UNITED NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

CEP/WG.5/2000/7
19 April 2000

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Meeting of the Signatories to
the Convention on Access to Information,
Public Participation in Decision-making and
Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
(Second meeting, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 3-5 July 2000)
(Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda)

WORKSHOP ON GOOD PRACTICE IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Report prepared by the delegation of the United Kingdom

1. Further to paragraph 18 of the annex to the report of the first meeting of the Signatories (CEP/WG.5/1999/2), the United Kingdom hosted a workshop in Newcastle Upon Tyne (United Kingdom) on 6-7 December 1999 on good practice in public participation at the local level.

2. The workshop was attended by 121 government, local government, NGO and business representatives from Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgysztan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan and Yugoslavia.

3. To ensure that participants with practical experience of public participation exercises attended the workshop, invitations were sent, with offers of funding, to the European ECO Forum and others. The United Kingdom Know How Fund assisted 49 participants representing governments, local

authorities and NGOs from central and eastern Europe and the newly independent States.

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4. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the European Commission, the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), the United Nations Environment and Development UK Committee (UNED-UK) were also represented.

Case study day

5. On Sunday 5 December, participants were shown case studies of public participation exercises in the Newcastle area. These included the Newcastle City Centre action plan, the sustainable development plan for Washington New Town and the Hadrian's Wall tourism management plan.

Workshop

6. The workshop on Monday 6 and Tuesday 7 December divided into three streams to discuss public participation at the local level for decision-making on specific activities (art. 6 and annex I to the Convention), decision-making on plans and programmes (art. 7), and helping people to participate in decision-making procedures ('capacity building'). REC had researched a set of case study examples of public participation procedures to encourage discussion and to identify good practice. Mr. Michael Meacher, the United Kingdom Minister for the Environment, attended and addressed the participants at the end of the workshop.

Conclusions

7. Mr. Jerzy Jendroska, Chairman of the workshop's plenary sessions, concluded that the workshop demonstrated that there was much interesting work on public participation going on across the UN/ECE region. He went on to say that it was clear that more could be done to improve public participation in the decisions covered by the Aarhus Convention and that this improvement was an ongoing process. The workshop was a useful contribution to that.

8. The workshop had demonstrated that there were a wide range of ways to implement the requirements of the Aarhus Convention and that there was not only one solution. The workshop also demonstrated that the public was made up of different groups and that they must all be contacted if public participation was to be done properly. It seemed clear that the earlier in the process public participation was undertaken, the better.

9. Although the workshop focused on practical experiences at the local level, it was very clear that a lot could be done by central government to help local processes, such as setting the legal framework and promoting public participation.

Outputs

10. The discussions and exchange of information between the many different participants with their wide range of experiences was very valuable. The evaluation form that participants completed indicated this.

11. The conclusions of the workshop were distributed to participants in Russian and English. This included a short summary of the overall conclusions of the workshop, a summary of the work of each of the three streams and a list of participants. 1/

12. The main output from the workshop was the good practice handbook produced by the United Kingdom. This is based on the discussion at the workshop and the REC case study research. It is a practical resource for authorities undertaking public participation processes. It offers advice and gives examples of good practice at different stages of the process. As requested at the workshop, the handbook reflects the language of the Convention, is intended to be neutral in tone and is available in paper and electronic copies. 1/ At the workshop, the UN/ECE secretariat offered to make the handbook available via the UN/ECE Web site.

Note

1/ Copies can be obtained by contacting Eamonn Prendergast by e-mail (eamonn_prendergast@detr.gsi.gov.uk) or by fax (+44 207 944 6169).