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**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
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**MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION
ON THE PROTECTION AND USE OF TRANSBOUNDARY
WATERCOURSES AND INTERNATIONAL LAKES
and
MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO THE PROTOCOL
ON WATER AND HEALTH TO THE CONVENTION**

Working Group on Water and Health

Fourth meeting

Geneva, 9-10 December 2004

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**THE OSLO ROUNDTABLE ON WATER AND HEALTH IN EUROPE IN THE
CONTEXT OF ACTIVITIES UNDER THE PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH
AND THE PARTNERSHIP ON WATER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Note by the secretariat*

* Late submission as the Oslo Roundtable was held on 28-29 September 2004.

1. At the invitation of the Government of Norway, the Oslo Roundtable on Water and Health in Europe took place at the Soria Moria Conference Centre (Oslo) on 28-29 September 2004. In the preparations for this meeting, UNECE in consultation with WHO/EURO and the Norwegian Ministry of Health had prepared a background paper on the aim of the Roundtable and possible follow up activities. The annex to the present document is an updated version of this background paper, which takes into account the outcome of the discussions at the plenary meetings of the Roundtable and a written contribution by Italy, submitted to the secretariat prior to the Roundtable. The report on the Oslo Roundtable will also be made available to the Working Group at its fourth meeting.

2. The Working Group may wish to examine the document and provide guidance to the secretariat in the preparations for the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol.

Annex

THE OSLO ROUNDTABLE ON WATER AND HEALTH AND POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

Introduction

1. Access to safe water is a fundamental need and a human right, vital for dignity and health of all people. The challenge of sustainable water resources management has become acute for the countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)² and the countries in South-East Europe (SEE) as water scarcity grows, water quality declines, environmental and social concerns mount and the threats posed by floods and drought are exacerbated by climate change. The unsustainable use and inefficient protection of the quality of water have economic, social and public health impacts that constitute potential sources of conflict.

2. Many countries in the EECCA and SEE sub-regions consider access to drinking water and provision of sanitation for everyone within a framework of integrated water resources management, aimed at sustainable use of water resources, ambient water quality which does not endanger human health, and protection of water ecosystems, among their highest priorities. Their recent signatures and ratifications of the Protocol on Water and Health demonstrate their political will for improvement in the field of water and sanitation, but financial resources for full implementation are only partially available.²

I. THE OSLO ROUNDTABLE IN THE CONTEXT OF EXISTING INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES

A. Purpose of Oslo Roundtable

3. At the invitation of the Government of Norway, the Roundtable on Water and Health in Europe (Oslo Roundtable) was held on 28-29 September 2004 at the Soria Moria Conference Centre near Oslo.

4. The Oslo Roundtable had two objectives: (a) to initiate discussions on cooperation to strengthen the capacity of the public health sector in surveying and reducing water-related diseases; and (b) to examine the possibility of establishing a structure through which partner countries, organizations and financial institutions could continue an effective dialogue with

¹ Regional Implementation Forum on Sustainable Development, back ground papers on water and sanitation by the UNECE secretariat (ECE/AC.25/2004/5 and Add.1 and Add.2, web site http://www.unece.org/env/wgso/SustainableDevelopment/sd_forum.jan2004.htm)

² EECCA is an abbreviation for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and it includes the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

EECCA and SEE countries on reducing the burden of disease in the context of the Protocol on Water and Health.

5. More specifically, the Oslo Roundtable identified priority areas of non-infrastructure intervention in water resources management, safe drinking water supply and sanitation, reduction of childhood morbidity and mortality, meeting water needs for vulnerable groups, and gender issues related to water supply and sanitation. The Roundtable was also expected to suggest appropriate mechanism to respond effectively to these needs through a country-driven process, including through interventions at a local level.³

B. Links between the Oslo Roundtable and the Protocol's provisions

6. The Oslo Roundtable is closely related to the general objective of the Protocol on Water and Health "to promote at all appropriate levels, nationally as well as in transboundary and international contexts, the protection of human health and well-being, both individual and collective, within a framework of sustainable development, through improving water management, including the protection of water ecosystems, and through preventing, controlling and reducing water-related disease" (article 1).

7. More specifically, it is linked to the provisions under article 12 (Joint and coordinated international action) and article 14 (International support for national action). It is worthwhile noting that the latter article refers particularly to assistance by the Parties for improved formulation of projects in pursuance of water-management plans in transboundary, national and/or local contexts and of schemes for improving water supply and sanitation, in order to facilitate access to sources of finance.

C. Links to the EU Water Initiative

8. In their Declaration (ECE/CEP/94/Rev.1, paragraph 51), the Ministers of Environment of the UNECE region welcomed water-related initiatives and partnerships from all donors and the support they will provide to the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. One of these partnerships is the "Strategic Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development" aiming at water supply and sanitation (WSS) including work on innovative financing mechanisms for water infrastructure and integrated water resources management (IWRM), including transboundary river basin and regional seas issues among countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA).

This "Strategic Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development" is part of the EU Water Initiative, which was launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002.

9. As regards its implementation, the Statement on the Strategic Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development – East European, Caucasian and Central Asian Component of the EU Water Initiative (see ECE/CEP/111, paragraphs 22 and 23) underlines two important aspects:

³ The report on the meeting will be issued as separate document. It will be made available at the fourth meeting of the Working Group.

- The need for a mechanism to coordinate, follow up and monitor the initiative during the implementation phase, starting 2003 and lasting until 2015;
- The requirement that the initiative should - to the extent possible – use, and benefit from, existing mechanisms and institutions.

10. In the further development of the Partnership⁴, the UNECE secretariat has been asked to provide guidance to the work on integrated water resources management (IWRM), including transboundary river basin and regional seas⁵, and provide inputs on the same theme to further implement the Environmental Strategy for the EECCA region.

An early concept paper of November 2002, prepared by UNECE with the assistance of the Global Water Partnership⁶, proposed six areas of cooperative work, each composed of a number of specific actions, as follows:

- Legal and regulatory framework and its implementation;
- Establishment and strengthening of institutions;
- Improvement of infrastructure and non-structural measures related to water, human health and the environment;
- Monitoring and assessment;
- Access to information and public participation;
- Development of concerted action programmes.

11. Five of these areas of cooperative work have been accepted at the first high-level meeting of Senior Officials and other representatives of the Ministries of Environment and other relevant ministries, organizations and institutions (Moscow, March 2003) for further elaboration and the drawing up of “building blocks”, i.e. project proposals. The UNECE’s and GWP’s proposal regarding “Improvement of infrastructure and non-structural measures related to water, human health and the environment” was not among the accepted activities, mainly due to its potential overlap with the Partnership’s component on “water supply and sanitation (WSS) including work on innovative financing mechanisms for water infrastructure”, but also due to the non-participation of competent representatives of the health ministries/authorities from EECCA countries in the high-level meeting.

⁴ To that effect, two high-level meetings of Senior Officials from the EECCA countries were held in Moscow in early 2003 and spring 2004. Moreover, a Steering Group led by Denmark and supported by OECD and UNECE held several preparatory and follow up meetings. In addition, decisions on the further development of the Partnership were taken at the third meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention.

⁵ The other component of the Partnership (water supply and sanitation, including work on innovative financing mechanisms for water infrastructure) is led by OECD.

⁶ INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (IWRM) INCLUDING TRANSBOUNDARY RIVER BASIN ISSUES:

Background paper for the Environmental Strategy of the 12 countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), prepared by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Global Water Partnership (GWP), Geneva, 30 November 2002

12. From the above, one can conclude that with its focus on “non-structural measures related to water, human health and the environment”, the Oslo Roundtable and its follow up fill an important gap in the Partnership. It also covers assistance for the SEE countries that, by definition, are not part of the Partnership on water for sustainable development.

D. The Water Convention’s CWC Programme

13. At their third meeting (Madrid, November 2003), the Parties to the UNECE Water Convention included in their work plan for 2004-2006 a capacity-building initiative to improve transboundary water management in EECCA countries and increase coordination and cooperation between different countries, actors and projects.

14. This project, called “Capacity for Water Cooperation – CWC”, will focus on facilitating the exchange of experience in the EECCA region itself as well as between the EECCA region and other regions in Europe. The aim is to create a framework for cross-fertilization between actors in the EECCA region (e.g. countries, river basin organizations, institutions) and, at the same time, facilitate transfer of experience from successful practices and approaches developed outside the EECCA region.

15. The project will be developed through a series of workshops on the following themes:

- The legal basis for cooperation (Kiev, 22-24 November 2004);
- Joint monitoring and assessments of shared water basins, including early warning and alarm systems (autumn 2005);
- Access to and exchange of information, and public participation (spring 2005);
- Integrated water resources management and river basin management planning I including the EU Water Framework Directive (2005 or 2006);
- Shared river basins and the relation to regional seas (2005 or 2006);
- The application of the Protocol on Water and Health (mid-2006).

16. The latter workshop on the Protocol on Water and Health will make an assessment of the level of implementation of the Protocol in the region, share experience on solving common problems, provide best practices, draw “lessons-learned” on water and health issues and help to identify priority areas of action under the Protocol. Most probably, the workshop will be held in conjunction with, or part of, the International Congress and Trade Fair “Ecology, Water and Technology – ECWATECH-2006” in Moscow in June 2006. With all likelihood “non-structural measures related to water, human health and the environment” will become part of this workshop.

II. PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE OSLO ROUNDTABLE

A. Need for assistance in EECCA and SEE countries

17. The Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP), organized by WHO and UNICEF on behalf of the UN community, reports significant gaps in sustainable access to improved water supplies and adequate sanitation in EECCA and SEE countries.

18. To prepare for the Oslo Roundtable, the above countries have been requested by WHO/EURO to provide information about their specific needs for assistance. A number of these countries have submitted project proposals, which can be grouped as follows:

- Improving access to safe water for children in EECCA and SEE countries;
- Disadvantaged areas;
- Governance – legislation, standards and guidelines;
- Surveillance and laboratories;
- Health aspects of water resources management.

19. It is worthwhile mentioning that most replies identified “children” as the target group. Actions should primarily focus on rural water supply.

B. Linking partner countries’ and organizations’ interest and recipient countries’ requirements

20. The WHO Resource Mobilization Unit provided assistance to the preparation of the Oslo Roundtable and had prepared a list of contacts with whom WHO had previously had a successful fundraising experience. Initial communications have been sent to these contacts. On the occasion of the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, 23-25 June 2004), representatives of Canada, Belgium, France, Germany and the OECD have also been approached for assistance. Norway through its Embassies was supporting the process of linking partner countries’ and organizations’ interests and country assistance needs.

III. THE WAY AHEAD

A. Oslo Roundtable and High-level follow up meetings

21. The participants of the Oslo Roundtable concluded that this meeting was an important step in the development of proper mechanisms to implement articles 12 and 14 of the Protocol. The participants also agreed that a follow up to the Oslo Roundtable with its focus on health issues and non-structural measures will fill an important gap in the Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development.

22. In further developing and implementing follow-up activities, coordination and even joint action is needed with the bodies responsible for, or involved in, the Partnership, in particular the Partnership's lead country/organization (Denmark until the end of September 2004, and its successor, the European Commission, thereafter), the UNECE secretariat and the Water Convention's Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management. Most of this work would fall under the responsibility of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group (see sub-chapter C below) and the secretariat (see sub-chapter D below).

23. Experience with the Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development has also shown the need for a mechanism to keep the political momentum of assistance programmes. This can be achieved through high-level meetings convened among the partners involved, such as the meetings of the Protocol Parties.

24. In addition, a mechanism could be developed under the Protocol, to keep other committees and bodies, which act under the auspices of UNECE or WHO/EURO, informed about the assistance programmes. In particular, arrangements should be made and cooperation sought with the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy, the European Environment and Health Committee as well as meetings of Senior Official responsible for the preparations of Ministerial meetings under the Environment for Europe process as well as the Ministerial Conferences on Environment and Health.

25. Given its mandate and functions, the Meeting of the Protocol Parties (see particularly article 16 of the Protocol) is the most appropriate body to keep the political momentum of the Oslo Roundtable and make policy decisions regarding future priorities (see also appendixes I and II).

C. Roundtable Follow-up Working Group

26. Experience under the Water Convention shows that bodies, like the Meeting of the Parties, the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties or the existing Working Group on Water and Health are unlikely to cope with operational aspects of the preparation, overview and facilitation of, and fund raising for, such water-and-health-related projects as described above.

27. Such a task could be delegated to a specific group, which could provide the intergovernmental and interagency framework for the follow up to the Oslo Roundtable. For the purpose of this document, this group will be called Roundtable Follow-up Working Group.

28. Norway is currently exploring the possibility of acting as a lead country of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group for a given period of time and suggested that the Working Group be co-chaired by a "recipient" country. Norway will inform the Working Group on Water and Health, accordingly.

Draft terms of reference of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group

29. Although the draft terms of reference of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group , including its possible decision making authority, would need to be based on the outcome of the fourth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health as well as discussions in the Legal Board, some preliminary elements can already be given noting the ongoing processes regarding the implementation of the Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development and existing models of project preparation committees.

30. The terms of reference of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group could include such items as:

(a) Assessments of priority needs. (Review the priority needs of EECCA and SEE countries, recommend key activities that would be relevant and effective to address those needs, and evaluate progress, based on indicators, towards the achievement of the aims of the Oslo Roundtable).

(b) Advice for the development of implementation projects. (Provide advice to the EECCA and SEE countries in the improved formulation of projects in order to facilitate access to source of finance as stipulated in article 14 (b) of the Protocol on Water and Health).

(c) Networking to establish, facilitate and develop cooperation and facilitate access to sources of finance. (Promote collaboration between national ministries/partner groups and the different international/regional networks of expertise and finance (e.g. Global Water Partnership, Regional Environment Centres, river basin organisations, ODA countries, financial institutions); establish links with the Partners that make up the Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development).

31. To carry out its functions, the Roundtable Follow –up Working Group would rely on secretariat services as described in appendix II.

Composition of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group

32. The Roundtable Follow-up Working Group should be a body composed of: (a) representatives of recipient countries; (b) representatives of partner countries, organizations and financial institutions⁷; and (c) technical experts. It is desirable to have a sufficient seniority of members of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group.

33. Technical experts include representatives of WHO Collaborative Centres, staff of the International Water Assessment Centre established under the Water Convention and members of the Convention's or the Protocol's working groups.

⁷ This includes lead ODA countries, other countries and international organizations with cooperation programmes of recognized importance to water and health, financial institutions as well as international foundations with recognized activities in water and health.

34. The participation of NGOs in meetings and other activities of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group follows the provisions in the Rules of Procedure (see MP.WAT/WG.4/2004/6).

35. The periodicity of meetings of the Working Group is still to be agreed upon. Although major parts of the work could be done by correspondence, at least one meeting per year, possibly in conjunction with the annual meetings of the Working Group on Water and Health or another meeting under the Protocol should be envisaged.

Link between the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group and other bodies under the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol

36. Following preliminary discussions during the third meeting of the Water Convention's Working Group on Water and Health (Budapest, April 2004) and some consultations with countries that have signed or ratified the Water-and-Health Protocol, it is important to repeat that follow up activities to the Oslo Roundtable shall become part of activities under the Protocol, pending – as mentioned above – a decision by the Parties at their first meeting.

37. To facilitate a decision by the Parties, details of the links between the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group and other bodies under the Protocol will be worked out by the Protocol's joint UNECE/WHO-EURO secretariat after the fourth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health in consultation with the Legal Board as well as countries that have ratified the Protocol.

D. Secretariat functions

38. The implementation of follow up activities to the Oslo Roundtable requires secretariat support, both from WHO/EURO and UNECE to carry out the following functions:

- (a) The convening and preparing of meetings of the RFC as well as related meetings (e.g. consultations of the joint secretariat and the lead country, Norway);
- (b) The transmission to the Partners involved in the Oslo Initiative of reports and other information received in accordance with the decisions taken by the Parties to the Protocol and the RFC;
- (c) The performance of such other functions as may be determined by the Meeting of the Parties and the RFC.

39. The above-mentioned secretariat functions are not part of the functions of the joint UNECE-WHO/EURO secretariat for the Protocol and require adequate staffing and finance through extra-budgetary contributions as stipulated in article 17, paragraph 1(c), of the Protocol.

40. Thus, the ultimate level of ambition in the development and implementation of follow up activities to the Oslo Roundtable depends on available financial and human resources to carry out the tasks under (a) to (c). In addition, financial assistance to representatives of

eligible countries to participate in the above meetings and travel support for staff of the joint secretariat is crucial.

41. These items require further specification in the preparations for the first meeting of the Protocol Parties. The draft decisions (see appendixes I and II) may facilitate this preparatory process.

42. Following the outcome of preparatory meetings for the Oslo Roundtable, Norway is exploring the possibility of strengthening the secretariat to carry out additional functions as described in the draft terms of reference (appendix II). The follow up to the Oslo Roundtable and the preparatory process for the first meeting of the Parties will shed more light on resource requirements and commitments by Parties so that a final decision can be made by the Parties at their first meeting.

Appendix I

**ELEMENTS FOR A DRAFT DECISION ON THE OSLO
ROUNDTABLE FOLLOW-UP WORKING GROUP**

The Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health,

1. Decides to establish the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group ;
2. Also decides that the terms of reference of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group shall include [see the text under Terms of Reference in the main body of the discussion paper],
3. Agrees that Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties may adapt these terms of reference to changing circumstances and needs to avoid to the extent possible, duplication of efforts with water-and-health-related activities of other United Nations bodies and other international organizations and programmes;
4. Invites the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and its working groups, the International Water Assessment Centre and relevant Collaborating Centres of WHO to participate in the activities of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group;
5. Invites lead ODA countries, other countries and international organizations with cooperation programmes of recognized importance to water and health, financial institutions as well as international foundations with recognized activities in water and health to participate in the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group;
6. Also invites competent international NGOs to participate in the activities of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group;
7. Expresses its appreciation to the Government of Norway for having convened the Oslo Roundtable on Water and Health in Europe and for its offer to support the activities of the Roundtable Follow-up Working Group.

Appendix II

**ELEMENTS FOR A DRAFT DECISION ON THE TERMS OF REFERENCE
FOR A FACILITATOR**

The Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health,

1. Agrees that facilitator shall:

(a) Critically analyze existing bilateral donor programs in order to be aware of current and future shifts in donor policy, procedures, and criteria including relevant programs operated by non-European countries/agencies/organizations active in the European region (USA, Canada, Japan and others);

(b) Keep abreast of the possibilities for international support to non-EU Member States through activities of DG SANCO, DG Environment and DG Research, ECHO, EURAID and other relevant bodies and programmes of the European Commission and the European Union, including the Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development;

(c) Keep abreast of the possibilities for international support through grants by international foundations and, in particular, through the Global Environmental Facility GEF and the FFEM;

(d) Maintain liaison with International Financial Institutions, particularly the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank, the Nordic Investment Bank, and the Asian Development Bank, to explore how health currently integrates, and could be made more prominent in major investment projects;

(e) Review programs of the United Nations, particularly CSD, and its specialized agencies, particularly UNEP, UNESCO and WMO, and review programmes under relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) to identify in a timely manner areas of possible synergy between the Protocol and the activities initiated by such agencies, programmes and agreements;

(f) Liaise with other organizations susceptible of operating grant programs or having the capacity to facilitate access to funding, in particular river basin organizations or professional groupings;

(g) Prepare an annual review on the evolution of donor policy and country needs in the area of water and health, and prepare a submission on the subject to the Meeting of the Parties, c.q. the meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health;

(h) Assist, upon request, with the formulation of country needs in line with the requirements of donor organizations;

(i) Organize, at regular intervals, conferences between donors and priority countries so that exchanges can take place on perceived needs and current possibilities for assistance;

(j) Participate in meetings of potentially interested parties and promote water and health as important component of any environmental or health focused cooperation policy.

2. Agrees also that Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties in consultation with the secretariat may adapt these terms of reference to changing circumstances and needs to avoid to the extent possible, duplication of efforts with water-and-health-related activities of other United Nations bodies and other international organizations and programmes.