



**EEB AGM, Brussels, 19-20 October 2013
Resolution on Turkey and the Aarhus Convention**

The General Assembly of the European Environmental Bureau calls on the Government of the Republic of Turkey to take the necessary steps to become a party to the Aarhus Convention and ensure its prompt implementation.

In June 2013, Turkey witnessed one of the largest demonstrations in its recent history. Plans to turn Gezi Park, one of the few green spaces left in the centre of Istanbul, into a replica of an old Ottoman Army Barracks were opposed by environmental activists. What started as hundreds showing concern for an environmental issue quickly spread to thousands as images depicting police intervention using pressurized water and tear gas spread across social media. Civilians concerned for their freedom of expression engaged together transcending ideological, religious and class lines.

The new building plan which is likely to host a shopping mall is part of a series of urban transformation projects which have been consistently transforming keynote buildings and public space into malls, mosques, newer plazas and residential buildings in Istanbul. Despite protests of environmentalist individuals and organizations and a court ruling on 31 May 2013 to stop the execution of the project and the escalating demonstrations across Turkey for days, the Turkish government has not cancelled its plans which came to a halt for the time being.

Gezi Park being in Istanbul managed to capture attention and support, also from the international community. However it is by no means a unique case in Turkey in terms of the environmental concerns it highlighted or the type of establishment response it elicited. There has been resistance all around Anatolia against construction of dams, hydropower plants, extractive industries, major projects and coal power plants for the last decade while the policy makers tend to turn a deaf ear to concerns of the civil society.

Hence, the protests became a platform to voice these environmental concerns of recent years around issues, policies and projects adopted despite popular opposition.

Six civilians lost their lives and more than 8000 were injured in the course of the Gezi Park protests.

These developments and associated issues highlight the importance of the public rights addressed in the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention: Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice, across decisions concerning the local, national and transboundary environment. There is an urgent need for effective communication channels to support interaction between the public and public authorities in making key decisions on people's environment and to facilitate the proper review of such decisions in a manner consistent with the Aarhus Convention.

Therefore, the EEB calls on the Government of the Republic of Turkey to take the necessary steps to become a party to the Aarhus Convention and ensure its prompt implementation.

Information note:

The Aarhus Convention (full title: Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters) was adopted in the Danish city of Aarhus in 1998 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. It entered into force in 2001 and as of October 2013 has 46 Parties. Turkey was actively involved in the negotiation of the Convention from 1996 to 1998 but did not sign it and has never acceded to it.