

Independent Evaluation of the
Aarhus Centres and
Public Environmental Information Centres

Report

Prepared by:

Dmytro Skrylnikov*

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* Dmytro Skrylnikov

Attorney

Head of Bureau of Environmental Investigation, Lviv, Ukraine

Lecturer on Environmental Law and the Head of practical training department at Lviv State University Law College, Ukraine

Executive co-director of the Association of Environmental Law of Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States (GUTA Association).

Contact address:

9/6 O.Basarab str., Lviv, 79017, Ukraine

e-mail: DSkrylnikov@mail.lviv.ua

EVALUATION REPORT

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FOR AARHUS CENTRES (ACs) AND PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION CENTRES (PEICs)

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List of abbreviations

AB - Advisory Board

AC - Aarhus Centre

BP - British Petroleum

BoA - Board of Advisers

BoE - Board of Experts

CSDC - Civil Society Development Centre

GSN - Green Spider Network

EECCA - Eastern Europe Caucasus Central Asia

EIA - Environmental Impact Assessment

ENVSEC - Environment and Security Initiative

EU - European Union

JTC - Judiciary Training Centre

MB - Management Board

MoE - Ministry of Environment

MoU - Memorandum of Understanding

MEFWA - Ministry of Environment Forestry and Water Administration (Albania)

MENR – Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (Azerbaijan)

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO - Non-governmental Organisation

OCEEA - Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PEIC - Public Environmental Information Centre

REC - Regional Environmental Centre

RUE - Republican Unitary Enterprise (Belarus)

UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNECE - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was adopted on 25th June 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus at the Fourth Ministerial Conference in the 'Environment for Europe' process.

The Aarhus Convention is a new kind of environmental agreement that links environmental rights and human rights. It acknowledges that we owe an obligation to future generations. It establishes that sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders.

The subject of the Aarhus 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. The Aarhus Convention grants the public rights and imposes on Parties and public authorities obligations regarding access to information, public participation and access to justice.

By setting principles for “access to information”, “public participation in decision-making” and “access to justice”, the Aarhus Convention provides the OSCE with a unique tool to support environmental governance processes at the national level which in turn contributes to the countries’ efforts in addressing environment and security challenges.

The OSCE, since 1999, has been working closely with the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat in promoting ratification and implementation of this Convention by its participating states through organizing awareness raising campaigns, national and regional seminars and supporting the establishment, functioning and growth of environmental NGOs.

Since 2002, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) and the OSCE field presences have been supporting the establishment and functioning of Aarhus Centres (AC) and Public Environmental Information Centres (PEIC) in several countries. To date, the OSCE has supported the establishment of Aarhus Centres in 7 countries: Albania, Armenia (9), Azerbaijan (3), Belarus, Georgia (3), Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (2). Some of these Centres are supported by the Environment and Security – ENVSEC Initiative, a partnership between OSCE, UNEP, UNDP, UNECE, REC, as well as NATO as an associate partner.

Given the increasing demand and interest for further enhancement of the OSCE’s Aarhus portfolio as a tool for addressing environment and security related challenges while contributing to the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention, the OSCE/OCEEA commissioned an independent evaluation of the Aarhus Centres/PEICs¹.

Overall objective of the evaluation exercise was to generate knowledge from the experience of the Aarhus Centres within the context of OSCE’s efforts to raise awareness on environmental issues as well as promoting participatory approaches in environmental decision-making and thus implementing the principles of the Aarhus Convention.

Evaluation was conducted during the period of 14 April – 13 June 2008.

¹ For the purpose of this report where it is appropriate the general title – Aarhus Centre (AC) is used for Aarhus Centres, Aarhus Information Centres and Public Environmental Information Centres (PEIC).

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Findings and the results of the evaluation are described in this report. It presents information about the nature, extent and where possible the effect of the Aarhus Centres activities in addressing the challenges associated with the three pillars of the Convention, i.e. access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, from a national context.

The Aarhus Centres form a wide network that can implement regional, national and local activities and can be an effective instrument in facilitation of the general implementation of the Aarhus Convention at all levels. This network can also deal with trans-boundary issues such as trans-boundary pollution, trans-boundary EIA and others.

The Aarhus Centres serve as a link between the government and NGOs in the sphere of environmental policy-making and implementation. They also provide the platforms for collaboration and partnership among NGOs in addressing environmental issues.

Institutional set-up and management arrangements of Aarhus Centres vary from country to country and even within the same country. Most of them are hosted by the Ministries of Environment (MoE)² while some others rely on logistical support from NGOs.

Most of the centres are managed by boards consisting of representatives from government and civil society. These boards serve as the primary source of expertise and guidance for the Aarhus Centre activities and offer a unique platform for exchange of information between governments and representatives of civil society.

Different types of institutional set-up, management, as well as functions and activities are examined in the report. It is observed that there is a need to elaborate a common vision for ACs activities and services, but national specifics, local conditions and priorities must be taken into consideration as well. The issues of sustainability and relations with governments, local authorities, NGOs, international organizations and business community are also addressed and recommendations are presented in the Report. Such recommendations are:

Institutional set-up, general management and coordination structure

1. Role and functions: The role and functions of the ACs should be clearly identified through a consultative process involving all relevant stakeholders. It should be underlined that one of the primary functions of the ACs should be to help governments in fulfilling their obligations under the Aarhus Convention. In this respect, it is highly recommended to develop an **Aarhus Centre Guidelines** that would define the purpose of an AC; its general functions; type of services to be delivered; type of activities to be conducted; stakeholders to be involved and their general roles and responsibilities; options for institutional set-up; staffing requirements; and possible funding mechanisms. These guidelines are recommended to be developed by the OSCE Secretariat together with the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat and relevant stakeholders at the country level.
2. National priorities and needs assessment: It is necessary to elaborate a common vision of AC activities and approaches to services, but national specifics, local

² There are different titles of relevant institutions in respective countries e.g. The State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry (Kyrgyzstan), the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration (Albania), the Ministry of Nature Protection (Armenia), the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources (Georgia), the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (Azerbaijan), the State Committee on Environment and Forestry (Tajikistan), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection (Belarus). For the purpose of this report where it is appropriate the general title - Ministry of Environment (MoE) - is used.

conditions and priorities must be taken into consideration as well. It is recommended to conduct a need assessment at the country level with the participation of relevant national and local stakeholders including the National Focal Points for the Aarhus Convention, taking also the latest Aarhus implementation reports as a reference.

3. Institutional set-up: The ACs in the capitals of countries have the primary function of providing easy access to, and facilitating the dissemination of, official environmental information as well as setting the platform of communication and co-operation between the government agencies, NGOs and general public. In this respect, the current practice of government agencies (mainly the Ministries of Environment) hosting the ACs in capitals is found to be effective as it facilitates the access to environmental information and ensures the interest and active participation of governmental authorities in the AC activities. At the regional level, it is recommended to ensure active ownership and involvement of the regional/local administrations either through hosting the ACs or by being active partners to the AC activities.
4. Host-NGOs: NGO-based ACs are found to be effective especially at the regional levels. The decision to use a host NGO should be taken if extensive consultations indicate that both local stakeholders (local/regional administrations, local NGOs, academia and general public) and the AC would benefit from this arrangement. In such cases, the major challenge would be to achieve a consensus among existing national/local NGOs on the host-NGO.
5. Government ownership: The Aarhus Centre should be considered as an institution that helps governments to fulfill their duties within the framework of the Aarhus Convention. This would require more integration of the ACs into the work of the Ministries of Environment and more ownership by the governments, reflected through provision of human and financial resources and timely and accurate information as well as active participation in the AC activities.
6. Staffing of ACs: It is important that the staff assigned for the ACs, particularly the AC Managers in case of government-hosted ACs, are easily accessible and devote their full time to AC related activities and not given any other assignments. It is also recommended that the AC teams, to the extent possible, involve IT experts, lawyers and training experts for effective delivery of the AC functions.
7. Management/Advisory Boards: The management/advisory boards that are established for the ACs in various countries are found to be highly effective mechanisms for bringing the governmental authorities (central and local) together with the NGOs and other stakeholders. Therefore, it is recommended to have this mechanism for all ACs, including for those located in regions.
8. Involvement of Donors: In order to inform and involve donors, international organizations and other partners in the AC activities, it is recommended to organize annual meetings through which information on the progress achieved and future plans are shared with a variety of stakeholders.

Relations with governments, local authorities, NGOs, international organizations and business community

9. Lack of a clear understanding and common view on the ACs' role and their functions by various stakeholders may hamper the efficiency of AC services and activities. In some cases, stakeholders such as NGOs and business do not realise how they can use ACs or what kind of support they can provide to help ACs in fulfilling their tasks.

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Therefore, it is strongly recommended to develop clear guidelines on the purposes and functions of the ACs.

10. It is observed that in most of the countries, the ACs are under-utilized by the governmental agencies. It is important that the ACs are also used and understood by other ministries (agencies) than just the Ministry of Environment (such as relevant ministries of economy, health, transport, justice, etc). Furthermore, governmental agencies should consider the ACs as an operational arm of the government in implementing the Aarhus Convention and provide all the means to facilitate the work of the ACs, particularly through provision of regular information on issues related to environment.
11. The national Focal Point to the Aarhus Convention plays an important role in bringing together ministries concerned as well affected and interested parties. Further collaboration and cooperation with the National Focal Points for the Aarhus Convention is highly recommended.
12. More efforts should be put in place to ensure participation and partnership of regional/local administrations and local self-government in AC activities.
13. Given the fact that there are many well-established and experienced NGOs and international organizations in each country, the ACs are recommended to cooperate more efficiently with these organizations in order to benefit from their know-how, experiences and resources (for example, in Azerbaijan, the OSCE supported the Green Pack project developed by the NGO Sustainable Development Public Union. The ACs could benefit significantly from the expertise generated and training materials produced as a result of this project. Similarly, the RECs have conducted various capacity building projects in these countries from which the ACs could benefit).
14. More opportunities should be explored at all levels (government, OSCE, ACs) to partner with the business community within the framework of ACs (e.g. in this context it might be worth exploring the UN Global Compact initiative, <http://www.unglobalcompact.org>). In exploring private sector partnerships it is important to pay attention to the issue of "conflict of interest" and it is essential to ensure that compromises over the AC's objectives are not made in pursuit of financial sustainability.

Sustainability

The issue of sustainability closely links to institutional set-up, governmental commitments, partnership with other relevant stakeholders in terms of implementation of the Aarhus Convention and monitoring and evaluation.

15. It is important that ACs not only implement several projects or activities related to the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention but also support development and implementation of relevant tools and mechanisms for a better implementation of Aarhus Convention at the national level. This requires their involvement in the regular official mechanisms of information dissemination. The ACs can also help governments in improving communication with public and in putting in place transparent and participatory decision-making processes.
16. As indicated earlier, the ACs should be fully utilized by the governments, particularly the Ministries of Environment, for implementing the Aarhus Convention. For example,

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the AC in Georgia assists the Ministry of Environment in regular dissemination of information on public hearings and serves as the depository of draft EIA reports that are available in the AC to any interested party. Where appropriate and so designated by the national authority, ACs also could serve as administrators or service providers of their respective national nodes of the Aarhus Clearing House, as in the case of the AC in Georgia.

17. It is also recommended that relevant governmental authorities formally recognize ACs through adoption of special regulations (in the form of a charter, regulations, order of the Minister, etc). Such regulatory arrangements are already in place for AC in Yerevan and AC in Minsk. The AC in Tirana, on the other hand, was formally established as a part of the Information Technology and Communication Department of the Ministry of Environment.
18. When establishing new ACs in regions, the experience of Tajikistan in selection of NGO in Khujand may be used. Announcement of the competition in regions on provision of services as the AC might help select the best candidate for running the centre. Such competition might also be open for local authorities. (In the beginning local government might need some assistance in the preparation of the project proposal and application but it might stimulate them for cost-sharing as well as for other commitments towards the accomplishment of AC mission). Before such competition the objectives and functions of the AC in region as well as main activities should be clearly identified.
19. Active involvement of ACs in other local, national or international projects and programmes (such as the OSCE project in Armenia) and partnerships with NGOs or regional and international organizations (such as RECs) through joint activities expand the impact of ACs, facilitate the exchanges of experience and experts and hence contribute significantly to the sustainability of ACs.
20. The deployment of volunteers may provide additional resource and capacity to the ACs. If the right people are identified and trained this can significantly reduce overheads and boost productivity.
21. Innovative approaches should be sought to mobilize resources in support of the ACs. For instance, in Tajikistan, it is proposed to define fees for services to the commercial and governmental organizations and for contractual works (information search, formatting, analysis, conduction of monitoring, in accordance with an agreement with job performers) in the future. Received funds would be used to maintain the AC activities. In such cases the issue of “conflict of interest” should be considered and it is essential to ensure that compromises over the AC’s objectives are not made in pursuit of financial sustainability. This issue can be also addressed in the proposed **Aarhus Centre Guidelines**.
22. The OSCE should provide guidance and assistance to the governments and the ACs in mobilizing resources in support of ACs.

Furthermore, some specific recommendations on how to improve OSCE’s support to the implementation of the principles and relevant pillars of the Aarhus Convention as well as to the future role and areas of focus of the Aarhus Centres were also developed and proposed in the Report (See E.7).

CONCLUSION

In order to ensure further improvement of the Aarhus Centre portfolio of the OSCE and strengthening the role and value of the ACs in addressing the challenges associated with all three pillars of the Aarhus Convention there is the need for further streamlining the Aarhus Centre activities, and to ensure their effective contribution to implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

There is the need for clarifying the role and functions of the Aarhus Centres and it is strongly recommended to develop clear guidelines on the purposes and functions of the ACs. These guidelines are recommended to be developed by the OSCE Secretariat, together with the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat and relevant stakeholders at the country level.

Some other major needs should be also taken into consideration, such as:

- The need for networking and information sharing among Aarhus Centres.
- The need for full utilization of Aarhus Centres as a tool by the governments in implementing the Aarhus Convention.
- The need for increased focus on local/regional authorities, local self-government and business community.
- The need to ensure the financial and technical sustainability of the Aarhus Centres.

It is very important that the OSCE and its partners continue to support the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in all countries as well as the establishment and functioning of the ACs/PEICs. The OSCE Secretariat and Field Operations should provide guidance and assistance to the governments and the ACs in mobilizing resources in support of ACs and help to ensure the financial and technical sustainability of the Aarhus Centres.

A. INTRODUCTION

A.1. Background:

The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was adopted on 25th June 1998 at the Fourth Ministerial Conference in the 'Environment for Europe' process. Named after the small Danish town in which it was signed, the Aarhus Convention aims to guarantee the public the right to participate in environmental decision-making.

As its title suggests, the Convention contains three broad themes, namely: access to information, public participation and access to justice.

Access to information: The Convention essentially aims to secure the public's right to obtain environmental information on request from public authorities and brings the obligation on public authorities to respond to public requests for information. Related to this, it also includes obligations for collection, updating, and public dissemination of environmental information. The scope of information covered is quite broad, encompassing those related to state of environment, human health and safety to the extent that these are affected by the state of the environment, as well as information on policies and measures.

Public Participation: The Convention sets the minimum requirements for public participation, depending on the type of decision to be taken on the environment. That is the reason why a distinction is made between decisions concerning specific projects or activities; and plans, programs and policies relating to the environment.

Access to Justice: In order to ensure the effective application of the first two pillars, the Convention aims to provide access to justice in the context of review procedures with respect to information requests and specific/project type decisions which are subject to public participation requirements. The judicial review mechanisms also cover breaches of environmental law in general.

The OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension adopted at the 2003 Maastricht Ministerial Council specifically addresses the importance of processes and institutions for providing timely information about issues of public interest in the economic and environmental field to the civil society and citizens as well as to the media and business community. Through the Strategy Document, the OSCE is committed to promoting public participation in sustainable development policy formulation and implementation which in turn requires a well-informed and responsive dialogue between citizens and the governments.

It is within this framework that since 2002, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) and the OSCE field presences have been actively promoting, in close collaboration with the Aarhus Convention Secretariat, the ratification and implementation of the Aarhus Convention and have been supporting the establishment and functioning of Aarhus Centres (AC) and Public Environmental Information Centres (PEICs) in several countries. To date, the OSCE has supported the establishment of ACs in seven countries: Albania, Armenia (9), Azerbaijan (3), Belarus, Georgia (3), Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (2). Some of these Centres are supported through the Environment and Security – ENVSEC Initiative, a partnership between OSCE, UNEP, UNDP, UNECE, REC, as well as NATO as an associate partner. Through the ENVSEC, the Governments of Belgium, Canada, Spain, Sweden and the United States of America have provided significant contributions to the establishment and operation of these Centres.

ACs/PEICs

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Albania | : Tirana, Shkodra and Vlora |
| Armenia | : Yerevan, Vanadzor, Idjevan, Dilijan, Goris, Kapan, Gavar, Hradzan, Gumri |
| Azerbaijan | : Baku, Ganja, Gazakh |
| Belarus | : Minsk |
| Georgia | : Tbilisi, Gardabani, Marneuli |
| Kyrgyzstan | : Osh |
| Tajikistan | : Dushanbe, Khujand |

In this initiative, the OSCE partners primarily with the Governments of the participating States where these Centres are located as well as the leading environmental NGOs in these countries.

The ACs have been instrumental in providing a forum for government officials from Ministries of Environment (MoE) to meet with members of environmental NGOs and to build co-operative approaches in order to tackle environmental issues. These Centres mostly serve towards the objectives within the context of the “information pillar” of the Aarhus Convention, although in some countries activities performed by the Centres have also included assistance to the citizens to participate in environmental decision making and, to a lesser extent, related to access to justice.

Given the increasing demand and interest for further enhancement of the OSCE’s Aarhus portfolio, the OSCE commissioned an independent evaluation of the ACs/PEICs (Annex 1: Terms of Reference, and Annex 2: Evaluation Guidelines).

A.2. Evaluation Process

The Evaluation was conducted during the period of 14 April – 13 June 2008 (Annex 3: Evaluation Schedule)

The evaluation combined comprehensive desk reviews and document analysis; consultations with key stakeholders (including the Aarhus Convention Secretariat, OSCE Secretariat staff, OSCE field operations staff, national focal points for the Convention, managers of the ACs / PEICs, government representatives, NGOs, academia, etc); and in-situ discussions with a sample of stakeholders. The evaluation was conducted as a lessons-learning and forward-looking exercise rather than a pure assessment of past results.

The evaluation was conducted at three levels, namely at the OSCE Secretariat level, the OSCE Field Operations level, and at the local level (level of individual ACs/PEICs)

During **Phase I** (14-20 April 2008) I visited the OSCE Secretariat, the Aarhus Convention Secretariat and Albania (Tirana and Vlora) to evaluate ACs (AC).

On 15 April 2008, I met with the representatives of the OSCE Secretariat (Marc Baltes and Esra Buttanri) to get a briefing on the OSCE’s ACs portfolio, to obtain relevant documentation and to discuss the Terms of Reference and OSCE’s expectations from the evaluation.

On 16 April 2008, I met with the representatives of the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat (Jeremy Wates, Marianna Bolshakova and Michael Stanley-Johns). The Aarhus

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Secretariat emphasized that one of the main tasks for ACs should be to help governments to fulfill their obligations under the Aarhus Convention. The staff composition of the ACs were also among the issues of discussion. It was noted that involvement of specialists such as IT experts, lawyers and training experts would help to fulfill the AC tasks.

17-20 April 2008 was devoted to ACs in Albania (Tirana and Vlora).

During **Phase II** (26 Apr-01 May 2008), I visited Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek and Osh)

During **Phase III** (7-18 May 2008), I visited Georgia, Armenia (Yerevan, Dilizhan, Hrazdan and Gumri) and Azerbaijan (Baku and Ganja).

During **Phase IV** (25-29 May 2008), I visited Tajikistan (Dushanbe, Khujand and Kurghon-Teppa as a potential region for a new AC)

In each country, I had meetings and/or individual interviews with managers and staff of ACs, members of management boards, governmental authorities, relevant stakeholders as well as with the OSCE field officers. In Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Armenia and Tajikistan, I also met with the national focal points for the Aarhus Convention. A number of documentation (e.g. MoUs, reports, statistic, etc.) were provided to me for review during these field visits.

During the 3rd Meeting of Parties to the Aarhus Convention that was held in Riga (11-13 June 2008) I had meetings with the Manager of the AC in Minsk, Belarus and with the Head of the Department of International Conventions and Agreements of the Republican Unitary Enterprise (RUE) "Belarusian Scientific Research Centre "Ecology" of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection of the Republic of Belarus.

Also, during the 3rd Meeting of Parties to the Aarhus Convention I took part in the OSCE side-event "Aarhus Centres: Platforms for Cooperation, Participation and Partnership" (11 June 2008, Riga) where the preliminary evaluation findings were presented and discussed with a number of stakeholders including governments and NGO representatives from the countries where the OSCE supported ACs are located; managers and representatives of ACs, UNECE and the OSCE. This evaluation takes into consideration some of the comments received from the participants during the side-event.

It should be noted that activities of ACs and their impact as well as collaboration with different stakeholders depend on many different factors such as political and economical situation in the country, budget and other resources, institutional set-up, relations with and involvement of governmental authorities as well as OSCE field offices, manager's skills, staff, experience, etc.

Therefore, the purpose of this report is not to assess and/or to compare individual ACs in different countries but to identify and analyze relevant positive experiences, weaknesses, lessons learnt and best practices in order to ensure further improvement and strengthening of ACs, to ensure their sustainability and to enhance their impact on implementation of the Aarhus Convention in various countries. It aims at presenting information about the nature, extent and, where possible, the effect of the ACs' activities in addressing the challenges associated with the three pillars of the Convention from a national context.

This report focuses only on the ACs /PEICs that are supported by the OSCE.

B. AARHUS CENTRES INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP

B.1. Overview of institutional set-up, general management and coordination structure

There are several types of ACs/PEICs that can be classified by different criteria such as location, institutional set-up, and level of support by government, etc. There are also different forms of institutional set-up (sometimes even within one country, e.g. Albania).

Such forms are as follows:

1. AC established on the basis of the Ministry of Environment (Environmental Agency or other relevant institution)

- AC in Tirana (Albania)
- AC in Yerevan (Armenia)
- AC Vanadzor, Idjevan, Dilijan, Goris, Kapan, Gavar, Hradzan, Gumri (Armenia) - the Ministry of Nature Protection and local governments
- AC in Baku, Ganja, Gazakh (Azerbaijan)
- AC in Minsk (Belarus)

2. NGO based AC

- AC in Vlora and Skodra (Albania)
- AC in Osh (Kyrgyzstan)
- AC in Khujand (Tajikistan)
- AC in Marneuli and Gardabani (Georgia)

3. AC as an OSCE project

- AC in Tbilisi (Georgia)
- AC in Dushanbe (Tajikistan)

ACs can also be differentiated by location (AC located in the capital city or in regions).

It is difficult to identify the most efficient institutional set-up as they all have some advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, the most important consideration should be the current and future roles and services of the ACs, and their sustainability.

Although there are variations in local circumstances, location (capital or region), governmental commitments, etc., some of the general findings can be summarized as follows:

Findings:

- The ACs that are directly linked to, or based at the relevant governmental institutions usually have better access to official information and provide a better platform for communication between authorities and public. Some of them are already fully or partially funded through the national/local budgets. Some of the disadvantages of this set-up are difficulties encountered in fundraising; frequent changes of high-level decision-makers within the governmental organizations; and weak relationships between the NGOs and the government agencies. Such centres usually can not afford to employ more than 1-3 persons. In some countries, managers of ACs are assigned other tasks in addition to their responsibilities in the AC.
- The NGO-based centres are more dynamic and flexible; they usually have effective communication with other NGOs and public. Some of them have effective fundraising skills (e.g. Khujand) as well as more opportunities to raise funds from different

donors. They can also utilize additional resources from other projects in support of AC activities. This model (NGO-based) is more applicable in regions, especially if such centres are supported by local authorities. As there is an enormous need in awareness raising, especially in regions, NGOs can effectively reach local population and organize different awareness raising activities with their experience .

- Activities of the project-based ACs are planned according to the project framework and funds allocated for that purpose. In most of the cases, there are not big distinctions between the government-based ACs and project-based ACs, since the project-based ACs are also mostly located in the MoEs. Major differences are related to official recognition of the ACs, AC structure, availability of resources and the signs of ownership. As they are perceived as OSCE projects, collaboration with relevant authorities is easier. AC staff is paid by the OSCE. A major disadvantage is that the project-based ACs rely solely on OSCE project funds and consequently, sustainability is the biggest challenge for these centres once the project is over.
- The ACs are established on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding usually between the Ministry of Environment and the OSCE (with the exception of AC in Osh), in some cases (such as Armenia) agreements also include regional governments.
- Most of the ACs are managed by a board consisting of representatives from government and civil society. Usually, such boards are established in line with the requirements of the Memorandum of Understanding and proved to be very effective in most countries. These boards provide essential support to ACs, including expertise and expert resources, guidance on ACs' management and activities, information and other resources. In many countries, such boards provide a unique platform for exchange of information between the government and the representatives of civil society. These boards have different names in different countries (in Armenia and Azerbaijan: Board of Experts; in Georgia: Management Board; in Albania and Kyrgyzstan: Advisory Board) but their functions and composition are usually similar. For example, the Board of Experts in Armenia consists of six representatives of the MoE, one representative of the National Assembly of Republic of Armenia, four experts from NGOs and one representative of the National Academy of Science RA. In Georgia, the Management Board consists of representatives of the MoE, the Parliament, Ministry of Education; and NGO community. In regions, the advisory boards of the ACs also include representatives of local government and local communities.
- There are also ACs that do not have any management board arrangement. These ACs usually obtain guidance from external bodies. In Azerbaijan, ACs in Ganja and Gazakh do not have any boards. Instead they only have Managers that are supported by the OSCE Office in Baku. In Tajikistan, the ACs in Dushanbe and Khujand do not have any boards.either. The AC in Dushanbe operates in close co-operation with the National Working Group on implementation of the Aarhus Convention. This group was established by the Government of Tajikistan and consists of representatives of different state agencies, academic institutions and NGOs. The AC in Khujand (as an NGO and project-based AC) is managed by the NGO management bodies. It performs activities in accordance with the OSCE project and in line with the Annual Plan of Activities that is approved and signed by the Regional Department for Nature Protection. Also the AC in Minsk does not have any board. It is based at the Republican Unitary Enterprise (RUE) "Belarusian Scientific Research Centre 'Ecology' " of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection of the Republic of Belarus. However, the MoE established the Public Coordination Council

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that consists of representatives of NGOs and representatives of the MoE. The Public Coordination Council can consider and co-ordinate activities of the AC, and provide some guidance.

- In some of the countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), in addition to the boards with management responsibilities as mentioned above, Advisory Boards were established to serve more as a supporting structure. Such boards consist of major donors, representatives of interested international organizations and diplomatic representations. During the evaluation, it was observed that these boards are not active any more. Due to the changing priorities and interests of donors it appears to be difficult to sustain such kind of board in a formal way .
- The day-to-day activities of the ACs are managed by the AC Managers/Coordinators. These AC managers are selected and appointed either by the Boards, the MoEs, relevant NGOs, or the OSCE field offices.
- Some ACs also involve volunteers in their activities. Usually, these are the ACs in regions (such as Osh - Kyrgyzstan; Gumri, Hrazdan - Armenia; and Khujand - Tajikistan).

B.2. Countries' overview

B.2.1. Albania

In July 2006, the OSCE Presence in Albania signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration (MEFWA) on "Collaboration in the Field of Environmental Information and Implementation of Aarhus Convention Requirements in Albania". Under this agreement it was foreseen to establish a Public Information Centre (Aarhus Centre) in Albania. In December 2006, the first Centre was opened in the MEFWA. According to the MoU the Centre shall perform the following tasks:

- serve as a link between the Government and non-governmental organization in the sphere of environmental policy making and implementation in Albania;
- serve as a link between Albanian environmental organizations and their potential counterparts among international organizations and foreign governments;
- serve as a basis for coalition-building among NGOs dealing with environmental issues, as well as partnership between NGOs in the Balkans;
- serve as a basis to enhance communication and flow of information between the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration, line ministries, government and academic institutions.

The second AC was opened on 20 September 2007 at the premises of the Civil Society Development Centre (CSDC) in Shkodra. The third AC was opened in Vlora on 19 December 2007, also at the premises of the Civil Society Development Centre (CSDC) in Vlora.

According to the MoU the Advisory Board was established in the AC in Tirana. Such Boards were also established in Shkodra and Vlora.

The AC in Tirana is based within the Ministry of Environment as part of the Information Technology and Communication Department. The AC manager has been designated and is paid by the Ministry.

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The AC staff both in Vlora and Skodra consists of one manager and one assistant who are paid by the OSCE.

Findings:

- Based at the Ministry of Environment, the AC in Tirana has easy access to official environmental information. Furthermore, the Ministry officials can often participate in the AC activities.
- In terms of sustainability, the AC in Tirana relies more on the resources of the Ministry of Environment than it does on resources of the OSCE or other donors.
- The AC Manager in Tirana is a staff member of the Ministry of Environment and has some other assignments within the Ministry in addition to his role as AC Manager.
- The ACs in Albania, especially those in Vlora and Skodra, have only been established recently, therefore it is too early to evaluate their performance.
- The ACs in Skodra and Vlora are based at the premises of the Civil Society Development Centres (CSDC). They are particularly active in public participation issues and have good collaboration with other NGOs as well as local communities.
- The ACs in Skodra and Vlora, rather than serving as individual centres, they constitute an integral part of the CSDCs that are managed and financed with the support of the OSCE. In terms of sustainability, these centres rely mainly on OSCE resources. Once the OSCE support is over, the CSDCs have the potential for fundraising in support of AC activities.
- The ACs in Albania offer a good platform for co-operation between the governmental authorities and non-governmental sector which should be utilized further to improve the communication and collaboration between the two partners.
- The ACs in Vlora and Skodra work effectively with the NGOs. Further efforts might be needed to reach out and to provide services also to general public.

B.2.2. Armenia

The first Public Environmental Information Centre (Aarhus Centre) in Armenia was established in Yerevan in 2002 by the OSCE, with the main objective of promoting public access to information and participation in environmental decision-making, and thus contributing to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Armenia.

Currently, there are nine ACs operating in Armenia – in Yerevan, Vanadzor city (Lori region), Idjevan and Dilijan cities (Tavush region) and Goris and Kapan cities (Syunik region), Gavar city (Gegarkhunik region), Hrazdan city (Kotayk region) and Gumri city (Shirak region).

The ACs are based on a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Nature Protection, the Regional Governors and the OSCE Office in Yerevan. According to the MoU, the ACs shall perform the following tasks:

- serve as a link between government and non-governmental organizations in the sphere of environmental policy making and its implementation in Armenia.

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- serve as a link between Armenian environmental organizations and their potential counterparts on the side of international organization and foreign Governments.
- serve as a basis for coalition building among environmental NGOs, as well as partnership between NGOs in the South Caucasus;

Main functions of the ACs include:

- distributing environmental information and making it available to various layers of Armenian society.
- facilitating public discussions and decisions on environmental issue, thus promoting public participation in decision-making;
- supporting access to justice and legal consulting;
- providing access to environmental literature and sources, Internet and Intranet of the Ministry of Nature Protection.

The ACs are guided by the Boards of Experts. These boards consist of representatives of government (including representatives of local authorities in case of ACs in regions) and civil society.

The AC in Yerevan has three staff members that are paid by the Ministry of Environment, whereas the AC staff in the regions are financed (including 1-2 personnel in each AC) by the OSCE Office in Yerevan through the respective regional administrations.

Findings:

- The ACs in Armenia have been instrumental in promoting environmental democracy and good governance at local level. In addition to being the focal points for promoting Aarhus Convention principles, they have a key role in the implementation of the national component of South Caucasus "Environment and Security Initiative" which addresses environmental risks of regional character.
- The ACs in Armenia serve as good examples of cost sharing and sustainability. The AC in Yerevan which was established with the support of the OSCE, is now fully funded through government resources.
- The regional administrations have included the ACs in their local budgets which sets a good example of local ownership and sustainability. It was observed that with very modest resources, the regional ACs are able to operate in a very cost-effective manner.
- There is also a good linkage between the ACs activities and other environmental projects that are supported by the OSCE Office in Yerevan.

B.2.3. Azerbaijan

ACs in Azerbaijan are established based on an agreement between the OSCE Office in Baku and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR) of Azerbaijan. The first AC was established in 2003 in Baku and, in August 2007, two other centres in Ganja and Gazakh were opened.

The Agreement defines the tasks of the ACs as follows:

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- serve as a link between the government and non-governmental organizations in the sphere of environmental policy making and implementation in Azerbaijan;
- serve as a link between Azerbaijani environmental organizations and their potential counterparts among international organizations and foreign governments.

These tasks are expected to be achieved by the following activities:

- providing free of charge access to public data on environmental issues, Internet, information obtained from the Ministry and other sources to environmental NGOs and other interested individuals;
- distributing public information on environmental issues and making it available to Azerbaijani society;
- facilitating public discussions on environmental issues, thus promoting public participation in decision-making;
- raising public awareness on access to justice.

The agreement also states that all potentially interested parties, such as NGOs, associations or governmental institutions, international organizations, as well as interested individuals, shall have equal access to the Centre's activities, are encouraged to incorporate it into their awareness-building projects, and to use the plan of the Centre's operation as a possible framework for various projects and grants.

The ACs are located in the premises of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources both in Baku and in the two regions. The Centres provide facilities for environmental library, internet access, and various meetings.

Their primary function is related to serving the "information pillar" of the Aarhus Convention, but they have the potential to contribute in assisting citizens for participation in environmental decision making.

The cost-sharing arrangement between the OSCE and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources contributes to the sustainability of ACs.

Findings:

- The AC in Baku (located within the MENR) has not been active for over a year due to the renovation within the premises which hinders the delivery of services that are expected from the AC.
- The AC Manager in Baku is a staff member of the MENR and has some other assignments within the Ministry in addition to his role as AC Manager.
- The ACs in Ganja and Gazakh have been recently established (August 2007) and practically became operational in February 2008; hence it is too early to evaluate their performance.
- The AC in Ganja is located far from the city centre. It provides a convenient venue for meetings and training activities but its location may hinder the accessibility for volunteers and general public.
- The AC in Gazakh is located in the city centre and is able to attract the attention of many visitors and volunteers.

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- Both regional ACs have only one Manager each and no support staff. In this respect, the assistance of volunteers could have a significant impact on the delivery of AC services, particularly in the regions.
- According to the latest National Report on Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan strives to organize Aarhus Centres in other parts of Azerbaijan, including Lankaran, Shaki, Shirvan (formerly Ali Bayramli), Mingachevir, Guba and Nakhichevan.

B.2.4. Belarus

The Aarhus Centre of the Republic of Belarus was created on December 30, 2005 within the framework of a joint project of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection and the OSCE Office in Minsk.

It is functioning within the Republican Unitary Enterprise (RUE) “Belarusian Scientific Research Centre ‘*Ecology*” of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection of the Republic of Belarus. Its main goals and functions as well as the management structure are defined by the Regulation on the Aarhus Centre that was adopted by the MoE.

The AC functions are defined as follows:

- providing ecological information on request of individuals and legal entities;
- consulting individuals and legal entities on the application of their rights to access ecological information, participation in decision-making processes and access justice in environmental matters;
- conducting educative and training activities (seminars, public lectures), including stuff training;
- providing publications to mass media, speeches on the radio and TV, organising advertising campaigns;
- collecting, accumulating, filing, storing, and disseminating ecological information (e.g.: creating a list of the most frequently asked questions);
- introducing ecological information in the Internet;
- assisting government authorities in drafting action plans for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention;
- facilitating individuals and legal entities in getting access to draft legislative acts, programmes, plans, and strategies in the area of environment, and organising their public discussion.

The AC staff is composed of one Manager and one Lawyer (contracted, part-time) who are both financed by the Ministry of Environment. The AC Manager is subordinated to the Head of the RUE “Belarusian Scientific Research Centre ‘*Ecology*” and reports to the MoE.

Findings:

- The AC mainly relies on national resources. This is partly due to the difficulties in Belarus in receiving financial support from international donors.
- There is a need for additional financial support for setting up Aarhus Centres in regions.

B.2.5. Georgia

The AC in Tbilisi was established in 2005 and its activities started in August 2006 within the framework of an OSCE project.

The aim of the AC is to facilitate implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Georgia, thus promoting access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making and access to justice.

The AC designs and implements several activities addressing all three pillars of the Aarhus Convention, and thus contributes to the process of implementation of the Convention. The project also establishes good network within state and non governmental sector. This relationship has turned into the definite role of the project to become a neutral mediator between state and NGOs.

Main target groups of the project are:

- Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia (MoE);
- General public;
- Environmental and related NGOs; and
- All relevant state or private institutions.

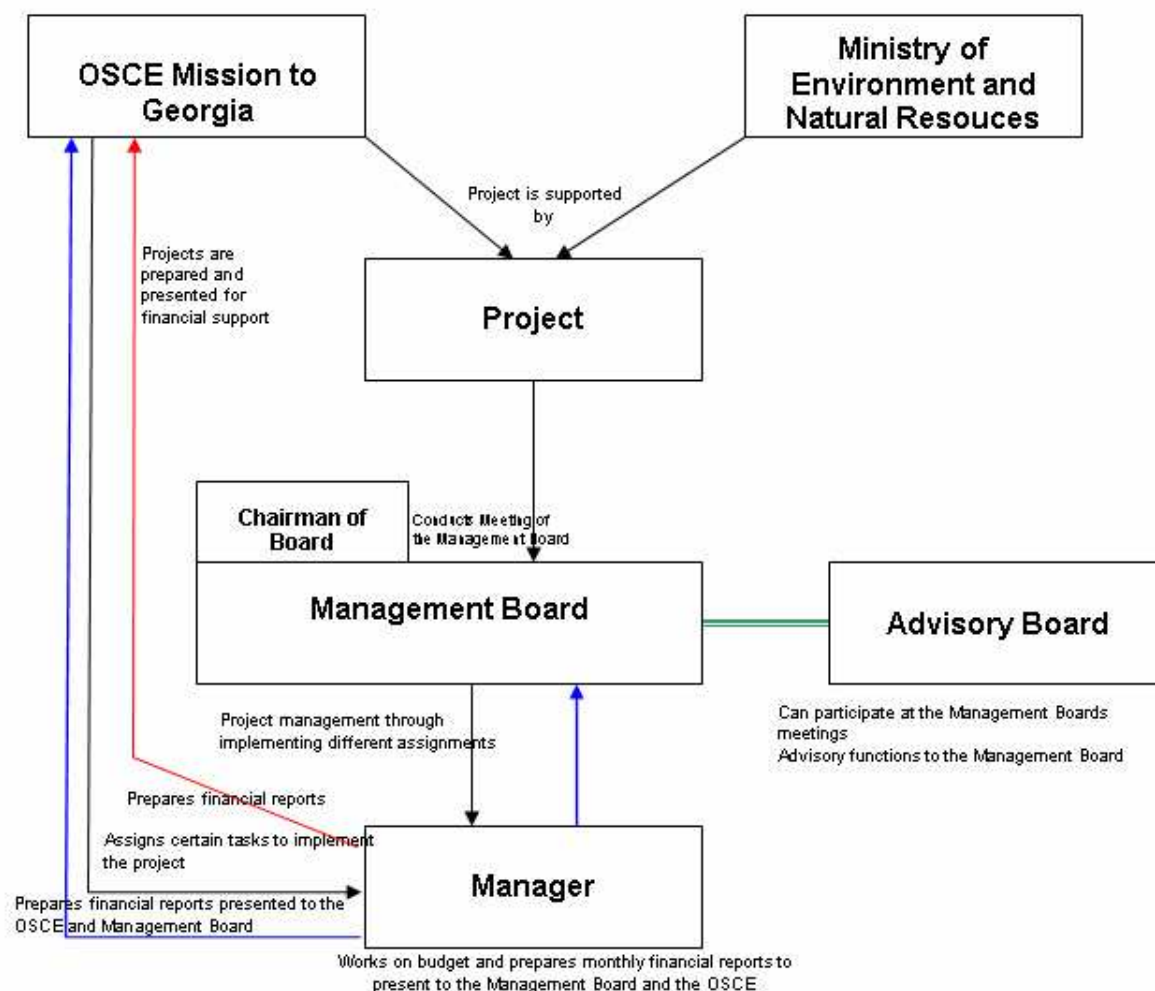
The AC has one Project Manager (full-time); one Project Co-coordinator (full-time); one Legal Advisor (part-time); one Public Outreach Specialist (full-time); one Centre Administrator (full-time); one Administrative and Legal Assistant (part-time); and one IT Specialist (part-time), who are all paid through the project budget.

There are also two local NGO-based PEICs in the south-central part of Georgia (Marneuli and Gardabani). Environmental Information Centre in Marneuli was established on December 12, 2006 with the financial support of OSCE Mission to Georgia. The environmental Information Centre in Gardabani was established on November 15, 2006. The aim of the local centres is to contribute in spreading environmental related information among the population and in enhancing public participation in decision-making processes, in particular regarding environmental issues in the bordering districts in the triangle of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, with the overall objective of reducing environmental risks to security.

Findings:

- In comparison with other centres, the AC in Tbilisi has the largest number of staff with a variety of expertise. The Centre's personnel structure appears to work efficiently in addressing all pillars of the Aarhus Convention.
- The Aarhus Centre takes an active role in providing information to the central node of the Clearinghouse Mechanism managed by the Aarhus Convention Secretariat. The Ministry of Environment has officially designated the AC as national node of the Clearinghouse Mechanism.
- The AC in Tbilisi also addresses some specific issues such as lack of environmental law courses in the Tbilisi State University. In 2008, the Centre started to assist the Tbilisi State University in conducting education in the frames of the Aarhus Convention. This implies assistance in curricula development, development of educational materials for International Environmental Law program, materials and workshops.

Management Structure Aarhus Centre Georgia



B.2.6. Kyrgyzstan

The Aarhus Information Centre was established in Osh on 6 December 2004, through the ENVSEC funds provided to the OSCE Centre in Bishkek. Later in 2005, it was registered as an NGO, namely Public Fund “Ecological Development”, that continues to serve as AC.

The Aarhus Centre in Osh focuses on four major areas:

- awareness raising on the Aarhus Convention;
- improving the youth’s environmental awareness and its involvement in environmental protection activities;
- promoting environmental journalism;
- and fostering dialogue between the government and the civil society on environmental issues.

The AC in Osh facilitated the establishment of the broad coalition that includes NGOs, local authorities and other environmental professionals. The AC provides the venue for the meetings of this coalition and participates actively in its activities.

The AC has the Board of Advisors that consists of representatives of local government, NGOs and academia.

The AC has two paid staff (a manager and an assistant) and over twenty volunteers.

Findings:

- Despite some problems raised by the State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry at the establishment stage of the AC in Osh, the AC now has a good working relationship and collaboration with the regional administration.
- The State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry intends to establish an AC in Bishkek and has already approached OSCE Office in Bishkek for that purpose.

B.2.7. Tajikistan

The Aarhus Convention Implementation Resource Centre (AC) was established on September 23, 2003 within the framework of an OSCE project together with the Ministry of Nature Protection of Tajikistan and in co-operation with the National Working Group on implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

AC is at the centre of the implementation of the Program of Action of the National Working Group on Implementation of the Aarhus Convention for 2004-2008. The AC serves as the primary source for environmental information and as the link between the Government and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and international organizations in the sphere of environmental policy making and implementation in Tajikistan.

The AC in Dushanbe was originally situated in the Ministry of Environment premises. But due to the recent reorganization of the Ministry and establishment of the State Committee on Environment and Forestry of Tajikistan, the Committee has moved to another building. At our meeting, the Chief of the State Committee stated that the AC would be provided with new office space within the new premises.

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The AC in Dushanbe has one Manager, one Assistant, one Legal Advisor and one IT Specialist, who are all financed through the OSCE project funds.

The Aarhus Centre in Khujand, Sughd region was created in 2005 within the framework of the ENVSEC in Fergana Valley as a program of the Public Organization “Youth Group on Protection of Environment” (YGPE)

AC staff in Khujand is composed of one Manager, one Administrator, one or two trainers and experts who are all paid through OSCE project funds. As the AC is hosted by an NGO, there are also a number of volunteers assisting with the AC activities.

Findings:

- As the host NGO in Khujand was selected through a competitive process, there has been a general acceptance of the AC by other NGOs active in the region. Rather than creating a new NGO to host the AC, this approach is found to be more effective and sustainable as it allows for the benefiting from accumulated knowledge and experience of an existing NGO within the region
- A strong demand was observed in Tajikistan to establish more ACs in various regions (particularly Kurghon-Teppa) mainly due to the pressing need for environmental awareness-raising, especially among the population of rural areas, and due to the requirements to address some transboundary issues (e.g. with Afghanistan).

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| | | OSCE - Gov. agreement | Institutional set-up | Boards | | Staff | | Premises (provided or paid by) |
|------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------|----|--------|---------|--------------------------------|
| | | | | | | Number | Paid by | |
| Armenia | | | | | | | | |
| Yerevan | March 2002 | + | MoE | BoE | AB | 3 | MoE | MoE |
| Dilijan | September 2006 | + | Reg.Adm + MoE | BoE | | 1 | OSCE | Reg.Adm |
| Gavar | May 2007 | + | Reg.Adm + MoE | BoE | | 1 | OSCE | Reg.Adm |
| Goris | December 2005 | + | Reg.Adm + MoE | BoE | | 1 | OSCE | Reg.Adm |
| Gyumri | October 2007 | + | Reg.Adm + MoE | BoE | | 1 | OSCE | Reg.Adm |
| Hrazdan | May 2007 | + | Reg.Adm + MoE | BoE | | 2 | OSCE | Reg.Adm |
| Tavush | November 2005 | + | Reg.Adm + MoE | BoE | | 1 | OSCE | Reg.Adm |
| Kapan | | + | Reg.Adm + MoE | BoE | | 1 | OSCE | Reg.Adm |
| Vanadzor | January 2006 | + | Reg.Adm + MoE | BoE | | 1 | OSCE | Reg.Adm |
| Albania | | | | | | | | |
| Tirana | July 2006 | + | MoE | BoA | | 1 | MoE | MoE |
| Skodra | September 2007 | + | NGO | BoA | | 2 | OSCE | OSCE |
| Vlora | December 2007 | + | NGO | BoA | | 2 | OSCE | OSCE |
| Azerbaijan | | | | | | | | |
| Baku | September 2003 | + | MoE | BoE | AB | 1 | MoE | MoE |
| Ganja | August 2007 | + | MoE | - | | 1 | OSCE | MoE |
| Gazakh | August 2007 | + | MoE | - | | 1 | OSCE | MoE |
| Georgia | | | | | | | | |
| Tbilisi | August 2006 | + | Project | MB | AB | 7* | OSCE | MoE |
| Gardabani | November 2006 | | NGO | | | 3 | OSCE | OSCE |
| Marneuli | December 2006 | | NGO | | | 3 | OSCE | OSCE |
| Kyrgyzstan | | | | | | | | |
| Osh | December 2004 | | NGO | BoA | | 2 | OSCE | OSCE |
| Tajikistan | | | | | | | | |
| Dushanbe | September 2003 | + | Project | - | | 4 | OSCE | MoE |
| Khujant | July 2005 | | NGO | - | | 3-4* | OSCE | OSCE |
| Belarus | | | | | | | | |
| Minsk | December 2005 | + | MoE | - | | 2* | MoE | MoE |

* Including part time personnel

B.3. Recommendations

1. Role and functions: The role and functions of the ACs should be clearly identified through a consultative process involving all relevant stakeholders. It should be underlined that one of the primary functions of the ACs should be to help governments in fulfilling their obligations under the Aarhus Convention. In this respect, it is highly recommended to develop an **Aarhus Centre Guidelines** that would define the purpose of an AC; its general functions; type of services to be delivered; type of activities to be conducted; stakeholders to be involved and their general roles and responsibilities; options for institutional set-up; staffing requirements; and possible funding mechanisms. These guidelines are recommended to be developed by the OSCE Secretariat together with the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat and relevant stakeholders at the country level.
2. National priorities and needs assessment: It is necessary to elaborate a common vision of AC activities and approaches to services, but national specifics, local conditions and priorities must be taken into consideration as well. It is recommended to conduct a need assessment at the country level with the participation of relevant national and local stakeholders including the National Focal Points for the Aarhus Convention, taking also the latest Aarhus implementation reports as a reference.
3. Institutional set-up: The ACs in the capitals of countries have the primary function of providing easy access to, and facilitating the dissemination of, official environmental information as well as setting the platform of communication and co-operation between the government agencies, NGOs and general public. In this respect, the current practice of government agencies (mainly the Ministries of Environment) hosting the ACs in capitals is found to be effective as it facilitates the access to environmental information and ensures the interest and active participation of governmental authorities in the AC activities. At the regional level, it is recommended to ensure active ownership and involvement of the regional/local administrations either through hosting the ACs or by being active partners to the AC activities.
4. Host-NGOs: NGO-based ACs are found to be effective especially at the regional levels. The decision to use a host NGO should be taken if extensive consultations indicate that both local stakeholders (local/regional administrations, local NGOs, academia and general public) and the AC would benefit from this arrangement. In such cases, the major challenge would be to achieve a consensus among existing national/local NGOs on the host-NGO.
5. Government ownership: The Aarhus Centre should be considered as an institution that helps governments to fulfill their duties within the framework of the Aarhus Convention. This would require more integration of the ACs into the work of the Ministries of Environment and more ownership by the governments, reflected through provision of human and financial resources and timely and accurate information as well as active participation in the AC activities.
6. Staffing of ACs: It is important that the staff assigned for the ACs, particularly the AC Managers in case of government-hosted ACs, are easily accessible and devote their full time to AC related activities and not to any other given assignments. It is also recommended that the AC teams, to the extent possible, involve IT experts, lawyers and training experts for effective delivery of the AC functions.

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7. Management/Advisory Boards: The management/advisory boards that are established for the ACs in various countries are found to be highly effective mechanisms for bringing the governmental authorities (central and local) together with the NGOs and other stakeholders. Therefore, it is recommended to have this mechanism for all ACs, including for those located in regions.
8. Involvement of Donors: In order to inform and involve donors, international organizations and other partners in the AC activities, it is recommended to organize annual meetings through which information on the progress achieved and future plans are shared with a variety of stakeholders.

C. RELATIONS WITH GOVERNMENTS, LOCAL AUTHORITIES, NGOS, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY

C.1. National governments

Given the mandate and primary functions of the ACs, it is very important that these centres are recognized and supported by the Governments at the national and regional levels.

As indicated earlier, the ACs are established on the basis of an agreement between the OSCE and the government (the Ministry of Environment) and mostly managed through a management/advisory board that includes representatives of government and NGOs. In some of the ACs, management/advisory board includes not only the representatives of the Ministry of Environment but also of other ministries (such as the Ministry of Education in Georgia, or the National Working Group on Implementation of Aarhus Convention in Tajikistan that includes representatives of various state agencies) as well as representatives of the parliament (such as Armenia and Georgia).

Findings:

- One of the important achievements of the OSCE's Aarhus initiative has been the allocation of premises by most of the governmental authorities (central and local) to serve as ACs / PEICs. These centres accommodate meetings and other activities of local stakeholders and serve as centres of information and communication.
- In most of the countries, ACs play the key role in providing dialog and communication between governmental authorities and the public.
- It was observed that all ACs collaborate with designated National Focal Points of the Aarhus Convention. It was also observed that the Ministries of Environment are willing to continue the AC activities.
- Although the governments are supportive to the ACs and even provide funding, it has been observed that in most of the countries the governments do not use the ACs efficiently as the main tool for implementation of the Aarhus Convention. Regular supply of environmental information to the ACs and provision of financial and administrative support by the government agencies are critical for the accomplishment of ACs' objectives.

C.2. Local authorities

Findings:

- In most of the countries, it was observed that local authorities are actively involved in the activities of the ACs at the regional level. They also take part in coordination and management of most ACs in regions (Albania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan); mainly through participation in the management/advisory boards.
- Armenia demonstrates one of the best examples of regional administrations' ownership of the ACs. Regional administrations host the ACs in their premises, they provide support for, and benefit from various AC activities (particularly capacity building activities). More importantly, in Armenia, the ACs are included in the budgets of the regional administrations which is a significant achievement in terms of sustainability.

C.3. NGOs and international organisations

NGOs and international organizations are involved in the AC activities in various ways. In some of the ACs, NGOs are represented in the management/advisory boards. NGOs usually benefit from the AC facilities in organizing their own meetings and events. Some ACs also provide the platforms for coalition building and partnerships among NGOs in addressing environmental issues. For example, the AC in Osh facilitated establishment of the broad coalition that includes NGOs, local authorities and other environmental professionals. There are also a number of NGOs that support the AC activities mainly through provision of documentation and publication. Various good examples of collaboration between the ACs, NGOs and the international organizations were observed during the evaluation, such as in Azerbaijan, the AC in Baku prepared a CD for youth on environmental legislation and international conventions with the support of the British Embassy and the NGO Ecosfera; the web-site of the AC in Tirana was created and is maintained in collaboration with the REC country office in Albania.

Findings:

- There are different opinions about the ACs among NGO community and international organizations. Some of them benefit from and/or contribute to the ACs' services and activities, whereas there are also others which distance themselves from ACs. In some cases, ACs are perceived by some NGOs and international organizations as competitors, particularly in fundraising and in conducting activities.

C.4. Business Community

Findings:

- Involvement of business community in AC activities has been very limited. There has been some involvement of the business sector in AC in Khujand. There is a good potential of business partnership in many countries. For instance in case of Azerbaijan, the British Petroleum (BP) provides support for various environmental education activities of NGOs. The ACs in Azerbaijan could also benefit from such support in conducting environmental awareness activities.
- There is also the possibility of providing services to the business community. For instance, in Georgia, the AC in Tbilisi developed guidelines for obtaining permits and licenses from the Ministry of Environment for the utilization of natural resources, etc.

C.5. Recommendations:

1. Lack of a clear understanding and common view on the ACs' role and their functions by various stakeholders may hamper the efficiency of AC services and activities. In some cases, stakeholders such as NGOs and business do not realise how they can use ACs or what kind of support they can provide to help ACs in fulfilling their tasks. Therefore, as indicated in Section B.3 (1), it is strongly recommended to develop clear guidelines on the purposes and functions of the ACs.
2. It is observed that in most of the countries, the ACs are under-utilized by the governmental agencies. It is important that the ACs are also used and understood by other ministries (agencies) than just the Ministry of Environment (such as relevant ministries of economy, health, transport, justice, etc). Furthermore, governmental

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agencies should consider the ACs as an operational arm of the government in implementing the Aarhus Convention and provide all the means to facilitate the work of the ACs, in particular through supplying them with regular information on issues related to environment.

3. The national Focal Point to the Aarhus Convention plays an important role in bringing together ministries concerned as well affected and interested parties. Further collaboration and co-operation with the National Focal Points for the Aarhus Convention is highly recommended.
4. More efforts should be put in place to ensure participation and partnership of regional/local administrations and local self-government in AC activities.
5. Given the fact that there are many well-established and experienced NGOs and international organizations in each country, the ACs are recommended to cooperate more efficiently with these organizations in order to benefit from their know-how, experiences and resources (for example, in Azerbaijan, the OSCE supported the Green Pack project developed by the NGO Sustainable Development Public Union. The ACs could benefit significantly from the expertise generated and training materials produced as a result of this project. Similarly, the RECs have conducted various capacity building projects in these countries from which the ACs could benefit).
6. More opportunities should be explored at all levels (government, OSCE, ACs) to partner with the business community within the framework of ACs (e.g. In this context it might be worth exploring the UN Global Compact initiative, <http://www.unglobalcompact.org>). In exploring private sector partnerships it is important to pay attention to the issue of “conflict of interest” and it is essential to ensure that compromises over the AC’s objectives are not made in pursuit of financial sustainability.

D. SUSTAINABILITY

The issue of sustainability closely links to institutional set-up, governmental commitments, partnership with other relevant stakeholders in terms of implementation of the Aarhus Convention and monitoring and evaluation.

Findings:

- Strong ownership by governmental agencies, particularly the Ministries of Environment, is critical for ensuring the sustainability of ACs. Hosting of the ACs in the Government premises (particularly in capital cities) and provision of technical, administrative, financial and human resources constitute the main elements of such government ownership. In most countries, during the evaluation, officials from the Ministries of Environment indicated that they could provide financial support to the ACs in the capital cities and even in the regions.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (or the Agreement) signed between the OSCE and the respective Ministry of Environment contributes significantly to sustaining collaboration and support by the Ministry to the activities and functions of the ACs as well as fulfillment of their commitments, regardless of the changes in staff or in policies within the Ministry.
- Management/advisory boards that consist of representatives from government and civil society are also important for the sustainability of ACs and their influence on national and local decision-making processes.
- Regarding the financial sustainability, it should be noted that there are still many ACs that are fully or partly dependent on the OSCE support. These are mainly centres in regions, such as Vlora, Skodra (Albania), Osh (Kyrgyzstan), Gardabani and Marneuli (Georgia), Gazakh and Ganja (Azerbaijan).
- The project-based ACs in capital cities (Tbilisi, Dushanbe) also rely heavily on OSCE support.
- The ACs in Armenia can serve as good examples of cost sharing and sustainability. The AC in Yerevan was established with the support of the OSCE and is now fully funded through the national budget. Furthermore, as indicated earlier, ACs in Armenia are also included in the budgets of the regional administrations which partly fund the AC activities in respective regions.
- The ACs in Baku, Minsk and Tirana are also financed by the respective Ministries of Environment.
- The NGO-based ACs are observed to be more flexible in their fundraising activities. The AC in Khujand is a good example in this respect.

D.1. Recommendations:

1. It is important that ACs not only implement several projects or activities related to the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention but also support development and implementation of relevant tools and mechanisms for a better implementation of Aarhus Convention at the national level. This would require their involvement in the regular official mechanisms of information dissemination. The ACs can also help

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governments in improving communication with public and in putting in place transparent and participatory decision-making processes.

2. As indicated earlier, the ACs should be fully utilized by the governments, particularly the Ministries of Environment, for implementing the Aarhus Convention. For example, the AC in Georgia assists the Ministry of Environment in regular dissemination of information on public hearings and serves as the depository of draft EIA reports that are available in the AC to any interested party. Where appropriate and so designated by the national authority, ACs also could serve as administrators or service providers of their respective national nodes of the Aarhus Clearing House, like in the case of the AC in Georgia.
3. It is also recommended that relevant governmental authorities formally recognize ACs through the adoption of special regulations (in the form of a charter, regulations, order of the Minister, etc). Such regulatory arrangements are already in place for AC in Yerevan and AC in Minsk. The AC in Tirana, on the other hand, was formally established as a part of the Information Technology and Communication Department of the Ministry of Environment.
4. When establishing new ACs in regions the experience of Tajikistan in selection of NGO in Khujand may be used. Announcement of the competition in regions on provision of services as the AC might help select the best candidate for running the centre. Such competition might also be open for local authorities. (In the beginning local government might need some assistance in preparation of the project proposal and application but it might stimulate them for cost-sharing as well as for other commitments towards the accomplishment of AC mission). Before such competition the objectives and functions of the AC in region as well as main activities should be clearly identified.
5. Active involvement of ACs in other local, national or international projects and programmes (such as the OSCE project in Armenia) and partnerships with NGOs or regional and international organizations (such as RECs) through joint activities expand the impact of ACs, facilitate the exchanges of experience and experts and hence contribute significantly to the sustainability of ACs.
6. The deployment of volunteers may provide additional resource and capacity to the ACs. If the right people are identified and trained this can significantly reduce overheads and boost productivity.
7. Innovative approaches should be sought to mobilize resources in support of the ACs. For instance, in Tajikistan, it is proposed to define fees for services to the commercial and governmental organizations and for contractual works (information search, formatting, analysis, conduction of monitoring, in accordance with an agreement with job performers) in the future. Received funds would be used to maintain the AC activities. In such cases the issue of “conflict of interest” should be considered and it is essential to ensure that compromises over the AC’s objectives are not made in pursuit of financial sustainability. This issue can be also addressed in the proposed **Aarhus Centre Guidelines**.
8. The OSCE should provide guidance and assistance to the Governments and the ACs in mobilizing resources in support of ACs.

E. IMPACT OF THE AARHUS CENTRES

E.1. General Overview

Some examples of AC activities that are common to most of the countries are provided below:

- Raising awareness on local environmental issues through all forms of media.
- Providing the public and decision-makers with easy access to environmental information.
- Re-packaging environmental information in a user-friendly and attractive format.
- Engaging government, civil society and the private sector in dialogue and information exchange.
- Raising public awareness of environmental issues through organizing meetings and seminars on specific topics.
- Promoting public participation in environmental decision-making by arranging public hearings on various national documents, including legislation.
- Organizing training for journalists, judicial staff, school children and other target groups.
- Providing free legal advice to citizens and organizations on environmental matters.

The ACs in different countries sometimes have different functions and activities. The functions and tasks of the AC are also different for the AC in capitals and in regions.

One of the main functions of ACs in capitals could be the provision of easy access to official information as well as the provision of the platform for communication between national government and the public.

As for the ACs in regions the main tasks could be awareness-raising (in most countries there is enormous need in awareness-raising on environmental issues especially in regions) as well as promotion of transparent decision-making processes at local level.

As it was mentioned already, the activities of ACs and their impact as well as how they are perceived by the national and local stakeholders (including government, local authorities, and business community) depend on many different factors such as political and economical situation in the country, budget and other resources, management and institutional set-up, etc. Some ACs serve more as resource and communication centres supporting NGOs and other stakeholders, but others also organize some lobbying activities or other direct actions. Therefore, different types of their impact could be observed: i) impacts from direct actions and activities that led to a solution of environmental problems or progressive developments in implementation of the principles of the Aarhus convention or ii) impacts that are the result of the empowerment of different stakeholders or their provision with relevant capacities, tools and resources to address environmental challenges and to build civil society. In my opinion latter impacts seem even more important, although sometimes it is difficult to evaluate them to the full extent.

In general, it can be stated that the ACs have been instrumental in bringing together a variety of stakeholders around the issues of environmental protection, and have provided a platform of dialogue, cooperation and joint action. The ACs contribute to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention at national and local levels in different areas of their activities. Some examples of the wide spectrum of activities carried out by the ACs and their impacts are presented below in this section (Section E).

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The most visible impact could be noted in capacity-building and awareness raising activities. The ACs in all countries supported and organised a number of capacity-building and awareness-raising activities for government representatives, NGOs and other civil society representatives as well as, in some countries such as Albania, for private sector representatives. A variety of events in the form of seminars, campaigns, etc. have been organized in many countries to promote Aarhus Convention principles among different professional groups, such as legal professionals, journalists, environmental inspectorates and other target groups such as women, youth, and children.

There are a number of instances in all countries where awareness has been transformed into action by different stakeholders.

In the latest national reports on implementation of the Aarhus Convention (2008) most of the countries, in which OSCE supported establishment and activities of ACs, reported progress in creating a general legislative framework for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, with most advances made in implementing the 'Access to Information' pillar. Most of the countries admitted the important role of the ACs in these achievements.³ Most of them acknowledged the important role of the ACs in awareness-raising activities in their reports and recognized the impact of the ACs, as well as their potential in the dissemination of information.

There are also many examples of AC activities supporting the implementation of the principles of participatory democracy at national and local levels. AC have proved to be instrumental in providing citizens and civil society organisations with necessary capacity and power to influence local and, national environmental policies and decisions.

E.2. ACs as resource centres

The Centres serve as environmental libraries, which are easily accessible by individuals, NGOs and other stakeholders. Common to almost all ACs / PEICs is the supply of free access to computers, databases of environmental legislation and Internet. These services are particularly important for the ACs in regions where people have almost no access to Internet and only very limited possibilities to find environmental literature. Some ACs organize classes on computer literacy for local activists and governmental officials (e.g. Armenia).

The Centres usually provide a meeting place for, and a link between governments, individuals, businesses, academia, judiciary and civil society.

E.3. Capacity building and awareness-raising

A number of trainings and other awareness-raising activities have been organized by all ACs / PEICs for government representatives, civil society representatives as well as, in some countries such as Albania, for private sector representatives, on the Aarhus Convention in general and their respective rights and obligations as per the Convention. A variety of events in the form of seminars, campaigns, etc. have also been organized in many countries to promote the principles of the Convention among different target groups such as women, youth, and children.

³ See also SYNTHESIS REPORT ON THE STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION , prepared by the Secretariat to the Aarhus Convention. ECE/MP.PP/2008/4, 21 May 2008 http://www.unece.org/env/documents/2008/pp/mop3/ece_mp_pp_2008_4_e.pdf

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Trainings and other awareness-raising activities have been organized by ACs on other environmental issues as well. For example, the ACs in Armenia host a number of workshops and seminars on a wide range of topics from water to biodiversity, from renewable energy resources to climate change and ozone depletion, from environmental impact assessment to regional socio-economic development programmes.

Journalists and media have also been among the primary target groups of most of the ACs in promoting the first pillar of the Aarhus Convention.

Public hearings have been the primary mechanisms utilized by most of the ACs in promoting the 'Public Participation' pillar. Centres are actively involved in public hearings for planned projects either through strengthening local/national capacities on how to organize public hearings, or through organizing them, or both.

It was observed that some ACs organize activities and events that are not directly related to the Aarhus Convention (such as planting trees, organization of photo competitions etc). While such initiatives have the potential to contribute to the awareness-raising and increased visibility of the ACs, it is recommended, in each case, to evaluate the impacts and added value of such initiatives on the efficiency (including cost-efficiency) and main functions of the AC.

E.4. Access to information

Information boards, the Aarhus Centre website and the media are the primary tools used for creating awareness and providing information on environmental issues. Periodic newsletters and Aarhus Centre websites contribute significantly to the increasing awareness of local stakeholders on environmental issues in their localities; local and national environmental policies and legislation as well as issues related to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. Some country-level examples are provided below:

E.4.1. Albania

AIC Tirana, in collaboration with Information Technology and Communication Department, publishes and disseminates the Electronic Environmental Bulletin (each month) in 500 email address and distributes it for free; available on the web site for all public interested in. The web site is updated regularly (www.aic.org.al).

As a result of OSCE and the AC activities, the Ministry started to regularly put information about environmental permits and plans that were issued on their websites. In addition applications for such permits which the ministries receive are published online in order to enable the public to make comments before final decisions are made.

E.4.2. Armenia

To demonstrate and promote the activities of the ACs, a website (www.aarhus.am) was established in partnership with the Ministry of Nature Protection. The Aarhus Centre website provides up-to date information on the activities of the Centres, environmental legislation, and programmes and projects of the Ministry of Nature Protection and NGOs.

E.4.3. Azerbaijan

There are some good examples of collaboration between the ACs, NGOs and the international organizations in the dissemination of environmental legislation. For instance the

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AC in Baku prepared a CD for youth on environmental legislation and international conventions with the support of the British Embassy and the NGO Ecosfera.

The web-site for the ACs has also been relaunched recently (<http://aarhuscenter.az>)

E.4.4. Belarus

The AC in Minsk helps the public in access to information and also provides access to open data bases. The database on the state of natural resources and wastes was established in line with the state programme . This data is accessible for NGOs and general public in the AC.

E.4.5. Georgia

Project Web Portal <http://aarhus.dsl.ge>

In order to achieve better access to the environmental information, the project developed an interactive, informational web site that provides the diverse information from environmental news to announcements and documents of different governmental bodies, nongovernmental or private environmental organizations. The high number of visitors on the website indicates that this kind of information proved to be mostly requested and urgent not only for environmental structures but also for general public.

The Aarhus Centre web site is often the sole source of important environmental information, which results in its wide popularity among stakeholders. In particular, on the web site one can easily access precise information on public hearings of EIA reports held in Georgia and keep further track of the procedures. Moreover, the web-site provides guidelines and procedures for obtaining permits and licenses from the MoE for the use of natural resources.

Taking into consideration the fact that radio remains the most widely accessible source of information to the general public, and in order to achieve active dissemination of environmental information in Georgia, the Centre launched bi-monthly live radio program on priority environmental issues. Through these programmes the public all around the country has the opportunity to be informed on the environmental problems in Georgia; to participate in the program; express own viewpoints and put any question to experts, representatives of government structures and NGOs.

E.4.6. Kyrgyzstan

The Aarhus Centre chose to utilize information boards in public places as a primary means for dissemination of environmental information in a city where access to computer and internet services is very limited. As a simple and cost-effective tool, the information boards have proved to be highly efficient in reaching out to the general public.

E.4.7. Tajikistan

The information boards are effectively used by the AC in Khujand as well.

The NGO 'Youth Group on Protection of Environment' publishes the youth ecological bulletin 'Compass' and, in partnership with the local TV, established the ecological TV broadcast 'Compass'.

E.5. Public participation in environmental decision-making

E.5.1. Albania

The AC in Vlora facilitated the preparation of the Environmental Strategy of Vlora Municipality.

The AC in Vlora coordinated the consultation meeting regarding PVC cleaning-cards and initiated the round table on the landfill issues in Vlora.

E.5.2. Armenia

The ACs are active in the implementation of the second pillar of the Aarhus Convention, 'Public Participation in decision making on environmental matters', by involving citizens in public hearings and environmental policy development process at an early stage. The 'Public hearing' section of the Centre's web-site shares announcements about forthcoming public hearings and provides with the electronic version of project proposals or Strategies. Hearings are conducted in a Centre, which obtains public input and provides the relevant governmental structure. Due to the National Law, which implies three steps of hearings on the same project, the public has a good opportunity to follow the case. Here is a list of hearings conducted in the Yerevan Centre:

- Environmental impact problems of exhausted gas render harmless project of 'Nubarashen dump'.
- 'The plans, programs related with the environment, the confirmation of the order of public participation in decision making process about the policy and the forming of public ecological board attached to the Minister of the Ministry of Nature Protection' .
- Exploitation of Teghut Copper Molybdenum mine.
- Second National Report of Aarhus Convention's Implementation in Armenia.
- Development of Solid Waste Management Policy;
- Comprehensive land use plans of the 'Centre' community of Yerevan.

Centres in Dilijan and Goris cities have conducted hearings on the 'Annual community budgets' and the 'Master Plan on National Park 'Dilijan'', whereas the Centre in Kapan city conducted a hearing on environmental projects implemented by local mining business.

As it was mentioned during interviews neither citizens, nor authorities were accustomed to 'hearings' before that. It was not matter of ignorance of public opinion, neither citizen's indifference. There was no institutional capacity to organize hearings. Aarhus Centres organize and conduct hearings, provide participants with room and documents, facilitate discussions, appeal to reasonability during discussions, give, take, or response to prior suggestions.

E.5.3. Azerbaijan

Since its establishment the AC in Baku conducted a number of activities in promoting the second pillar of the Aarhus Convention such as the public hearings on the 'Draft law on Biodiversity' and the public discussions of the 'National Report on Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Azerbaijan'.

E.5.4. Belarus

The hot line of the Aarhus Centre in Minsk is used to provide consultations to the public and serves as an instrument of public control. The public can report any activity that may jeopardize the environment, cause violation of environmental rights or any other non-compliance with environmental legislation. The AC helps to deliver reported issues to relevant authorities and assists in finding solutions.

For instance, this hot line was instrumental in launching a major public campaign against massive tree cutting envisaged in the framework of a construction project in the town of Borisov. This campaign of informed citizens, supported by the Ministry of Environment, led to a legal case, which resulted in the termination of the harmful project activities.

In an attempt to protect their primary source of income, the beekeepers of the Treskovschina village of the Minsk district called the Aarhus Centre hot line and made a complaint on the inappropriate use of pesticides in a winter rape field which resulted in the massive death of bees in the region. It was based on this claim that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection joined forces with the National Academy of Sciences and fielded an inspection group to review the case. This inspection proved the inconvenient use of these pesticides and called for measures by relevant authorities.

E.5.5. Georgia

In response to the request of the MoE to assist in improving the level of public participation in environmental decision-making, the Aarhus Centre initiated a separate watchdog component on public hearing procedure of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports. The component aims at assisting the MoE in the dissemination of information on public hearings, provides EIA reports to any interested party and gives observation and assessment details of the whole EIA process including information dissemination and public participation procedures; public hearings; EIA reports; decision-making and post-decision-making follow-ups. On the basis of these observations the Centre develops observer report revealing pitfalls and drawbacks of the present EIA system, and gives recommendations for improvement. The reports are delivered to the MoE and communicated to investors, NGOs and the general public. Recommendations are followed by particular improvement in some components of the EIA system. Precisely, since the establishment of the watchdog component, the quality of the announcements about public hearing in the newspapers has been improved; local newspapers started to publish announcements and some suggestions and recommendations regarding the structure and content of EIA reports have been taken into account; Overall, the watchdog component helps to improve the quality of public participation in decision-making processes.

E.5.6. Kyrgyzstan

A number of trainings have been organized by the Aarhus Centre on how to organize public hearings. These were followed by three public hearings: for a gold mining project in Chatkal district of Jalalabat province; construction of a cement factory in Kyzyl Kiya; and waste management in Tashkomur.

One of the success stories in Kyrgyzstan about the direct impact of the AC activities on local community can be mentioned. During the public hearings on waste management in Tashkomur, the local government decided to provide money for waste management (containers and truck) and announced it at the hearings.

The AC in Osh provides training for people on how to arrange public hearings and informed them about their rights. After such trainings people request hearings and actively participate in them. Moreover, the governmental authorities started to request companies to hold such hearings. During one of the hearings on a gold mine project, it was a problem when a road had to be constructed over the hill with endangered juniper. Both environmental authorities as well as public were against it. The local shepherd who was present at the hearings showed them another alternative as he knew the area better than others. He led them to an old road that was not crossing the hill with juniper. The success of this public hearings

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encouraged the local government to organize public hearings on all new projects that may have an environmental impact.

The Centre also organized a number of trainings on 'Solving ecological problems through advocacy' in regions that are confronted with serious environmental problems.

E.5.7. Tajikistan

The local environmental strategy and action plan for the city of Taboshar was approved on 27 December 2007. Initiated by the Aarhus Centre in Khujand, the strategy and action plan formulation process was conducted in a participatory manner involving all stakeholders. The inhabitants of Taboshar identified and prioritized the environmental problems and suggested necessary measures for inclusion in the action plan.

The Aarhus Centre in Dushanbe continues to be a close partner to the Ministry of Environment in organizing public hearings on several environmental regulations.

E.6. Access to justice

E.6.1. Armenia

The ACs, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and NGO EPAC-Armenia, have organized a series of seminars on the third pillar of the Convention with the participation of judges and prosecutors as well as government representatives, NGOs and the business community.

E.6.2. Georgia

Legal report

In order to contribute to the harmonization process of national legislation to the Aarhus Convention, the Centre developed a legislative and institutional analysis of the implementation Aarhus Convention in Georgia. This research also incorporated recommendations for improvement and was delivered to the MoE.

Legal Consultations

The project provides free legal consultations on the Aarhus Convention and different environmental matters. Besides targeting NGOs and the general public, these consultations are very useful for the MoE, too. The Department of Licensees and Permits of the MoE often relies on the knowledge of the Aarhus Centre Legal Advisor and checks with her whether legal decisions are made according to the provisions of the Aarhus Convention. For instance, in case NGOs request involvement in the decision making process /administrative procedure for permit issuance and indicate the specific clauses of the Aarhus Convention, the MoE Department of Licenses and Permits preliminarily checks with the Aarhus Centres Legal Advisor before making final decisions.

One of the main tasks of Aarhus Centre Georgia is to provide legal consultations to the public, environmental NGO and other stakeholders connected to the rights and obligations under the Aarhus Convention and the National Environmental Legislation.

Most interesting is the case of a consultation provided to a group of Georgian citizens from the Kakheti Region. The consultation was related to the violation of their rights and freedoms under the Aarhus Convention. More precisely, affected people lived in the villages facing oil spill pollution as a result of the accident on one of the oil wells of the British-Georgian Oil

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Company. Although some compensation was given to those people, this compensation included only property damage assistance. Upon the consultation with the AC these people decided to protect their rights under the Aarhus Convention. They stressed out the Convention's principle of access to environmental information (complaint against local authorities) and their worsened living conditions and working environment that harmed their life and health (complaint against the company).

Others

In 2008, the Centre started assisting the Tbilisi State University in conducting education on the Aarhus Convention. This implies assistance in curricula development, development of educational materials for the 'International Environmental Law' programme, materials and workshops.

Publication and distribution of Information Booklet on Aarhus Convention for Judges (300 copies in Georgia, 300 copies in Russian).

E.6.3. Kyrgyzstan

The Aarhus Centre in Osh organized two trainings on Aarhus Convention for lawyers, judges and prosecutors mainly from south Kyrgyzstan.

E.7. Recommendations:

1. It is recommended to create a mechanism for periodic review of AC activities and performance. This could be done in co-operation with the Aarhus Convention Secretariat.
2. The ACs have the potential to serve as a wide network that can implement regional, national and local activities and can be an effective instrument in facilitating the general implementation of the Aarhus Convention at all levels. This network can also deal with trans-boundary issues such as trans-boundary pollution, trans-boundary EIA and others. During the evaluation, not much co-operation has been observed among the ACs within the countries or at the regional level. Therefore, it is highly recommended to establish a mechanism of communication, information-sharing and capacity-building among the ACs. Various means, including the organization of information-exchange programmes, trainings, mutual site visits and study tours could be effective ways of learning from each other.
3. As it was noted by the Aarhus Convention Secretariat, the AC experts might also be incorporated into a future network of designed national environmental communication officers, along the model of the European Network on Environmental Communicators ('Green Spider Network' (GSN)), which is supported by the European Commission and serves EU and neighbouring countries. The Green Spider Network's framework document could be referred to in the establishment of such a network. GSN's 2007-2008 work plan already includes activities supporting communication of the Aarhus Convention. There are potential synergies between the OSCE, the European Commission/Green Spider Network and the Aarhus Convention Secretariat on web communication and networking that are worth exploring. Such co-operation could provide a basis for further developing an EECCA network of environmental communicators and national nodes of the Aarhus Clearinghouse Mechanism.

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4. It is also recommended for each AC to develop a communication strategy and to identify the most effective means of communication, tailored to specific audiences, in a cost-effective manner.
5. The participation of ACs in the Aarhus Clearinghouse Mechanism could provide a further opportunity for strengthening co-operation between the ACs, the Convention's Parties and the Secretariat of the Aarhus Convention. The ACs can take an active role in providing information to national nodes of the Clearinghouse Mechanism and to the central node managed by the Secretariat. Where appropriate and so designated by the national authority, ACs may serve as administrators or service providers of their respective national nodes, like in the case of the Aarhus Centre Georgia.
6. The national reports on implementation of the Aarhus Convention should be prepared through a transparent and consultative process and involve the public. The process of preparing reports should therefore start in time so that drafts are available for public consultation. The ACs can play an important role in the national reporting mechanisms while assisting Governments in drafting and facilitating the process of consultations.

Access to information

7. It is very important to develop and use electronic tools but in some cases, where only small percentage of the population has access to Internet and computer, it is important to develop and use other relevant tools for the delivery of information to the public. For example, the AC in Osh installed several information boards in public places. These boards are used for announcements as well as for other information and communication purposes and do not need much resources for maintenance. Such boards are also used by some of the ACs in Armenia and the AC in Khujand. In countries in which they already exist, such boards should be used more efficiently and be updated on a regular basis. The ACs are encouraged to develop and use simple and cost-effective tools for information dissemination.
8. Most ACs are very efficient in the dissemination of environmental information. However, they are not connected to the government's environmental information records, registers or databases (if such exist) and so not part of the official process of information dissemination. In this respect, it is recommended to establish mechanisms through which governments provide up-to date information to the ACs on a regular basis and allow access to electronic databases, relevant lists, registers and files.
9. As per the Aarhus Convention, it is the obligation of Parties to ensure that public authorities collect, possess and disseminate environmental information. In some countries (Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) the Ministries of Environment, especially their regional offices, have very limited technical capacity for the collection and dissemination of information. Under these conditions, it is very difficult to implement relevant provisions of the Convention. In case it is needed, some technical assistance could be provided to relevant governmental authorities.
10. The ACs can be instrumental in developing and testing the implementation of certain tools for better implementation of the Convention.
11. The ACs can assist governments in fully implementing Article 5 of the Aarhus Convention which deals with 'active' and 'effective' access to information and requires

actions beyond simply making the information available to public. Records, databases and documents can be considered effectively accessible when, for example, the public can search for specific pieces of information, or when the public has easy access through convenient office hours, locations, equipment such as copy machines, etc. The ACs can be part of such information systems and provide public with easy access. This would require that such information is provided to ACs by relevant governmental agencies on a timely and regular basis.

12. Article 5, paragraph 2 (a) requires governments to provide sufficient information to the public about the type and scope of environmental information held by the relevant public authorities, about the basic terms and conditions under which such information is made available and accessible, and about the process by which it can be obtained. The public will have much better access to environmental information if it knows what type of information is held, where it is held and, if they exist, the terms and the procedures for obtaining it. Under the Convention the information must be 'sufficient', or complete enough to ensure that it helps the public to effectively gain access to information.
13. The ACs can also help governments at different levels in the identification of the type of environmental information to be collected, analyzed and disseminated as well as in the identification of the appropriate means for dissemination. ACs can also put such meta-data on their web-sites.

Public participation in environmental decision-making

14. Public hearings are the primary mechanisms used by most of the ACs in contributing to the 'public participation' pillar of the Aarhus Convention. They provide a means for communicating information between governments and citizens, interested groups, businesses and other parties. Through public hearings, ACs provide a mechanism for obtaining input from all stakeholders about proposed regulations, permits or other changes that could affect the public. In this respect, ACs should help governments to establish mechanism for transparent decision-making and to become a part of such mechanism (Projects in Albania on EIA and public participation might provide relevant experience).
15. There is a need to further focus on strengthening national and local capacities for environmental impact assessments (including trans-boundary) and to work more closely with the private sector, government and the public.
16. The ACs should be used by the governments to facilitate consultations and discussions on drafts of governmental plans, strategies, draft regulations or laws at local and national levels.
17. Where it is relevant ACs should help governments to adopt and implement principles of Strategic Environmental Assessment.
18. A different approach should be used in case of public hearings for the environmental impact assessment of projects and activities (Art.6 of the Aarhus Convention). In most of the countries, it is the responsibility of investors (proponents) to organize such hearings and it might not be efficient when ACs fulfill investors' duties and use recourses of the ACs for this purpose. Therefore, organisation of public hearings in EIA procedure may not be considered as the task for ACs, except if they provide such services for relevant investor or governmental agency. In such cases, if the national

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legislation and circumstances allow, all costs should be covered by the client (investor).

19. At the same time, ACs can serve as a place where public can get information about the process of public participation in EIA and provide access to EIA documentation. For example, the AC in Georgia assists the MoE in regular dissemination of information on public hearings and serves as depository of draft EIA reports that are available in the AC to any interested party.
20. It might still be a task for the ACs to provide education on public participation issues for different stakeholders (investors, authorities, public).

Access to justice

21. It was noted that the 3rd pillar; 'Access to Justice', is presently implemented very weakly by all ACs. Initiatives in support of 'Access to Justice' remain to be a challenge both in terms of scope and quantity. Partnerships with other sectors, such as Ministry of Justice, Bar Associations, Judiciary Training Centres (JTC), academia as well as, in some cases, the private sector, would be crucial for working on the 3rd pillar.
22. Trainings for judges and other legal professionals on the Aarhus Convention seem to be very important. Conducting such activities could be one of the main tasks for the ACs in promoting the access to justice pillar. To assure the high level of such training, the ACs need to involve relevant experts. The Ministry of Justice, Bar Associations, judiciary training centres and academia could be engaged in the development of trainings and training materials.
23. Due to financial, technical and political limitations the ACs are not yet in a position to provide full legal assistance to the public, including representation in courts or other relevant administrative bodies.
24. The cost of legal aid is considered to be one of the main barriers in access to justice.
25. The ACs can at least provide free of charge legal consultations about environmental rights, relevant procedures for public, etc. Some ACs already have such experience (e.g. AC in Minsk, AC in Tbilisi, and some ACs in Armenia).
26. The ACs can also create a list of NGOs and public interest lawyers that provide pro-bono legal services and provide such information for people or NGOs when they need assistance. It is very important to provide some support and assistance to lawyers as well as NGOs, and to promote networking activities among public interest lawyers from different regions.
27. Support of law clinics and collaboration with law clinics (wherever they exist) could also be recommended.

F. CONCLUSION

As part of its comprehensive approach to security, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is concerned with economic and environmental matters, recognizing that co-operation in these areas can contribute to peace, prosperity and stability.

By setting principles for 'Access to Information', 'Public Participation in decision-making' and 'Access to Justice', the Aarhus Convention provides the OSCE with a unique tool to support environmental governance processes at the national level which in turn contributes to the countries' efforts in addressing environment and security challenges.

The projects supported by OSCE usually reflect a decentralized and enabling approach, based upon cooperation and collaboration between governmental and non-governmental sectors. ACs in many of these countries have enabled the development of a new model and understanding whereby public institutions, local/regional administrations, local self-government and non-governmental organizations jointly address the environmental challenges in their localities and seek solutions. The overarching goal of this emerging model would be that well-informed citizens represented through civil society organizations have the necessary capacity and power to influence local and, collectively, national environmental policies and decisions. Aarhus Centres/PEICs have proved to be instrumental in providing local stakeholders with tools to achieve this goal.

The ACs form a wide network that allows them to implement regional, national and local activities promoting the Aarhus Convention principles and facilitating its implementation at all levels as well as to address environmental and security challenges, including transboundary issues.

In the latest national reports on implementation of the Aarhus Convention (2008) most of countries in which OSCE supported establishment and activities of ACs reported progress in creating a general legislative framework for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, with most advances made in implementing the access to information pillar. Most of the countries admitted the important role of the ACs in these achievements, acknowledged the essential role of the ACs in awareness-raising and recognized the impact of the ACs and their potential in disseminating information. However, there is still the need for full utilization of Aarhus Centres as tool for governments in their implementation process.

The implementation of the public participation pillar is still at an early stage in most of the countries. Despite improvements in the legal framework, practical application is hindered due to gaps and discrepancies in legislation and due to the lack of clear rules and implementing procedures. The implementation of the access to justice pillar remains the weakest in these countries.

In order to ensure further improvement of the Aarhus Centre portfolio of the OSCE and to strengthen the role and value of the ACs in addressing the challenges associated with all three pillars of the Aarhus Convention, there is the need to further streamline the Aarhus Centre activities, and thus to ensure their effective contribution to implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

Sometimes, the lack of a clear understanding and common view on the ACs' role and their functions by various stakeholders may hamper the efficiency of AC services and activities. Consequently there is a need to clarify these issues. It is strongly recommended to develop clear guidelines on the purposes and functions of the ACs.

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These guidelines are recommended to be developed by the OSCE Secretariat together with the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat and relevant stakeholders at the country level.

Some other major needs should be also taken into consideration, such as:

- The need for networking and information sharing among Aarhus Centres.
- The need for increased focus on local/regional authorities, local self-government and business community.
- The need to ensure the financial and technical sustainability of the Aarhus Centres.

It is very important that the OSCE and its partners continue to support the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in all countries, and the establishment and functioning of the ACs/PEICs. The OSCE Secretariat and Field offices should provide guidance and assistance to the governments and the ACs in mobilizing resources, and help to ensure the financial and technical sustainability of the Aarhus Centres.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FOR AARHUS CENTRES AND PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION CENTRES (PEICs)

1. Background

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 at the Fourth Ministerial Conference in the 'Environment for Europe' process.

The OSCE, since 2003 has been supporting the creation of Aarhus Centres and Public Environmental Information Centres (PEIC), in close cooperation with the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative. To date, the OSCE has supported the establishment of Aarhus Centres in 7 countries: Albania, Armenia (9), Azerbaijan (3), Belarus, Georgia (3), Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (2).

Aarhus Centres/PEICs

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Albania | : Tirana, Shkodra and Vlora |
| Armenia | : Yerevan, Vanadzor, Idjevan, Dilijan, Goris, Kapan, Gavar, Hradzan, Gumri |
| Azerbaijan | : Baku, Ganja, Gazakh |
| Belarus | : Minsk |
| Georgia | : Tbilisi |
| Kyrgyzstan | : Osh |
| Tajikistan | : Dushanbe, Khujand |

In this initiative, the OSCE partners primarily with the governments of the participating states where these Centres are located as well as the leading environmental NGOs in these countries. UNEP, UNDP, UNECE, REC and NATO are the natural partners to the OSCE through their involvement in the ENVSEC Initiative. Governments of Belgium, Canada, Spain, Sweden and United States of America have provided significant contributions to the establishment and operation of these Centres.

Given the increasing demand and interest for further enhancement of the OSCE's Aarhus portfolio as a tool for addressing environment and security related challenges while contributing to the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention, the OSCE plans to conduct an independent evaluation of the Aarhus Centres/PEICs.

Independent Evaluation will benefit significantly from the outcomes of the Regional Aarhus/Public Environment Information Centres Meeting held in Gudauri, Georgia on 26-27 September 2006. The need for a balanced approach to all three pillars of the Aarhus Convention, sustainability of the Centres, roles and involvement of governmental bodies, local administrations and parliamentarians in activities of the Centres, and the role of Aarhus Centres vis-à-vis those of the environmental NGOs were among the main issues of discussion throughout the meeting. One of the conclusions of the meeting was to conduct an independent review of the Centres.

Furthermore, in the follow-up to the Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security adopted at the 2007 OSCE Ministerial Council, which called the OSCE *to utilize more*

effectively its institutional capacity and its transboundary co-operative arrangements in environmental matters and to work towards raising awareness on the potential impact on security of environmental challenges, the results of this evaluation would be instrumental in advancing OSCE's work for raising environment-security awareness as well as in further supporting the implementation and ratification of the Aarhus Convention.

2. Objectives

Overall objective of the evaluation exercise is to generate knowledge from the experience of the Aarhus Centres within the context of OSCE's efforts to raise awareness on environmental issues as well as promoting participatory approaches in environmental decision-making and thus implementing the principles of the Aarhus Convention. The results of the Evaluation will be used not only for programming purposes by the OSCE, but also as a policy advocacy tool for the OSCE and its partners to promote the principles of the Aarhus Convention as well as its ratification and implementation.

In addition to this broader scope, this evaluation will be a lesson learning and forward looking exercise rather than purely an assessment of past results. It will aim to present information about the nature, extent and where possible the effect of the Aarhus Centres' activities in addressing the challenges associated with the three pillars of the Convention, i.e. access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, from a national context.

In this respect, the Independent Evaluation will have three interlinked objectives:

1. **Assessment of the performance and impact** of the Aarhus Centres and Public Environmental Information Centres (PEICs) in achieving the objectives of the three pillars of the Convention:

- Access to information;
- Public participation in decision-making; and
- Access to justice in environmental matters

The cross-cutting themes that should be addressed under each pillar are the following:

- ✓ **capacity building:** the effect of Aarhus Centre activities on strengthening the capacity of NGOs as well as other stakeholders, including the local administrations, governmental institutions and the judicial; as well as on the establishment of partnerships among governmental (including local government) and non-governmental actors;
- ✓ **awareness raising:** The contribution of the Aarhus Centres to raise awareness on environmental issues in general and more specifically on local environmental challenges;
- ✓ **sustainability:** Experiences and/or prospects of working closely with government authorities and its impact on ensuring the technical and financial sustainability of the Aarhus Centres;
- ✓ **leveraging partnerships and resources:** The effectiveness of the Aarhus Centre model in attracting customers, partners and resources as well as influencing local decision-making processes.

2. **Identification of lessons learnt and best practices** both in terms of substance, results, support as well as working structures and modalities. Substantial variations in national features and circumstances, particularly in terms of civil society development and

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government's involvement in different countries should be fully taken into account in the evaluation process.

3. Development of recommendations to improve OSCE's support to the implementation of the principles of the Aarhus Convention both at field operations level as well as at the secretariat level. This would include but not limited to the following:

- Enable the Secretariat to provide more effective support to the field operations and the managers of the Aarhus Centres and the PEICs;
- Strengthen the linkages of the environmental initiatives with the security challenges;
- Improve ways to draw, share and document lessons and best practices;
- Provide guidance to the future role and areas of focus of the Aarhus Centres and PEICs in line with the evolving requirements with respect to the Aarhus Convention while keeping in mind the diversified and decentralized structure of the Aarhus portfolio;
- Provide guidance to the OSCE Field Operations and the managers/coordinators of the Aarhus Centres in further strengthening the partnership and working modalities with the local stakeholders, again taking into account the variations in local circumstances and specific requirements;
- Provide a framework for the future OSCE interventions in the area of support to the implementation and ratification of the Aarhus Convention.

3. Methodology

The exercise will entail a combination of comprehensive desk reviews and document analysis; consultations with key stakeholders (including the Aarhus Convention Secretariat, OSCE Secretariat staff, OSCE field operations staff, national focal points for the Convention, managers of the Aarhus Centres / PEICs, government representatives, NGOs, academia, etc); and in-situ discussions with a sample of stakeholders (at least one Aarhus Centre/PEIC in each country). The evaluation will be participatory in nature and will make use of focus groups.

The evaluation will be conducted at three levels, namely at the OSCE Secretariat level, field operations level, and at the local level (level of individual Aarhus Centres/PEICs)

4. Timing and Activities

Evaluation will be conducted during the period 14 April – 13 June 2008. It will follow the following steps:

- Identification of countries/cities that will be visited by the evaluation consultant;
- Briefing and planning meetings for the evaluation consultant
- Review of documentation and preparation for country visits.
- Meeting with the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat in Geneva
- Country visits will be conducted within the month of April, May and early June
- The consultant is expected to submit a Progress Report on 20 May 2008, Draft Final Report on 9 June 2008, and Final Report on 13 June 2008.

AARHUS INDEPENDENT EVALUATION GUIDELINES

The following information will be used to provide general guidance for the country visits although actual issues to be covered in country visit will depend on the country programme specificities and major issues for assessment:

A. AARHUS CENTRES INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP:

1. Brief overview of institutional set-up in each country and the general management and coordination structure
2. Brief overview of composition and operational modalities of the Aarhus Centre Management Boards
3. What are the perceived advantages/disadvantages of the established set-up?
4. What are the working relationships between Aarhus Centres Management Boards, Centre Coordinators and OSCE Field Operations?
5. What are the staffing arrangements to support Aarhus Centre related activities at different levels?

B. SUSTAINABILITY

1. What is the level of commitment and contribution (cash or in-kind) of national/local government agencies to the maintenance and operation of Aarhus Centres and to its activities?
2. What are the signs of ownership of these Aarhus Centres/and their activities by other national and local stakeholders?
3. Have there been any cases where the Aarhus Centre platforms have influenced local/national decision-making processes?

C. LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES:

1. What are the prospects for attracting partners and resources in support of Aarhus Centre activities/platforms?
2. Have there been cases where the Aarhus Centre platforms have been able to attract attention of donors to a specific issue?
3. To what extent business community involved in the Aarhus Centre activities?

D. IMPACT OF THE AARHUS CENTRES:

D.1. General:

1. What is the level of interest, commitment and participation of central and local government agencies/authorities to the activities of the Aarhus Centres?
2. What is the level of interest, commitment and participation of national level as well as local NGOs, community groups etc?
3. To what extent the national and local media interested and involved in Aarhus Centre activities?
4. What linkages exist between the Aarhus Centre activities/initiatives with :
 - national environmental strategies, programmes, projects and other initiatives (such as national reporting, etc)
 - local government programmes and projects
 - NGO/CBO activities
 - other OSCE supported programmes and projects
 - programmes and projects supported by other multilateral agencies and bilateral donors
5. To what extent the Aarhus Centres have been instrumental in facilitating the general implementation of the Aarhus Convention and promoting its principles?

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D.2. Aarhus Convention Pillars:

Following factors should be elaborated for each pillar of the Convention, i.e. access to information, public participation in decision-making; and access to justice in environmental matters:

D.2.1. Capacity building:

1. What are the capacity development approaches and activities of the Aarhus Centres?
2. What are the primary target groups?
3. What are the types and levels of skills developed among target beneficiaries?
4. What is the level of involvement of women and youth in Aarhus Centre initiatives?
5. What are the mechanisms and approaches to ensure participation of local stakeholders in Aarhus Centre activities?
6. What are the signs of ownership of these Aarhus Centres/and their activities by the national and local stakeholders?

D.2.2. Awareness-Raising:

1. What are the mechanisms and approaches adopted to raise awareness on Aarhus Convention principles and pillars?
2. To what extent the Aarhus Centres contributed to awareness-raising among different target groups on Aarhus Convention?
3. To what extent the Aarhus Centres contributed to awareness-raising among different target groups on local and national environmental problems and possible solutions?
4. Are there any instances where this awareness has been transformed into action?

E. LESSONS LEARNT AND BEST PRACTICES

1. What are the primary lessons learnt in terms of areas listed above?
2. What are the best practices that could be shared with, and replicated in other countries?

F. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of all above factors addressed, recommendations should be developed to ensure further improvement/strengthening of the Aarhus Centre portfolio of the OSCE. To the extent possible, these recommendations should be developed at three different levels: OSCE Secretariat, OSCE Field Operation, Aarhus Centres. More specifically, the recommendations should aim to:

- Enable the OSCE Secretariat to provide more effective support to the field operations and the managers of the Aarhus Centres and the PEICs;
- Improve ways to draw, share and document lessons and best practices;
- Provide guidance to the future role and areas of focus of the Aarhus Centres and PEICs in line with the evolving requirements with respect to the Aarhus Convention while keeping in mind the diversified and decentralized structure of the Aarhus portfolio;
- Provide guidance to the OSCE Field Operations and the managers/coordinators of the Aarhus Centres in further strengthening the partnership and working modalities with the local stakeholders, again taking into account the variations in local circumstances and specific requirements;
- Provide guidance on resource mobilization, establishment of new partnerships and sustainability.
- Provide a framework for the future OSCE interventions in the area of support to the implementation and ratification of the Aarhus Convention.

E. LIST OF POSSIBLE RESPONDENTS:

1. OSCE Economic and Environmental Officers and their Assistants
2. National Focal Points for Aarhus Convention
3. Managers/Coordinators of Aarhus Centres
4. Members of the Aarhus Centre Management Boards and other similar structures
5. Officials of other government agencies involved at national level
6. Local/regional government authorities in Aarhus Centre locations
7. NGO networks or major national NGOs
8. Participating NGOs and communities
9. Judicial authorities involved in activities
10. Academic institutions involved in activities
11. Media representatives involved in activities
12. Private sector representatives involved in activities
13. Multilateral agencies and bilateral donors involved in Aarhus related activities directly or indirectly.

**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FOR AARHUS CENTRES (ACs)
AND PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION CENTRES (PEICs)**

Programme of visits

Albania, 17-20 April 2008

17 April

9:00-10:00

Robert Mangham

10:00-11:00

Visit the AIC facility Tirana

11:00-12:00

Meeting with Mr. Gavrosh Zela, Aarhus Focal Point, MEFWA

12:00-12:30

Meeting with Mr. Bajram Mejdiaj Chief of Legislation Sector, MEFWA

12:30-13:30

Lunch

13:30-14:30

Meeting with UNDP, Head of Cluster, Adriana Micu

14:30-16:30

Meeting with NGOs

16:30-18:00

Meeting with HoP, Ambassador Robert Bosch

18:00

Meeting with Mr. Jamarber Malltez, World Bank Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) project.

18 April

07:00-10:30

Travel to Vlora

10:30-11:30

Meeting with Mr. Pirro Cenko, Programme Coordinator, and Ms. Madlina Puka, Community Mobilization Expert, Ministry of Public Works, ICZM

11:30-12:30

Meeting with Mr. Aleksander Mita, Head of CSDC/AIC Vlora

12:30-13:30

Tour incorporating Petrolifera, proposed port facility, and TEP

13:30-15:00

Lunch with Mr. Oscar San Jose Ortiz, OSCE Vlora Project Office Head

15:00-16:00

Meeting with NGOs

16:00

Meeting with Regional Environmental Agency

19 April

7:00-11:00

Depart Vlora for Tirana

11:00-12:30

Mr. Alken Myftiu, Regional Environmental Centre (REC)

Rest of Saturday free for clarifications and report preparation

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Kyrgyzstan, 26 April - 1 May 2008

28 April

Bishkek

10:00–13:00

Meeting with Mr. Pecheniuk O, the National Focal Point for the Aarhus Convention

14:00–15:00

Visit to OSCE Centre in Bishkek

15.30–17.00

Meeting with:

Ms. Bekkulova Zh., the Head of the Strategy and Policy Department of the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry

Ms. Salykmambetova B., the Head of the International unit of the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry.

30 April

Osh

Meetings in the Aarhus Centre:

9:00-10:00

The AC staff (the Manager of the AC, assistant and volunteers).

10:00-12:00

Batyrov Zh. – the Head of the Osh-Batken regional department of nature protection.

Sultanov T – the leading specialist of the Osh City Administration

Soronkulov G. – the Head of the Zhalalabad regional department of nature protection.

Kokkoozov A. – the courses of the civil protection of the Ministry of Emergency Situation

Abdrazzakova G. – producer EITR (mass-media)

12:00-13:00

Lunch

13:00-14:00

Mamasaliev G. – the Chairman of the Advisory Board

Kaldybaev N. – the member of the Advisory Board

Alymova N. - the member of the Advisory Board

14:00-16:00

Toychuev R – the Head of the Institute of Medical Problems, and the Head of NGO “Maternity and childhood protection”

Arziev Zh. – the National Academy of Science

Kaldybaev N. – the National Academy of Science

Aybasheva N. – the Head of NGO “Eco-harmony of women”

Manasov P. – the Head of NGO “Tabiyat South”

Kaldanova O.- the Chief of the Board of NGO “Eco-medical”

Amadaliyeva F. – the Head of NGO “Democracy and Education”

Georgia, 8 -9 May 2008

8 May

10:15–11:00

Meeting with Mr. Shota Rukhadze, the Deputy Director of the High School of Judges

Meeting venue: High School of Judges

11:30–12:00

Meeting with the OSCE Economic and Environmental Officers and their assistants

Meeting participants:

Mr. William Hanlon, Economic and Environmental Officer

Ms. Nana Baramidze, National Environmental Officer

Ms. Tamuna Moistrapishvili, Administrative Assistant

Meeting venue: the OSCE Mission to Georgia

12:15–13: 30

First common Meeting

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Meeting Participants:

National Focal Point for the Aarhus Convention, Ms. Nino Gokhelashvili
Representative of the Ministry of Education, Ms. Manana Ratiani,
Coordinator of Aarhus Centre Georgia, Ms. Nino Gvazava
Public Outreach specialist for the Aarhus Centre Georgia, Ms. Tamuna Gugushvili
Legal Advisor of the Aarhus Centre Georgia, Dr. Maia Bitadze
Members of the Aarhus Centre Management Board:
Ms. Eka Slovinski, Ministry of Education of Georgia
Mr. Ramaz Gokhelashvili, IUCN Caucasus Office
Ms. Nino Gokhelashvili, the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia
Meeting venue: Aarhus Centre Georgia

13:30–14:30

Lunch

14:45–16:30

Second common meeting

Meeting Participants:

NGOs

Ms. Nino Tevzadze, Janashia, Caucasus Environmental NGO Network, CENN

Ms. Lela Janashia, REC Caucasus

Ms. Ketil Gujaraidze, Association Green Alternative

Ms. Rusudan Simonidze, Greens Movement

Ms. Ketil Skhireli, IUCN Caucasus Office

Ms. Lia Todua, Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia

Media representatives involved in activities:

Ms. Tiniatin Mosiashvili, Journalist from Radio Green Wave,

Mr. Rezo Getishvili, Environmental Journalist.

Private Sector representatives:

Mr. Juguli Akhvlediani, Mr. Vakhtang Gvakharia, Consulting firm GAMA,

Meeting venue: Aarhus Centre Georgia

17:00–17:30

Meeting with the Deputy Dean of the Law Faculty of Tbilisi State University

Professor Nana Chigladze

Meeting venue: Tbilisi State University

18:00–18:30

Meeting with the National Focal Point for the Aarhus Convention, Ms. Nino Gokhelashvili

Meeting venue: Aarhus Centre Georgia

9 May

11:00–11:30

Additional meeting with the Aarhus Centre Coordinator, Ms. Nino Gvazava

Meeting venue: Aarhus Centre Georgia

11:30–12:00

Meeting with Coordinator for the Gardabani Public Environmental Information Center (PEIC), Mr. Shota Sakhvadze

Meeting venue: Aarhus Centre Georgia

12:00–12:30

Meeting with Coordinator for the Marneuli Public Environmental Information Center (PEIC), Mr. Rovshan Babakishiev

Meeting venue: Aarhus Centre Georgia

Armenia, 10-13 May 2008

10 May

14:30-18:00

Yerevan Aarhus Centre

14:30-15:00

Meeting with the Focal Point - Ms. Aida Iskoyan

15:00-15:30

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Meeting with the Coordinators of Aarhus Centres from Kapan and Goris cities (Syunik region).

15:30-18:00

Council of Experts Ms. Karine Danielyan "For Sustainable Human Development,
Ms. Amalia Hambartzumyan "Xazer"NGO,
Ms. Inga Zarafyan "Eco-news",
Ms. Azganush Drnoyan "Environmental Expertise" State Agency, MNP;
Mr. Andranik Saratikyan Coordinator of the Yerevan Aarhus Centre (MNP);
Mr. Genadi Kojoyan " Information-Analytical Centre" MNP

12 May

09:30-18:00

Visit to Kotaik and Gumri Centres

Meeting with the Coordinator of Kotaik Centre (Hrazdan City) – Mr. Edgar Yengibaryan

Meeting with local Officials and NGOs

Meeting with the coordinator of Dilijan Centre (Tavush Region) – Mr.Albert Haroyan

Meeting with local Officials and NGOs.

13 May

Meeting with the coordinator of Gumri Centre (Shirak Region) – Mr. Gevorg Petrosyan

Meeting with local Officials and NGOs.

09:30

Visit to Dilijan Centre.

14:30

Mr. Andranik Gevorgyan – "EIA" Agency, MNP, Director

17:00

Meeting with the Deputy-Head Mr. Marc Bojanic OSCE Office in Yerevan.

Azerbaijan, 15-16 May 2008

May 15

10:00–10:30

Venue: Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources

Shovkat Bakirov - Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources

11:00–13:00

Venue: Conference Room, OSCE Office in Baku

Firuz Sultanzadeh - Public awareness, Ecological education, community work, Ecotourism (Former Board Member)

Lidiya Guluzadeh – TETA Khazri, Union for environmental awareness and nature protection

Fikrat Jafarov – Public Union for Sustainable Development

Galina Kozlova – NGO Ekograf

Irada Yusubova – Centre for Independent Researches

Samir Isayev – Ecolex, Environmental Law Centre

13:00-15:00

Lunch

15:00–16:00

Venue: Conference Room, OSCE Office in Baku

Lyaman Yusifova - OSCE Office in Baku

Khoshbakht Ismailova, OSCE Office in Baku

16:10–16:40

Elnara Hasanova – British Petroleum (telephone conference)

May 16

Venue: Aarhus Centre, Ganja

14:00–17:00

Elchin Abbasov – Ganja Aarhus Centre Manager

Elshad Mammadov – NGO Eco Sphere

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Irshad Abbasov – Ganja State Technical University, Head of Ganja Lake Monitoring Laboratory
Suleyman Bayramov - Ganja Media Centre
Local newspaper representatives
NGO representatives

Tajikistan, 26-29 May 2008

26 May

3:20-5: 00

Arrival from Istanbul to Dushanbe

5: 00 – 11:00

Rest in the hotel

11:15–12:00

Introductory meeting with Ms. Bess Brown / Economic Officer, Ms. Muhabbat Kamarova / Environmental Program Assistant

12:00–13:00

Introductory meeting with Mr. Klaus Rasmussen, Deputy Head of Centre in Dushanbe

13:00–14:00

Lunch

14:00–15:30

Meeting with Mr. Kodir Boturov, Coordinator of the Aarhus Convention in Tajikistan in Aarhus Centre, meeting with representatives of civil society and partners of the Aarhus Centre in Dushanbe

16:00–17:30

Meeting with Hursandkul Zikirov, Chairperson of Nature Protection Committee under RT Government

18:00-20:00

Working dinner with IPs and CID staff

27 May

7:00-8:00

Flight from Dushanbe to Khujand by Tajik Air flight

8: 00–9:00

Drive from the airport to the OSCE Khujand Field Office OSCE Khujand FO vehicle Nissan Patrol D020013, driver – Mr. Muhsin Maksudov

9:00–9:45

Introductory meeting with Ms. Giorgia Varisco, OSCE Khujand Field Officer, Ms. Nazokat Yakubova, Field Assistant

10:00–11:00

Meeting with Mr. Dmitriy Prudskih, Manager of the Aarhus Centre in Khujand

11:15–13:00

Meeting with Mr. Saidamin Isomaddinov, Head of the Sughd Regional Nature Protection Department

13:00–14:00

Lunch

14:00–16:00

Meeting with the representatives of civil society and partners of the Aarhus Centre in Khujand

16:00–16.30

Drive to Khujand airport

16:30-17:00

Check-in for the flight Khujand-Dushanbe

18.00

Arrival to Dushanbe airport, drive to the hotel

28 May

8:30-10:30

Drive to OSCE Kurghon-Teppa Field Office

10:30–11:00

Introductory meeting with Mr. Stoyan Davidov, OSCE Kurghon-Teppa Field Office

11:00-14:00

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Visiting Tigrovaya balka reserve,

14:00-15:00

Lunch

15:00-16:00

Meeting with local NGOs and activists in the OSCE Kurghon-Teppa Field Office.

16:00-18:00

Drive to Dushanbe, rest in the hotel

29 May

03.00

Check-in for the flight Dushanbe-Istanbul

Flight to Istanbul