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NOTE

from: General Secretariat
to: Delegations

Subject: Second Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Bucharest, 23 – 25 November 2010)
- Information from the Romanian delegation

Delegations will find annexed a note from the Romanian delegation on the above topic, to be dealt with under “other business” at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 20 December 2010.

Second Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

Bucharest, 23 – 25 November 2010

-Information from the Romanian delegation-

The Second Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE/WHO-EURO Protocol on Water and Health (London 1999) to the UNECE Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki 1992) was held on 23 – 25 November 2010 in Bucharest, Romania. The event was organized by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Ministry of Health of Romania in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe.

The meeting was attended by around 180 participants representing ECE member states (32, including 17 EU countries), UN Organizations and Specialized Agencies, Intergovernmental and Non Governmental Organizations and the Joint Secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health (UNECE and WHO-EURO).

The Protocol currently has 24 Parties, 15 of which are EU Member States. In addition, several EU Member States such as Slovenia and Sweden, and several non-EU countries such as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have announced that they are in the process of ratification. Implementation of the Protocol requires an integrated approach and the alignment of policies and strategies in different sectors such as health protection, environmental management, regional development, investment, infrastructure, education, etc. The structure of work under the Protocol aims to reduce gaps between the most advanced and the less advanced countries, promoting collective approaches, exchange of experience, transfer of knowledge and mutual assistance.

The scope of the meeting was to review the progress achieved, during the Romanian chairmanship of the Bureau, by both the Parties and Signatories in the implementation of the Protocol since the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 17-19 January 2007) as well as to discuss and agree on further actions in the fields of water and health with the aim of fostering the implementation of the provisions of the Protocol.

The meeting showed the increasing relevance of the Protocol, both for EU-countries and for non-EU countries, and it is hoped that all Parties and other stakeholders will help to respond to the existing challenges regarding water and health by supporting implementation of the workplan for 2011-2013 and by ratifying and implementing the Protocol. At the meeting many speakers stressed that EU legislation and the Protocol on Water and Health are clearly complementary. This is particularly evident in one of the main obligations of the Protocol, the setting of targets, indicators and reporting in areas covering the entire water cycle ranging from drinking water quality; reduction of water-related disease; protection of water sources for drinking, bathing, aquaculture or shellfish harvesting; management of wastewater; to prevention, control and clean-up of pollution. In spring 2010, the Parties reported for the first time on their targets set as well as planned measures to achieve them. At the Meeting in Bucharest, the Parties reviewed the results of this first reporting exercise and considered the first regional implementation report and adopted the first decision on compliance.

Several guidance documents were adopted at the meeting which will provide strategic and practical support to the Parties in complying with the two main obligations of the Protocol: to set targets and deadlines, assess progress and report; and to develop systems for the surveillance of and response to water-related disease. The Guidance documents adopted include the *Guidelines on the Setting of Targets Evaluation of Progress and Reporting*, a *Policy* and a *Technical Guidance on water-related disease surveillance*. The Parties have demonstrated vision in recognizing that emerging issues such as extreme events (floods and droughts) and the impact of climate change will have important consequences in the achievement of the Protocol's objectives, namely, access to safe water and adequate sanitation for all. They therefore developed and adopted the *Guidance on Water Supply and Sanitation in Extreme Weather Events*.

Finally, the Parties adopted an ambitious workplan for 2011-2013 with activities in many areas. There are numerous opportunities for cooperation with the EU, for example in the activities on setting of targets, implementing measures, assessing progress and reporting, indicators and reporting, small-scale water supply, public awareness, education and information, etc. It is also of great importance to link this Protocol with the EU Water Initiative to strengthen environmental governance in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asian countries.

During the meeting, a new Bureau of the Parties was elected: Norway, as chair, and Germany, Romania, France, Hungary, Switzerland, Belgium, Russian Federation and Belarus as members.

The vast majority of targets as required by the Protocol correspond to those required by relevant EU Directives. In addition, in the EU Member States, the trend has been to develop the implementing legislation in accordance with the EU Directives dealing with drinking water, sanitation, water management, bathing water and wastewater treatment. However, at the Bucharest meeting, it was mentioned that the Protocol touches upon areas which are not regulated by EU Directives and, in this respect, the Protocol offers the opportunity to deal with specific or emerging problems beyond the scope of EU legislation or with a different approach, such as small-scale water supply and sanitation systems, equitable access to water.

In their concluding remarks, the participants stressed that the meeting was a success and represents a step forward in achieving better human health by promoting sustainable management of water and sanitation.
