

Press Release

How the European Union violates international environmental law since two decades

The fight of NGOs to implement the Aarhus Convention in Europe

Does the European Union actively prevent members of civil society from challenging violations of environmental and climate laws in the European Union courts? For more than two decades the EU is in critique of hindering NGOs and citizens to get access to court. The Fifth Aarhus Workshop, organised by Slovenian and German NGOs, will discuss this matter with government officials and legal experts.

In 1998 the Aarhus Convention was adopted, an international treaty that binds the European Union itself and all its Member States to provide access to justice in environmental matters to EU citizens and environmental NGOs. Due to this treaty civil society and NGOs have the right to go to court and challenge EU-decisions, when environmental and climate laws are presumed to be violated. Examples for those administrative decisions are approvals of new fossil fuel projects, fishing quotas, approvals of state aid for nuclear power plants and so on.

Since the European Union is in such critique of not allowing citizens and NGOs to review EU-decisions, there will be a new regulation implementing this treaty. The question is, whether the new regulation will finally fully comply with the Aarhus Convention.

To tackle the implementation deficits within the European Union, the Independent Institute for Environmental Issues UfU e.V. is working together with Slovenian partners during the Slovenian Council Presidency of the EU. The now Fifth Aarhus Workshop on 7.9.2021 will provide the opportunity to discuss with governmental officials, legal experts and NGOs how access to justice can be improved in Europe. Dr. Michael Zschiesche, Managing Director and Chairman of the UfU board says: “The double standard by the European Union needs to end. EU citizens and NGOs must be able to hold the European Union accountable, when their decisions harm the environment and the climate, as civil society can hold Member States accountable in environmental matters.”

Regarding climate litigation, Aljoša Petek, Environmental Lawyer at PIC, points out that “looking for legal remedies is only necessary if national authorities do not adopt reasonable and adequate measures to prevent climate-related human rights violations”.

So far the Workshops had almost 200 attendants mainly from Europe working in environmental associations, foundations, universities, governmental organisations as well as legal entities.

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Further information on this project and its background can be found on the UfU Homepage. Please contact UfU if you need further information.

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The Independent Institute for Environmental Issues is a scientific institute and a citizens' organisation. As a registered association, UfU is active in the fields of education, science and environmental protection.

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