



Casebook Nuclear Advocacy

Case-Law on International Regulations in the Nuclear Sector

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OEKOBÜERO is the alliance of the Austrian Environmental Movement. It consists of 17 Austrian organizations engaged in environmental, nature, and animal protection like GLOBAL 2000 (Friends of the Earth Austria), FOUR PAWS, Greenpeace CEE, and WWF Austria. OEKOBÜERO works on the political and legal level for the environmental movement.

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Content

Introduction	4
List of Abbreviations.....	5
1. Aarhus Convention	6
Mochovce NPP – Facing Decades-Old Issues.....	6
Problematic NPP in Belarus	9
Legislative Gap in the Czech Republic?	13
Restrictive Disclosure of Information regarding a New NPP in Romania	15
Insufficient Public Participation regarding the Temelín NPP	18
Additional Reactors of the Mochovce NPP	21
Transnational Challenges regarding NPP Hinkley Point C	24
Transboundary EIA on NPP Hinkley Point C in Germany	26
Harassment of Nuclear Activists in Belarus.....	29
Extension of Operating Time at Borssele	32
Lack of Participation and Access to Justice at Temelín?	34
Lifetime Extension of Nuclear Reactor Tihange I	37
Storage for Radioactive Waste at Almaraz.....	38
2. Espoo Convention.....	40
Armenia – New Nuclear Power Unit in Metsamor.....	40
Armenia – Governmental Energy Programme	43
Ukraine – Lifetime Extensions of Rivne NPP.....	44
Belarus – Permitting the Ostrovets NPP	48
UK – International Notification on Hinkley Point C	52
Spain – Cessation of NPP Santa Maria de Garoña	55
3. EU Directives.....	56
Lifetime extension of Doel 1 and 2	56

Introduction

Due to their far-reaching impact, nuclear issues in particular have consistently raised significant compliance and implementation challenges with regards to two UNECE multilateral agreements, namely the Aarhus Convention and the Espoo Convention as well as EU legislation. Furthermore, while the two Conventions as well as European provisions on EIA and nature protection establish independent and differing obligations on the Parties or member states, the precise interactions and all potentials for synergies have to date not been fully clarified by the bodies set up to assist Parties with compliance, namely the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee (ACCC) and the Espoo Implementation Committee (Espoo IC). This has resulted in a situation wherein the rules and best policies/courses of action for addressing transboundary environmental problems in this sector are unclear.

In order to gain an overview on the different decisions and approached in the nuclear sector, this casebook includes all relevant international cases related to nuclear activities. It aims to support better compliance and implementation with international provisions in the nuclear sector through an enhanced understanding of the legal and procedural issues involved, and the development of pragmatic solutions.

List of Abbreviations

ACCC	<i>Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee</i>
ECJ	<i>European Court of Justice</i>
EIA	<i>Environmental Impact Assessment</i>
EIC	<i>Espoo Implementation Committee</i>
LTE.....	<i>lifetime extension</i>
MoP / MOP.....	<i>Meeting of the Parties</i>
NPP	<i>Nuclear Power Plant</i>

1. AARHUS CONVENTION

Mochovce NPP – Facing Decades-Old Issues

Body	ACCC
Case Number	ACCC/C/2009/41
Party / Member State	Slovakia
Date of Decision	17 December 2010
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Article 6(4) and (10)
Communicant / Complainant	Global 2000/Friends of the Earth Austria

Background

On 1 July 2009 the communicant submitted a communication to the Compliance Committee alleging a failure by Slovakia to comply with its obligations under article 6(1), (4) and (10) as well as article 9(2), (3) and (4) of the Convention.

Firstly, the communication alleged that the Party concerned had failed to provide for public participation in the decision-making process regarding the Mochovce NPP (situated in Southern Slovakia, close to the Austrian, Czech and Hungarian borders). To be precise, three specific instances of decision-making by the Slovak Nuclear Regulatory Authority (*Úrad Jadrového Dozoru*; hereinafter, "UJD") were questioned in the light of article 6(1), (4) and (10) of the Convention:

- (a) Decision No. 246/2008 of 14 August 2008 to permit the change of construction of Mochovce NPP Units 3 and 4;
- (b) Decision No. 266/2008 of 14 August 2008 to permit the implementation of changes in safety-related equipment during completion of the Mochovce NPP Units 3 and 4; and
- (c) Decision No. 267/2008 of 14 August 2008 to permit the implementation of changes in the document "Preliminary Safety Report of NPP Mochovce Units 3 and 4".

The location permit for the project was issued in 1979, and the construction permit for the four reactors was initially issued on 12 November 1986, under the condition that construction be completed in 115 months. Two reactors, Mochovce 1 and 2, were finalized and started operating in 1989, whereas the other two, Mochovce 3 and 4, were only partially constructed. The work on these two reactors was curtailed in the early 1990's due to financial constraints. On 5 May 1997, the period for the completion of construction work under the construction permit was extended several times, at last to 31 December 2011. In 2007, Slovakia decided to complete the Mochovce NPP by finalizing and putting into operation reactors Mochovce 3 and 4. In May 2008 the developer applied for the three permits in question. The applications were approved by above mentioned UJD decisions.

Before the decisions were made, two organizations, Greenpeace Slovakia and Za Matku Zem, had filed their statements with UJD relating to the developer's application for construction changes, as parties to the proceedings in accordance with the general provisions of the Code of Administrative Procedure, and claimed that it was necessary to carry out the EIA and have the EIA final statement before the decision was issued by UJD. Their arguments were rejected on the grounds that these organizations did not fulfil the criteria necessary for organizations to participate in the proceedings. In September 2008, the Slovak Ministry of Environment decided that an EIA would be carried out not for the construction changes to the project, but for its operation, and that such an assessment would be finalized before the initiation of its operation. In the Communicant's eyes this was already

too late, as the construction of the new reactors was already under way. The EIA process, which allegedly was the only process providing for public participation, had only recently started and was scheduled to be finalized just before the new reactors started to operate. It should be noted that, according to Slovak law, the EIA procedure was not a permitting procedure in itself, although the results of the EIA procedure should be considered in subsequent permitting procedures.

Secondly, the communicant also alleged that, since it was not possible to appeal against the different decisions due to restricting standing requirements in Slovak law and by generally not providing for access to justice in environmental matters in its legislation, the Party concerned failed to comply with article 9 (2), (3) and (4) of the Convention.

Decision

Before introducing the findings, the core issues highlighted by the Committee shall be briefly addressed. Firstly, the Committee addressed the relation between the 1986 and 2008 decisions. It noted that while it is undisputed that NPPs are covered by article 6, the applicability of the Convention in the present case still must be clarified, as the Convention had not been applicable in 1986 -- but the UJD decisions were made in 2008 when the Convention clearly was applicable. The Committee then stated that the Party concerned was obliged to ensure public participation before the 2008 UJD decisions, if they amounted to a reconsideration or an update of the operating conditions or if the decisions concerned a change to or extension of the activity in accordance with annex I, paragraph 22, to the Convention. It was clear to the Committee that the UJD decision 246/2008 in itself -- but even more so in combination with decision 266/2008 and decision 267/2008 -- amounted to a reconsideration and update of the operating conditions.

Secondly, the Committee also had to deal with the topic access to justice and use of domestic remedies. Here, the Committee highlighted, that the regional court had not decided to inhibit the construction of the Mochovce NPP while the case was pending before it. In other words, the construction of the plant was being carried out despite the appeal for judicial review and its completion was possible before the court had made its decision. For these reasons, the Committee decided to examine the communication and not to await a possible decision by the national court. The general issues of lacking access to justice on the other hand, as brought up by the Communicant, were not considered by the Committee as it would not be appropriate to examine these claims not awaiting the outcome of the pending case.

Thirdly, the Committee dealt with the alleged failure to provide sufficient early public participation. While there was no opportunity for public participation in the decision-making leading to the three UJD decisions of August 2008, the EIA procedure that provided for public participation was carried out before the permit was given to put the Mochovce NPP into operation. The question was thus whether the opportunity for public participation in the EIA procedure after the construction permit was issued, but before the operation was permitted, was sufficient to meet the requirements of the Convention. Here, the Committee concluded that each party to the Convention has a certain discretion to design the decision-making procedures covered by article 6(10), however would not allow the Party to entirely exclude public participation. Yet, within such procedures where public participation is required, it should be provided early in the procedure. A mere formal possibility, *de jure*, to turn down an application at the stage of the operation permit when the installation is constructed, is not enough to meet the criteria. In the present case the Committee was convinced that once the construction was carried out, many decisions could no longer be challenged by the public. For these reasons the Party concerned had failed to comply with article 6 as shown in the findings below.

The Committee found that by failing to provide for early and effective public participation in the decision-making leading to the UJD decisions 246/2008, 266/2008 and 267/2008 of 14 August 2008 concerning Mochovce NPP, the Party concerned had **failed to comply with article 6(4) and (10)** of the Convention.

The Committee further recommended the Meeting of the Parties to advise the Party concerned to review its legal framework to ensure that early and effective public participation is provided for in decision-making when old permits are reconsidered or updated or the activities are changed or extended compared to previous conditions, in accordance with the Convention.

In Decision IV/9e, the Meeting of the Parties endorsed on its 4th session that by failing to provide for early and effective public participation in the decision-making leading to the decisions by the

Slovak Nuclear Regulatory Authority concerning the Mochovce Nuclear Power Plant, Slovakia failed to comply with article 6 (4) and (10) of the Convention. It recommended to review the legal framework to ensure that early and effective public participation is provided for in decision-making when old permits are reconsidered or updated, or the activities are changed or extended compared to previous conditions, in accordance with the Convention.

Impact

At the MOP5, the Committee reported that, according to the Party's reporting, there had been legislative amendments concerning permits under the Building Act and the Atomic Act as well as a judgement of the Supreme Court of Slovakia awarding Greenpeace Slovakia the status of a party with all rights in the proceedings relating to the construction of Mochovce reactors 3 and 4. The communicant had reported that Slovak legislation still only provided for public participation in the reconsideration or update of old permits only if an EIA was carried out, whereas no EIA had been carried out for the 2008 decisions. Thus, the Committee was not persuaded that, if similar decisions were taken again under the current legal framework, the public would be entitled to participate.

In a supplementary report, however, the Committee referred to the Party's statement concerning public participation. According to this statement, the Conventions requirements would be met in future new permits (or changes to existing permits) and if no EIA was carried out the public concerned could still participate in a permitting procedure according to the Administrative Procedure Code. The communicant stressed that public participation in a permitting procedure for a change of activity was conditioned on participation in a prior EIA and that authorities would refuse participation on the grounds that if special laws such as the Atomic Act regulate party status to proceedings the general law would not apply. Inter alia because this was not substantiated by practice examples or case-law, the Committee finally concluded that Slovakia had taken sufficient measures to implement Decision IV/9e.

Problematic NPP in Belarus

Body	Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee
Case Number	ACCC/C/2009/44
Party / Member State	Belarus
Date of Decision	28 January 2011
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Articles 4 and 6
Communicant / Complainant	European ECO Forum

Background

On 10 December 2009 the Communicant submitted a communication to the ACCC alleging that Belarus had failed to comply with various obligations the Convention in relation to a project to construct a nuclear power plant (NPP).

The communication concerned the planning and authorizing procedure for construction of an NPP in Belarus. This communication incorporated, but was not limited to, all facts and allegations previously made in relation to the NPP by Amicus Curiae Memorandum filed by European ECO Forum Legal Focal Point within communication Ref: ACCC/C/2009/37. To sum it up the major points of allegations were:

Generally speaking, the Communicant criticized the failure to take necessary legislative and regulatory measures to implement the provisions of article 6(2), (3), (8) and (9) of the Convention.

Regarding the NPP specifically, the Communicant also added the following: Firstly, the Party Concerned allegedly failed to provide sufficient information regarding the NPP. Between 2007 and 2009, four requests were made by different parties, all directed at the Ministry of Energy or the Directorate for the Construction of the NPP. The requests contained pleas for information about the phase of the project, location and public participation about the NPP as well as a request to access to the full EIA Report of the NPP in paper and electronic form. The authorities replied within one month, but the allegations were related to the accuracy of the information and the form in which information was provided.

Secondly, the Communicant alleged the failure to sufficiently involve the public. This point included

- Not adequately informing the public about the decision in which the construction of the NPP was authorized – allegedly failing to comply with article 6(2): the public notice for commencement of public consultations was published only on the internet and in a local newspaper, and the EIA plan was not published in its entirety online, it was only the preliminary version of the EIA Report – this would not suffice the requirements of article 6(2).
- Not ensuring early public participation – allegedly failing to comply with article 6(4): The Communicant alleges that the public consultations began at a late stage when most options were closed; the public was not given any possibility to discuss the non-NPP alternative, the choice of technology or the choice of location.
- Not providing all information relevant to decision-making – allegedly failing to comply with article 6(6): The brief EIA Overview, as a basic document for the general public to understand the project, focused on two issues only (the location alternatives and the socio-economic benefits); and the EIA Report provided to the public was much shorter (about 135 pages) than the so-called full EIA Report (about 1,000 pages), which was never available to the public.
- Not allowing relevant NGOs to submit comments during organized hearings – allegedly failing to comply with article 6(7): As stated by the Communicant, there was only one public hearing in a small town which was organized on a Friday during work hours from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.; NGOs then also had a hard time to enter because the room was full, they could

not disseminate their copies of the NGO critique of the EIA because they allegedly had gotten confiscated and they were only given three minutes to speak.

Lastly, the Communicant alleged that activists were pressured trying to promote their views on nuclear energy. This involved claimed incidents of defamation (leaflets distributed by unidentified individuals including contact details of two environmental activists), detention and house search of one environmental activist and arrest of a Russian expert when he tried to bring copies of the NGO Critique of the EIA to the public hearings in Ostrovets. Allegedly, all cases were related to environmental activists carrying out awareness-raising activities on the potential effects of the NPP.

Decision

Before introducing its final findings, the main remarks of the Committee's consideration and evaluation shall be introduced – beginning with the alleged failure to provide information. As mentioned above, the authorities duly replied in all instances. The Committee further acknowledged that not all information provided was accurate and complete; nevertheless, the information provided might have reflected the current knowledge of the authorities, thus the authorities provided the information that was held by them at that time and the Party concerned did not fail to comply with the Convention. Regarding the alleged failure to give access to information in the form requested, the Committee recalled that article 4(1) requires that "copies" of environmental information be provided. In the Committee's view "copies" does, in fact, require that the whole documentation is available close to the place of residence of the person requesting information, or entirely in electronic form, if this person lives in another town or city. According to the facts presented in this case, access to information was restricted to the site of the Directorate of the NPP in Minsk only and no copies could be made.

Regarding the alleged failures involving public participation the Committee stated

- That publishing the notice on the Internet as well as in the national (*Respublika and Sovjetskaya Belorussia*) and local printed media (*Ostrovetskaya Pravda and Grodnenskaya Pravda*) would suffice. Not giving a hint that the full EIA report, next to the preliminary EIA report, was also online, did not suffice the requirements of 6(2) on the other hand (see in the findings).
- As for the alleged failure of 6(4), the Committee has not been provided with any evidence that the public was involved, in forms envisaged by the Convention, in previous decision-making procedures which decided on the need for NPP and selected its location. Once the decision to permit the proposed activity in the Ostrovets area had already been taken without public involvement, providing for such involvement at a following stage could under no circumstances be considered as meeting the requirement under article 6(4) to provide for "early public participation when all options are open". This is the case even if a full EIA procedure is being carried out. This effectively reduced the public's input in many stages of the procedure, which resulted in the finding introduced below.
- The alleged failure of 6(6) was also confirmed by the Committee, stating that the EIA report is a crucial document containing important details about a proposed project and the possibility to examine the full report is vital (see in the findings).
- Regarding the alleged failure of 6(7) the Committee also confirmed the Communicants allegations stating that by making the developers rather than the relevant public authorities responsible for organizing public participation, including the collection of comments, the Belarusian legal framework fails to comply. Furthermore, organizers are not entitled to judge whether to allow the public to submit their comments and corroborating documents or not (also found in the findings). Here the Committee also wished to underline that that any discussion in closed groups cannot be considered as public participation under the Convention – in order to meet the requirements such a procedure must be in principle be open to all members of the public concerned.

To conclude the Committees general evaluation, it has to be pointed out that the Committee by itself brought up article 9(1). It stated that while there were no specific allegations concerning access to justice, in the light of the information regarding the use of domestic remedies, it observed that qualifying redress procedures as being of economic nature, and therefore subject to rules for

commercial disputes, may well lead to limiting effective access to justice as required under article 9(1).

In relation to the general legal framework the Committee found that

- (a) There is considerable uncertainty as to the participatory procedures applicable in case of nuclear activities;
- (b) There is lack of clarity as to the decision which is considered to be the final decision permitting an activity in terms of article 6(9).

In relation to the NPP the Committee additionally found that

- (a) By restricting access to the full version of the EIA Report to the premises of the Directorate of the NPP in Minsk only and by not allowing any copies to be made, it **failed to comply with articles 6(6) and 4(1)(b)**;
- (b) By not duly informing the public that, in addition to the publicly available 100-page EIA report, there was a full version of the EIA Report (more than 1,000 pages long), it **failed to comply with article 6(2)(d)(vi)**;
- (c) By providing for public participation only at the stage of the EIA for the NPP, with one hearing on 9 October 2009, and effectively reducing the public's input to only commenting on how the environmental impact could be mitigated, and precluding the public from having any input on the decision on whether the NPP installation should be at the selected site in the first place (since the decision had already been taken), it **failed to comply with article 6(4)**;
- (d) By not informing the public in due time of the possibility of examining the full EIA Report, it **failed to comply with article 6(6)**;
- (e) By limiting the possibility for members of the public to submit comments, it **failed to comply with article 6(7)**.

Furthermore, the ACCC recommended, inter alia, ensuring the compatibility of and coherence between the general framework for public participation in decisions on specific activities (the general EIA legislation) and the framework for public participation in nuclear activities.

Impact

As the ACCC considered it too late for its consideration in 2011, the case was considered at the MoP's 5th session in 2014. By that time, the Party had reported on different measures, inter alia the establishment of a minimum 30-day period for public discussion after public notice is given as well as the establishment of a working group for preparing proposals for the better implementation of the Convention. An observer informed to Committee that in September 2011, the President of Belarus had confirmed the Ostrovets site for the NPP within an Edict and that the Directorate for Nuclear Power Plant Construction had selected the design and reactor type and signed the contract for its construction. These decisions, however, were not discussed with the public and no regard was taken of public opinions or suggestions. It was also reported that, in summer 2012, members of the public, including those involved in communication ACCC/C/2009/44 had been arrested and detained.¹ In 2013, Belarus reported that section 1 of its Regulations on the Conduct of EIA states that these Regulations also set out the EIA procedure, including consideration of transboundary impact, of proposed activities including activities in the field of nuclear energy. The Party also reported on several training on the Aarhus Convention held in 2013 and 2014.

In Decision V/9c, the MoP endorsed the recommendations of the Committee to

- Para 7(a): Ensure that the amended legal framework clearly designates which decision is considered to be the final decision permitting the activity and that this decision is made public, as required under article 6(9);
- Para 7(b): Ensure that the full content of all the comments made by the public is submitted to the responsible authorities for taking the decision;
- Para 7(c): Make appropriate practical and other provisions for the public to participate during the preparation of plans and programmes relating to the environment.

¹ Note: This incident was at a later stage subject to Case ACCC/C/2014/102.

Although, in 2015, the Party reported on an Action Plan for the Implementation of the Convention from 2014-2017, the Committee in its 1st Progress Review did not find that the requirements of Decision V/9c had been fulfilled. In 2017, the Committee reported that article 15(4) of the law "On state ecological experience, strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment" does not make clear which public authority is responsible for making a final decision and that there had not been any information on legislation requiring that the final decision permitting an activity be made public. Regarding the second recommendation, Resolution No. 458 now laid down that the comments from the public are submitted in full to the authorities competent to take decisions. The amended Law on Environmental Protection as well as Resolution No. 458 provided a legal basis for public participation on the preparation of plans and programmes related to the environment. Yet, the Committee emphasized that if Belarus were to deliberately set out to adopt the main programmes within the scope of article 7 just prior to the entry into force of the new provision in order to avoid giving the public the right to participate, such an approach would run directly counter to the spirit of the Convention.

In Decision VI/8c, the MoP came to the conclusion that the requirement of para 7(a) of Decision V/9c was not yet fulfilled. It furthermore concluded that Belarus had fulfilled the requirements of para 7(b) to submit the full content of all comments made by the public regarding the EIA report; however, it had not yet fulfilled these requirements with respect to comments on other information relevant to decisions to permit activities subject to article 6. The requirements of para 7(c) were met according to the Party's reporting.

Legislative Gap in the Czech Republic?

Body	ACCC
Case Number	ACCC/C/2010/50
Party concerned / Member State	Czech Republic
Date of Findings	29 June 2012
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Articles 6 and 9
Communicant / Complainant	Ekologický právní servis (Envnmt. Law Service)

Background

On 14 June 2009 the Communicant submitted a communication to the ACCC alleging a failure by the Czech Republic to comply with its obligations under numerous articles of the Aarhus Convention – even though the convention had been in force from October 4th, 2004 already. Among others the Communicant stated, that the law and practice of the Party concerned provides for a restrictive definition of who may be party in environmental decisions; and that the Party Concerned failed to comply with article 9 of the Convention because some acts and omissions are excluded from the possibility of a court review (see letter of communication, p. 11). This failure allegedly included that the scope of a reviewable act is influenced by the diverse regulation of the parties of the respective decision-making procedures. Regarding some of the procedures (among them the Czech Nuclear Act) the laws would explicitly state that only the applicant (i.e. the investor) has the position of a party. Therefore, only the applicant would have standing and no one else could ask the court to review the legality of decisions.

The Communicant underlined its statements with the example of the permits issued according to the Act No. 18/1997 Coll., “On Peaceful Exploitation of Nuclear Energy (Nuclear Act)”. In article 14 para 1, the act would stipulate that only an applicant is party to the administrative procedures exercised according to it. Persons whose rights potentially could have been affected by such activities allegedly had no possibility to influence issuing the permits – nor access to judicial review. Lastly, the Communicant stated, that NGOs were in similar situation: Courts would conclude, that it wasn’t necessary for NGOs to participate neither in procedures according to the Nuclear Act nor having access to court reviews of their outcomes.

Decision

The ACCC found, among other things, that:

- Through its restrictive interpretation of “the public concerned” the system of the Czech Republic failed to provide for effective public participation during the whole decision-making process, and thus was not in compliance with article 6(3);
- The rights of NGOs (meeting the requirements of article 2(5)) as well as the rights of the members of the public were too limited, to the extent that it resulted in a breach of article 9(2);

The ACCC further recommended, that members of the public concerned (NGOs included) are allowed to effectively participate and submit comments throughout the decision-making procedure subject to article 6. Furthermore, NGOs fulfilling the requirements of article 2(5), have the right to access review procedures regarding any procedures subject to the requirements of article 6, and in this regard, they have standing to seek the review of not only the procedural but also the substantive legality of those decisions.

The MoP endorsed the Committee’s findings in Decision V/9f at its 5th session.

Impact

In its 1st progress report, the Czech Republic explained that European Commission had instituted an infringement procedure for incorrect transposition of the EIA Directive. The Party thus had prepared a legislative amendment to address both the European Commission's and the ACCC's concerns. The proposed legislative amendment included, inter alia that the term "public concerned" was explicitly defined and would include those natural persons who may be affected by a project. The public concerned would have the opportunity to take part in proceedings on an environmental authorisation and the right to challenge both the substantive and procedural aspects of that authorisation in court. It would further be able to challenge the authorisation in court with no requirement of prior participation (the submission of comments) in proceedings.

The communicant stated that the proposed amendments would not fully meet the recommendation set out in decision V/9f: Tenants would still be explicitly excluded from being parties of the permitting procedures and from standing to challenge the permits at courts. Moreover, the proposed amendments would introduce new requirements for environmental NGOs to participate in administrative procedures with a status of a party and/or challenge decisions in the courts, namely NGOs would either have to prove that they were active in environmental protection for more than 3 years, or gather at least 200 signatures supporting their participation in the administrative procedure or their lawsuit.

As the Committee had not been provided with the text of the proposed legislative amendments, it is not in a position to make any findings regarding the extent to which they fulfil each of the recommendations set out in decision V/9f. In its report to the MoP in September 2017, however, the ACCC considered that, although certain reservations concerning the rights of tenants and the access to information remained, in contrast to the legal situation at the time of the Committee's findings on communication ACCC/C/2010/50, the legal framework of the Party concerned now permits members of the public "to examine and to comment on elements determining the final building decision throughout the land planning and building processes". Accordingly, the ACCC found that the Party concerned has met the relevant requirements of decision V/9f. At this point, the communicant also agreed that the EIA Act now granted NGOs the possibility to challenge the procedural and substantive legality of decisions subject to article 6 without requiring them to be parties to the proceedings preceding the issuance of the challenged decision, which led to compliance with the second relevant requirement of Decision V/9f.

Restrictive Disclosure of Information regarding a New NPP in Romania

Body	Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee
Case Number	ACCC/C/2010/51
Party / Member State	Romania
Date of Decision	28 March 2014
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Article 4 and 7
Communicant / Complainant	Greenpeace Central and Eastern Europe and Romanian Centre for Legal Resources

Background

On 2 September 2010 the communication alleged that the Party concerned had failed to comply with several provisions of the Convention. Specifically, the communication alleged non-compliance by the Party concerned with respect to three decisions: the decision to build a new nuclear power plant (NPP); the decision(s) regarding the location, technology, and other matters for the proposed construction of the NPP; and the adoption of Romania's Energy Strategy as a whole.

The first two decisions both addressed problems with a planned new NPP. A brief overview on the facts of the case shall be given: Articles in the press and statements of the Ministry of Economy, Commerce and Business Environment (Ministry of Economy) had informed the public about the exploratory studies commissioned by the Ministry regarding possible locations for a new NPP. Therefore, on 6 February 2009, the Communicant submitted a request to the Ministry of Economy to access information relating to the proposed NPP – mainly requesting the list of locations that were examined for suitability of the NPP, possible and preferred locations and copies of the official decision regarding the preferred locations. The Ministry did not respond to this request and the Communicant submitted a new request on 24 March 2009 – again, no response. In March 2009 the Communicant brought this matter to Court. The Bucharest Court ordered the Ministry to provide the requested information. But the court decision was appealed by the Ministry on grounds that the information was not “public information”. Eventually, the Ministry declassified the list of the 102 locations studied at the beginning of the project, but not the rest of the information. In the meantime, in March 2011, the Court of Appeal decided in favor of the Ministry.

In October 2009 another press statement was made announcing four possible locations for the proposed NPP at Somes River. The Communicant reacted to this and submitted a third request for access to information about these possible locations, about the quantity of the water that could be used as a cooling agent and about the capacity that the new NPP could have. The Ministry responded to this third request declaring that the information requested was not public and that no decision had yet been made regarding the NPP. The Ministry stated that data regarding a new NPP in Romania is secret and needs to be supplemented until a decision can be made. In 2009 the communicant also brought this matter to the court. The Bucharest court decided in favour of the communicants request; the Court of Appeal, however, ruled that the requested information was not final.

Regarding the third issue, Romania's Energy Strategy, the communication alleged (among other things) that by not providing information in English, it had discriminated against public not residing in the country and that the remedies available were not adequate and effective.

Decision

The Committee considered and evaluated all the allegations made by the Communicant; before introducing its final findings the most important remarks deserve to be mentioned. Regarding the failure to respond to the first two requests the Committee's opinion can quickly be told: the first two requests had been ignored. Authorities have to respond to requests of members of the public to access environmental information within one month after a request to information has been submitted.

Regarding the third request, on the other hand, the Committee stated that the authorities replied - but refused to grant access. Authorities may refuse only if this exemption is provided under national law and, if national law allows such actions, that these exemptions are to be interpreted restrictively. Additionally, the Convention only allows refusal when the disclosure may adversely affect the confidentiality of proceedings of a public authority. Such proceedings relate to concrete events and do not encompass all the actions of public authorities. While national legislation may provide for the possibility to consider actions as confidential, it cannot treat all the actions undertaken by public authorities in relation to selecting feasible locations for an NPP as confidential. The criteria in legislation for such exceptions should be as clear as possible, so as to reduce the discretionary power of authorities to select which proceedings should be confidential. Taking all these considerations into account, the Committee noted, that neither in this document nor in any other document submitted by the Party concerned the public interest served by the disclosure was mentioned, nor was there any balancing between interests for and against the disclosure. The judgement of the Court of Appeal which overturned the judgement of the Bucharest court also did not include any discussion in this respect except for stating that pre-decisional studies should not be disclosed until authorities decided that it's ready to be disclosed.

Furthermore, the Committee evaluated if review procedures were effective, fair and publicly accessible. Here it has to be stated that most of the allegations made by the communicant were not substantive or the Committee did not see itself in a position to make any findings; therefore the Party concerned did not fail to comply with Art 9(4).

Regarding the Energy Strategy the Committee stated that the Party concerned mostly acted in line with the Convention. The authorities did not discriminate against foreign members of the public in holding back translations and refusing to grant information in English. Art 3(9) cannot be interpreted as generally requiring the authorities to provide a translation of the information into any requested language. If, on the other hand, national law provides for translations to different official languages, then Art 3(9) implies that these translations must be handed out in a non-discriminatory way. In the present case, however, the Party concerned confirmed that at the time the public authorities had not held such a translation and the communicant did not provide evidence on the contrary. Not providing information in English cannot be considered discrimination in this case. But, lastly, the Committee found that participation in closed advisory groups cannot be considered as public participation meeting the requirements of the Convention. The draft 2007 Strategy was published on the Ministry websites, but the general public only had 11 days to get acquainted with the draft and submit comments.

Therefore, following mentioned reasons above, the Committee found that:

- (a) Since the authorities did not respond at all to two of the three information requests submitted by the communicant in relation to the decision-making process regarding the proposed construction of a new NPP, the Party concerned failed to comply with article 4(1), in conjunction with (2) and (7) of the Convention.
- (b) With respect to the communicant's third information request, by not ensuring that the requested information regarding the possible locations for the NPP was made available to the public, and by not adequately justifying its refusal to disclose the requested information under one of the grounds set out in article 4(4) of the Convention, taking into account the public interest served by disclosure, **the Party concerned failed to comply with article 4(1) and (4) of the Convention.**
- (c) By not providing sufficient time for the public to get acquainted with the draft 2007 Energy Strategy and to submit comments thereon, **the Party concerned failed to comply with article 7, in conjunction with article 6(3) of the Convention.**

To conclude, the Committee recommended that the Party concerned should take the necessary legislative, regulatory and administrative measures to ensure that public officials are under a legal and enforceable duty. Also the Party concerned should provide adequate information and training to public authorities about the above mentioned duties.

Insufficient Public Participation regarding the Temelín NPP

Body	ACCC
Case Number	ACCC/C/2012/71
Party / Member State	Czech Republic
Date of Findings	13 September 2016
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Article 6
Communicant / Complainant	Ms. Brigitte Artmann

Background

On 31 May 2012, the German communicant alleged that the Czech Republic had failed to comply with articles 3(9), 6 and 9 of the Aarhus Convention by not granting the members of the affected public in Germany sufficient opportunity to participate in the decision-making procedure regarding the Temelín NPP.

At that time, reactors 1 and 2 at the Temelín site were already operating. The decision-making procedure in question concerned the additional reactors 3 and 4, for which the EIA process was launched in 2008. In accordance with the Espoo Convention, Germany was involved in all stages of the transboundary EIA process.

The Party concerned noted that the decision-making process at the time of the communication was still in its initial phase, whereas the permission phase had not yet been reached.

For the permitting procedure on the Temelín NPP, the reference to the public concerned in Czech Republic ("affected territorial self-governing units") in the EIA Act was interpreted to include municipalities whose administrative territory includes an internal or external part of the emergency planning zone (approximately the area of a circle with a radius of 13 kilometres centred in the containment area of the first production unit of the Temelín NPP). In Germany, however, the public living in border districts was informed of the possibility to participate in the procedure. The information was available only on the official websites of the ministries and councils of the respective border districts and cities. The Czech Republic explained this by submitting that once the information was provided to the German authorities, it could not influence the manner in which they chose to inform the public.

In June 2012, an official hearing was held in the Czech town of Ceske Budejovice for Czech citizens and interested persons from neighboring countries. Also, informal discussions were organized in Vienna and Passau. The communicant stated that there was no proper notice for the public in Germany on the hearing in Ceske Budejovice. The public was given 30 days in August 2010, extended by a further 30 days in September, to comment on the EIA documentation of around 2,000 pages. The period to comment on the EIA expert report dated from 7 May until 18 June 2012. The official hearing thus was held 4 days after the period for written comments ended. It lasted from 10am until 3am the following morning. Apart from this fact, the Communicant complained that the total number of questions per participant was limited. Although she had submitted her remaining questions in writing after the hearing, she never received any answer from Czech side.

Apart from the issues regarding information on the public participation procedure, the Communicant also criticized that the Czech Republic did not take proper account of the public's input in the EIA procedure and had chosen a compartmentalized "salami-slicing" approach regarding the NPP and radioactive waste storage. Regarding article 9 she noted that there were no opportunities for physical persons to challenge decisions, act or omissions regarding the EIA procedure and that the public had no right to bring actions during the subsequent procedures on condition that they met the statutory requirements, e.g., they were affected owners of neighbouring plots.

Findings

As the entire decision-making procedure regarding the new reactors at Temelín had not been concluded, the Committee note that it could only assess the already completed EIA procedure. The ACCC also did not consider the allegations regarding article 3(8) and 9 arguing that the communicant did not provide sufficient evidence or case-law to substantiate these points.

Concerning the general application of article 6, the ACCC first noted that, also in line with the 2014 Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters (Maastricht Recommendations), the obligation to ensure that the requirements of this provision are met always rests with the Party of origin. It further recalled its finding in Case ACCC/C/20006/16 that “the requirement for the public to be informed in an ‘effective manner’ means that public authorities should seek to provide a means of informing the public which ensures that all those who potentially could be concerned have a reasonable chance to learn about proposed activities”. Neither the notification requirements in the Czech EIA Act nor the Ministry’s request to the German authorities had included a clear requirement to this effect.

The ACCC also stressed that in the case of decision-making on ultra-hazardous activities like an NPP, being activities invariably of wide public concern, particular attention must be taken at the stage of identifying the public concerned and selecting the means of notification in order to ensure that all those who potentially could be concerned have a reasonable chance to learn about the proposed activities and their possibilities to participate. Furthermore, for such an activity, members of the public may be affected or be likely to be affected by, or have an interest in, the environmental decision-making within the scope of the Convention even if the risk of an accident is very small. In this regard, the ACCC noted the rather inconsistent approach of the Party concerned to defining the public concerned, as, for domestic purposes it was confined to the public living within a radius of 13 kilometres, whereas in Germany it included the public in the districts of Bavaria, more than 100 kilometres away.

Concerning **notifications**, the ACCC considered that, in case of ultra-hazardous activities it might be insufficient to rely on the affected territorial self-governing units using locally specific ways of informing the public. Also, a notice on the Ministry’s web page would not in itself be enough in order to ensure effective notification, as it is not reasonable to expect members of the public to proactively check that website on a regular basis. It also referred to the Maastricht Recommendations, which provide that public notice should be placed also in “the newspaper(s) corresponding to the geographical scope of the potential effects of the proposed activity and which reaches the majority of the public who may be affected by or interested in the proposed activity”. The Committee thus concluded that the Czech law did not contain a sufficient guarantee that in the case of decision-making regarding activities having clearly more than local scope all those who potentially could be concerned, including the public concerned outside its territory, would indeed have a reasonable chance to learn about proposed activities and their possibilities to participate, which led to **non-compliance with article 6(2)**.

Regarding the very basic information about the hearing in Ceske Budejovice (only timing and venue), the ACCC found that, in order to adequately and effectively inform the public concerned of its opportunities to participate as required by **article 6(2)(d)(ii)**, the Czech Republic would be in **non-compliance** with the Convention **if this hearing were to remain the last possibility** for the public concerned in Germany to participate in the permitting procedure.

According to the ACCC, a period of 60 days to comment on the EIA documentation and 43 days to comment on the EIA expert report were **sufficient to meet the requirements of article 6(3)** and it would be unworkable if the Convention required Parties to entirely avoid organizing public participation procedures during other Parties’ holiday periods.

The timing and duration of the hearing the ACCC found that organising a hearing in such a manner was not acceptable as the public cannot be expected to participate effectively if its opportunity to be heard comes only after it has been already sitting in the hearing for more than a full working day. However, this shortcoming could as well be rectified at a later stage of the permitting-procedure and thus **did not lead to non-compliance with article 6(3)**.

The Committee noted that, according to the Maastricht Recommendations, if a particular tier of the decision-making process has no public participation, then the next stage that does have public participation should provide the opportunity for the public to also participate on the options decided at that earlier tier. Similarly, a multi-stage decision-making procedure that provides for public participation on certain options at an early stage but leaves other options to be considered at a later

stage without public participation would not be compatible with the Convention. It thus concluded **that if the permitting procedure were to continue and the public concerned was not provided with the opportunity to participate effectively in that stage, the Party concerned would be in non-compliance with article 6(4). Likewise, if the public authorities were provided with any further information relevant to the decision-making than that made available to the public concerned, that would amount to non-compliance with article 6(6).** It noted, however, that the time frame for submitting written comments should extend for a reasonable time beyond the date of any public hearing in order that the public concerned has the possibility to submit comments in the light of what it learns at the hearing.

The ACC considered limiting the number of questions as an acceptable means for organising a hearing as further questions could be submitted in line with article 4. In the present case, however, it was not able to estimate whether the communicant's questions were in form of requesting information.

As the communicant did not make an allegation under article 3(2), the ACCC did not make a finding regarding this provision and only expressed its concern that the Party concerned did not appear to take steps to make sure that the rules to be applied during the hearing were known and understood by the public concerned in advance.

The ACCC recommended the Party concerned to provide a legal framework to ensure that when selecting means of notifying the public under article 6(2), public authorities are required to select such means and to ensure effective notification of the public concerned, bearing in mind the nature of the proposed activity, and including, in the case of proposed activities with potential transboundary impacts, the public concerned outside the territory of the Party concerned. It also recommended to ensure that, when conducting transboundary procedures in cooperation with the authorities of affected countries, the competent public authorities make the necessary efforts to notify the affected public in an effective manner.

The MoP endorsed the Committees findings and recommendations on the present case in Decision VI/8e.

Impact and implementation

By the time of the 1st progress review to Decision VI/8e and the ACCC meeting in March 2019, the Czech republic could not report on any measures taken that public authorities are required to select such means of notification to ensure effective notification of the public concerned. On the contrary:

- The duty to publish the information about the EIA procedures also by other means, such as via newspapers and other media, was cancelled in 2015.
- Regarding transboundary notification, the Czech Republic continued to claim that Czech authorities cannot exercise their power on the territory of another Party.
- Regarding public participation in subsequent procedures, the Czech Republic asserted that the conditions needed for NGOs to participate in the subsequent decision-making procedures on the Temelín NPP were the same for both domestic and foreign NGOs, namely that the organization must be "a legal person of private law whose principal activity is not business (or other profit making activity) and whose activity set in its founding act is protection of the environment or public health." It must also have either been in existence for 3 years or be supported by at least 200 persons by their signatures. There was, however, no sufficient information on opportunities to participate for other members of the public concerned (apart from NGOs), inside and outside the territory of Czech Republic. Neither did the Czech Republic provide evidence to show at which of the subsequent stages in the multi-stage decision-making procedure for the NPP the public concerned will be entitled to participate.

Which steps will finally be taken by the Czech Republic in order to fulfil the requirements of the respective decision still is to be awaited.

Additional Reactors of the Mochovce NPP

Body	ACCC
Case Number	Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee
Party / Member State	ACCC/C/2013/89
Date of Findings	Slovakia
Relevant Legislation	9 June 2017
Communicant / Complainant	Aarhus Convention, Articles 4(4), 6(4), 9(2)

Background

The communication submitted on 10 June 2013 alleged non-compliance with the Convention's provisions on public participation and access to justice, specifically articles 3(1), 6 and 9(2)-(4) in the course of the decision-making on the extension of the Mochovce NPP.

On 14 August 2008, three permits were approved by the Nuclear Authority regarding the Mochovce NPP, including decision 246/2008 permitting the change of construction of Mochovce Units 3 and 4. In November 2008, Greenpeace Slovakia sought to appeal this decision on the ground that it was necessary to carry out an EIA, including public participation. The appeal of Greenpeace Slovakia was dismissed by the Nuclear Authority in April 2009 on the ground that Greenpeace Slovakia did not have standing in the proceedings. The Bratislava Regional Court confirmed this dismissal arguing that the permit did not deal with any activity subject to annex I and Greenpeace Slovakia did not have standing. On 27 June 2013, the Supreme Court annulled Nuclear Authority decision this second instance (appeal) decision and returned the case to the Nuclear Authority ordering to carry out and EIA and grant Greenpeace SK standing.

In August 2013, the Nuclear Authority restarted the proceeding and granted standing to the communicants. In fall 2013 a Preliminary Safety Analysis Report and a Basic Design of Mochovce Units 3 and 4 were open for inspection at Mochovce in Kalna nad Hronom municipality. A repeated appeal decision No. 291/2014 was issued in May 2014 as well as a decision excluding suspensive effect of the appeal filed by the communicants in 2008. In October 2014, the Constitutional Court found that the rights of Slovenské elektrárne, a.s., had been violated by the judgment of the Supreme Court issued in favour of Greenpeace, but confirmed rather than cancelled that judgment because the appeal decision had already been issued by the Nuclear Authority.

The Communicant complained that even though the Supreme Court had clarified that the Convention was applicable, "no legislative measures were taken to regulate this in general rules, in particular for cases where old permits are updated and no EIA was required" and that that the administrative appeal and court procedures took five years without any injunctive measures to halt the construction process.

Regarding access to information the communicant brought forward that the Slovak Nuclear Act significantly limited public access to nuclear-related information by stipulating that the Nuclear Authority may ban access to information if, in the opinion of that Authority, "its publication is likely to adversely affect public safety". In such cases the information is withheld as "sensitive information". In October and November 2013, the Nuclear Authority blacked out an important amount of the information in the Preliminary Safety Analysis Report and the Basic Design of the new Mochovce Units as sensitive information. Apart from Mochovce as the location for inspection of documents being difficult to reach from Bratislava, the communicant noted that the documentation was

voluminous and no electronic version of it was available to the public concerned, despite the fact that the authorities had an electronic copy thereof.²

The allegation of non-compliance with article 9(3) was argued with the fact that if no EIA was conducted, members of the public may derive standing only through the general provisions of the Administrative Code. Slovakia countered that in the present case, standing according to article 9(3) was denied only for the fact that the decision did not have an impact on the environment. Also, following the *Slovak Brown Bear Case*³, the Slovak Ministry of Justice would have issued a directive guiding the authorities in granting standing to the public concerned in environmental proceedings, including in proceedings under the Nuclear Act.

Lastly, the communicants alleged that the courts did not necessarily address requests by the public concerned for an injunction to be granted and, moreover, that there would be no clear legal requirement for courts to do so, namely that Nuclear Authority decision No. 761/2013 excluded the suspensive effect of the appeal.⁴

Decision

Regarding article 4(4) the ACCC noted that the Party concerned had not provided any evidence to show that its legal framework requires that the exemptions on disclosure in of the Nuclear Act and accompanying legislation are to be interpreted in a restrictive way, taking into account the public interest served by disclosure and whether the information relates to emissions into the environment.⁵ The Committee stressed that an approach where whole categories of environmental information are unconditionally declared as confidential and for which no release is possible is **incompatible with article 6(6), in conjunction with article 4(4)** and thus found Slovakia in non-compliance with the Convention to this regard.

The ACCC also noted that the Nuclear Authority refused access to the electronic version of the information because, among other things, the request filed by electronic mail was not accompanied by a certified electronic signature. The Committee found that requiring a certified electronic signature every time a request is filed by electronic mail would seriously limit access to information under article 4 and if that were the case the Party concerned would be in non-compliance with that provision. However, it did not have any evidence before it to establish whether this requirement is the standard practice of the authorities of the Party concerned when dealing with requests for access to information by electronic mail.

On article 9(2), the ACCC found that, as the Supreme Court took a decision annulling the contested Nuclear Authority decision, the communicants were granted standing in the proceedings, which did not indicate non-compliance with that provision.

Regarding article 9(3), the Committee noted that, in January 2015, an amendment to the Nuclear Act came into force whereby the requirement to participate in the EIA procedure in order to have standing was removed from the legislation. As the communicants acknowledged that neither they nor other NGOs had tried to get standing in proceedings under the Nuclear Act since this amendment, they could not sufficiently substantiate their allegation that the Party concerned was in non-compliance with article 9(3).

As no case law was provided to substantiate their allegation that courts systematically refuse applications for injunctive relief in cases related to the environment, the ACCC did not find Slovakia in non-compliance with Article 9(4) in this respect. However, it emphasized that it is implicit from the wording of that provision that in a review procedure within the scope of article 9 the courts are

² Note: The Committee refrained from considering this allegation further, as the communicants did not demonstrate that they actually ever made a clear request for the Party concerned to provide the documentation in an electronic format.

³ Case C-240/09, *Lesoochránárske Zoskupenie VLK v. Ministerstvo životného prostredia Slovenskej*, ECLI:EU:C:2011:125.

⁴ Note: This last allegation was finally not considered by the ACCC on the grounds that introducing a new allegation at the time of the hearing neither gives the Party concerned due time to prepare a considered response nor permits the Committee to explore the allegation fully in the presence of both parties.

⁵ It pointed out that the Nuclear Act required public authorities to take into account the public interest in *withholding* the information whereas the Convention requires authorities to do the opposite, i.e., to take into account the public interest in *disclosure*.

required to consider any application for injunctive relief, bearing in mind the requirement to provide fair and effective remedies.

As the communicants solely referred to the Mochovce NPP case, the ACCC did not see a lack of clear and consistent framework to implement the provisions of the Convention according to article 3(1).

It therefore concluded that Slovakia had failed to comply with article 4(4), and also article 6(6), in conjunction with article 4(4)

- by adopting an approach in the Directive on Sensitive Information whereby whole categories of nuclear-related environmental information are unconditionally declared as confidential and for which no release is possible and
- for failing to require that any grounds for refusal are interpreted in a restrictive way, taking into account the public interest served by disclosure and whether the information relates to emissions into the environment.

The MoP endorsed the ACCC's findings in Decision VI/8i and recommended that Slovakia take the necessary legislative, regulatory and administrative measures and practical arrangements to ensure that when providing access to nuclear-related information, any grounds for refusal under article 4(4) are interpreted in a restrictive way and taking into account the public interest served by disclosure and whether the information requested relates to emissions into the environment.

Impact and implementation

Based on Slovakia's first progress report of October 2018 the situation remained unchanged. Slovakia provided no evidence that it has taken any legislative, regulatory and administrative measures and practical arrangements to ensure the implementation of Decision VI/8i regarding the findings in the present case.

Even more, in June 2019, the communicants reported on legal amendments which led to an even wider interpretation of "sensitive information" according to the Nuclear Act as well as amendments restricting possibilities to appeal in environmental matters.

Actual steps to implement Decision VI/8i thus still need to be awaited.

Transnational Challenges regarding NPP Hinkley Point C

Body	Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee
Case Number	ACCC/C/2013/91
Party / Member State	UK
Date of Decision	19 June 2017
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Article 6(2)
Communicant / Complainant	German citizen Sylvia Kotting Uhl

Background

On 12th June 2013 the communicant submitted a communication to the ACCC. She alleged that UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland not only had failed to comply with article 6(2), (5) and (7) of the Convention but also the Convention's requirements of non-discrimination. The reasoning behind this allegation was, that the Party concerned *"did not provide the German public with opportunities to participate in a transboundary environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedure concerning the proposed construction of two third-generation nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point, known as Hinkley Point C."*

On 18th July 2011 the Party concerned had adopted its National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation (EN-6; United Kingdom, Department of Energy and Climate Change [London, The Stationery Office, 2011]). This Statement forms the Government's policy in regard to nuclear new build and identified relevant sites. Within this Statement indicated Hinkley Point, a coastal headland in Somerset, south-west England, as a suitable location for new nuclear power plants.

On 2nd December 2011 a registration period for the public to make presentations was announced. This period lasted 52 days. Altogether 1,197 persons registered as interested parties. On 18th September 2012, Austria requested to participate in the environmental impact assessment procedure of the Party concerned, invoking Article 3(7) of the Espoo convention. Austria stated that *"(...) there is no convincing evidence that severe accidents with major releases of radionuclides can be excluded with certainty (...) Consequently, in case of certain beyond-design-based accidents Austria may be significantly affected by impacts of the NPP (note: New Power Plant)"*.

The communicant argued that Art 6 of the Convention does not distinguish between participations for persons that live in the issuing country and persons of another country. Furthermore, she argued that if it was possible for Austria as party to the Aarhus Convention to request participation, members of the public concerned should have the same rights. If this was not granted, their rights would be dependent on the initiative of the government which would be incompatible with the concept of the Aarhus Convention interpreting the right to participate as an unconditional one.

At its forty-second meeting in Geneva September 2013, the Committee decided that the communication was admissible and the communication was forwarded to the Party concerned (which responded a few months after). One year later, in September 2014, the Committee held a hearing in its forty-sixth meeting with participation of both parties. After a multitude of questions and proceedings the Committee completed its draft findings and forwarded them to both Parties and the Committee before finalizing its findings on 19th June 2017.

Decision

The Committee found, that:

- (a) The UK failed to comply with Art 6(2) of the Convention regarding the decision-making in Hinkley Point C by not ensuring that the public concerned in Germany had a reasonable chance to learn about the proposed activity and the opportunities for the public to participate.
- (b) Furthermore, the UK failed to provide a clear requirement in its legal framework to ensure that public authorities are bound to select such means which ensure that all those who potentially could be concerned have a reasonable chance to learn about the proposed activity.

The Committee recommended the Party concerned to put in place a legal framework to ensure the effective notification of the public concerned – inside and outside the Party’s territory – always keeping in mind the nature of the proposed activity and the potential effects in case of an accident. When identifying the public concerned by the environmental decision-making on ultra-hazardous activities, such as NPPs, the precautionary principle must be applied.

The MoP endorsed the findings of the Committee in Decision VI/8k at its 6th session. It recommended to ensure that, when selecting the means for notifying the public under article 6(2), public authorities are required to select such means as will ensure effective notification of the public concerned in the territory outside of the Party concerned, bearing in mind the nature of the proposed activity, and the potential for transboundary impacts. When identifying who is the public concerned by the environmental decision-making on ultra-hazardous activities, such as nuclear power plants, the UK should ensure that public authorities apply the precautionary principle and consider the potential extent of the effects if an accident would indeed occur, even if the risk of an accident is very small.

Impact

In its first progress report 2018, the Party reported that a “Planning Advice Note 12” had been introduced to ensure that “all Espoo and Aarhus states” would be informed of applications for nuclear power stations. This procedure had already been applied regarding the planned Wylfa Newydd NPP. The Committee asked the Party to report if public authorities are legally required to comply with this Advice Note and whether the failure to do so could be challenged. The ACCC further noted that the requirements of Article 6 apply to all activities that have potential for transboundary impacts, not limited to “Espoo and Aarhus States”.

The Committee also stressed that is not sufficient to grant public access depending on the question whether the government on the state where a member of the public lives exercises its rights under the Convention. The Committee asked the Party to report on further steps that were taken to ensure that the public concerned was informed in an adequate and effective manner. In this respect it also noted that this includes not only the mediums through which the notice is to be conveyed, but also the language(s) in which this is done.

Transboundary EIA on NPP Hinkley Point C in Germany

Body	ACCC
Case Number	ACCC/C/2013/92
Party / Member State	Germany
Date of Findings	18 January 2017
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Articles 3, 4, 6
Communicant / Complainant	Ms. Brigitte Artmann

Background

The communicant alleged in her communication of 24 June 2013 that Germany had failed to comply with the Aarhus Convention by not providing the public in Germany the opportunity to participate on the transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure regarding the construction of two new nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point C, UK. The communicant alleged inter alia that Germany failed to identify the public in Germany as being among the public concerned.

Regarding article 3(1), the communicant alleged that Germany was in breach of the Convention by failing to take the “necessary measures” and “proper enforcement measures” required by that provision. For failing to “facilitate participation” as required in article 3(2) the communicant brought up another argument for non-compliance with the Convention. The communicant also alleged that the public in Germany was not identified by the relevant authorities of the United Kingdom and the Party concerned as being among the public concerned in the case of a “beyond design base accident” and was therefore discriminated against.

In February 2013, the communicant had sent an email to the German Federal Minister for Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety requesting that the public of the Party concerned be given the opportunity to participate in an environmental impact assessment on Hinkley Point C. In March 2013, Germany informed the EIC on a lack of transboundary notification regarding the planned construction of NPP Hinkley Point C by the United Kingdom.⁶ In December 2019, following the recommendations of the EIC, the UK wrote to Germany to ask whether the notification was still useful at the current stage of the development of Hinkley Point C. By letter of 9 March 2017, Germany replied, noting the interest of the German public in nuclear plants in the vicinity of Germany and stating that it considered that notification under the Espoo Convention would still be useful in order to provide an opportunity for the authorities and the public of other Parties to comment on the project.

Germany, inter alia, argued that there could be no violation of the Aarhus Convention by failure to demand a transboundary EIA process, if neither the Party of origin nor the potentially affected Party deem that a specific case requires the implementation of a transboundary EIA. Rather, the communicant’s claims were governed by the Espoo Convention and that therefore the Espoo Convention would take precedence over the Aarhus Convention.

⁶ See Case EIA/IC/CI/5.

Findings

Regarding non-compliance with article 6, the ACCC recalled its findings on communication ACCC/C/2012/71 (*Czechia*) in which it stressed that “whether in a domestic or transboundary context, the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the public participation procedure complies with the requirements of article 6 lies with the competent authorities of the Party of origin”. As the decision on Hinkley Point C was to be taken by the UK and there was no transboundary procedure under the Espoo Convention or EIA Directive within which the German authorities were required to carry out tasks under a joint responsibility. The Committee thus found that Germany did not fail to comply with article 6.

Regarding a failure by Germany to comply with article 3(1), the Committee found that the communicant had not provided sufficient evidence that Germany had failed to take the “necessary measures” and “proper enforcement measures” required.

The ACCC did not find that the fact that the public concerned in Austria was entitled to participate in a decision-making procedure carried out by the UK amounted to discrimination by Germany.

Regarding article 3(2) the Committee first noted that there is nothing in the wording of the Convention to imply that the obligation to “endeavour to ensure that officials assist and provide guidance to the public ... in facilitating participation in decision-making” applies only with respect to the authorities competent to take a decision under articles 6, 7 or 8 of the Convention. Likewise, there is nothing in its wording to imply that the obligation applies only with respect to decision-making procedures inside the Party concerned. Yet, the provision, according to the ACCC, “should not be interpreted as requiring a Party to necessarily always use all of the rights and competences that it has under international or national law with respect to a decision-making procedure in another country”. However, the Convention requires a level of effort appropriate to the actions open to it in the particular context.

The Committee considered that, in the case of a formal notification from another country, when deciding whether to enter into a transboundary procedure under applicable international or EU regimes, a Party to the Aarhus Convention must take into account a strong interest of its own public in the outcome of the decision-making subject to the EIA procedure – even without a clear request from its public, when deciding whether to enter into the transboundary procedure. However, in the present case, Germany was not notified by the UK about the decision-making prior to the grant of development consent. Moreover, it was requested by the communicant to initiate a transboundary procedure only at the very end of February 2013. However, the ACCC noted that refusal by Germany of the communicant’s request should have clearly demonstrated that due account had been taken of her concerns and not only of the views of the authorities. Also, at a minimum, it should have provided the links to where the relevant information and contact details concerning the national public participation procedure could be found on the UK website.

Finally, the ACCC referred to the obligation in article 3(2) is to “endeavour to ensure” rather than “to ensure”, and considered in particular the awareness of Germany that the decision on the Hinkley Point C NPP was required to be taken in less than three weeks after the communicant had addressed the Party concerned via e-mail. The Committee also noted that Germany had subsequently informed the UK that it wished to be notified for the purposes of a transboundary EIA procedure under the Espoo Convention.

The Committee therefore did **not find the Party concerned to be in non-compliance with the Convention.**

Note: In its findings the ACCC had revised his draft findings of 18 November 2016, according to which “by not undertaking any efforts to facilitate the participation of the German public in the decision-making procedure regarding Hinkley Point C in the face of a clear request from its public to do so, the Party concerned failed to comply with article 3, paragraph 2 of the Convention”.

Inter alia it had argued that the right to participate in decision-making would be granted without discrimination as to citizenship, nationality or domicile and is related to environmental impacts of activities subject to the Convention. Such impact may occur across national borders. Thus, the obligation to “assist and provide guidance to the public...in facilitating participation in decision-making” would also apply to decision-making procedures outside Germany where German authorities are not competent to take decisions. The ACCC had stressed that, in the case of decision-

making on ultra-hazardous activities like a NPP, the obligation to take efforts to facilitate the public's participation in decision-making must be given particular weight.

The Committee had found that some efforts should have been undertaken by Germany to at least inquire with the UK what could be done to facilitate the participation of the German public. "If, as a result of those efforts, it ultimately became clear that nothing further to facilitate the participation of the German public could be done, the Party concerned's refusal of Ms. Artmann's request should have been well reasoned and clearly demonstrated that due account had been taken of her concerns and not only of the views of the authorities."

For its draft findings, the ACCC had also argued that the interest of the German public in decision-making regarding construction of NPPs had been well-known to the German authorities.

Harassment of Nuclear Activists in Belarus

Body	ACCC
Case Number	ACCC/C/2014/102
Party / Member State	Belarus
Date of Findings	18 June 2017
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Article 3 (8)
Communicant / Complainant	Ecohome

Background

In its communication of 24 April 2014, Ecohome alleged Belarus' failure to comply with its obligations under article 3(8) of the Convention. The allegations referred to different incidents involving Mr. Ozharovskiy, a Russian anti-nuclear activist, Ms. Novikova, a well-known anti-nuclear activist in Belarus, Ms. Sukhiy, the chair of the board of the communicant, Mr. Matskevich, a well-known human rights activist in Belarus as well as XX, another environmental activist to remain anonymous.

The reported incidents of 2009 involved search and seizure, detention or arrest of Mr. Ozharovskiy. Regarding these incidents, the Committee noted that they were already brought before the Committee in the context of communication ACCC/C/2009/44. In its findings on that communication, the Committee had held that, on the basis of the information provided, it could not assess with sufficient certainty what happened exactly and therefore refrained from making a finding on this issue. Therefore, it chose not to re-examine the same allegation again.

The Committee also chose not to evaluate the incidents referring to the anonymous "XX" involving, inter alia, search and detention in the year 2009 as well as search, seizure and penalties in 2012. While not ruling out that there may be cases of alleged non-compliance with article 3(8), where a Party concerned would be able to adequately respond to the allegations concerning its compliance without knowing the identity of the person concerned, it considered that this is not so in the present case.

One of the two remaining incidents evaluated by the Committee took place in July 2012: Mr. Ozharovskiy and Ms. Novikova were arrested in Minsk, for committing a "public order violation by using obscene language on the street". Mr. Ozharovskiy was held in detention for 10 days and given a 10-year ban from entering Belarus. Ms. Novikova was held in detention for five days despite poor health after a serious illness and was allegedly denied access to her essential post-cancer medication during some of the period of her detention. Ms. Sukhiy and Mr. Matskevich were also arrested for committing a "public order violation by using obscene language on the street". Mr. Matskevich was held in detention for five days. Ms. Sukhiy was fined Rbl 1.5 million (approximately €75). Mr. Ozharovskiy and Ms. Novikova denied that they were using obscene language and stated that they were instead on their way to the Russian Embassy to present a petition concerning the proposed construction of the Ostrovets nuclear power plant. Likewise, Ms. Sukhiy and Mr. Matskevich denied that they were using obscene language on the street. Ms. Sukhiy stated that, after learning of the arrests of Mr. Ozharovskiy and Ms. Novikova forty minutes earlier, she was on her way to the Russian Embassy to present the petition in their place. Mr. Matskevich stated that he was on his way to provide legal assistance to Mr. Ozharovskiy and Ms. Novikova following their arrest.

The second chain of incidents occurred in relation to the annual Chernobyl Way, conducted on the anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 2013: Ms. Sukhiy was stopped for a "documents check" on the street outside her apartment shortly before the start of the Chernobyl Way 2013 street action and detained until it was over. She was responsible for bringing posters and flags, etc., for the event. Ms. Novikova was blocked in Ms. Sukhiy's apartment due to the presence of police outside the apartment building for several hours until the Chernobyl Way 2013 street action was over. She was one of official organizers named in the application for the permit for the action.

Decision

The Committee first set out that in order to demonstrate a breach of article 3(8), the following four elements must be established,

- One or more members of the public have exercised their rights in conformity with the provisions of the Convention;
- The member of the public or those members of the public have been penalized, persecuted or harassed;
- The penalization, persecution or harassment was related to the member(s) of the public's exercise of their rights under the Convention (*Note: The Committee explained that the communicant must first establish a prima facie case that members of the public were penalized, persecuted or harassed because they sought to exercise their rights under the Convention. The burden of proof then moves to the Party concerned to show, on the balance of probabilities, that the penalization, persecution or harassment was entirely unrelated to the fact that those persons sought to exercise their rights under the Convention.*);
- The Party concerned has not taken the necessary measures to fully redress any penalization, persecution or harassment that did occur.

Regarding the arrests for "using obscene language in the street" the Committee noted that a petition against a proposed activity that may have a significant environmental impact, such as a nuclear power plant, is a legitimate exercise of the public's right to participate in decision-making as recognized in the Convention. Likewise, a member of the public who provides legal assistance to persons seeking to exercise their rights in conformity with the provisions of the Convention is thereby taking part in these persons' exercise of their rights and is consequently entitled to protection according to article 3(8). Given that Belarus did not dispute that the activists were seeking to deliver the petition to the Russian Embassy, the Committee considered it implausible that all four persons would risk the successful delivery of the petition by, within 40 minutes of each other, using "obscene language on the street". As the Party concerned stated that it "regards this as a politicized issue, since handing over a petition is a political act, the Committee concluded that it failed to demonstrate that the above arrests for "using brutal language on the street" were unrelated to the delivery of the petition. The committee therefore concluded that the described incidents led to a non-compliance of Belarus with article 3(8).

Likewise, regarding the events during the Chernobyl Way 2013, the Committee pointed out that an authorized street action concerning an activity covered by the Convention, such as nuclear energy, constitutes a means through which the public can raise the awareness of public authorities and the wider public regarding their concerns about the potential environmental impacts of nuclear energy. Due to a lack of evidence to establish that Ms. Novikova was definitely present in Ms. Sukhiy's apartment at the relevant time, the Committee considered not to have sufficient evidence before it to make a finding with respect to this allegation. However, it did consider the allegations regarding the document check of Ms. Sukhiy: Although, the Party concerned stated that it had received reports of a group of 15 people consuming alcohol and engaging in disorderly conduct in the vicinity of Ms. Sukhiy's apartment and, during the check of the information received, Ms. Sukhiy and three other persons were subject to a documents check, it did not provide any explanation as to why the documents check needed to last for almost three hours, i.e., until just before the scheduled end of the Chernobyl Way 2013 event. Therefore the Committee concluded that the prolonged documents check of Ms. Sukhiy on 26 April 2013, which prevented her participation in the Chernobyl Way 2013 street action, constituted harassment, penalization and persecution in non-compliance with article 3(8).

The Committee recommended the Party to

- (a) Take the necessary legislative, regulatory, administrative, institutional, practical or other measures to ensure that members of the public exercising their rights in conformity with the provisions of the Convention are not penalized, persecuted or harassed for their involvement;
- (b) Disseminate the Committee's findings and recommendations to senior officials in the police, security forces, judiciary and to other relevant authorities, for their information and action, together with a request for them to disseminate the findings to all relevant officials in order to raise awareness of their obligation to ensure compliance with article 3(8);
- (c) Deliver appropriate training and information programmes on human rights law relevant to article 3(8) for police, security forces and the judiciary to ensure that members of the police and security forces do not exercise their powers in a manner, and identity checks and

arrests for alleged public order violations are not utilized in a way, that would restrict members of the public from legitimately exercising their rights to participate in decision-making;

- (d) Report to the Committee on an annual basis on all measures taken to fulfil the measures above.

In Decision VI/8c, the MoP at its 6th session welcomed the willingness of Belarus to accept these recommendations and requested the Party to report on the measures taken to implement them.

In its first progress review on the implementation of Decision VI/8c, the Committee noted that the entry ban on Mr. Ozharovskiy and the court decisions convicting Ms. Novikova, Ms. Sukhiy and Mr. Matskevich of administrative offences have not been revoked, which leads to ongoing penalization, prosecution and harassment within the meaning of article 3(8). The recommendations on communication ACCC/C/2014/102 and decision VI/8c had been disseminated to the ministries and relevant institutions. The Committee stressed, however, the requirement to disseminate the Committee's findings and recommendations to "senior officials in the police, security forces, judiciary and to other relevant authorities" not merely for their information, but also for their action. Accordingly, dissemination of the findings and recommendations alone, without a request for further action, would not meet the requirements of Decision VI/8b. While training programmes and training materials for law enforcement officials had been elaborated, they were not yet actually delivered in practice to law enforcement officials (police) nor to security forces or the judiciary.

In its progress review, the Committee furthermore expressed its concerns that of thirty-five requests to hold public meetings, pickets and a demonstration received by the Brest City Executive Committee during 2018, only one application to hold a public meeting was approved.

Extension of Operating Time at Borssele

Body	ACCC
Case Number	ACCC/C/2014/104
Party / Member State	Netherlands
Date of Findings	21 January 2019
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Article 6
Communicant / Complainant	Stichting Greenpeace Netherlands

Background

The communicant alleged in its communication of 6 May 2014 a failure to comply with article 6 of the Convention with regard to extending the operating time for the NPP Borssele. The original operating license issued in 1973 for the power plant had included a safety report based on a design lifetime of 40 years. In 1997, a restriction of the operational period until 2004 was entered into the operating license according to an agreement of 1994 between the Party concerned and the electricity producers' cooperative. As a reaction to court proceedings, the Government announced in 2002 that the plant would close in 2013 instead.

In 2006 the Government concluded an agreement with the operator to continue the operating period of the NPP Borssele until 31 December 2033 at the maximum followed by an amendment of the Nuclear Energy Act in 2010 according to which the licenses for the NPP would be revoked with effect from 31 December 2033. Since 1973, the operating license for Borssele had been amended several times, each time with an EIA and public participation. Conducted safety reviews involved public participation. In 2012, the Minister of Economic Affairs announced the preliminary decision to grant the extension of the design lifetime stating that not EIA would be necessary, because the extension did not concern an extension or modification of the design. Relevant documents were available for inspection for a period of six weeks and an evening information session was held in a town near Borssele. In 2013, the decision on the extension of the operating period was available for public perusal and interested parties could lodge an appeal. According to the communicant, the public consultation was limited to the issue of technical safety, excluding issues relating to the potential impact on the environment and that neither the agreement of 2006 nor the amendment of the Nuclear Energy Act in 2010 were subject to public participation procedures.

The Netherlands requested the ACCC to differ its consideration in the light of the ongoing parallel investigation of the EIC.

Decision

First, the ACCC stated that the present case concerned claims under the Aarhus Convention which are independent of whether a transboundary EIA was required under the Espoo Convention.

On the case itself, the ACCC first noted that neither the communicant nor the Party concerned excluded the possibility that article 6(10) could potentially apply to the Borssele license amendment. It disagreed with the position of the Netherlands that the fact that the 1973 license was for an "indefinite" period means that the 2013 license amendment extending the design lifetime until 2033 was not a change in the plant's operating conditions and stated that the permitted duration of an activity is clearly an operating condition. Therefore, the ACCC did not find it necessary to consider the applicability of article 6(1) (a).

The ACCC explained that the applicability of article 6(10) led to the requirement to apply the provisions of article 6(2)-(9) *mutatis mutandis*, i.e. "with the necessary changes", and *where appropriate*. This, however, does not mean that a Party has complete discretion to determine whether or not it was appropriate to provide for public participation. Plus, the discretion as to the "appropri-

ateness” of the application of the provisions of article 6 must be considered to be even more limited if the update in the operating conditions might itself have a significant effect on the environment. The ACCC thus considered that, except in cases where a change to the permitted duration is for a minimal time and obviously would have insignificant or no effects on the environment, it is appropriate for extensions of duration to be subject to the provisions of article 6. The Committee accordingly concluded that it was required to apply the provisions of article 6(2)-(9).

Regarding the applicability of article 6(4), the ACCC recalled its findings in case ACCC/C/2007/22 (France) that this implies that when public participation is provided for, the authority must be neither formally nor informally prevented from fully turning down an application on substantive or procedural grounds. The agreement of 2006, however, created an enforceable contractual obligation on the public authorities not to interfere with the plant’s operation until 2033. Even if no compensation would be payable if the plant was closed before 2033 for not complying with the applicable safety requirements, the possibility for the competent authorities to refuse to grant the 2013 licence amendment solely on the grounds of nuclear safety does not equate to all options being open and the duration of the NPP until 2033 was already set prior to the 2012 public participation procedure. The ACCC thus concluded that, by not having at any stage provided for public participation, meeting the requirements of article 6, where all options were open, in regard to setting the end date for the operation of Borssele NPP, the Netherlands had **failed to comply with article 6(4), in conjunction with article 6(10)**.

Regarding article 6(6), the ACCC noted that although an analysis on the consequences of ending or continuing the operation of the Borssele plant after 2013 would be highly relevant to any decision-making to grant a lifetime extension of that plant beyond 2013 it is not necessary to give the public concerned access to all available information relevant to a decision-making procedure carried out. Regarding article 6(8), the ACCC commended the format used in the 2013 decision to summarize, group and respond to the comments received from the public and considered that it may serve as a useful example on how to deal with comments received from the public in the text of a decision subject to article 6.

Lack of Participation and Access to Justice at Temelín?

Body	ACCC
Case Number	ACCC/C/2013/106
Party / Member State	Czech Republic
Date of Draft Findings	28 August 2019
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, articles 6, 9
Communicant / Complainant	V havarijní zóně jaderné elektrárny Temelín

Background

The communication submitted on 26 November 2013 alleged the failure by the Czech Republic to comply with its obligations under articles 6(3) and (8), and 9(2)-(4).

The communication inter alia referred to the Czech EIA Act, which was amended in 2015. Prior to this amendment, EIA procedures ended with a non-binding EIA opinion. Since then, EIA procedures end with the adoption of a binding EIA statement. The 2015 EIA Act also regulates “subsequent procedures” as procedures in which, pursuant to special regulation, a decision is to be issued which permits the location and implementation of a project under consideration by the 2015 EIA Act. Annexes 5 and 6 of the 2015 EIA Act state that the EIA statement must include a “settlement” of the comments received on the notification and on the expert report.

In 2008, the Communicant had participated in the planning permitting procedure for the construction of a spent nuclear storage facility, submitting a number of comments and objections. On 14 April 2008, the competent authority granted the planning permit for the facility. The communicant sought administrative review but its administrative appeal was dismissed on 18 July 2008. The Communicant challenged this dismissal in court and requested suspensive effect which was refused. On 27 October 2010, the Municipal Court in Prague agreed that the communicant’s objections had not been dealt with by the appellate authority and remitted the case for another decision. At that time however, the building permit had already been issued on and development of the facility had commenced.

The Communicant had also brought a legal challenge demanding that its comments be taken into consideration in the subsequent building permit procedure which was rejected by the Municipal Court of Prague on 11 May 2010 as well as Supreme Administrative Court on 14 January 2013 on the grounds that the planning permit procedure is the only procedure under the Building Act in which the association had standing to participate.

The Communicant challenged the EIA opinion of the Ministry of Environment with respect to the construction of blocks 3 and 4 of the Temelín NPP. Its challenge was rejected by the Municipal Court of Prague on the grounds that the opinion did not affect the communicant’s legal interests. This ruling was upheld by the Supreme Administrative Court on 4 June 2013.

In a judgment of 19 August 2014, the Supreme Administrative Court held that unincorporated associations whose main role was to protect nature and landscapes were entitled to participate in building permit procedures.

Under the 2015 EIA Act, planning, building and change in construction procedures will involve decisions issued on the basis of a binding EIA statement and are hence subsequent procedures governed by that Act. The Communicant argued that the 2015 EIA Act did not give a definite answer on the question of whether procedures under the 1997 Atomic Act were considered as a subsequent procedure. The Party concerned stated that, in the context of the present communication, the relevant subsequent procedures were the planning and building procedures under the Building Act, the procedure for the placement of a nuclear plant, the procedure on the construction of a nuclear plant and the procedure for granting the nuclear power plant operating permits pursuant to

the 1997 Atomic Act. It asserted that all of these procedures meet the definition of subsequent procedures as defined in the 2015 EIA Act and accordingly the 2015 EIA Act's provisions on public participation apply to all of them. By email of 21 October 2016, however, observer OEKOBÜERO stated that a pending amendment of the 2015 EIA Act would exhaustively list subsequent procedures and that procedures under the 1997 Atomic Act were not on the list.

The Communicant claimed that the Czech Republic was in breach of article 6(8) by failing to ensure that in decision-making on NPPs due account is taken of the outcome of the public participation. It contended that the public concerned is excluded from participation in the building permit procedure and thus could not exercise its rights. The communicant also submitted that, while anyone could participate during the EIA procedure, no final decision was issued by the assessing authority which reflected the comments or suggestions of the public.

Regarding article 9(2), the communicant submitted that under the Code of Administrative Justice, for a person to have legal standing to file a challenge, the person must either have a claim that its rights have been curtailed by an administrative authority's decision establishing, altering or abolishing rights or obligations, or a claim that its rights have been curtailed by an administrative authority's actions to such an extent that it could result in the adoption of an unlawful decision. In practice, access to justice, in most cases, would be restricted to persons that have already participated in the previous related administrative procedure in the matter. The Czech Republic countered inter alia, that article 9(2) would not be "directly executable", arguing that Parties would have an obligation to ensure "a judicial or other independent and impartial review of substantive or procedural legality" and that standing requirements had to be determined in accordance with national law and with the objective of wide access to justice.

The communicant also claimed that the Czech Republic systematically and consistently prevented members of the public concerned from access to court review of the most significant administrative procedures through which decisions are adopted on crucial issues of approval for the commissioning of nuclear facilities or the construction of storage of spent nuclear fuel. The Czech Republic submitted that, for the same reasons as article 9(2), article 9(3) would not be "directly executable".

The communicant further submitted that the law of the Party concerned is in conflict with article 9(4) because court proceedings take a long time, frequently lasting for more than 1 or 2 years before a court would even order a trial and because there were no statutory deadlines within which courts must decide a case. Furthermore, filing an action against a decision adopted by the administrative authorities would not have suspensive effect under the Administrative Procedure Code.

Decision

The Committee found that a number of the Communicant's allegations are not substantively different from those examined regarding communication ACCC/2010/50. It thus stated that it will accordingly examine any further information received from the communicant regarding those points in the context of its follow-up on Decision VI/8e. In line with its practice, the Committee did not examine the compliance of legislative drafts not yet adopted, such as the draft amendments to the Building Act or to the 2015 EIA Act.

The Committee noted the statement of the Party concerned that the regulation in the 2015 EIA Act of public participation in subsequent procedures takes precedence over the regulation of public participation in the legislation under which these procedures are conducted. As it is already examining the issue of whether procedures under the Atomic Act are treated as subsequent procedures for the purposes of the 2015 EIA Act in the context of its review of Decision VI/8e, the ACCC did not examine OEKOBÜERO' claim concerning the pending amendment of the 2015 EIA Act.

The Communicant had presented cases to prove the restriction of public participation in practice. But as these all referred to the legal situation before the adoption of the 2015 EIA Act, the ACCC found that the allegations regarding article 6(1) and (3) were not substantiated.

According to the ACCC, the Communicant did not provide any evidence that comments would continue to be rejected for formal reasons despite the 2015 EIA Act, the Committee could not conclude in the abstract that the system instituted through the 2015 EIA Act would lead to such a result. Also regarding other allegations concerning article 6(8), the Committee found that the communicant did not substantiate its allegations sufficiently.

As the Czech Republic had stated that, while it is not immediately possible to challenge the binding EIA statement itself, the EIA statement are fully reviewable within an appeal against any subsequent decision, the Committee considered that there is nothing in the Convention to prevent Parties from establishing such a system as long as all relevant claims can still be brought when challenging the subsequent decision and that adequate, effective and timely remedies are available.

Since the Communicant had not provided any examples of court decisions (issued after the entry into force of the 2015 EIA Act) in which the public concerned have been denied the possibility to challenge a substantive defect in a permitting procedure within the scope of article 6, the Committee found the allegation to this regard as well to be unsubstantiated.

Regarding article 9(3), the ACCC concluded that the Communicant had not identified any provisions of national law relating to the environment which it claims were contravened but could not be challenged through administrative or judicial procedures.

Regarding article 9(4), the ACCC noted that the Convention does not necessarily require Parties to set out in law specific timeframes within which the courts must decide cases. Thus, the Committee does not find the Party concerned to be in non-compliance with article 9(4) for failing to set statutory deadlines within which the courts must decide a case. It further noted it does not consider automatic suspensive effect to be necessarily required – “although it can be a very useful mechanism through which to prevent environmental damage”. Neither had the communicant provided evidence that the courts of the Party concerned are applying the provisions of the 2015 EIA Act in a manner that denies injunctive relief in cases where the execution of the challenged planning permit may cause environmental damage or that it often takes 1-2 years before a court schedules a hearing in an administrative proceeding.

Hence, the Committee in its draft findings did not find the Czech Republic to be in non-compliance with article 6 or 9 in the circumstances of the present case.

Lifetime Extension of Nuclear Reactor Tihange I

Body	ACCC
Case Number	ACCC/C/2017/145
Party / Member State	Belgium
Date of Decision	21 September 2017
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, article 6
Communicant / Complainant	Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union in Germany (NABU)

Background

On 11 March 2017, a German local branch of the NGO NABU submitted a communication alleging non-compliance with article 6 of the Convention in connection with the lifetime extension of the Tihange I nuclear reactor. The communicant alleged that the decision for lifetime extension of the NPP Tihange was taken without public participation and without a national or transboundary EIA procedure. The reactor Tihange I was originally planned to cease operations in 2015 at latest. Meanwhile Belgium decided to prolong its operating time until 2025.

According to the communicant there was neither a clear publication in Germany about the decision and the assessment procedure, nor a notification of Germany or the German public under the obligations of the Espoo Convention. The German public was only informed by regional German media. Due to a lack of official information, the communicant was not able to name the date when the decision by Belgium to extend the lifetime of Tihange I until 2025 taken. As far as the communicant was informed, neither an EIA (national or transborder) nor a consultation of the public, as required under Belgian, European and international law, were carried out.

The communicant further stated, that it did not have no access to Belgian Courts. Greenpeace Belgium filed a civil lawsuit against the prolongation of Tihange I and Doel I and II. The communicant, however, could not provide further details on the matter. The communicant also sent a copy of its communication to the EIC.

Decision

At its 58th meeting, the ACCC considered the preliminary admissibility of the communication as well as the additional information provided on 17 August 2017. It finally determined the communication to be inadmissible under paragraph 20(d) in conjunction with paragraph 19 of the annex to decision I/7 on compliance, on the ground that the communication was not supported by sufficient corroborating information. Specifically, the ACCC considered that neither the communication itself nor the additional information provided sufficient corroborating information to enable the ACCC to properly examine the allegations made in the communication.

Storage for Radioactive Waste at Almaraz

Body	ACCC
Case Number	ACCC/C/2017/152
Party / Member State	Spain
Date of Decision	12 March 2018
Relevant Legislation	Aarhus Convention, Article 6
Communicant / Complainant	Pessoas – Animais – Natureza (PAN)

Background

The communication submitted on 20 January 2017 by a Portuguese NGO alleged a failure of Spain to comply with the provisions of the Convention regarding a temporary storage for radioactive waste in Almaraz.

Reactor I of the Almaraz NPP was in operation since 1981, reactor II is in operation since 1983. The Communicant reported on different incidents that happened since the 80's. In the year 2020, the Almaraz Nuclear Power Plant will reach the deadline of its operating life license, which can then be extended until 2030. For that license extension to take place there would be a previous need to build an individual temporary storage (ATI) for radioactive waste. According to the Communicant, Spain had internally decided to build a temporary deposit for nuclear waste 100km from the border of Portugal without any notification or other sign for public participation.

In a communication of August 2017, the Communicant had also complained about the lack of public participation regarding the lifetime extension of the Spanish NPP Santa Maria de Garoña.

In February 2018, the ACCC asked the Communicant to resubmit the communication using required format and further elaborating various points and the communicant submitted further information.

It explained that the ATI, located in the premises of the nuclear station of Almaraz, was currently being constructed as the permit was already validated by the Minister of Energy after the Portuguese Environmentalist Agency (APA) had stated that it complies with the ATI requirements.

The Spanish government had only carried out a national EIA, not taking into account any public participation from Portugal. Portuguese authorities only had access to the documentation of the ATI following political pressure, but no transboundary EIA was conducted, nor was the Portuguese public invited to participate in the national Spanish EIA. Due to the lack of knowledge and guidance regarding the Spanish system and not having had responses from the Spanish side, neither the communicant, nor any other Portuguese organization known of had sought to challenge the absence of Portuguese public participation in the permitting of the ATI before Spanish courts.

The ATI was intended for the storage of nuclear waste for more than 10 years. Another concern expressed by the Communicant was that it might also be the basis for the construction of a larger nuclear depository in the form of a centralized storage where radioactive waste from all of Spain could be stored for an even longer period of time.

Regarding the LTE of the NPP Santa Maria de Garoña, Spain finally had not authorized the renewal of the exploitation license of the plant.

Note: A case regarding the Almaraz permitting procedure is currently also pending before the Espoo Implementation Committee (EIA/IC/INFO/22).

The Espoo case regarding the NPP Santa Maria de Garoña (EIA/IC/INFO/26) was closed for the Spanish Government decided to cease operations.

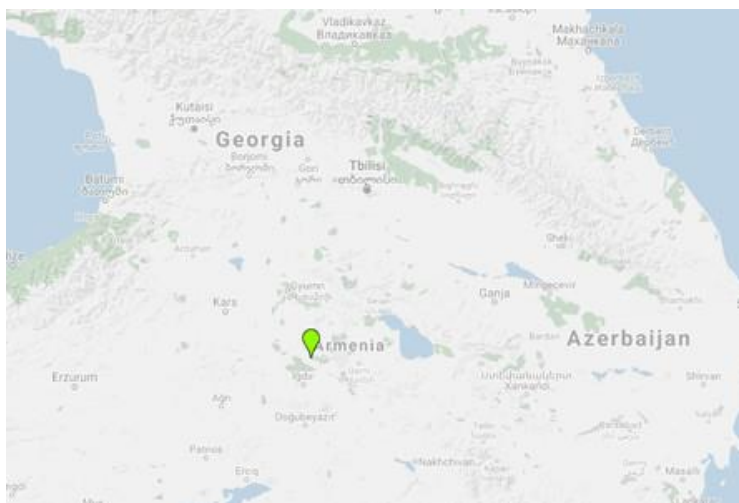
Decision

As the allegations Santa Maria de Garoña were outdated at the time of considerations and there was a lack of substantiations regarding the Almaraz case including the fact that domestic remedies had not been exhausted, the communication was found inadmissible.

2. ESPOO CONVENTION

Armenia – New Nuclear Power Unit in Metsamor

Body	Members of the Parties, IC
Case Number	EIA/IC/S/3
Party / Member State	Armenia
Date of Decision	5-7 February 2019
Relevant Legislation	Espoo Convention, Articles 3(5) and (8), 4(2), 5, 6
Communicant / Complainant	Azerbaijan



(Source: UNECE, https://www.unece.org/env/eia/implementation/eia_ic_s_3.html)

Background

On 5 May 2011 Azerbaijan sent a submission to the Committee issuing concerns about Armenia's compliance with its obligations under the Convention, with respect to the planned construction of a nuclear power station in Metsamor. To specify, Azerbaijan was concerned with the application of the Convention by Armenia, as the plans in Metsamor allegedly were activities of the type listed in item 2 of appendix I to the Convention and therefore could cause significant transboundary impact. Azerbaijan alleged that Armenia had „decided to terminate the environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedure under the Convention while proceeding with the decision-making on the planned activity“.

Armenia had planned to construct a new nuclear power plant unit on an already existing NPP site built in the 1970s near Metsamor. The new unit should be owned by the Government of Armenia. and was planned to replace this unit 2, which was commissioned to be shut down in 2016. Of the neighbouring countries, only Azerbaijan is a Party to the Espoo Convention. Armenia and Azerbai-

jan do not have diplomatic relations and their relationship is characterized by confrontations and the absence of direct contacts and cooperation.

Armenia asked the Convention's secretariat to send the notification on its behalf to Azerbaijan, as well as to Georgia, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran. On 1 September 2010, the Executive Secretary of ECE sent notification letters on behalf of Armenia to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the respective states. Three States, including Azerbaijan, responded to the secretariat indicating their wish to participate in the transboundary EIA procedure under the Convention. The secretary forwarded this information via e-mail to the Armenian focal point. On 19 October 2010, the Secretary to the Convention received a letter from the Armenian Minister of Nature Protection stating that, "Armenia had not received an official response" from Azerbaijan, but only related informal e-mail messages from the secretariat "which cannot be considered as an official reply for the Republic of Armenia". Therefore, Armenia considered that in the absence of a response within the time specified in the notification, the provisions of the Convention would not apply.

Despite the exchange of several messages and the information on Azerbaijan's submission, Armenia reiterated its position that it considered it had not received "a substantial official response" from Azerbaijan on its intention to participate in the transboundary EIA within the fixed time frame and, on that basis, it had no obligations towards Azerbaijan. Moreover, Armenia confirmed its intention to pursue the application of the EIA procedure according to its national legislation and practice.

At its twenty-first session in June 2011, the EIC took note of the submission by Azerbaijan and considered the matter at its following sessions.

The present case led the EIC to consider various procedural questions, inter alia on:

- The potential role and responsibilities of the secretariat in the notification process, and its ability to be in charge of the notification on behalf of the Party of origin;
- The use of different means of communication (letter, fax, e-mail messages, etc) and their legal status for the purposes of implementing the Convention;
- Requirements relating to the content and the format of a response;
- The deadline and expiry for a response.

In general, the EIC considered e-mail to be a widely used, commonly acceptable and rapid means of communication and information exchange, including in public international relations, and acknowledged the legal validity of electronic means of communication for the purposes of notifying. It further estimated that, in case of a notification through an intermediary, the intermediary must inform the Parties of the contents of the response in a timely manner, which might also be done by e-mail. Armenia notified Azerbaijan only after informing its own public about the new unit in Metsamor, which, according to the EIC, led to non-compliance with article 3(1).

The EIC considered that regardless of the fact that the secretariat served as an intermediary, this did not release Armenia from its obligations under the Convention. In the view of the Committee, when a Party of origin entrusts the notification procedure to an intermediary, the fulfilment of the conditions set out in article 3(3) is to be established from the correspondence between the affected Parties and the intermediary. Any miscommunications between the Party of origin and the intermediary should have no impact on the application of the provisions of the Convention and the Party of origin retains responsibility for any actions or omissions of the intermediary in the process of notification.

Based on the information provided by Armenia, that the final decision on the construction of the NPP had not yet been taken and the works not yet initiated, the Committee concluded that there was still a possibility for Armenia to continue the implementation of the transboundary EIA procedure in conformity with the articles 3(5) and (8), 4(2), 5 and 6 of the Convention. The EIC recommended the designation of an intermediary as well as the use of new technologies and innovative approaches for communication (such as automated e-mail functions and videoconferences) by the two Parties to solve the difficulties in communication.

Decision

In **decision VI/2** the MOP endorsed the findings of the Committee that Armenia was in non-compliance with its obligation under the article 3(1) of the Convention. However, taking pressure of the situation, the MOP also endorsed the findings of the Committee that Armenia was not in non-compliance with article 3(5) and (8), article 4(2), article 5 and article 6 of the Convention, considering that -- to the extent that the final decision on the construction of the NPP had not yet been taken and the works had not yet been initiated -- there was still a possibility for Armenia to continue the implementation of the subsequent steps in the transboundary environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedure.

The Committee was requested by the MOP to follow up and, as appropriate, monitor the steps in the transboundary EIA procedure in relation to the planned construction of the Metsamor NPP.

Impact

The Committee drafted its report on the activities of the Committee to the MoP at its seventh session.⁷ In fall 2014, the Government of Armenia informed the Committee that it had adopted a new energy programme which, among other things, envisaged that no work had been initiated or carried out in relation to the planned construction of the Metsamor NPP. The information contained in the notification of August 2010 on the project -- which had originally been the subject of compliance concerns voiced by Azerbaijan -- had no further validity.

The Committee took into account the information provided and agreed that, since the decision for the planned construction of the NPP was no longer valid and activities based on that decision were suspended, there was no transboundary EIA procedure relating to that project and therefore no longer a ground to follow up.

In its **Decision IS/1b**, the MOP, whilst also recalling its decision IS/1 on general issues of compliance with the Convention adopted at the intermediary sessions, took note of the information the final decision on the construction of the Metsamor NPP was no longer valid and activities based on that decisions were suspended. The MoP thus endorsed the findings of the EIC that there was no longer a project requiring a transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure relating to the Metsamor NPP. The MoP finally urged Armenia to ensure that any projects carried out in the future in accordance with energy-related programmes, including nuclear activities, are in compliance with the Convention.

Note: As a result of the follow-up on decision VI/2, the EIC initiated an information gathering procedure in relation to the new Energy Programme adopted by the Armenian Government. For further information see Case SEA/IC/INFO/2 77.

⁷ ECE/MP.EIA/2017/4-ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2017/4, paras. 27-29.

Armenia – Governmental Energy Programme

Body	Members of the Parties, EIC
Case Number	SEA/IC/INFO/2
Party / Member State	Armenia
Date of Decision	4 April 2017
Relevant Legislation	SEA Protocol
Communicant / Complainant	-

Background

Within Decision VI/2, the MoP decided on Case EIA/IC/S/3 on the planned construction of a new unit for the Metsamor NPP by Armenia. After a long decision-making process, Armenia made the final decision, that the construction of the Metsamor NPP was no longer valid and activities based on that decision were suspended as the Armenian Government had introduced a new programme on energy development. As there was no longer a project requiring a transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure, the case regarding non-compliance with the Espoo Convention was closed. The MoP urged Armenia to ensure that any projects carried out in the future in accordance with energy-related programmes, including nuclear activities, are in compliance with the Convention.

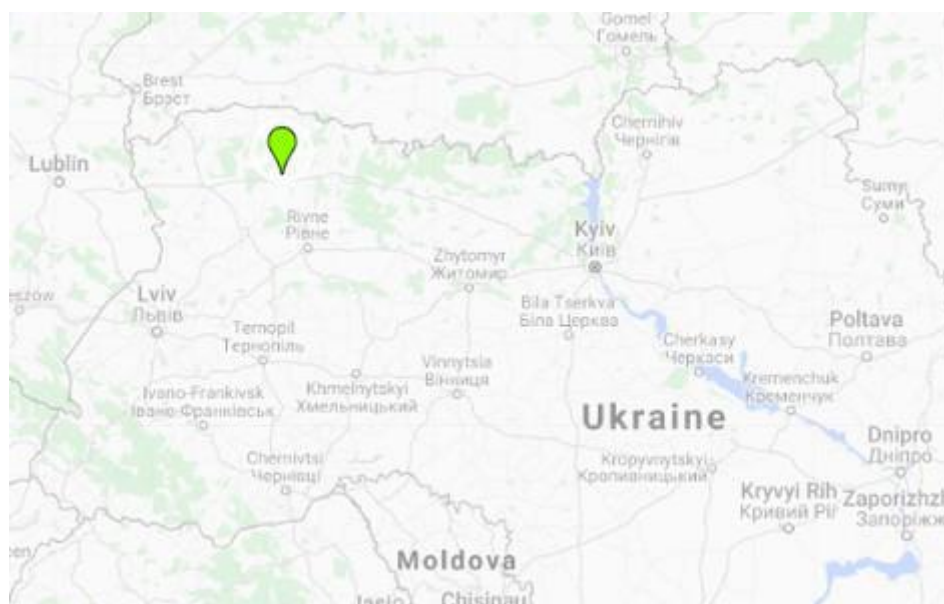
The relevant section of that programme envisaged the construction of a new reactor at the Metsamor NPP in 2018 and seemed to set the framework for future activities in the energy field. In February 2017, the Committee noted that, at the time of its examination, that Programme of the Government was no longer valid. The Committee also noted that following the resignation of the Government on 8 September 2016 and the appointment of the new Government, a new Programme of the Government had been adopted on 18 October 2016 by Government decision 1060A, which made no reference to the construction of a new reactor. Furthermore, subsequent to parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2017, a new Government would be formed, followed by the adoption of another programme of the Government.

Decision

The Committee deliberated on the nature of the Programme and whether an SEA procedure, including a transboundary procedure, or at least the notification of potentially affected countries, would have been required before the adoption of the Programme. Having considered all information provided by Armenia, the Committee agreed that there was no plan or programme under the provisions of article 2(5) and article 4 of the Protocol. Consequently, that Programme was not subject to the SEA procedure stipulated in the Protocol. It concluded that the information provided by Armenia was sufficient and decided to close the information gathering on the issue.

Ukraine – Lifetime Extensions of Rivne NPP

Body	Meeting of the Parties, EIC
Case Number	EIA/IC/CI/4; IS/1g
Party / Member State	Ukraine
Date of Decision	5-7 February 2019
Relevant Legislation	Espoo Convention; Articles 2(2) and (3), 4(1), 3, 6
Communicant / Complainant	NGO Ecoclub



(Source: UNECE, <https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/environmental-assessment/areas-of-work/review-of-compliance/committee-initiative/eiaicci4-ukraine.html>)

Background

Back at its twenty-first session (20 June 2011), the EIC first began its consideration regarding the planned extension of the Rivne NPP in Ukraine, close to the border with Belarus and Poland. Information on this subject had been sent to the Committee by a Ukrainian NGO on 20 April 2011, explaining that Ukraine had “initiated and partially completed a process for extending lifetime (designed period) of operation set for some nuclear reactors”⁸. A final decision was already taken regarding two nuclear reactors of the NPP. The information argued that such an extension of nuclear reactors lifetime would qualify as a “major change” and, therefore, fall under the definition of proposed activity under the Espoo Convention.

The Rivne NPP has four reactors and its construction began in 1973. Reactor 1 was commissioned in December 1980, reactor 2 one year later, reactor 3 in December 1986 and reactor 4 in 2004. In April 2004, the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers adopted Decision No. 263-r on “Complex Program of

⁸ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2019/ece/Restart/CI_Ukraine/2_Supporting_Information_3.0_FINAL.pdf.

Works to Extend Operation Lifetime of Existing Nuclear Reactor of Nuclear Power Plants". The operator of all Ukrainian NPPs, Energoatom, adopted a Workplan to implement the decision. In December 2009, Energoatom filed an application to amend its license for the lifecycle operation of the Rivne NPP. In December 2010, the Board of the State Committee on Nuclear Regulation took decision No. 15 extending the lifetime of nuclear reactors 1 and 2 by twenty years and issuing a new license for the operation of nuclear reactors 1 and 2 by Energoatom until 31 December 2031.

In its 23rd session in December 2011, the EIC found that Ukraine had not applied the Espoo Convention in relation to the planned extension of the NPP. It noted that the main issue was to establish whether the activity in question was a "proposed activity" subject to the Convention and concluded that lifetime extension of NPPs could be considered as a major change to an activity in appendix I, and thus fell under the scope of the Convention.⁹ In its 24th session, the EIC reached a consensus that the extension of the life-time of a NPP, even in absence of any works, was a major change to an activity and thus subject to the Convention referring to paragraph 10(c) of the background note by the secretariat on the application of the Convention to nuclear energy-related activities¹⁰. In its final findings the Committee agreed the extension of the lifetime of an NPP originally designed to operate for 30 years for a further 20 years represented an activity that would require a comprehensive EIA of its effects according to the Convention, *regardless of whether it was treated as a major change to an existing activity or a new activity*, and regardless of whether originally it had been subject to such an EIA or not.¹¹

The EIC further considered the information received during its following sessions. At its 27th session in March 2013, it decided to begin a Committee initiative and invited Ukraine to participate in the discussion and to present information and opinions on the matter under consideration at its 28th session. It addressed several questions to Ukraine, inter alia, whether the extension of the lifetime of the Rivne NPP units 1 and 2 had been subject to a transboundary EIA procedure or if a report covering environmental impacts had been submitted to the Ukrainian public for comments.

The Committee adopted its findings and recommendations on its 30th session in February 2014 to be considered at the MOP6:¹²

It noted that this was the first time that the EIC was to consider the application of the Convention to the extension of lifetime of an NPP and the impact of its considerations to the application of the Convention to nuclear activities. The EIC also found that the Ukrainian legislation at hand did not provide for the carrying out of neither a domestic nor a transboundary EIA procedure, in case of extension of the license through its renewal, because – according to Ukraine – the actual object of the project remained the same as originally licenced. It considered that the re-evaluation should have been conducted after having properly and comprehensively assessed the environmental impact, including transboundary impact, of the activity subject to extension through the license renewal. The EIC considered that the decision to authorize a proposed activity, according to the national procedure, only for a limited period of time meant that any subsequent decision to extend that limited period of time would, under the Convention, be another final decision, different from the initial one, making less relevant the examination of whether this was an activity or any major change to an activity. The Committee also established whether the activity in question had a significant adverse transboundary environmental impact: Referring to its previously stated opinion, that "notification is necessary unless a significant transboundary impact can be excluded"¹³, it concluded that in absence of a transboundary EIA documentation arguing to the contrary it could not exclude the significant transboundary impact of the proposed activity. Ukraine therefore should have notified the possibly affected Parties.

⁹ The EIC also referred to the background paper for the nuclear panel discussion held during the MoP in June 2011 (ECE/MP.EIA/2011/5).

¹⁰ ECE/MP.EIA/2011/5.

¹¹ <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2014/EIA/IC/ece.mp.eia.ic.2014.2.e.pdf>.

¹² For more information and access to relevant documents visit <https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/environmental-assessment/areas-of-work/review-of-compliance/committee-initiative/eiaicci4-ukraine.html>.

¹³ Decision IV/2, annex I, para. 54.

Decision

At its 6th session in June 2014, the MOP considered the Committee's findings and recommendations, as reflected in **Decision VI/2**: It endorsed the findings of the Committee that the extension of the lifetime of the NPP, subject to the proceedings, after the initial license had expired, should be considered a proposed activity under article 1(v), and is consequently subject to the provisions of the Convention. The MOP also decided that Ukraine was in **non-compliance with its obligations under article 2(2) with respect to the general legal and administrative framework** applicable in the decision-making for the extension of the lifetime for nuclear reactors. Lastly, the MOP endorsed the findings of the EIC that Ukraine was in **non-compliance with its obligations under article 2(2) and (3), article 4(1), as well as articles 3 and 6 with respect to the extension of lifetimes of reactors 1 and 2 of the Rivne NPP**.

The MOP invited the Committee, in its follow-up assessment of the case, to consider the specific circumstances of the case as well as the fact that Ukraine had acted in good faith.

Implementation and further process

In its 39th session, the EIC continued its consideration of the follow-up by Ukraine. Ukraine had informed Austria about its intention to conduct a transboundary EIA procedure with respect to the Rivne NPP. Ukraine was requested to:

- (a) Notify all potentially affected Parties (including Austria, Belarus, Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovakia), in accordance with article 3;
- (b) Prepare the EIA documentation, including transboundary aspects;
- (c) Carry out consultations with authorities of the affected Parties based on the EIA documentation, according to article 5;
- (d) Ensure public participation;
- (e) Revise the final decision taking into account the outcomes of the EIA procedure, including the EIA documentation and comments received by the affected Parties.

By the EIC's 41th session in April 2018, Ukraine had initiated the transboundary EIA procedure notifying Austria, Belarus, Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Slovakia. The Committee, on the other hand, noted a lack of clarity about the proposed activity referred to in the notification and that the notification had not included a suggestion for a time frame within which the EIA procedure was to be carried out. It noted that such lack of clarity might cause difficulties for the potentially affected Parties to plan their involvement and efficiently participate in the transboundary procedure.

In its 42nd session, the Committee noted that all the possibly affected parties had responded to the notification by Ukraine of 29 January 2018, expressing their wish to participate in a transboundary impact assessment procedure. The Committee highlighted that, in its letter of 27 July 2018, Ukraine had neither responded to the questions regarding the request to clarify the nature of the proposed activity and its subsequent steps, nor to the requested timeline and documentation of the progress made of the transboundary procedure. It also stated that Ukraine should prove clarifications regarding the nature of the proposed decision.

For the outcomes of the EIC's deliberations since the MOP7 in June 2017 in Minsk, please see the Committee's report on its 42nd session¹⁴.

In its **Decision IS/1g** the MOP finalized its findings on compliance by Ukraine with its obligations under the Convention in respect of the extension of lifetime of the Rivne NPP. Recalling its Decision IS/1 on general issues of compliance with the Convention adopted at the intermediary session, the MoP noted the steps taken by Ukraine to comply with the provisions of the Convention referred to in Decision VI/2 and welcomed the adoption by Ukraine of the Law on EIA in May 2017 followed by a number of pieces of secondary legislation.

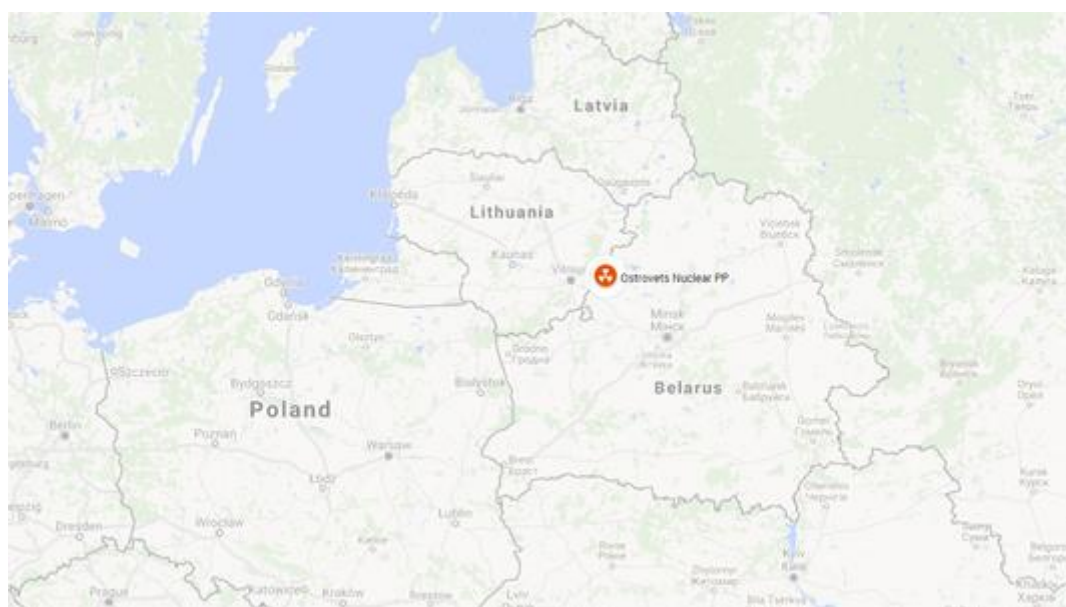
The Government of Ukraine was requested to adopt without delay the remaining secondary legislation, with a view to fully aligning its national legislation with the Convention. The EIC also endorsed that, despite the positive steps taken, Ukraine remained in non-compliance with its obligations under the Convention, as referred to in paragraph 70 of Decision VI/2 and requested Ukraine to

¹⁴ ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2018/4, paras 27-31.

continue the transboundary EIA procedure with Parties wishing to participate in the procedure in order to bring the project into compliance with the Convention without delay, including preparing the EIA documentation, consulting with authorities and the public of the affected Parties based on the EIA documentation, and revising the final decision on the lifetime extension of reactors 1 and 2 of the Rivne NPP, taking due account of the outcomes of the EIA procedure, including the EIA documentation and comments received from the affected Parties.

Belarus – Permitting the Ostrovets NPP

Body	Meeting of the Parties, EIC
Case Number	EIA/IC/S/4
Party / Member State	Belarus
Date of Decisions	June 2014, February 2019
Relevant Legislation	Espoo Convention, Article 2(6), 3(8), 4(2), 5(a), 6(1) and (2)
Communicant / Complainant	Lithuania



(Source: UNECE; http://www.unece.org/env/eia/implementation/eia_ic_s_4.html)

Background

On 16 June 2011 Lithuania sent a submission to the Committee issuing concerns about Belarus' compliance with its obligations under the Convention, with respect to the planned construction of a nuclear power station in Ostrovets, Belarus. Following this submission the Committee closed the information-gathering case on Belarus (EIA/IC/INFO/5), initiated earlier further to information provided by the Ukrainian NGO Ecoclub, since the submission by Lithuania addressed the same factual situation (project).

To sum it up, following points were made in the submission letter: Firstly, Lithuania requested the Committee to draw attention on the issue and to take action by reminding Belarus to not only fully comply with the requirements of the Espoo Convention, but also to restart the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process. Secondly, the Committee should invite Belarus to suspend all construction processes until the EIA report was fully finished. The third and final request made in Lithuania's letter was to invite Belarus once again to revise their decisions and to withdraw all actions regarding the NPP in Ostrovets, as it were only 50 kilometers away from the center of Vilnius, Lithuania's capital city.

Lithuania had pointed out that the contents and procedural aspects of the EIA procedure in Belarus were unclear, whereas Belarus explained that legislation regulating the procedure of EIA implementation, i.e. the Law on State Ecological Expertise of 9 November 2009, amended on 14 July 2011, Resolution No. 755 of 19 May 2010, amended by resolution No. 689 on 1 June 2011 as well as Decision No. 571 of 4 May 2009, introducing special rules for public participation in decision-making on nuclear issues, had recently been introduced. Other disputed aspects included the date of notification of the project, the preliminary and final EIA report as well as the conduction of public hearings in Ostrovets and Vilnius and other procedural questions regarding public participation. Other arguments brought up were insufficient or undetailed information on the project and the lack of reasonable alternatives concerning the chosen site.

At its twenty-second session (5-7 September 2011) the Committee addressed the submission by Lithuania for the first time, forwarding it to Belarus. In session twenty-three the Committee took note of the reply that had been received from Belarus on 22 September 2011. It also agreed to invite the two Parties to its next session, where each Party could briefly present their case. In its following sessions, the Committee continued to work on the topic, finalizing its draft version of Decision VI/2 during its twenty-seventh session (12-14 March 2013).

In its findings and recommendations on the case, the EIC pointed out that the two Parties had agreed that the requirements concerning the notification had been fulfilled by the notification of 24 August 2009. Furthermore, Belarus had attended a public hearing in Vilnius on 2 March 2010 at thus started the consultation at an early stage and before the final decision concerning the site selection was taken. According to the EIC, Belarus failed to provide the final EIA documentation to the affected public in Lithuania. Furthermore Lithuania was not informed on the availability of the final EIA report. Although there had been meetings and exchanges of letters between the two Parties dedicated to the NPP issue, the EIC noticed a lack of response to several questions by Lithuania and delays in answering.

Regarding the questions of alternatives, Ostrovets was chosen as the priority site at the beginning of the process in 2008, prior to the notification and the completion of the final EIA. In this regard, the EIC explained that the description of locational alternatives to be included in the EIA documentation should be especially required when an activity is planned near a city. Belarus had split the final decision on the NPP into one part on the location and another part on permitting the construction on this location, which had not yet been taken. The EIC noted that article 6 would apply in each case as both of these decisions were part of the final permitting decision.

Decision

In Decision VI/2, the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) endorsed the findings of the Committee that Belarus had improved its legal framework on EIA and that there were no grounds for non-compliance with article 2(2). The MoP also endorsed that, on 14 March 2013, Belarus was in compliance with its obligations under article 3(2)(a) and (c) and article 3(8) of the Convention in relation to the activities referred to in the submission by Lithuania. The MOP also endorsed the findings of the Committee that Belarus was in non-compliance with its obligations under article 2(6), article 4(2), article 5(a) and article 6(1) and (2).

Therefore, the MOP requested a few things (among others): The Government of Belarus should take a final decision on the site selection, ensuring that due account had been taken to the course of the outcome of the EIA documentation as well as forward it to Lithuania. The MOP further requested Belarus to continue the procedure of transboundary EIA on the basis of the final EIA documentation, agree with Lithuania on the steps to be followed, answer all of Lithuania's questions and take into consideration the Lithuanian comments. It also requested both Belarus and Lithuania to ensure that the Lithuanian public is informed and sufficiently involved in the EIA procedure. To conclude, the MOP requested the Committee to thoroughly analyze the steps undertaken after the adoption of the Committee's report on its twenty-seventh session and to report to the MOP at its seventh session on the matter.

The Committee fulfilled the request for further analysis in its report made for the seventh session of the MOP¹⁵, which makes it redundant to introduce further relevant Committee sessions (namely the ad hoc, thirty-ninth, fortieth, forty-first and forty-second session), as this report sums up the

¹⁵ ECE/MP.EIA/2017/4-ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2017/4, paras. 36-44.

development between decision VI/2 and the later decision IS/1b. In the beginning of its report the Committee noted, that Belarus and Lithuania submitted regular reports and information during the intersessional period. In September 2016, the Committee: a) recognized efforts made by Belarus to satisfy the language requirements of public consultations; b) noted that Belarus and Lithuania had made some efforts on agreeing on the steps for the post-project analysis with respect to the NPP, which might involve the establishment of a joint body; and c) observed efforts by both Parties in negotiating a bilateral agreement for the implementation of the Convention. In February 2017, the Committee concluded that Belarus had undertaken all the required steps to reach the final decision as provided for in the Convention. However, based on the available information, the Committee could not reach a final conclusion on the compliance of the steps taken by Belarus, as the essence of the compliance case was about unresolved substantive aspects of the EIA documentation that could not necessarily be treated separately from the procedural aspects of EIA.

In this context, the Committee recalled that the persistent disagreement between the two Parties related in particular to scientific and other technical matters (for example finding reasonable locational alternatives). Since the Committee did not have the capacity nor the mandate to examine scientific issues, it recommended to establish and finance an expert body modelled after the inquiry commission provided for under appendix IV to the Convention. Belarus, despite encouragement from the Bureau in January 2016, maintained its reservations regarding the Committee's proposal. In December 2016, the Committee noted that the Parties had been unable to find consensus on their points of disagreement through bilateral expert consultations.

At its intermediary session in February 2019, the MOP chose to adopt Decision IS/1 on general issues of compliance with the Convention together with separate decisions specific for each relevant Party. Within Decision IS/1, the MOP, inter alia, considered that

- (a) Early and appropriately wide notification plays an essential role in the transboundary procedure, in keeping with the precautionary approach and the principle of prevention enshrined in the Convention and with the Convention's objective of enhancing international cooperation in assessing environmental impact, in particular in a transboundary context, as mentioned in its preamble;
- (b) [...]
- (c) [...]
- (d) in so far as their consideration is required, procedural and substantive aspects of transboundary EIAs should not necessarily be treated separately by the EIC when assessing compliance, where such consideration is essential for the assessment. The EIC does not examine compliance with technical provisions and requirements outside the scope of the Convention, such as those related to nuclear safety;

Environmental impact assessment documentation should contain sufficient information, including any of a substantive nature on the selection of the alternatives and the reasons and considerations to be taken into account in the final decision. In its decision IS/1d, the MOP gave a lengthy report on compliance by Belarus with its obligations under the Convention in respect to the Belarusian NPP in Ostrovets -- the most important aspects of decision IS/1d shall be introduced.¹⁶

To decide on the subject, the MOP recalled its decision VI/2 and also the decision at its seventh session to finalize deliberations on the review of compliance with the Convention at an intermediary session¹⁷, based on a revised draft decision to be prepared by the Committee. Furthermore, it considered the report of the Committee made for the seventh session of the MOP, as well as the reports of the Committee on its ad hoc, thirty-ninth, fortieth, forty-first and forty-second sessions.

Therefore, the MOP

- *Endorsed* the findings of the Committee¹⁸ that Belarus had taken all the required procedural steps to reach the final decision on the planned activity at Ostrovets, as provided for in the Convention.
- *Endorsed* that the essence of the compliance matter concerned unresolved substantive aspects of the environmental impact assessment documentation, including reasonable locations alternatives and the methodology and data used in determining the siting -- in order

¹⁶ For more detailed information see ECE/MP.EIA/27/Add.1 - ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/11/Add.1.

¹⁷ ECE/MP.EIA/23-ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/7, para. 27.

¹⁸ ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2017/2, para. 8.

to enable the Committee to reach its final conclusion additional resources and specific expertise were needed, as they had not been made available to it;

- *Endorsed* that in order to reach a final conclusion on whether Belarus complied with its obligations both procedural and substantive aspects of the environmental impact assessment procedure had to be examined, since those two aspects could not be treated separately.
- Also *endorsed* that the environmental impact assessment documentation, which had been made available to the affected parties and the public, made reference to locational alternatives for a NPP and to criteria for the site selection, but did not provide sufficient information about the reasons and considerations -- explaining the selection of the Ostrovets site over the alternative locations to be taken into account in the final decision on the activity in accordance with the Convention;
- Further *endorsed* that by not providing such information in the EIA documentation and the final decision on the activity, Belarus **failed to comply with article 4(1), article 5(a) and article 6(1) of the Convention.**

To finish its decision IS/1d the MOP brought up a few additional points. It urged Belarus to ensure that, in the context of any future decision-making that could fall under the Convention, the Convention is applied and the environmental impact assessment documentation contains a proper evaluation of reasonable alternatives -- including the no-action alternative. Showing good faith, the MOP also encouraged both Belarus and Lithuania to continue bilateral expert consultations on issues of disagreement. It also encouraged both Parties to continue working on the post-project analysis and to establish a joint bilateral body.

UK – International Notification on Hinkley Point C

Body	Meeting of the Parties, EIC
Case Number	EIA/IC/CI/5
Party / Member State	UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Date of Decision	5-7 February 2019
Relevant Legislation	Espoo Convention, Articles 2(4) and 3(1)
Communicant / Complainant	Germany



(Source: UNECE, <https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/environmental-assessment/areas-of-work/review-of-compliance/committee-initiative/eiaicci5-united-kingdom.html>)

Background

At its twenty-eighth session, the Committee began its consideration of the information provided by a German Member of the Parliament and the Irish NGO Friends of the Irish Environment, in March 2013, respectively, regarding the planned construction of NPP Hinkley Point C by the United Kingdom. The Committee noted that the German Government had not been notified and the German public had not been consulted on the planned activity.

Therefore, the Committee held preliminary discussions on the matter and agreed that the United Kingdom should be invited to clarify, inter alia: whether the Government had notified any potentially affected Parties; if so, which ones; in what form the notification had been made; whether they had used the format for notification provided in decision I/4 of the Meetings of the Parties (MOP); and what had been the response received, if any.

Further to its twenty-eighth session the Committee continued its consideration. It reviewed clarifications received from the Government of Austria, Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom in response to the Committee's letters of 15 October 2013. Additional information had also been submitted on 9 December 2013 by the member of the German parliament representing the Green Party who had originally submitted the information. The Committee asked the Chair to write to the

Governments of other neighboring countries as well -- i.e., Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Spain, -- with a copy to the German member of the Parliament and the Irish NGO, to enquire whether they shared the opinion of the UK that the project would not have any significant transboundary negative impact.

In its thirtieth session the Committee noted that the UK had failed to notify any potentially affected Party about the planned activity. The Committee further noted the information that national legislation in the UK did not provide for the possibility to extend the transboundary consultations, as presented in the transboundary procedure with Austria, which had requested the UK to exchange information following to article 3(7). To underline this point, the Committee recalled its previous opinion in decision IV/2 that: while the Convention's primary aim, as stipulated in article 2(1) was to "*prevent, reduce and control significant adverse transboundary environmental impact from proposed activities*", even a low likelihood of such an impact should trigger the obligation to notify affected Parties in accordance with article 3. This means that notification is necessary unless a significant adverse transboundary impact can be excluded.¹⁹ The EIC also recalled that a procedure regulated in article 3(7) did not substitute the obligations of a party of origin and considered that, in the principle of prevention, parties of origin should be "exceptionally prospective and inclusive" and ensure that all parties potentially affected by an accident – however uncertain – are notified as well as take into account the worst-case scenario. On the above grounds, the Committee found that there was a profound suspicion of non-compliance and decided to begin a Committee initiative.

In the following sessions it was all about gathering information, sending information back and forth between the potentially affected Parties and giving the UK a chance to participate in the meetings. Some states referred to an opinion issued by the European Commission in February 2012, considering that the proposed activity concerning Hinkley Point C was not likely to cause significant adverse transboundary environmental impact. In the Committee's view (during its thirty-second session), the opportunity provided by the United Kingdom to Austria to participate under the Espoo Convention had demonstrated the agreement of the two Parties that a likely significant environmental impact on Austrian territory could not be excluded according to article 3(7) of the Convention. The likelihood of a significant environmental impact outside the territory of the United Kingdom had also not been excluded by the Netherlands and Norway.

By the EIC's thirty-eighth session, the United Kingdom had written to all 44 Parties to the Convention on 21 December 2016, asking them whether they considered that a notification under the Espoo Convention was useful at the current stage of the proposed activity. However, the NPP had been granted development consent by the relevant Secretary of State on 19 March 2013, and, according to a letter of the United Kingdom, the work under the development consent had already commenced. The Committee was therefore concerned that the continuation of works at Hinkley Point C might influence the views of the Parties consulted by the United Kingdom. Moreover, if the potentially affected parties considered that a notification was useful and therefore asked to participate in the transboundary EIA procedure, the continuation of works might render the results of the procedure irrelevant.

The Committee prepared draft Decision VII/2 on its conclusions drawn from the Hinkley Point C case. At the MOP7 in June 2017, however, the European Union provided its comments on draft decision VII/2 and the MoP agreed that further efforts to reach consensus were needed and decided to finalize its deliberations at an intermediary session. It mandated the Implementation Committee to prepare a revised draft for the intermediary session.

The following sessions, namely the thirty-ninth, the fortieth and the forty-second, were recalled by the MOP in its decision IS/1h and are therefore of highest importance as to understand the reasoning for the decision. The Committee noted that the United Kingdom had contacted all the Parties to the Espoo Convention and then entered into discussions with those Parties that had indicated to it that they would find a notification regarding the activity at Hinkley Point C useful (i.e., Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway) or that had expressed their interest in further discussions and/or information about the planned activity (Denmark and Luxembourg). The Committee further noted that, on 28 July 2017, the United Kingdom had shared information with the Parties that had expressed interest in receiving a notification or further information about the activity and had offered them "an opportunity to comment in relation to potential transboundary impacts" by 20 October 2017 so as to give those Parties "ample opportunity to consult their public (should they consider it necessary)". These ongoing consultations with the interested Parties were welcomed by the

¹⁹ Decision IV/2, annex I, para. 54.

Committee -- nevertheless, it still maintained its view that the UK was to refrain from carrying out works until the transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure was finalized.

The Committee finalized draft decision IS/1h at its forty-second session.

Decision

To decide on the subject, the MOP considered, inter alia, the findings and recommendations of the Implementation Committee with regard to the Hinkley Point C NPP, as set out in the report of the Committee on its thirty-fifth session.²⁰ The MOP endorsed the Committee's finding that the UK failed to comply with the Convention by not notifying the potentially affected parties in accordance with article 2(4) and article 3(1) of the Convention in the case of the Hinkley Point C NPP project in its Decision IS/1h.

While acknowledging the steps taken by the UK in consulting with the potentially affected Parties and sharing additional information with them after the construction of the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant had commenced, the MoP endorsed that these steps do not remedy the breach of the Convention.

The MOP also endorsed the Committee's finding that no further action from the United Kingdom is required on the grounds that the potentially affected Parties have accepted the consultation process offered by the United Kingdom at the current stage of the activity and on the understanding that, in future, it will provide notification of planned nuclear power plants in accordance with the Convention.

Decision IS/1h recalled Decision IS/1 on General issues of compliance with the Convention, which, as regards the Hinkley case, considered that:

- Early and appropriately wide notification in accordance with the Convention, regardless of the number of the affected Parties, plays an essential role in the transboundary procedure, in keeping with the precautionary approach and the principle of prevention enshrined in the Convention and with the Convention's objective of enhancing international cooperation in assessing environmental impact, in particular in a transboundary context, as mentioned in its preamble;
- Although the likelihood of a major accident, accident beyond design basis or disaster occurring for nuclear activities listed in appendix I is very low, the likelihood of a significant adverse transboundary environmental impact can be very high, if the accident occurs. Consequently, when assessing, for the purpose of notification, which Parties are likely to be affected by a proposed nuclear activity listed in appendix I, the Party of origin should make the most careful consideration on the basis of the precautionary principle and available scientific evidence;
- Where no notification has taken place in accordance with article 3(1), but where a Party that considers that it would be affected by a likely significant transboundary environmental impact of a proposed activity listed in appendix I enters into discussions on the application of the Convention with the Party of origin, that discussion should be conducted under article 3(7). It may also be regarded as good practice to offer Parties that have indicated their wish to be notified under article 3(1), an opportunity to receive a notification in line with the provisions of the Convention.²¹

²⁰ ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2016/2.

²¹ Note: Draft Decision IS/1 prepared in the second two points went further, than the final Decision adopted on the EU's initiative:

(b) For certain activities, in particular nuclear energy-related activities, while the probability of a major accident, accident beyond design basis or disaster occurring is very low, the likelihood of a significant adverse transboundary impact of such an accident can be very high and its consequences severe. Therefore, on the basis of the principle of prevention, when considering the affected Parties for the purpose of notification, the Party of origin should be exceptionally prospective and inclusive, in order to ensure that all Parties potentially affected by an accident, however uncertain, are notified. The Party of origin should make such consideration using the most careful approach on the basis of available scientific evidence, which indicates the maximum extent of a significant adverse transboundary impact from a nuclear energy-related activity, taking into account the worstcase scenario;

Spain – Cessation of NPP Santa Maria de Garoña

Body	EIC
Case Number	ECE/IC/INFO/26
Party / Member State	Spain
Date of Decision	7 December 2018
Relevant Legislation	Espoo Convention
Communicant / Complainant	Portuguese polit. Party Pessoas-Animais-Natureza

Background

Compared to some of the other presented cases, this one is of different nature: The EIC used it as an illustration of a proper and sufficient response from a Party addressing the issue.

On 17 August 2017, the Portuguese political party Pessoas-Animais-Natureza sent information to the EIC concerning the planned lifetime extension of the Santa Maria de Garoña NPP. The EIC proceeded to analyze the information and asked its Chair to request Spain to inform the EIC by the end of 2017 about:

1. The status of operation of the Santa Maria de Garoña NPP; and
2. the Plans of the Government of Spain regarding that NPP, including the next steps to be taken.

Spain informed the EIC on 27 October 2017, as requested by the EIC. In its document, Spain declared the permanent cessation of the operation of that plant by order ETU/754/2017 adopted on 1 August 2017 and that Spain subsequently intended to issue a permit to dismantle the plant followed by the closure declaration.

Decision

On its 43rd session in December 2018, the EIC concluded that the information provided by Spain was sufficient and decided to close the information gathering on the issue. The EIC further recommended that Spain should ensure that further activities related to the decommissioning of the Santa Maria de Garoña NPP should be carried out in accordance with the Convention, as appropriate.

The Committee wrote the Government of Spain to inform it accordingly and to thank Spain for its consideration. It also requested the agreement of the Government place the correspondence between the EIC and Spain on the Convention's website, with the intention to use it as an illustration of the EIC's approach to the compliance issue and of a proper and sufficient response from a Party in addressing the issue.

(c) In the absence of notification, in particular regarding nuclear power plants, when a potentially affected Party considers that a significant adverse transboundary impact of a proposed activity cannot be excluded and expresses the wish to be notified, the Party of origin should apply the Convention. In this situation, a failure to notify would infringe on the right of the potentially affected Parties and their public to be informed and to participate in a timely manner in the environmental impact assessment procedure

3. EU DIRECTIVES

Lifetime extension of Doel 1 and 2

Body	ECJ
Case Number	C-411/17
Party / Member State	Belgium
Date of Decision	29 July 2019
Relevant Legislation	EIA Directive, Habitats Directive, Birds Directive
Communicant / Complainant	Inter-Environnement Wallonie ASBL, Bond Beter Leefmilieu ASBL

Background

On 31 January 2003, Belgium introduced a Law “on the phasing out of nuclear energy for the purposes of industrial production of electricity”, providing that “Nuclear power stations used for the industrial production of electricity by the fission of nuclear fuels shall be deactivated 40 years after the date on which they were brought into service for industrial purposes and may no longer produce electricity thereafter”. This law was later amended by the Law of 28 June 2015, according to which reactor 1 of the Doel NPP should resume operations until 15 February 2025 and Doel 2 should be deactivated on 1 December 2025, extending both their operations by ten years. The explanations to this amendment included that, given the major uncertainties surrounding restarting the Doel 3 and Tihange 2 stations, and the planned closure of thermal power stations in 2015, combined with the fact that foreign capacity could not in the short term be integrated into the Belgian grid. In September 2015, the responsible authority confirmed the decision it had adopted in August 2015 not to carry out an EIA in respect of the changes envisaged by the operator.

The Belgian environmental protection associations Inter-Environnement Wallonie and Bond Beter Leefmilieu Vlaanderen brought proceedings before the Belgian Constitutional Court seeking annulment of the Law of 28 June 2015.

The implementation of the lifetime extension would be accompanied by substantial investment and major upgrading work to the two power stations concerned, inter alia, renewal of the spent fuel pools, building a new pumping station and adaptation of the base to offer better protection to the power stations against flooding. These measures were not involved in the Law of 28 June 2015 itself, but in an Agreement of 30 November 2015 which was made after it entered into force.

The two reactors in question are located on the banks of the Scheldt, close to protected areas under the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive, designated as such specifically for protected species of fish and cyclostomata in that river.

The Constitutional Court addressed the ECJ with the following questions (summarized version):

- Can legislative acts such as the Law of 28 June 2015 be excluded from the scope of the **Espoo Convention** according to Article 1(ix)? Must articles 2-6 of the Espoo Convention be applied prior to the adoption of such a legislative act?
- Can legislative acts such as the Law of 28 June 2015 be excluded from the scope of the **Aarhus Convention** according to Article 2(2)? Must articles 2-6 of the Aarhus Convention be applied prior to the adoption of a legislative act postponing the date of deactivation and

the end of the industrial production of electricity of the Doel 1 and Doel 2 nuclear power station?

- Is Article 1(2) of the **EIA Directive**²², in conjunction with Annex II applicable to the postponement of the date of deactivation and of the end of the industrial production of electricity of a nuclear power station? Are articles 2-8 and 11 of the EIA Directive and Annexes I-III applicable prior to the adoption of legislation like the Law of 28 June 2015? Does Article 2(4) EIA Directive permit an exemption from the application of Articles 2-8 and 11 for overriding reasons in the public interest linked with the security of the country's electricity supply? Can legislative acts such as the Law of 28 June 2015 be excluded from the scope of the EIA Directive according to the concept of "specific act of legislation" within the meaning of its article 1(4)?
- Is article 6 of the **Habitats Directive**²³ in conjunction with Articles 3 and 4 of the **Birds Directive**²⁴ applicable to the postponement of the date of deactivation and of the end of the industrial production of electricity of a NPP? Must article 6 of the **Habitats Directive** be applied prior to the adoption of a legislative act postponing the date of deactivation of Doel 1 and Doel 2? Does article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive allow grounds linked with the security of the country's electricity supply to be considered an imperative reason of overriding public interest?
- Can the national court maintain the effects of the Law of 28 June 2015 in order to avoid legal uncertainty and to allow the environmental impact assessment and public participation obligations arising under those Conventions or directives to be fulfilled?

Judgement

The ECJ first answered the questions related to the EIA Directive. It recalled that the term "project" in this context refers to work or interventions involving alterations to the physical aspect of the site. The Court therefore decided that measures and the upgrading work inextricably linked to the Law of 28 June 2015 together constitute a single project. The fact that the implementation of those measures required the adoption of subsequent acts in respect of one of the power stations concerned, according to the Court, did not change that analysis.

The Court further recalled that articles 2(1) and 4(1) of the EIA Directive, read together, indicate that projects covered by Annex I, present an inherent risk of significant effects on the environment and therefore an EIA is indispensable in those cases. It noted that the measures have the effect of extending, "by a significant period of 10 years", the duration to produce electricity for industrial purposes with respect to both power stations combined with major renovation works necessary due to the ageing of those power stations. The ECJ therefore found these measures comparable, in terms of the risk of environmental effects, to that when those power stations were first put into service.

Given that the Doel 1 and Doel 2 are located close to the Belgian border to the Netherlands, the Court found it indisputable that the project could also have significant effects on the environment in the latter Member State, within the meaning of Article 7(1) of the EIA Directive.

Regarding the stage at which the EIA must be conducted, the Court recalled that the competent authority to take effects on the environment into account at the earliest possible stage in all the technical planning and decision-making processes to prevent the creation of pollution or nuisances at source rather than to counteract their effects subsequently. An EIA must therefore be carried out as soon as it is possible to identify and assess all potential effects of the project on the environment. Where one of those stages is a principal decision and another an implementing decision which cannot extend beyond the parameters set by the principal decision, the effects which the project may have on the environment must be identified and assessed at the time of the procedure relating to the principal decision. The Court saw this to be the case as the Law of 28 June 2015 already defined the essential characteristics of the project and should no longer be a matter for

²² Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment.

²³ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, as amended by Council Directive 2013/17/EU of 13 May 2013.

²⁴ Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds, as amended by Directive 2013/17.

debate or reconsideration. The EIA should extend to work inextricably linked to the measures at issue in the main proceedings, if both the work and its potential effects on the environment were sufficiently identifiable at that stage of the consent procedure.

As regards the exemption from the EIA Directive according to article 2(4), the ECJ noted that the European Commission in this case would have needed to be notified of Belgium's decision to ensure the security of the electricity supply. A Member State may exempt a project such as that at issue in the main proceedings from the requirement to conduct an EIA in order to ensure the security of its electricity supply only where it can demonstrate that the risk to the security of that supply is reasonably probable and that the project in question is sufficiently urgent to justify not carrying out the assessment. The Court also noted that this exemption would apply without prejudice to article 7 on the obligations incumbent on Member States in whose territory a project that is likely to have significant effects on the environment in another Member State is intended to be carried out.

Concerning article 4(1) EIA Directive, the Court noted that as its first condition a project must be adopted by a specific act of legislation that has the same characteristics as a development consent. In addition, the project must be adopted in a "sufficiently precise and definitive manner", so that the legislative act adopting the project must include all the elements of the project relevant to the EIA. The legislative act must demonstrate that the objectives of the EIA Directive have been achieved as regards the project in question, which was not the case regarding the Law of 28 June 2015.

Regarding the Habitats Directive the Court first noted that an activity can only be authorised according to article 6(3) where "there is no reasonable scientific doubt as to the absence of such effects". On the definition of a "project" it held that if an activity is covered by the EIA Directive, it must, a fortiori, be covered by the Habitats Directive. The fact that a recurrent activity has been authorised under national law before the entry into force of the Habitats Directive does not constitute an obstacle to such an activity being regarded, at the time of each subsequent intervention, as a distinct project for the purposes of that directive. The fact that the national authority that is competent to approve the plan or project in question is the legislature has no bearing in this matter. In this respect, the Court named the fact that one of the reactors in question had been re-commissioned and there were new safety standards and an increase of capacity.

In contrast to the provisions of the EIA Directive, no derogation is possible from the assessment under article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive on the grounds that the competent authority to grant consent to the project in question is the legislature.

In the present case the ECJ clearly saw it likely to undermine the conservation objectives for nearby protected sites, given the scale of the work involved and the length of the extension granted for industrial production of electricity and by collecting large volumes of water from the nearby river for use in the cooling system, which are then discharged into that river, but also the risk of a serious accident.

The ECJ therefore concluded that measures such as those at issue together with the work of upgrading and of ensuring compliance with current safety standards, constitute a project in respect of which an appropriate assessment of its effects on the protected sites concerned should be conducted. The fact that the implementation of those measures involves subsequent acts is not decisive in that respect. Work that is inextricably linked to those measures must also be subject to such an assessment before the adoption of those measures if its nature and potential impact on the protected sites are sufficiently identifiable at that stage.

Regarding article 6(4) Habitats Directive, the Court first stressed the condition to interpret it strictly and to take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. Knowledge of the effects of a plan or project is thus a necessary prerequisite for the application of article 6(4) – as well as a weighing up against the damage caused to the site. The prerequisite of overriding public interest presupposes that it must be "of such an importance that it can be weighed against that directive's objective". Furthermore, the only ground capable of constituting a public security ground that would justify proceeding with the project is the need to nullify a genuine and serious threat of rupture of that Member State's electricity supply.

The Court decided **not to answer the questions concerning the Espoo Convention** as that project in question must undergo an assessment procedure of its transboundary effects in accordance with Article 7 of the EIA Directive, which takes account of the requirements of the Espoo Convention.

It also chose **not to answer the question concerning the Aarhus Convention** arguing that it is clear that the EIA Directive applies to those measures, which is intended to take account of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention.²⁵

Regarding the last question the EJC concluded that a national court may, by way of exception, maintain the effects of measures, such as those at issue in the main proceedings, adopted in breach of the obligations laid down by the EIA Directive and the Habitats Directive, where such maintenance is justified by overriding considerations relating to the need to nullify a genuine and serious threat of rupture of the electricity supply in the Member State concerned, which cannot be remedied by any other means or alternatives. The effects may only be maintained for as long as is strictly necessary to remedy the breach.

²⁵ Advocate General Kokott, on the contrary, chose to answer these questions in her opinion of 29 November 2019. She found that *the extension of the period of industrial production of electricity by 10 years is an activity within the meaning of Article 1(5) and Appendix I, point 2 to the Espoo Convention which requires a trans-boundary environmental impact assessment pursuant to Article 2(3) because it may cause a significant adverse transboundary environmental impact.*

Advocate General Kokott also found that *the extension of the period of industrial production of electricity by certain nuclear power stations is to be regarded, on the one hand, as consent for an activity within the meaning of Article 6(1)(a) and the fifth indent of point 1 of Annex I to the Aarhus Convention and, on the other, as a change to and extension in time of the operation of nuclear power stations within the meaning of Article 6(1)(a) and the first sentence of point 22 of Annex I in conjunction with the fifth indent of point 1.*