

LEGAL REGULATION OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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Abstract

Access to environmental information is a fundamental principle of international environmental law, emphasizing transparency and public participation as essential for environmental protection and justice. Despite international initiatives, national legal frameworks vary in providing timely and effective access to such information, which can influence public awareness and environmental responsibility. The purpose of this study is to examine the legal regulation of access to environmental information in the European Union (EU) and several post-Soviet countries. The methodology includes general scientific methods (systemic, analytical, dialectical, formal-logical, and modeling) and specialized legal approaches (historical-legal, comparative-legal, and formal-legal). The study finds that while EU institutions have extensive reporting mechanisms, capacity and awareness gaps limit effective use of environmental data. In post-Soviet countries, legal frameworks often lack mechanisms for early public involvement and effective feedback. Comparative analysis highlights a strong link between national regulations and international norms, with opportunities for legislative improvement and civic empowerment. The study concludes that enhancing access to environmental information can improve transparency, strengthen democratic participation, and support sustainable environmental governance. The paper is relevant for policymakers and scholars seeking to align national legislation with international environmental standards.

Keywords: Environmental Information, State Bodies, Public Access, Legislation, Environmental Protection Activities

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1. INTRODUCTION

The management of global knowledge increasingly depends on public access to information, particularly regarding environmental risks. However, many existing management systems still prioritize administrative or corporate secrecy, concentrating environmental information in the hands of public authorities or private stakeholders. Currently, 98 sovereign states have laws on access to information, with over 50 including such provisions in their constitutions (Beaulieu & Matos de Lara, 2021). Access to information is now recognized globally as a tool for state verification and a means to detect human rights violations, corruption, and anti-democratic actions. Beyond identifying shortcomings, promoting access to certain information enhances public debates and increases participation in decision-making. In this context, transparency of authorities is a fundamental prerequisite for upholding rights guaranteed under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR, 1950).

In principle, information should be widely accessible, except in cases of national security or private matters, as access enables individuals and groups to exercise their rights. Reliable and open data also help counter misinformation, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when timely information enabled citizens to respond appropriately. The shift to digital information, however, is recent, and public authorities are still adapting to transparent disclosure practices. The rise of digital documents has also introduced conflicts between privacy protections and freedom of information requests, highlighting the need to balance access and privacy.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 analyzes legal regulation in the EU and post-Soviet countries. Section 5 presents the main findings and recommendations. Section 6 concludes the study and highlights its relevance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary environmental scholarship increasingly frames environmental degradation as a multidimensional crisis driven by human activity. Accelerated climate change, large-scale biodiversity loss, and ecosystem disruption have emerged as interconnected global threats with long-term social, economic, and legal implications (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2025; Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services [IPBES], 2022). Recent empirical studies demonstrate that industrial development, unsustainable land use, and intensive resource extraction continue to undermine terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems, thereby increasing the risk of irreversible environmental damage (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2022; Rockström et al., 2021).

Against this background, access to environmental information has gained prominence as a foundational element of effective environmental governance. Legal scholars argue that transparent environmental information flows enhance regulatory

compliance, support evidence-based policymaking, and enable meaningful public oversight (Knox, 2021).

The academic discourse on environmental rights increasingly conceptualizes the right to environmental information as an autonomous human right. Unlike traditional civil or socio-economic rights, this right is oriented toward protecting environmental conditions that underpin human life and health (Paddeu, 2021). Its normative foundations are traced to international human rights law, where access to information serves as a procedural guarantee supporting broader environmental and social justice objectives (Lewis, 2018).

Within Europe, the right to access environmental information has been institutionally strengthened through supranational legal instruments and policy initiatives. The Aarhus Convention continues to serve as a key legal framework, shaping national legislation and administrative practice across European states (Directive 2003/4/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2003 on public access to environmental information and repealing Council Directive 90/313/EEC, 2023). Recent studies emphasize that the European Union (EU) has expanded this framework through digital governance tools, open environmental databases, and transparency obligations linked to the European Green Deal (European Parliament, 2022; Jans & Vedder, 2024). Nevertheless, researchers note persistent challenges related to uneven implementation, administrative discretion, and limited public awareness in certain jurisdictions (Krämer & Badger, 2024).

In post-Soviet countries, access to environmental information remains uneven despite formal adherence to international standards. While legislative reforms have introduced environmental transparency provisions, practical enforcement often lags behind declared commitments (Yerezhepkazy et al., 2025). Scholars identify institutional inertia, fragmented legal regulation, and insufficient technological infrastructure as major obstacles to effective implementation (Bekezhanov et al., 2022).

The reviewed literature indicates a growing consensus that access to environmental information is instrumental in strengthening environmental protection, public trust, and civic engagement. However, systematic comparative research examining differences between EU legal mechanisms and post-Soviet regulatory models remains limited. Addressing this gap, the present study analyzes the legal regulation of access to environmental information in the European Union and selected post-Soviet countries. The research seeks to identify convergences and divergences in legal approaches, assess compliance with international standards, and formulate recommendations aimed at improving transparency and public participation in post-Soviet legal systems through the adoption of best practices developed within the EU.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The broad and diverse nature of the human right to environmental information required the use of a wide range of general and specialized scientific research methods. Applying this combination of

methods made it possible to objectively examine the issue and ensure the credibility of the findings and conclusions. The study presented in the article is grounded in a materialistic view of the human rights system, understanding it as a product of society's historical evolution.

A dialectical approach was used to analyze both doctrinal and legislative sources related to environmental human rights. This method allowed the authors to consider these rights as part of a broader social reality — one that is closely connected with political, economic, cultural, and other social processes, and continues to develop under various influences in a globalized world. The dialectical method also supported the examination of how the European Court of Human Rights exercises its discretion when expanding the scope of environmental information and interpreting the right of access to such information in its case law.

Logical methods such as analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction were applied to examine in depth the legal structures of international and national norms that secure the right to environmental information. Using these tools, the study identified challenges in the practical implementation of these norms, as well as outlined several conceptual categories of environmental information.

A systemic approach — one of the key methods for organizing and structuring legislation — was crucial for identifying regulatory gaps regarding access to environmental information, especially in the context of globalization and the changing nature of environmental legal relations. This method also enabled the development of well-reasoned proposals for improving and modernizing the existing national and international legal framework in this field.

Finally, methods of legal modeling and forecasting allowed the authors to draw on the experience of various states and the factors influencing their legal development. With this foundation, the study formulated concrete, scientifically grounded suggestions for updating and harmonizing legal norms that protect environmental human rights — particularly the right to access environmental information — in light of modern technological and social advancements.

The comparative legal method enabled a comparative analysis of different legal systems, allowing the authors to compare and synthesize positive practices in regulating the right of access to environmental information and the mechanisms for its effective implementation across various countries. It was also used to identify common patterns in how globalization affects information and environmental human rights and to examine international experience in addressing existing challenges in this field. The historical-comparative method contributed to the analysis of the universal laws of the development of the right to access to information in the field of environmental protection in space-time coordinates. The legal modelling method made it possible to anticipate future directions for reforming the legal regulation of access to environmental information in the post-Soviet space, particularly in the context of increasing international cooperation. The study was guided by key methodological principles, including objectivity

and historicism; the scientific progression from the abstract to the concrete; the integration of theory and practice; and principles of synergetics, particularly polyvariance, non-linearity, and constructiveness.

Efforts to conserve natural resources and protect the environment have only recently begun to take root within broader social systems (Craig et al., 2016). This shift has helped draw public attention to environmental challenges and has fostered greater awareness and responsibility (Carter et al., 2017). Under the influence of global changes, civil society itself is evolving; its activities are reaching a new qualitative stage, contributing to the emergence of what scholars describe as a global civil society (Fang et al., 2016).

Over the past 25 years, environmental activism has grown significantly worldwide. This growth is reflected in major international environmental forums (Haynes-Maslow & Leone, 2017), the creation of numerous local, regional, and global programs aimed at conserving and restoring natural resources, landscapes, and water bodies, and the expanded role of environmental education. The media have increasingly covered environmental topics, and hundreds of "green" movements and organizations have emerged across the globe (Jaganathan, 2016).

Despite this progress, many governments today are retreating from environmental protection policies rather than advancing them. Yet it is widely recognized that environmental problems are urgent and cannot be addressed without decisive political action. For this reason, the existing mechanisms for providing information on environmental measures must be implemented consistently and responsibly.

The research employs a combination of general scientific and specialized legal methods. General methods include systemic, analytical, synthetic, dialectical, formal-logical approaches, and legal modeling, which allow for a comprehensive understanding of the regulation of access to environmental information. Specialized legal methods, such as historical-legal, comparative-legal, and formal-legal analysis, are applied to examine legislation in the EU and post-Soviet countries. Additionally, alternative methods, such as case studies, surveys, or statistical analysis, could be employed in future research to further evaluate the effectiveness of legal frameworks and public access mechanisms. This methodological approach ensures a thorough and reliable analysis of both national and international practices.

4. RESULTS

Under Article 15 of the consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2012), citizens and residents of EU Member States have the right to access documents held by the European Parliament, the Council, and the European Commission. This right allows individuals to obtain a wide range of materials, including legislative texts, official documents, historical archives, as well as meeting agendas and minutes.

In this context, the EU has established a set of rules that enshrine the principle that the public has the right to access, among other things, environmental information held by the competent

authorities of the member States: Council Directive No. 90/313/EEC on the freedom of access to information on the environment (1990), Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2003/4/EC on public access to environmental information and repealing Council Directive No. 90/313/EEC (2003), Regulation (EC) No. 1367/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 September 2006 on the application of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters to Community institutions and bodies (2006), which supplemented the relevant provisions of Regulation (EC) No. 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents (2001). Under the relevant regulations, environmental information refers to any data — whether written, visual, audio, electronic, or presented in any other material form — relating to the following:

- The condition of environmental elements, including air and the atmosphere, water, soil, land, landscapes, and natural areas such as wetlands, coastal zones, and marine environments. It also covers biological diversity and all its components, including genetically modified organisms, as well as the interactions between these elements.
- Environmental factors that influence or may influence these elements, such as chemical substances, various forms of energy, noise, radiation, waste (including radioactive waste), and emissions, discharges, or other releases into the environment.
- Actions and measures, including administrative decisions, policies, laws, plans, programs, environmental agreements, and other activities that affect or are likely to affect ecological elements.
- Reports on the enforcement and implementation of environmental legislation.
- Economic assessments, including cost-benefit analyses and related assumptions used when developing or applying the measures and activities mentioned above.
- Information about human health and safety, including issues such as contamination of the food chain, as well as living conditions, cultural heritage sites, and built structures, when these may be affected by the state of environmental elements.

Information transparency is a priority of the European Ombudsman — an independent and impartial body that holds the institutions and bodies of the EU accountable, as well as contributes to effective governance. Within the framework of its mandate, the Ombudsman serves as a compensation mechanism for those who have encountered difficulties in obtaining public access to documents stored in institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies of the European Union. If an institution refuses access by invoking one of the exceptions set out in Regulation (EC) No. 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council on public access to documents of the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission (2001), individuals may ask the institution to review its decision (the so-called confirmatory application). If access is wholly or partly denied, applicants may also contact

the European Ombudsman. In such cases, citizens may argue that the cited exceptions do not apply or that disclosure of the document serves an overriding public interest. They can also contact the Ombudsman if the institution does not respond to their request within the established time frame.

The Council of Europe has developed Information documents No. SG/Inf(2020)11 "Respecting democracy, rule of law and human rights in the framework of the COVID-19 sanitary crisis. A toolkit for member states". Section 3.3 includes a discussion of freedom of expression and access to information. It is emphasized that "public access to official information should be regulated on the basis of existing principles set out in the Court's case law"¹ (Council of Europe, 2020). The document also notes that restrictions on access to official information "should be exceptional and proportionate to the purpose of protecting public health" (Council of Europe, 2020). Based on the above-mentioned rules for public access to documents, the European Parliament has created an electronic register of documents, articles, electronic books, and databases. Citizens can follow and participate in the development of proposed EU legislation from the moment it is approved by the Commission through to its planning and final adoption. In some cases, a document may appear on the public register but remain unpublished, in which case a written request for access may be required. With regard to environmental information, the Shared Environmental Information System was established to improve the collection, exchange, and use of environmental data across Europe. In the current context, this common environmental information system aims to create an integrated, EU-wide environmental information network with online access by simplifying and modernizing existing information systems and processes.

In the area of access to environmental information, the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe [UNECE], 1998) is closely aligned with the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (2009). The latter entered into force on 1 December 2020 for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, the Republic of Moldova, Sweden, and Ukraine, and represents the first binding international legal instrument to recognize a general right of access to official documents held by public authorities. The Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (2009) establishes minimum standards for handling requests for access to official documents, including procedures, forms, and fees, as well as review mechanisms and additional safeguards. At the same time, it is sufficiently flexible to allow national legal systems to build upon these standards and provide broader access to official documents. The Convention concentrates the core of provisions reflecting national practice in the field of access to official documents and is based on three main principles: transparency of public authorities; self-development of people and the exercise of basic human rights; public trust in

¹ meaning the European Court of Human Rights.

government bodies. The Convention also includes procedures for checking applicants for access to official documents in case of denial of access. Despite the fact that the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (2009) provides for a general right of access to official documents, restrictions on this right can only be justified in strictly defined cases provided for by the Convention. This document is open for accession by any State that is not a member of the Council of Europe or any international organization in accordance with the requirements of Article 17 of the Convention.

An analysis conducted by the European Environmental Bureau indicates that citizens are showing an increasing interest in gaining access to information held by public authorities and governments in accordance with the Aarhus Convention of 1998. There are also various obstacles to access to environmental information throughout Europe, including the refusal to provide information on questionable grounds.

In some German states, for example, in 2017, people were charged up to 180 euros per request for documents that should have already been published in the public domain, the report says. When there are facts of non-compliance, called "reports", the compliance mechanism of the Convention is triggered. This position was expressed by Stichting Greenpeace Netherlands in 2014, which claimed that the Netherlands did not "ensure public participation ...before its decision to extend the operation period of the Borssele nuclear power plant (NPP) until December 31, 2033" (Qiu, 2020). After a hearing and gathering of information in 2018, the Committee concluded that the Netherlands was indeed not in compliance with the Aarhus Convention, and made a brief recommendation to the Netherlands to "take the necessary legislative, regulatory and administrative measures to ensure that when a public authority reviews or updates the duration of any nuclear-related activity under Article 6 of the Convention, the provisions of paragraphs 2-9 of Article 6 are applied" (Qiu, 2020).

The implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the post-Soviet countries is not as effective as it is stipulated by its content. Thus, in 2007, the Committee on Environmental Policy of the European Economic Policy provided, in particular, an overview of the effectiveness of environmental activities in Ukraine and conclusions on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention. According to this document, Ukraine lacked a national coordinator for the Aarhus Convention for three years after 2003, with a new coordinator appointed only in June 2006. This situation weakened Ukraine's participation in meetings of the Parties to the Convention and in the international implementation process, prompting the Committee to issue a number of critical observations. Thus, the Public Council under the Ministry of the Environment of Ukraine expressed its concern about the impact on the environment of the proposed major projects, such as the reconstruction of the Danube-Black Sea shipping channel, as well as the lack of a state program for sustainable development and the lack of integrated environmental protection elements in the sectoral components of the EU-Ukraine

European Neighborhood Policy Action Program. Moreover, the Committee expressed concern about insufficient transparency in relations with local self-government bodies, which hinders public participation at the early stages of decision-making for certain types of activities.

This concern is particularly relevant to local commissions responsible for land use and urban planning. Thus, according to the above provisions, the Committee positively assessed the adoption of a number of normative acts, but, at the same time, noted the lack of direct-action mechanisms in most normative acts, which hinders the successful implementation of the requirements of the Convention. However, since 2016, positive changes have been recorded in Ukraine in the issue of fulfilling the obligations under the Convention. The basis for this conclusion is the national report on the implementation of the Aarhus Convention 2016. According to this document, a significant contribution to the implementation of the Convention was the adoption of Law of Ukraine No. 2939-VI "On access to public information" (2011), which prescribes certain guarantees for ensuring the right to access to public information, and, accordingly, to environmental information. According to Part 1 of Article 3 of the Law of Ukraine No. 2939-VI "On Access to Public Information" (2011), the right to access public information is ensured by requiring information holders to provide and publish data, while making the process of submitting requests and receiving information as simple and straightforward as possible. At the current stage, the legislation is at the peak of its reform in order to ensure the most effective mechanism for access to environmental information on the territory of Ukraine.

Access to environmental information in Belarus is governed by national legislation, including the Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 1982-XII "On Environmental Protection" (1992), as well as the Aarhus Convention, which forms part of national law and can be applied directly. As a result of the public association of Belarus "Ecodom" held in 2018, founded in 1996 to promote an environmentally friendly lifestyle and ideas of sustainable development, monitoring the implementation of the right to access to environmental information in Belarus, the following conclusions were obtained: executive authorities are not fully familiar with the norms on public access to environmental information, which was expressed in non-compliance with the deadline for its provision, consideration of applications not in the requested form (instead of providing a copy of the protocol of public discussions, an answer was given in which the content of the protocol was rewritten), refusal to provide information on far-fetched grounds; judicial practice in cases defending the right to access to environmental information shows that the restrictive approach of courts to the interpretation of legal norms prevails with a twofold advantage; the concept of "environmental information" still needs to be clarified (Magonov, 2014). The Republic of Kazakhstan, having become a sovereign country, has signed many international legal initiatives on environmental protection, including implementing the provisions of the Aarhus Convention into the environmental legislation of the state.

In contemporary Kazakhstan, several challenges hinder the effective implementation of the Aarhus Convention: the presence of incompetence and corruption within state bodies and a lack of coherent coordination between them; gaps in the legal framework, including unclear mechanisms for citizen participation in decision-making and an inefficient system for collecting and processing environmental information; shortcomings in the judicial system; weak institutionalization of the Convention; and low levels of public engagement (Erezhepkzy, 2018).

As a result, it can be concluded that a number of legal acts that establish requirements for access to environmental information and interpret this concept in their regulatory initiatives form the basis for all European (and not only) countries to improve environmental legislation. The EU has taken important steps to bring Community legislation as closely as possible in line with the requirements of the Aarhus Convention. Namely, the Community's environmental policy is based on the integration of environmental protection into other policies and is aimed at protecting the environment for future generations. The countries that signed the Aarhus Convention have created specialized acts regulating and defining the concept of "environmental information" and access to it, and also interpret and define ways and mechanisms for the effective implementation of such a right, in turn improving integrated systems of electronic access to environmental information. The countries of the post-Soviet space have ratified a large number of international legal initiatives on issues related to access to information in the environmental sphere, thereby confirming their intention to the international community to direct state policy towards effective and safe interaction with the environment, and to carry out a steady course in this direction. However, the conducted research gives every reason to assert that the legal regulation in the field of ensuring access to information in the field of environmental protection remains declarative, requiring the implementation of real and effective mechanisms for the implementation of legalized rights to environmental information.

5. DISCUSSION

Many countries have laws regulating citizens' right to information, often focusing on data held by state bodies. Scholars refer to these as "freedom of information" laws. For instance, Mendel (2008) notes that such laws grant civil society access to information managed by elected authorities, while obliging these authorities to publish key information. However, according to Curtin and Leino-Sandberg (2016), EU legislation on access to documents is outdated, given the institutional practices of its various bodies and agencies operating across diverse political contexts. According to legal scholars, the existing legal framework requires further refinement. Transparency levels in public institutions remain uneven and often fall short of proactive disclosure standards (Beaulieu & Matos de Lara, 2021). The entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (2009) reinforces the significance of the right to

information and encourages European states to expand their legal obligations in this area. The ratification process also shows that many Eastern European countries are eager to appear more transparent than their Western counterparts, demonstrating their commitment to the rule of law.

It should also be noted that in the context of transformations of environmental legal relations, the interpretation of the definition of "environmental information" is also changing, which, of course, acquires a new meaning. According to Demchuk (2021), the factors that have shaped the development of the concept of "environmental information" and its content include: the establishment of a modern democratic state; raising public awareness; involving citizens in the approval of environmentally significant initiatives; ensuring access to environmental information that can help prevent serious threats to life and health (as illustrated by the Chernobyl disaster); harmonizing domestic legislation with EU law; and advancements in information technology and scientific research. The legal scholar emphasizes that the basis for understanding and researching the legal nature of environmental information is the awareness of the inextricable connection between man and nature. On the one hand, economic activity negatively affects the state of the natural environment; the anthropological pressure on the environment increases annually, sometimes leading to irreparable consequences. On the other hand, a human as a biological being increasingly feels helpless in the face of natural disasters, and environmental information can become a tool, the correct and timely use of which will minimize the negative impact of humans on nature and protect them from natural disasters.

Barritt (2024) considers the Aarhus Convention a key instrument of international environmental law, promoting goals from intergenerational justice to sustainable development and environmental protection. The jurist notes that environmental law encompasses broad concepts — such as environmental democracy, governance, and sustainable development — each shaping expectations of the law's purpose. Since its adoption, the Aarhus Convention has been widely praised for fostering civic environmental responsibility and democratic legitimacy. By legally recognizing the right to an adequate environment, it strengthens the transparency and accountability of state authorities in environmental protection (Počuća et al., 2018). Scholars emphasize that an effective legal framework addressing today's environmental crises should empower civil society and raise public awareness about environmental issues affecting both human life and ecological sustainability.

Erezhepkzy (2018) highlights that state regulation of public access to environmental information involves creating legal, economic, and social mechanisms to ensure such access. In Kazakhstan, these mechanisms remain underdeveloped, particularly in providing timely information to the public at early stages of decision-making and incorporating public feedback into lawmaking. Erezhepkzy (2018) recommends improving legislation to ensure effective public communication and clearer rules for public participation in decisions affecting environmental protection. Similarly, Magonov et al. (2018) propose

measures for Belarus, including enhancing the professionalism of law enforcement and legal personnel, increasing public legal awareness, and expanding and publishing judicial practice, for example, in cases related to the Aarhus Convention.

Ratification of the Aarhus Convention by Ukraine, according to the opinion of Shyhapova and Cherkashyna (2020), is not the last stage of its implementation. According to Dikhtievskyi et al. (2022), addressing the existing challenges in accessing public information on the use of natural resources in Ukraine requires establishing clear regulations on the criteria for publishing such information on the official websites of the relevant authorities. The implementation of such a proposal is correlated with the determination at the legislative level of the timing of the publication of information on the state of use of natural resources by state authorities in the field of environmental protection (Ladychenko & Golovko, 2018), as well as the managers of such information. Taking into account the above, in the opinion of the jurist, it is necessary to amend the Law of Ukraine No. 2939-VI "On access to public information" (2011) by supplementing it with Article 15-1 as follows: Publication of information on the state of use of natural resources by its managers.

Proskura (2021) notes the fact that environmental information is publicly open, although there are also certain restrictions in the exercise of the right of access to environmental information. Restrictions on this right must be justified in a certain way at the legislative level, and also represent an integral, logical, consistent mechanism for ensuring security. In this regard, the lawyer proposes to distinguish the following types of environmental information: necessary, socially important, and general environmental information. Scientists are also invited to introduce the practice of environmental information requests into the educational program of middle and graduate students and students in the post-Soviet space. In this way, young people will be able to practice and understand the basics of accessing environmental information and learn how to exercise their own information rights in practice. The use of environmental information, the prevention of environmental threats to the local population, and the improvement of the efficiency of local governance are the goals of local authorities (Ladychenko et al., 2020). To ensure public access to environmental information, researchers suggest developing an open data infrastructure centered on a unified state open data portal integrated with other web portals; regularly publishing and updating datasets as open data; and promoting open projects and services — social, public, media, and commercial — based on this data. In particular, collaboration with authorities can enhance transparency and efficiency, provide high-quality services, and foster innovative business development.

In the EU, environmental transparency is supported by around 181 reporting obligations across 58 pieces of environmental legislation (European Commission, 2017). Environmental data are widely available through impact assessments in member states, and while data collection and technology are not major obstacles, the capacity to effectively use this information is often limited,

including at decision-making levels. Strengthening skills and resources at management levels will enable better use of these technologies. Although member states control electronic reporting, integrating data from multiple sources changes this dynamic. Scholars note that sharing success stories of using new technologies can encourage cooperation and awareness in environmental information management. Proper and timely use of such information can minimize human impact on nature and improve disaster preparedness. To build an effective legal framework addressing the growing environmental crisis, the rights under the Aarhus Convention should focus on empowering civil society and raising public awareness of environmental issues affecting both human life and ecological sustainability.

An important component of environmental protection is based on the political component and the competence of state bodies, which have a direct and strong influence on the effective implementation of environmental policy, as well as the fulfillment of international legal obligations of states assumed in this area. Proper environmental governance is necessary to address the most urgent environmental problems that pose a serious threat to humanity and its survival. The Aarhus Convention, in terms of providing environmental information, reflects the general interest of the globalized public in ensuring government accountability and responsibility in the field of environmental protection. By linking human rights with environmental issues, the Convention elevates public participation in environmental governance to the level of a recognized human right to an adequate environment. This is realized through three specific rights: access to information, participation in decision-making, and access to justice. Today, the Convention is widely regarded as an important tool for promoting more effective environmental protection and supporting the principle of sustainable development. The provisions of this international document are mainly implemented in the legal systems of countries, including the post-Soviet space, providing greater transparency in environmental issues, creating opportunities for citizens to control state bodies, and making an undeniably significant contribution to environmental protection both at the regional and global levels. In connection with the concerns that arise regarding the impact of automated decision-making on transparency and its potentially discriminatory nature in the countries of the EU, a more detailed study of the possibility of applying legal measures that can contribute to increasing the transparency of automated decision-making systems in the field of access to public documents is required.

6. CONCLUSION

The study showed that the current legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan regarding the development of mechanisms for adequate, timely, and effective informing of the interested public at the very initial stage of the decision-making procedure on issues related to environmental protection requires its qualitative reform to better detail the parameters of effective public participation in decision-making on specific types of planned economic activities.

Improving access to environmental information in Belarus requires raising the professional expertise of law enforcement officials — including civil servants, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and legal scholars — enhancing the overall legal awareness of society, and expanding judicial practice while making its reviews publicly available. On the territory of Ukraine, there is also an imperfection of legal regulation in the field of ensuring access to information in the field of environmental protection. The analysis of the discussion positions of representatives of the doctrine of environmental law showed that it is necessary to make optimal, effective changes to the Law of Ukraine No. 2939-VI "On access to public information" to legislate the criteria for publishing such information on the official web pages of managers.

Restrictions in the examined laws should be justified legislatively and form a coherent mechanism for ensuring security. It is proposed to classify environmental information internationally into three types: essential, socially important, and

general. Additionally, incorporating the practice of requesting environmental information into secondary and graduate education in post-Soviet countries is recommended. Ensuring public access to environmental information in the post-Soviet space requires supporting the recommendations of researchers to develop an open data infrastructure centered on a unified state portal integrated with other open data platforms; regularly publishing and updating datasets as open data; and promoting open projects and services based on this data. In particular, collaboration with authorities can enhance transparency and efficiency, provide high-quality services, and foster innovative business development.

These conclusions highlight the relevance of the study for future research on improving environmental governance and public participation. The research is also limited by its focus on legal frameworks, without a direct empirical assessment of citizens' access and use of environmental information.

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