



IMPACT

Triumph for Participatory Democracy in Europe and Central Asia

E-LAW advocates participated in the negotiations that led to the June 1998 signing of the Aarhus Convention.



E-LAW advocates in Europe and Central Asia played critical roles in drafting and ratifying the Aarhus Convention — a regional convention guaranteeing access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. The Aarhus Convention became legally binding on October 30, 2001.

The genesis of the Aarhus Convention can be traced to the Rio Declaration of 1992. Principle 10 of the Declaration calls for public participation, access to information and access to justice in environmental matters. The environment ministers of various European governments decided in the mid-1990s to make the drafting of a regional convention part of the “Environment for Europe” process. This effort culminated in the signing of the Convention in the city of Aarhus, Denmark, in June, 1998.

Many environmental lawyers in the E-LAW network, representing their home organizations, participated in the negotiations that produced the Convention. The negotiation process was unique in that representatives of non-governmental organizations were invited as full participants, working side-by-side with government diplomats to hammer out the specific terms of the legal instrument.

Sandor Fulop of E-LAW Hungary, Peter Roderick of E-LAW England and Wales, and Olga Razbash of E-LAW Russia had seats at the table and intervened forcefully to ensure that the public interest was reflected.

After the Convention was signed, E-LAW advocates and many others turned their attention to gaining the required 16 ratifications by national parliaments to allow the Convention to begin operation.



Peter Roderick (in white) celebrates the signing of the Aarhus Convention.

Svitlana Kravchenko, head of E-LAW Ukraine, helped obtain ratification in her home country and in several other countries of the former Soviet Union. Fe Sanchis Moreno of Spain, Aida Iskoyan of Armenia, Ilya Trombitsky and Piotr Gorbunenko of Moldova, and Merab Barbakadze of the Republic of Georgia each worked for their countries’ ratifications. These advocates and others in Europe and Central Asia are now working to implement the Convention in the region.

Environmental lawyers in Europe and Central Asia are proud of their accomplishments. But there is much work still to be done. The rights guaranteed by the Aarhus Convention must move off the paper and into the minds of government officials and judges charged with implementation. E-LAW advocates will continue to play a central role in this task.

For more information about this E-LAW Impact, contact the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide at elawus@elaw.org.