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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB for the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 16 December 2025 Eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and its High-level Segment (MOP8) (Geneva, Switzerland, 17–20 November 2025) - Information from the Presidency and the Commission

1. Background

Since 2005, the European Union has been a Party to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), adopted under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in 1998. All EU Member States are likewise Parties to this mixed agreement.

The Convention's overarching aim is “to further the accountability and transparency of decision-making and to strengthen public support for decisions on the environment.”

In recent years, it has also gained prominence in the effort of protecting environmental defenders who exercise their rights under the Aarhus Convention. At the Meeting of the Parties in 2021, the Parties established the Rapid Response Mechanism to safeguard environmental defenders and, as part of this new mechanism, appointed a Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders.

2. Eighth Meeting of the Parties

The Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention takes place every four years and is prepared by annual Working Parties. To date the Meeting of the Parties, have a consensus-based decision-making process.

MoP8 was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 17–20 November 2025. More than 300 participants from 43 Parties to the Convention and representatives of approximately 47 NGOs and other stakeholders took part over the four-day meeting.

The Meeting of the Parties adopted more than 30 decisions covering a wide range of subjects. The following developments should be noted.

Compliance Mechanism: Concerns arose in relation to the findings of the Aarhus Convention's Compliance Committee (ACCC) regarding the UK's Withdrawal Bill (ACCC/C/2017/150), adopted in October 2025. Given the situation, the EU and its Member States proposed postponing findings adopted shortly before the Meeting to an extraordinary MoP in 2026, as their complexity and volume prevented a proper assessment of their implications for the interpretation of the Convention. The Meeting of the Parties agreed by consensus to postpone only the decision relating to the UK's compliance cases. Additionally, the UK issued a statement reserving its position in relation to any new interpretations of, or recommendations relating to, its obligations under the Aarhus Convention that may arise from all the decisions on individual compliance cases, which were adopted at MoP8.

These developments prompted broader discussions on the functioning of the Compliance Mechanism, as current timelines make it difficult for Parties to adequately review compliance findings before their adoption at a MoP. Based on the proposal by the EU and its Member States, supported by the UK, Parties agreed to discuss the compliance procedure during the next intersessional period in close cooperation with the Secretariat and the Compliance Committee.

ACCC election: Parties elected new members of the Compliance Committee from France, Hungary, Ukraine, Armenia, Lithuania and Iceland. The Commission had initially nominated a member of its Legal Service to serve on the Committee but agreed with a compromise candidate following objections from the Chair of the Compliance Committee, as well as Norway and Switzerland, who argued that electing an active executive-branch official would break the Committee's own practice of avoiding members of executives.

Special Rapporteur Election: Parties re-elected Mr. Michel Forst (France) as Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders with 41 votes to 1. The election was held at the request of Azerbaijan and marks only the second formal vote ever conducted under the Convention.

Financial issues: Following a proposal by the EU and its Member States, Parties decided not to change the funding scheme from voluntary contributions to a recommendatory or mandatory approach. The Aarhus Secretariat reiterated that, due to the UN liquidity crisis and declining voluntary contributions, it may gradually be forced to discontinue servicing some parts of the Convention, starting with the Rapid Response Mechanism, unless new funds become available. The Secretariat also noted that financial constraints could affect the reform of the Compliance Mechanism and the organisation of a possible extraordinary MoP. Currently, only around USD 20,000 is available for 2026.

3. Joint High-Level Segment

The fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) was held back-to-back with MOP8. The two sessions featured a joint High-level Segment on 20 November 2025 where delegations focused on the role of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in advancing public rights to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

In a statement delivered at the High-Level Segment by UNECE Executive Secretary *Tatiana Molcean*, United Nations Secretary-General *António Guterres* expressed strong support for the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol, emphasizing that these instruments have, over the past two decades, inspired and advanced environmental democracy globally.

Geneva Declaration: The meetings culminated in the adoption of the *Geneva Declaration on Advancing Public Rights to Tackle the Triple Planetary Crisis in the Face of Geopolitical Tensions*, a landmark commitment to strengthen transparency, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters despite rising geopolitical challenges. The Declaration issues an urgent call to action, stressing that effective responses to the intertwined global crises require upholding the public's rights to access environmental information, participate in decision-making and seek justice, as enshrined in the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol.
