international speakers from EU countries	9	Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Spain
No. of international speakers from non-EU countries	2	Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro
No. of speakers from international organisations	3	UfM, UNECE, UNEP/MAP
No. of training-oriented presentations (on concepts, methodologies, etc.)	8	8 presentations
No. of interactive/participatory activities (open discussions, brainstorming sessions)	4	1 exercise for each of the 3 main pillars of the AC and 1 exercise on the application of the principles of the AC in international decision-making
No. of in-person Peers/Trainees	19	Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Greece
No. of remote Peers/Trainees	10	

5 PROFILE OF THE PEERS/TRAINEES

This regional training was designed to primarily address the Peers already appointed. They were policy officials of Ministries of Environment and Water (particularly those involved in Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments) but also governmental departments dealing with International Conventions (Ministries of Foreign Affairs), relevant national experts/advisors as well as key environmental NGOs.

The profile of the Peers/ trainees requested from the Environment and Water WES Focal Points is outlined below:

- country representatives on the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development;
- policy persons from the Ministry of Environment (dealing with International Conventions, Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments, stakeholder engagement, public consultations, etc.);
- policy persons from the Ministry for Water (dealing with e.g. International Conventions, Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments related to water management, infrastructures and public works, stakeholder engagement, public dialogues, etc.);
- policy persons from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Ministry of Justice dealing with International Conventions (ideally active in the UfM Senior Officials Meetings);
- other key actors: decision makers/Members of Parliament and/or their advisors; academics from relevant departments of Law;
- environmental NGOs.

In the end, the represented Ministries were:

- Environment
- Foreign Affairs
- Justice
- Water, Irrigation, Agriculture, Fisheries
- Industry
- Energy

All WES Partner Countries (except Algeria) were represented at the training either physically or remotely.

Peers/Trainees from Israel and Palestine were not able to physically attend the training due to the war in the region. The total number of trainees was **29** (a complete list, including in-person and online participation, is available upon request to the WES support team).

Training Workshop Demographics

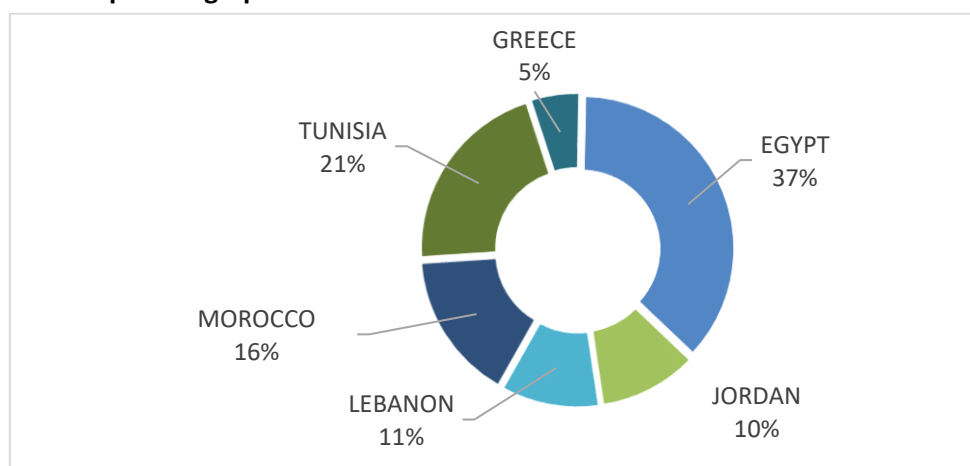


FIGURE 5-1: REPRESENTATION OF TRAINEES PER COUNTRY (IN PERSON)

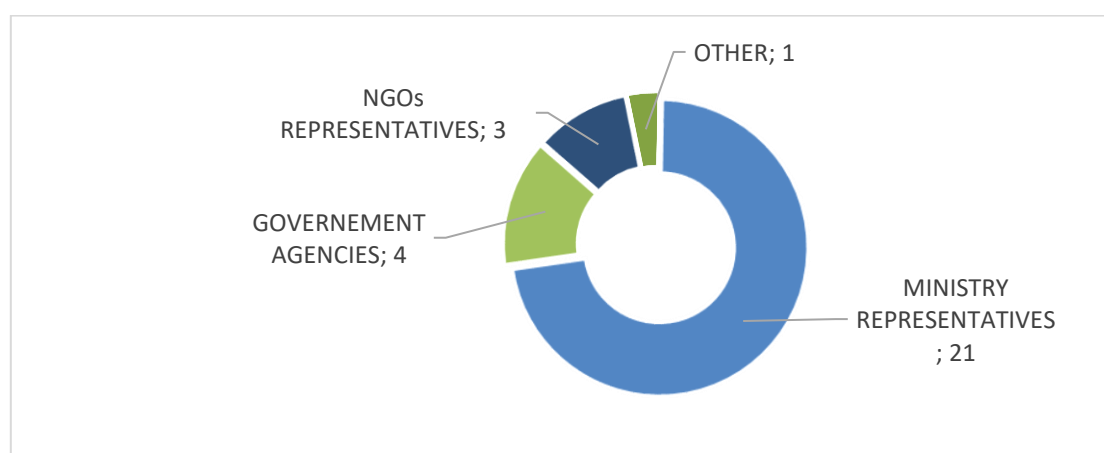


FIGURE 5-2: REPRESENTATION OF ALL TRAINEES PER TYPE OF INSTITUTION

6 STATISTICS GENDER AND YOUTH

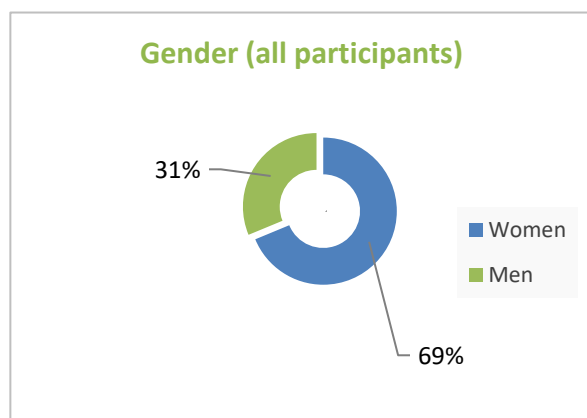


FIGURE 6-1: GENDER (ALL PARTICIPANTS)

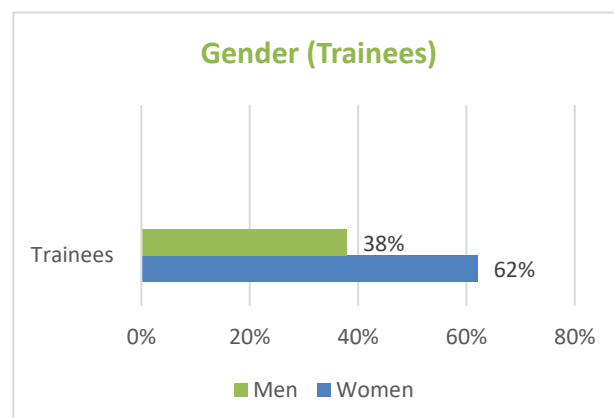


FIGURE 6-2: GENDER (TRAINEES)

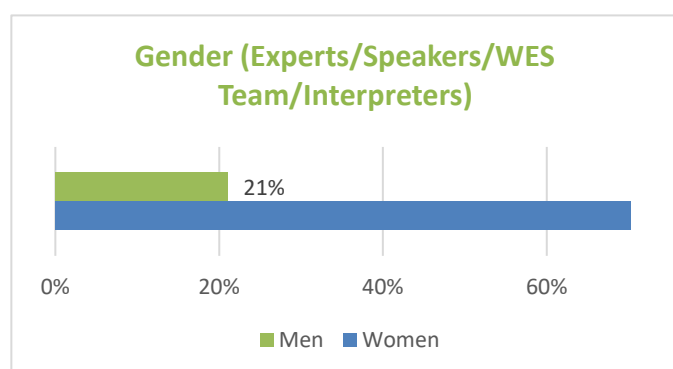


FIGURE 6-3: GENDER (EXPERTS/SPEAKERS/WES TEAM/INTERPRETERS)

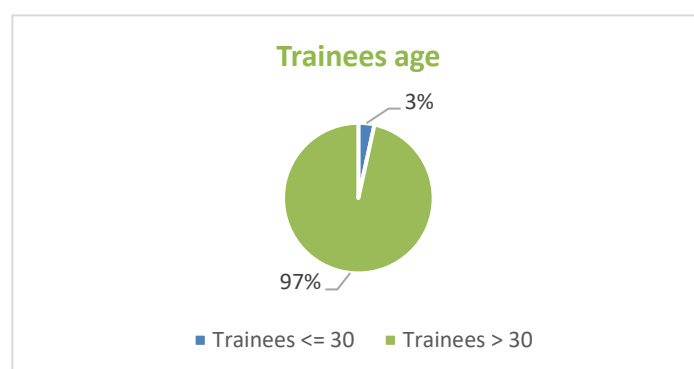


FIGURE 6-4: TRAINEES - AGE

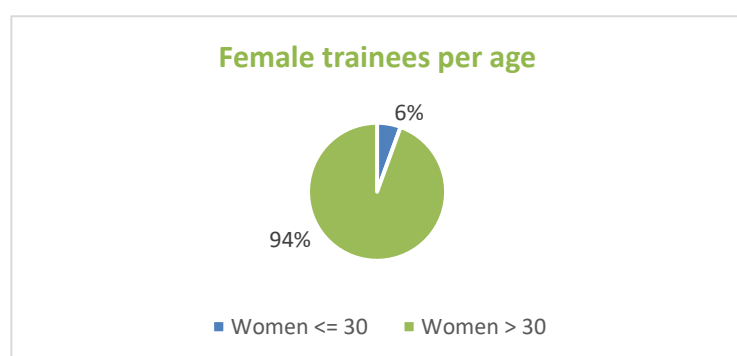


FIGURE 6-5: FEMALE TRAINEES - AGE

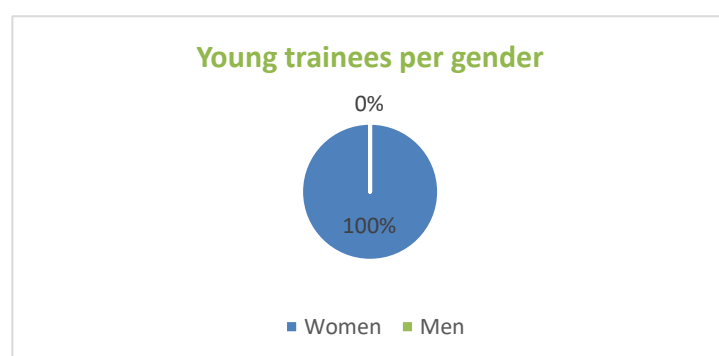


FIGURE 6-6: YOUNG TRAINEES (18-30) - GENDER

7 EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING

7.1 RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

A. Organisational, administrative and planning issues before and during the event

A set of 10 criteria; A1-A10 (see table below) were assessed by the participants, using a qualitative description ranging between “Excellent” to “Poor”.

A. ORGANISATIONAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND PLANNING ISSUES BEFORE AND DURING THE EVENT		EXCELLENT	GOOD	AVERAGE	POOR	Total Replies	Average Score (max = 4)
A1	Appropriate handling of invitations, visa support, information sharing and smoothing obstacles	16	1		1	18	3,78
A2	Efficient logistics: accommodation, transportation, location of venue and interpretation	10	6	2		18	3,44
A3	Provision of support (if requested) for participants' preparation for the event	10	5		1	16	3,50
A4	Efficient and effective follow-up of preparations and progress towards the event	13	4	1		18	3,67
A5	Smooth flow of programme, efficient handling of emerging needs and attentiveness to participants concerns	12	6			18	3,67
A6	Presentations correspond and contribute to the planned objectives and are conducive to enhanced shared understanding and participation on addressed topics	11	6			17	3,65
A7	Clarity, coverage and sufficiency of concepts, objectives, anticipated outputs and outcomes	9	9			18	3,50
A8	Usefulness of the distributed material	6	11	1		18	3,28
A9	Efficiency and effectiveness of the facilitation	15	3			18	3,83
A10	Overall rating of the event	10	8			18	3,56



FIGURE 7-1: APPROPRIATE HANDLING OF INVITATIONS, VISA SUPPORT, INFO SHARING AND SMOOTHING OBSTACLES (A.1)



FIGURE 7-2: EFFICIENT LOGISTICS: ACCOMMODATION, TRANSPORTATION, LOCATION OF VENUE AND INTERPRETATION (A.2)



FIGURE 7-3: PROVISION OF SUPPORT (IF REQUESTED) FOR PARTICIPANTS' PREPARATION FOR THE EVENT (A.3)

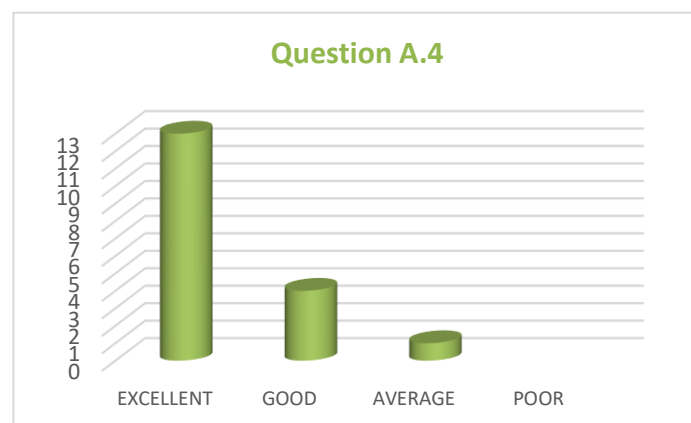


FIGURE 7-4: EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP OF PREPARATIONS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS THE EVENT (A.4)

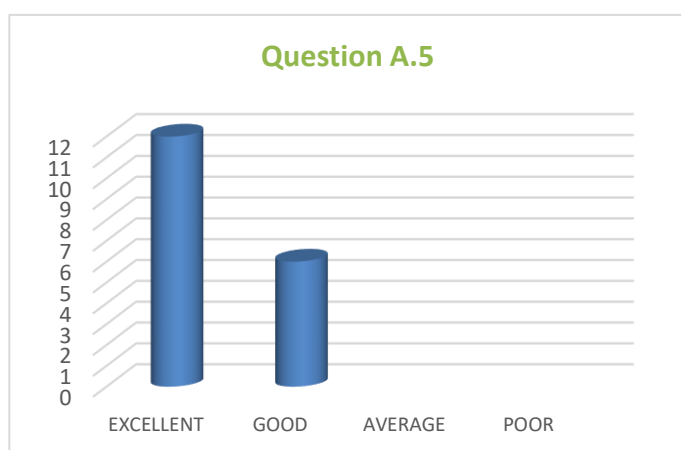


FIGURE 7-5: FLOW OF PROGRAMME, HANDLING OF EMERGING NEEDS (A.5)

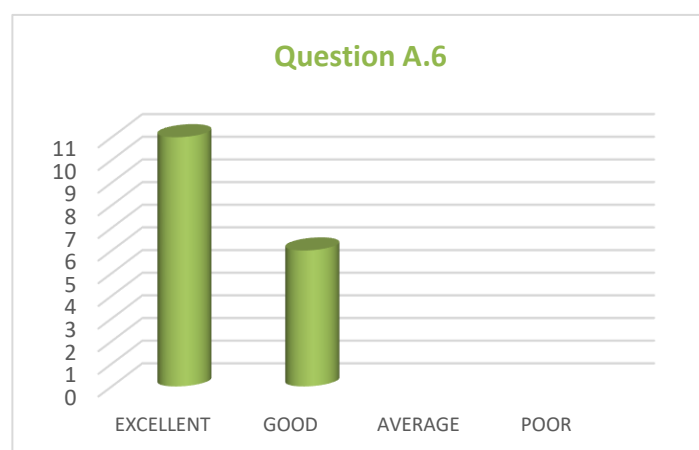


FIGURE 7-6: EVALUATION OF PRESENTATIONS (A.6)



FIGURE 7-7: CLARITY, COVERAGE AND SUFFICIENCY OF CONCEPTS, OBJECTIVES, ANTICIPATED OUTPUTS (A.7)

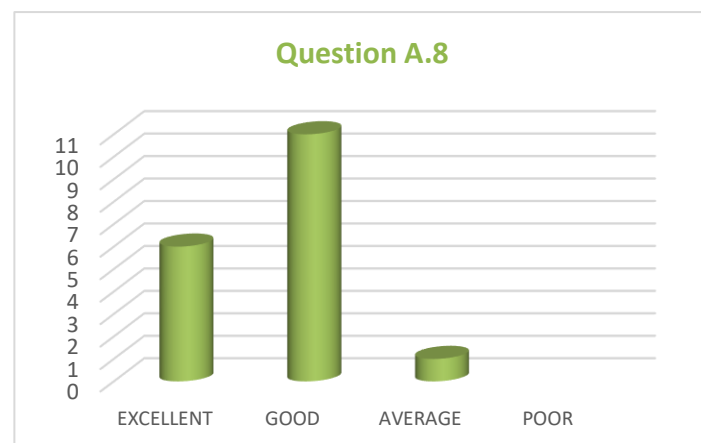


FIGURE 7-8: USEFULNESS OF THE DISTRIBUTED MATERIAL (A.8)



FIGURE 7-9: EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FACILITATION (A.9)



FIGURE 7-10: OVERALL RATING OF THE EVENT (A.10)

B. Feedback by participants:

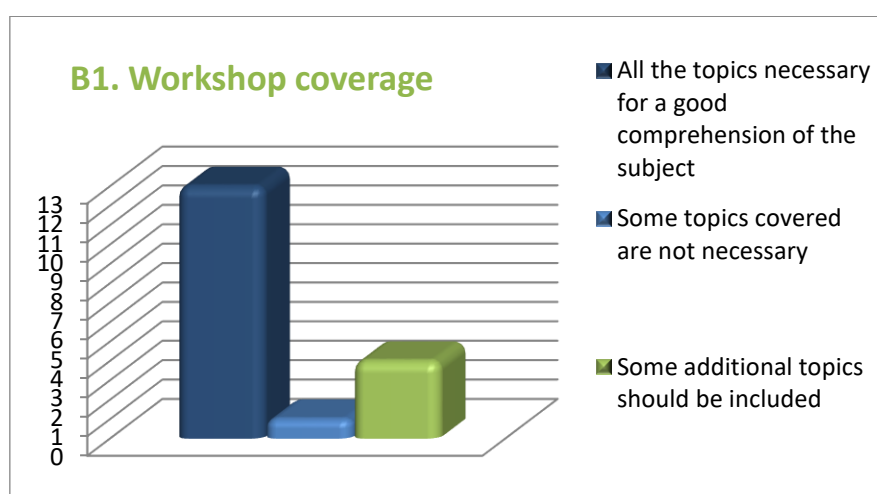


FIGURE 7-11: WORKSHOP COVERAGE



FIGURE 7-12: WORKSHOP DIFFICULTY

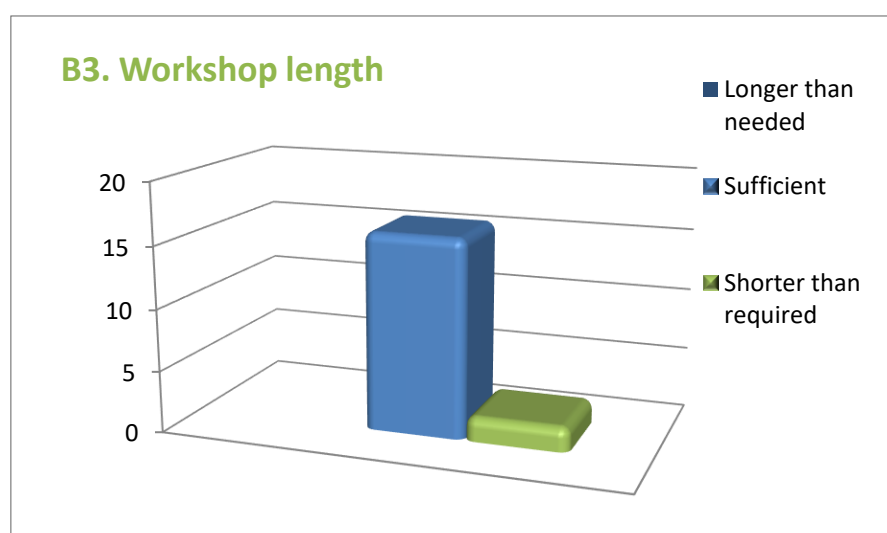


FIGURE 7-13: WORKSHOP LENGTH

Statements made by the participants

B4

What is the most valuable thing you learned during the training (knowledge or skills)?

1. One of the most valuable aspects I learned about the Aarhus Convention during the training is its emphasis on the three pillars of environmental democracy: access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters. Each pillar plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in environmental governance
2. Il faut bouger et prendre l'initiative maintenant, car cette convention est une convention carrefour qui aide à la bonne application de plusieurs conventions environnementales
3. The relationship between different actors, government NGOs, academia, etc. regarding environmental needs and changes through actions and different initiatives lead
4. Comprendre les piliers de la convention ainsi l'échange d'expérience entre tous les participants et exposants
5. The main pillars of the Aarhus convention and the steps to follow with my authority

Statements made by the participants	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Prendre connaissance de la Convention d'Aarhus ; échange de informations 7. L'importance du rôle du Public dans la prise de décision 8. Best practices and experiences from other countries 9. Une vision plus claire sur la Convention Aarhus 10. A good introduction to the Aarhus Convention 11. Concrete examples and best practices 12. Knowing examples from other Parties 13. The steps that should be followed 14. The 3 pillars of the Aarhus Convention 15. Pillars of Aarhus convention 16. Content of Aarhus convention 17. Knowledge
B5	<p>How do you think that the current event will assist you in your future work on the subject?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It might raise a lot of points to take in consideration before encouraging or supporting any environmental relevant matters or initiatives 2. It helps me recognize patterns or trends that might impact environmental policies, public engagement, or legal frameworks 3. Une connaissance approfondie est acquise sur les procédures nécessaires pour adhérer à la conception d'Aarhus 4. L'atelier va nous aider à sensibiliser nos décideurs pour l'adhésion de notre pays à cette convention 5. The knowledge I got will be very useful for me and the Ministry of Industry in many ways 6. The training clarifies some points for me; good practice examples for other countries 7. Creating an information center helps in dealing with request for information 8. C'est très utile pour la mise en place d'un système d'information sur l'eau 9. La participation m'a donné plusieurs de connaissances et informations 10. Renforcement de capacité en matière de partage d'information 11. Getting to know the content of the convention 12. Enrich my experience in environmental issues 13. It answers a lot of questions
B6	<p>Please indicate whether (and how) you could transfer part of the experience gained from the event to your colleagues in your country?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Host presentations to share the knowledge gained. Use interactive sessions to engage colleagues, discussing the significance of the Aarhus Convention, its pillars, and its relevance in environmental governance 2. I will submit a report to the Minister in my country and share my experience of this event with my colleagues at my administration 3. Une réunion de synthèse sera provoquée avec les parties prenantes dans le processus d'adhésion 4. By preparing a report and sharing the training content with my colleagues 5. I will do a presentation for my colleagues and provide them all the links 6. Better implementation of the provisions of the convention 7. I will write a report for my department 8. Submitting report about the event 9. Coopération; réunion en ligne

Statements made by the participants	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Reporting; open discussions 11. Consulter SINE et Chikayat 12. Sharing information 13. Through reporting 14. Oui
B7	What did you like most about this event?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I value the content presented and the opportunity to participate in such an informative event 2. The interaction between the presenters and the participants 3. The open atmosphere of exchanging experiences and ideas 4. Interaction between the presenter and the participants 5. Explanation of the provisions of the conventions 6. L'organisation et la qualité des intervenants 7. Good presentations and organization 8. Création du centre Aarhus 9. Everything was very good 10. Professional instructors 11. The themes on the agenda 12. Examples on each pillar 13. La qualité des experts 14. It was interactive 15. L'échange 16. Tout
B8	What needs to be improved?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishing efficient feedback channels allows attendees to provide real-time feedback during the event. During the second day's first session, I had a question and raised my hand, unfortunately, I wasn't noticed by the moderator. This made it difficult for me to engage and contributed to a less interactive experience. 2. Countries with big and heavy economies parts of the Convention should also share their experience to the audience not only small countries 3. S'approfondir sur les 3 piliers de la convention notamment l'évaluation et le retour d'expérience dans les pays membres 4. Generally, an additional overview of the background and genesis of Aarhus Convention 5. No need, it will help me do promotion to the Aarhus Convention at my country 6. Add more case studies and examples related to the topics 7. Assurer le transport de l'aéroport et merci infiniment 8. More info on real cases and best practices 9. Entrer la langue arabe a cet événement 10. Virtual participation 11. More clarifications 12. Travel itinerary 13. Nothing

C. Remarks by the trainer

A set of 9 criteria; B1-B9 (See table below) are assessed by the trainer(s). Please use either the qualitative descriptions used in Section A or open text, as appropriate.

B1	Efficient and effective performance and interaction by participants Very good interaction with and by participants throughout the 2-day training.
B2	Efficient and effective cooperation and team spirit Excellent
B3	Level of achievement of planned objectives Excellent
B4	Did the event contribute to helping participants practice skills or gain knowledge related to course concepts Yes (according to the evaluation forms)
B5	What worked well during the event The coverage of all topics, the quality of the presentations, the level of the invited speakers (remote and in-person ones) and the knowledge of the experts. Generally, the training went according to the trainers' plan and goals. There was a good ratio of trainees that engaged during the sessions, discussions and interactive exercises.
B6	What didn't work well and why Many mentioned that some additional topics should be included. Also, several declared that they needed more examples by Aarhus Parties on their experience, especially by countries with big and heavy economies. They also wished to learn more about the background, genesis and the 3 pillars of the Aarhus Convention.
B7	What components/concepts did participants seem to understand well The majority declared they obtained a good understanding of the Aarhus Convention and its main pillars. It also seems that they understood well the importance of the Aarhus Convention as well as the importance of public participation in decision-making.
B8	Were there any components/concepts that participants appeared to not understand No apparent misconceptions were detected. However, it could seem that a very small number of participants needed more clarifications and background information on the Aarhus Convention.
B9	What aspects of the event could be improved and what to be kept Aspects to keep: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quality of the content and high implication and dedication of experts and staff, good communication with participants. – The combination of theoretical interventions with exercises and the diversity and quality of presenters. Aspects to improve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The composition of the trainees and the distribution among Mediterranean countries (however, this was due to the current war situation in the region)

8 ANALYSIS OF THE TRAINING

8.1 DAY 1

The rationale behind the very first session of the training was to provide Peers/trainees with some key presentations that ranged from the basic concepts of the training; introduction to the Aarhus Convention, links with the Barcelona Convention, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) other

international treaties and processes, and the Mediterranean Accession Agenda to the Aarhus Convention.

The following sessions were dedicated to the two Pillars of the Aarhus Convention; **Pillar 1: Access to Information** and **Pillar 2: Public participation in decision-making**. The pillars were introduced to the Peers/trainees by the trainer in charge and presentations by Aarhus Parties on their experience were made. More specifically, an invited speaker from the Environment and Resources Authority of Malta described how the Convention's pillar on access to information is implemented in her country, while another one from the Federal Ministry for Environment and Tourism of Bosnia and Herzegovina focused on public participation in decision making on urban development/cities.

During this day, there were Q&A slots after each session and an interactive group exercise (*see Annex 10.3*) was made for each of the two pillars. The day ended with a wrap up and closing remarks for Day 1 and an introduction to Day 2.

8.2 DAY 2

The second day started with introductory sessions by the trainer in charge in relation to **Pillar 3: Access to Justice** and **Application of the principles of the Aarhus Convention in international decision-making**. Presentations by Aarhus Parties on their experience were made. More specifically, an invited speaker from the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism of Montenegro outlined how access to justice in information-related cases is applied in the country, while another speaker from the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of Cyprus shared the experience of the application of the Convention's principles through the hosting the 9th "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference that took place in Nicosia in October 2022.

The next session was dedicated to support capacity building and implementation on the ground; an introductory presentation was made on the Aarhus Centres and the Aarhus Centre in Greece, a case in progress, was also presented.

A discussion on further needs of the countries and next steps in the P2P process took place, reflecting also on the opportunity of the follow-up project of WES (2024-2027/28).

During this day, there were Q&A slots after each session and interactive group exercises were made (*see Annex 10.3*). The day ended with the evaluation of the training, distribution of certificates and wrap-up/closing remarks of the training.

9 CONCLUSIONS & OVERALL ASSESSMENT

This Regional Training was the first ever dedicated to the Promotion of the Aarhus Convention in the whole of the Mediterranean, co-organized by the WES project and the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat.

Accession to the Aarhus Convention provides greater political visibility at international level building the image of the acceding country as a strong supporter of environmental democracy and it sends a strong positive signal to other countries, including trade and aid partners, as well as foreign investors and international institutions of the Government's commitment to effective governance and democracy. It is evident that the familiarization and eventual accession to the Aarhus Convention

requires first and foremost the political will of the governments of the targeted countries to fulfil in a solid way the commitments concerning public participation vis-à-vis the various conventions and international fora.

This report shows that 13 Mediterranean countries participated in the training (unfortunately not Algeria) and that the majority were Peers/trainees from ministries or government agencies. It is safe to say that the targeted group of stakeholders was successfully met and their understanding of the Aarhus Convention and the implementation capacity of the participating WES PCs on the main pillars of the Aarhus Convention have been enhanced significantly, as stated in their feedback comments.

The structure and the content of the sessions of this training was of high quality, providing thorough and comprehensive presentations and discussions on all aspects related to the Aarhus Convention. The experts and invited speakers were very knowledgeable on the topics and this made possible the delivery of an excellent training that managed to comprehensively cover this important topic. The trainees felt that they were in a safe space to voice their questions, concerns, etc. It goes without saying that had it not been a hybrid meeting with a strong physical component, this would not have been possible. During coffee breaks and lunch, important discussions continued between the WES experts, the Aarhus Convention secretariat and the participating Peers. The overall assessment of this workshop was positive, the objectives set at the beginning were met and the participants were enabled to work together, exchanging knowledge and carrying out the proposed exercises.

Peers/trainees were provided with resources to develop further their knowledge, such as the training material, the MAAAC document and various links related to the Aarhus Convention and its implementation (guidelines, recommendations, etc.).

The feedback from the interactions and the evaluation can be summarised as follows:

- Profile of Peers/trainees: In terms of gender participation the training can be regarded as gender balanced; 62% of participants were women, the majority of which above the age of 30. Interestingly, despite the fact that 97% of the Peers/trainees were above 30 years old, all younger participants were predominantly women.
- Evaluation results: All Peers/trainees rated the training as excellent and very good and most of them evaluated the training of adequate difficulty. All of them rated the training of excellent and good clarity, coverage and sufficiency of concepts, objectives and anticipated outputs. While around 70% considered all topics necessary for a good comprehension of the subject, approximately 20% considered that some additional subjects should have been included. Almost 80% considered the length of the 2-day training as sufficient.

The HE-4-REG Regional Training has been conducted under challenging conditions due to the current war situation in the region. This was the reason why many of the Peers/trainees canceled their physical attendance and they decided to participate on-line for safety reasons. Despite this fact, the training gathered the expected number of Peers/trainees from almost all of the targeted countries and managed to fulfill its purpose to encourage the accession to and implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the non-UNECE Mediterranean countries and promote public participation processes. It is noted that adequate time is required for the candidate countries to successfully complete the accession process.

10 ANNEXES

10.1 AGENDA

«Promotion of the Aarhus Convention in the whole of the Mediterranean»

Regional Training in Athens, Greece, 14-15 November 2023

Venue: Wyndham Grand Athens

DAY 1: 14 November 2023

8:30-9:00	Registration for day 1	
Time	Session/Description	
9:00-9:30	<p>Welcome remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Michael Scoullas, WES Team Leader - Ms Ella Behlyarova, Secretary to the Aarhus Convention, Environment Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) - Mr. Stavros Antoniadis, Associate Administrative Officer/Environmental Lawyer, UN Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan Coordinating Unit - Ms Alessandra Sensi, Head of Sector, Environment, Green and Blue Economy, Water Environment and Blue Economy Division, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) (remote) - Dr. Dionysia-Theodora Avgerinopoulou, Member of the Hellenic Parliament, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Environmental Protection, Member of the Circle of Mediterranean Parliamentarians for Sustainable Development (COMPSUD) 	
9:30-10:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Aarhus Convention and links with the Barcelona Convention and other international treaties and processes, Ms Summer Kern, WES Senior Expert on the Aarhus Convention (20 min) • The Mediterranean Accession Agenda to the Aarhus Convention, Prof. Michael Scoullas, WES Team Leader (15 min) • Q&A <p>Background material: Quick Guide to the Aarhus Convention Implementation Guide</p>	
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break	
11:00-13:00	Pillar 1: Access to Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the main provisions of the Aarhus Convention, Ms Summer Kern, WES Senior Expert on the Aarhus Convention (20 min) • Presentation by an Aarhus Party on its experience: Ms Chloe Galea, Senior Officer Legal Affairs, Environment and Resources Authority of Malta (remote) (15 min) • Q&A • Exercise on access to information <p>Background material: Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools</p>
13:00-14:00	Lunch Break	
14:00-15:30	Pillar 2: Public participation in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the main provisions of the Aarhus Convention, Ms Summer Kern, WES Senior Expert on the Aarhus Convention (20 min) • Presentation by an Aarhus Party on its experience: Ms Suada Numic, Head of Department in the Sector for Environmental Permits, Federal Ministry for Environment and Tourism of Bosnia and Herzegovina (remote) (15 min) • Q&A <p>Background material: Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters</p>

15:30-15:45	Coffee Break	
15:45-16:15	Pillar 2: Public participation in decision-making (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise in groups on public participation in decision-making
16:15-16:30	Closing of Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap up and Closing remarks for Day 1 and introduction to Day 2

DAY 2: 15 November 2023

8:45-9:00	Registration for day 2	
Time	Session/Description	
9:00-11:00	Pillar 3: Access to Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the main provisions of the Aarhus Convention, <i>Ms Summer Kern, WES Senior Expert on the Aarhus Convention (20 min)</i> • Presentation by an Aarhus Party on its experience: <i>Ms Maja Raicevic, Senior Advisor, Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism of Montenegro (remote) (15 min)</i> • Q&A • Exercise in groups on access to justice <p>Background material: Analytical studies and surveys</p>
11:00-11:30	Coffee break	
11:30-13:00	Application of the principles of the Aarhus Convention in international decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the main provisions of the Aarhus Convention, <i>Ms Summer Kern, WES Senior Expert on the Aarhus Convention (20 min)</i> • Presentation by an Aarhus Party on its experience: <i>Ms Eirini Konstantinou, Head of European and International Affairs, Department of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of Cyprus (15 min)</i> • Q&A • Exercise in groups on the application of the principles of the Aarhus Convention in international decision-making <p>Background material: Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums Snapshot on the Almaty Guidelines Checklist of Measures</p>
13:00-14:00	Lunch break	
14:00-14:45	Supporting capacity building and implementation on the ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aarhus Centres: a platform for multistakeholder cooperation, <i>Ms Ella Behlyarova, Secretary to the Aarhus Convention (10 min)</i> • Aarhus Centre in Greece – a case in progress, <i>Prof. Evangelos Raftopoulos, WES Senior Legal/Policy Expert in International Environmental Law/President, MEPIELAN Centre. (remote) (20 min)</i> • Q&A <p>Background material (courtesy of OSCE): The Aarhus Centres - A Brief Introduction Aarhus Centres Guidelines Updated Guidelines on Gender Mainstreaming in Aarhus Centres Activities</p>
14:45-15:30	Next steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on further needs and next steps in the P2P process, <i>Ms Ella Behlyarova, Secretary to the Aarhus Convention and Ms Anastasia Roniotes, WES Environment Expert</i>
15:30-16:00	Closing session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of the training • Certificates • Wrap-up and Closing remarks of the training

10.2 LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

(available upon request)

10.3 GROUP EXERCISES

Pillar 1: Access to information

Issue 1: Ahmed, an individual, works at the NGO Birds for Life. He sent the following request for environmental information as an individual to the city Camden. Specifically, Ahmed asked:

- For any and all information concerning how Camden's approach to the environment in its land use policies over the past 20 years could possibly affect the bird population in the country and the surrounding environment
- For any studies that have been collected regarding the flight paths of terns, a specific native migrating bird species, in the past 2 years near a specific area where several large wind farms are being planned.

Camden replies that, as an individual, Ahmed has no right to this information, and demands that he resubmit his request in the name of his NGO Birds for Life and give reasons why this NGO Birds for Life is entitled to this information. Ahmed resubmits his request for information in the name of Birds for Life, and states that his NGO Birds for Life is a long-standing NGO concerned about the protection of birds and bats with respect to projects like windfarms. The city of Camden then refuses the requested information on the grounds that this is not environmental information.

Questions: in particular what, if any, lessons learned/good practices can you identify?

- Can you identify any problems with the city of Camden's response with respect to the requirements of the Aarhus Convention? If so, what specifically was problematic?
- Can you identify any differences in the two questions that Ahmed originally posed and how they should be treated under the Convention?

Issue 2: Dovington is the national government and notices that it is getting a lot of very mixed messages of how requests for public information are treated in Camden and other cities in its jurisdiction. Sometimes these seem to work well; sometimes not.

Question: again, think about lessons learned/good practices

- Can you identify any ideas how Dovington can help its public authorities handle requests for information more effectively and properly?

Pillar 2: Public participation in Decision-making

Issue 1: The government of Alcatraz plans to reclaim certain lands from the sea and build a new city district. Please assume that these activities engage the public participation provisions of the Aarhus Convention. Please then describe the steps Alcatraz needs to take to ensure effective and inclusive public participation under the Aarhus model.

Questions:

- How should Alcatraz identify the public concerned? Who specifically should this cover?
- Once Alcatraz has identified the public concerned, how can it effectively notify them? Through what means? What would work best in your countries?
- What sort of time frames would be reasonable, making sure all options are open?
- What sort of access to information should be available?
- What comments should the public be able to make?

- How can due account of the input from the public be considered and demonstrated?
- How to provide notice of a final decision?

Issue 2: Country Alcatraz develops an app by which any individuals can, using their personal information, register, to say they are interested in any article 6 (project-level) applications, including trading ports, piers for loading and unloading connected to land and outside ports. This enables them to have notification of any article 6 projects that could be of interest. Moreover, any interested persons are always informed as to new information put into the administrative file by either the applicant or by the public authority.

Questions: in particular what, if any, lessons learned/good practices can you identify?

- Which provisions of the Aarhus Convention does this app serve to help?
- Would this be possible in your country and what other methods do you think would be helpful to make sure you can identify and provide effective notification to your public concerned?
- Do you have any suggestions as to how to improve this system?

Pillar 3: Access to justice

Issue: Access for Justice Now! is an environmental NGO, which is recognized in its own country as meeting the requirements for an NGO to qualify under article 2(5) (the definition of the public concerned). It was accordingly permitted to participate in an environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedure concerning a major transportation project under its own laws. Assume the project in question falls under article 6 of the Convention. The city of Burbank is the permitting authority.

Despite Access for Justice Now!'s objections in the article 6 public participation procedure, the public authority Burbank approved the project. Access for Justice Now! therefore challenged this approval. It argued that Burbank's decision violated specific national laws relating to the EIA procedure undertaken, and air pollution, waste, and chemicals.

Because the project concerned such a major project, the court demanded of Access to Justice Now! that, before the court could proceed, Access to Justice Now! deposit 3 million Euros to be given to the court, to account for the delay in implementing the project due to the court proceedings. Assume Access to Justice Now! did some crowd-funding and got the required 3 million Euros together.

But ultimately the lower court ruled that Access to Justice Now! had no interest at all in the decision-making process for the procedure and therefore ruled that Access to Justice Now! had no right to bring these claims at all and dismissed them entirely.

Questions: in particular what, if any, lessons learned/good practices can you identify?

- The refusal of the court to allow environmental NGO Access to Justice Now! to bring any claims forth
- The deposit of 3 million Euros asked of the environmental NGO Access to Justice Now! to allow to court proceedings to continue.

On appeal, the higher court rules in the end that NGO Access to Justice Now! was fully correct that the permit was illegal, and voids the decision of permitting city Burbank. In the meantime, the forest was cut down, and major infrastructure built.

Question: What, if any, problems or good practices can you identify?

Article 3 (7): Public Participation in International Forums

Issue: A number of important meetings leading up to a Meeting/Conference of the Parties are to take place in the coming months. A few NGOs, academics, and other members of the public have approached expressing their interest to feed into this process; specifically, they propose providing comments on documents planned to be adopted at the meeting/conference, suggesting text for the formal statements made by their respective governments, and being included as part of their government's delegation.

Questions: What, if any, problems or good practices can you identify?

- Is there a place for observers foreseen (in the Barcelona and Aarhus Conventions)?
- If so, how can such participation best be facilitated in your region? Who should you reach out to? Is language an issue? If so, how can you best adapt to this?
- How can international organizations help?
- How can national governments help (providing information, participation, involving in delegations, financial support, etc.)?

10.4 AARHUS CONVENTION

ABOUT THE AARHUS CONVENTION AND THE PROTOCOL ON PRTRs

The **UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)** was adopted on 25th June 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus at the Fourth Ministerial Conference in the 'Environment for Europe' process. Together with its **Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs)**, it protects every person's right to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being. They are the only legally binding international instruments open for accession to all UN Member States that put Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development into practice.

The Aarhus Convention:

- links environmental rights and human rights
- acknowledges that we owe an obligation to future generations
- establishes that sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders
- links government accountability and environmental protection
- focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities in a democratic context

The subject of the Convention goes to the heart of the relationship between people and governments. The Convention is not only an environmental agreement, it is also a Convention about government accountability, transparency and responsiveness. It grants the public rights and imposes on Parties and public authorities' obligations regarding access to information and public participation and access to justice. Moreover, through its obligations on its Parties to promote the application of its principles in international environmental decision-making processes and within the framework of international organizations in matters relating to the environment, the Aarhus Convention is forging and supporting processes for public participation in the negotiation and implementation of other international agreements.

In the twenty years since the adoption of the Convention a number of important achievements must be highlighted. Laws and practices have been revised to bring them into line with the Convention. Members of the public are learning to use the Convention to make their governments more transparent and accountable. There is a growing body of jurisprudence based on the Convention and the legislation that implements it. The entering into force of the Protocol on PRTRs in 2009 established a new legally binding international framework for reporting on emissions of pollutants from a wide range of potentially harmful activities. An amendment to the Convention adopted in 2005 underpins the rights of the public to participate in decision-making on genetically modified organisms. The Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums reflect a growing recognition that where the environment is concerned, public involvement is important not only at national and local levels but also at the international level. The Lucca Guidelines provide guidance on access to information, public participation and access to justice with respect to genetically modified organisms. The Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters elaborate with further practical guidance as to the application of public participation obligations. The Recommendations on the more effective

use of electronic information tools, support the implementation of the Convention through the promotion of such tools.

The Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and PRTR.net have emerged as leading global repositories of information on activities relevant to the Convention, the Protocol and Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

The Convention's innovative compliance and reporting mechanisms, both of which envisage a key role for the public, have yielded valuable information on the extent and nature of the challenges in implementation and crucially have directly facilitated solutions leading to concrete implementation. They serve as an important reminder that the value of an international treaty lies not only in the quality of its text, or in how many Parties it has, but also in how well it is implemented. The Convention's newest innovation, the Rapid Response Mechanism for the Protection of Environmental Defenders, was established in 2021, to assist Parties to promote this important obligation.

RELEVANCE OF THE AARHUS CONVENTION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES AND BENEFITS OF THE ACCESSION TO THE CONVENTION

The Mediterranean Countries, Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols have already a series of commitments to engage stakeholders and the public, at large, in consultations and participatory governance (i.e. for Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), for the Ecosystem Based Approach (EBA). These commitments concern all the countries of the region, most of which, apply participatory processes for Environmental Impact Assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessments, Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) the management of specially protected areas, the adaptation to climate change, implementation of the biodiversity convention, etc. Participatory and information/communication processes are also related and supported by the Mediterranean Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (MSESD) and its Action Plan. Accession to the Aarhus Convention provides a solid and comprehensive framework for governance to engage the public effectively that would support and synergize these efforts.

The Aarhus Convention is widely accepted to be the leading example of implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration. Accession to the Convention, could facilitate the design and implementation of green economy programmes, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its Sustainable Development Goals and the UfM's 200GreenerMed Agenda (to be endorsed by the up-coming UfM Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Action) in an effective, sustainable and participatory manner. Being a Party to the Convention will significantly contribute to countries' efforts to promote citizen-centered and environmentally sound policies.

In addition, accession to the Convention would greatly support Governments' policies to tackle poverty and inequality by ensuring that all persons, including the poorest segments of society and rural communities, are able to participate in decisions that impact their lives and as a result to benefit from the income generated by different sectors of the economy, including the mining and extractive industries.

Owing their cross-cutting nature, the Convention and its Protocol are used for implementing a wide-range of issues such as ending poverty (Goal 1); health protection (Goal 3); water and sanitation management (Goal 6); clean energy (Goal 7); green economy (Goals 8, 9 and 12); the reduction of

inequalities (Goal 10); sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12); climate action (Goal 13); tourism (Goals 8, 12, 14 and 15) and urban planning (Goals 11 and 13). Their implementation thereby helped Governments to progress in achieving goals and targets across 2030 Agenda and, particularly, Goal 16, by promoting effective, accountable and transparent institutions; effective access to information; effective and inclusive public participation and transparency in national and international decision-making; and effective and equal access to justice for all.

The background of governance and administrative culture of Mediterranean Countries vary widely. However, this diversity is not a problem. The current Aarhus Parties come from a wide range of political, social and economic backgrounds and this diversity has benefitted all, leading to exchanges of lessons learned, a greater appreciation of common challenges and interests, and a respect for differences.

Informed participation in the decision-making process leads to better decisions, as the government or implementing agencies take into account valuable information from the public concerned. This process ultimately enhances public confidence in governmental decisions and reduces the instances of lengthy legal procedures and appeals and costly remedial measures by the State. It also helps to achieve greater political stability and sustainable economic development at the national and regional levels.

The Convention is therefore recognized to bring value to all its Parties, wherever on the political, social or economic spectrum they stand and it brings more benefits than costs to the countries that have ratified it.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Mediterranean Commission of Sustainable Development (MCSD) and the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2016-2025) encourages all Mediterranean countries to accede to the Aarhus Convention. Many Mediterranean governments are trying to improve environmental governance and mobilize citizens organizations in becoming constructive allies in dealing with the accumulated environmental and sustainability problems.

Mediterranean challenges for environmental governance include fragmentation of responsibility, uncoordinated and non-results-based planning and implementation, as well as weak human and financial resources in the public sector, particularly at the local level. Public participation is particularly important at the local level, which is the level of government closest to the people, and the level of decision-making where many environment-related decisions are taken.

The MSSD at the regional level encourages as a flagship initiative the accession to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention). A target associated with this strategic direction is that by 2025, two-thirds of Mediterranean countries will have acceded to the Aarhus Convention. The UfM (also a member of the MCSD) works toward the reinforcement of mechanisms for stakeholder's participation and engagement.

A Concept Note on launching the MSSD Flagship initiative has been drafted by the Circle of Mediterranean Parliamentarians for Sustainable Development (COMPSUD), and MIO-ESCDE, with the contribution of MEPIELAN Centre, and acknowledged by the MCSD and the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention Secretariat at the 18th Meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable

Development (Budva, Montenegro, 11-13 June 2019 (Report, UNEP/MED WG.469/11, paras. 36, 37, 40). Furthermore, the 21st Meeting of the MCSD Steering Committee (Teleconference, 13-14 May 2020) encouraged MIO-ECSDE (on behalf also of COMPSUD) and the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention Secretariat to proceed with a technical assistance and capacity building activity in support of the MSSD Flagship Initiative on Environmental Governance to encourage the accession to and implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the Mediterranean countries, in close cooperation with the UNECE Secretariat, MEPIELAN Centre (the Mediterranean Programme for International Environmental Law and Negotiation) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Secretariat. The meeting also acknowledged that MIO/ECSDE and MEPIELAN Centre will embark on the development of the legal and governance dimensions of this MSSD Flagship Initiative (Report, UNEP/MAP WG.479/6, para. 43 (ix)), facilitated by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat.

PUTTING IN MOTION THE MSSD FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE

The Convention is open for accession by any UN Member State. For States which are not Members of UNECE, accession requires an approval by the Convention's Meeting of the Parties. In recent years, Parties to the Convention have made clear their strong encouragement for countries outside the UNECE region to join. To guide interested non-UNECE Member States on the accession they adopted a decision IV/5, encouraging States outside the UNECE region to accede to the Convention and welcoming any expression of interest to do so. The major steps of the accession procedure for non UNECE Member States are outlined in para. 4 of the decision.

In the Geneva Declaration, adopted at their Joint High-level Segment (Geneva, 2021), the Meetings of the Parties to both the Convention and its Protocol clearly stated:

"We welcome the accession of Guinea-Bissau to the Aarhus Convention and reiterate our invitation to interested States to accede to the Convention and its Protocol, and to apply their provisions in the meanwhile, and we stand ready to offer our experience and knowledge in this regard and to facilitate accession."

The promise of this invitation was indeed realized in 2021, when the Meeting of the Parties approved the accession of Guinea Bissau, not only as a new Party, but the first Party to accede that is not a Member of the UNECE.

Thus, interested States would be welcome to become a Party to the Aarhus Convention.

The MSSD target of two-thirds could be achieved by having five more countries joining the Convention. The following Mediterranean countries are not Parties to the Convention

- (a) UNECE Member States: Israel, Monaco and Turkey. No approval by the Meeting of the Parties is required for their accession.
- (b) Non-UNECE Member States: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia. Their accession requires an approval by the Meeting of the Parties of the Convention, in a procedure such as that through which Guinea Bissau successfully acceded.

10.5 TRAINING MATERIAL

The presentations and other material of the training can be downloaded from the project web page:
https://www.wes-med.eu/activities_type/he-4-reg-overall-environmental-governance-promotion-of-the-aarhus-convention-in-the-whole-of-the-mediterranean/

10.6 USEFUL LINKS

Aarhus Convention

- Aarhus Convention Implementation Guide
- Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Environmental Matters
- Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums
- Lucca guidelines on access to information, public participation and access to justice with respect to genetically modified organisms
- Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools
- Findings of Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee
- National implementation reports and synthesis reports
- Case studies on electronic information tools
- Aarhus Clearinghouse
- Jurisprudence Portal

Protocol on PRTRs

- Guidance to Implementation of the Protocol and Simplified Guide
- PRTR.net
- National implementation reports and synthesis reports

Other

- EU Water Framework Directive
- EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (Directive 2011/92/EU, as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU)
- EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive
- EU Habitats Directive
- Foundation Discussion Document (FDD) for the Mediterranean Accession Agenda to the Aarhus Convention
- Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development
- Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development