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THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE POTENTIAL OF THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH COMMITTEE

Report to the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health

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the Council of Europe and the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

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Executive summary

The European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) was established by ministers of the environment and of health at the Second European Conference on Environment and Health in Helsinki in 1994, for a period of five years. Since then it has been leading the Environment and Health process in Europe, according to the mandate given in paragraph 27 of the Helsinki Declaration.

According to paragraph 29 of the Helsinki Declaration, an evaluation is to be made of the Committee's achievements and of its future potential and a report submitted to the Third Conference in 1999.

The evaluation of the Committee's achievements is presented in paragraph 5 of this document. On that basis, the draft terms of reference of a reconstituted EEHC as agreed at the pre-conference meeting (Bled, Slovenia, 14–16 February 1999) are set out in paragraph 13 of this document.

Introduction

1. The EEHC was established at the Second European Conference on Environment and Health in Helsinki in June 1994, initially for a period of five years. It comprised four representatives designated by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, four representatives selected by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy and representatives designated by UN/ECE, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), WHO, the European Commission (EC), the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. In paragraph 29 of the Helsinki Declaration on Action for Environment and Health in Europe, ministers agreed that EEHC's achievements and future potential would be discussed at the Third Ministerial Conference.

2. At its June 1998 meeting in Rome, EEHC had an initial discussion on this subject and requested the secretariat to prepare draft revised terms of reference for a reconstituted EEHC, for consideration at its November 1998 meeting in Helsinki. Following this meeting, the revised terms of reference of the EEHC were agreed at the pre-conference meeting.

EEHC's tasks from Helsinki to London

3. EEHC has been leading the Environment and Health process since the Helsinki Conference in accordance with the mandate given to it in paragraph 27 of the Helsinki Declaration:

- to promote the concept of sustainability as it is to be applied in relation to environment and health;
- to coordinate and evaluate the implementation of the Environmental Health Action Plan for Europe (EHAPE);
- when requested by countries, to facilitate and support the development of environmental health action plans, including assistance in analysis of the economic, environment and health implications of particular policy and intervention options; and to assist in the identification of external resources for the development of plans;
- to cooperate with the bodies of the Environment for Europe process, in order to promote the inclusion of actions addressing health issues in, or their close linkage with, action plans for the environment and to promote and facilitate development of joint projects by international organizations at European level in support of EHAPE;
- to provide advice on environmental health issues to organizations and donors ready to support countries in economic transition or recovering from the effects of armed hostilities;
- to assist in the identification of emerging environmental health issues that require collaborative action or further study;
- to promote a common research policy involving continuing collaboration between the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/EURO), the European Science Foundation (ESF) and other appropriate bodies that might wish to be involved, such as the European Commission;
- to foster information exchange and dissemination.

4. EEHC, in its capacity of steering committee for the London Conference, has also taken major responsibility for preparation of the Conference. This part of EEHC's work has been carried out in the spirit of the theme of the London Conference, i.e. "Implementation of action in partnership for the twenty-first century".

EEHC's achievements

5. EEHC has been a unique coalition of countries, international organizations and the European Commission in the area of environment and health in Europe. Among its strengths, EEHC brought together members who would not otherwise have come together, to discuss common issues and to build upon, rather than duplicate, each other's efforts. It enabled members from the environment side to learn more about the health implications of environmental factors, and members from the health side to learn more about environmental factors that can adversely affect health. It also enabled members to learn about current and planned work by various bodies, thus avoiding a waste of resources.

6. Its shortcomings appeared to stem mainly from its initial terms of reference. In retrospect, some of the terms of reference outlined in the Declaration on Action for Environment and Health in Europe and agreed at the first meeting of EEHC lacked sufficient focus and feasibility. Though these terms of reference were aimed at worthwhile goals, they were beyond the capabilities and remit of the countries and organizations represented on EEHC.

7. The terms of reference that were best fulfilled were those on which specific action was clear: supporting the development of NEHAPs through the establishment of the NEHAP Task Force, and promoting collaboration by the EC, ESF and WHO on research through the joint EC/ESF/WHO Liaison Group.

8. In 1996, a third specific function was taken on by EEHC – that of acting as the steering committee for the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. In this capacity, EEHC showed dynamic leadership. For WHO/EURO, this was the first time that an outside body had taken on such a function, and the positive experience shows that much can be gained from this approach. As the Steering Committee, the EEHC provided critical input into, and guidance on, all aspects of the Third Ministerial Conference.

EEHC's potential after London

9. The need for EEHC to continue after the London Conference should be linked not only to its present mandate (which was based on experiences up to the Helsinki Conference) but also to the theme of the London Conference ("Implementation of action in partnership for the twenty-first century") and its outcomes. The EEHC should also lead the Environment and Health process further towards its next goal, e.g. towards "Sustainability in environment and health in Europe", possibly aiming at making this the theme of a fourth ministerial conference.

Purpose of EEHC

10. The present functions of EEHC have been listed in paragraph 3.

11. In addition, the future EEHC should concentrate on facilitating and promoting implementation of the actions to be decided in London, taking advantage of the partnerships built up during the preparatory process.

Terms of reference of the reconstituted EEHC

12. The new EEHC should continue as an advisory committee with the same terms of reference as given in paragraph 27 of the Helsinki Declaration, and in addition (based on the considerations outlined in paragraph 9 above) with the following three functions which will be necessary to follow up on the London Conference's decisions:

- to monitor, facilitate and promote the implementation of actions decided by environment and health ministers at the London Conference;
- to promote cooperation and coordination with associated organizations and related processes and, in particular, the linkage between the Environment for Europe process and the Environment and Health process;
- to develop further the Environment and Health process in Europe by facilitating and promoting partnerships and intersectorality at all levels in the field of environment and health that lead towards sustainability.

Method of working

13. It is important that EEHC members feel shared ownership of the Committee. Therefore, the Committee should be given the flexibility to formulate its own rules and procedures. This should be done at the first EEHC meeting after the London Conference. At this meeting it should also be decided how the Committee can best carry out its work, e.g. by establishing topic-specific platforms, working groups or task forces on (some of) the topics discussed at the London Conference, to ensure that decisions made by ministers are also implemented in practice. Frequency of meetings, rotation of chairmanship, etc. should also be decided.

Composition of EEHC

14. In order to comply with its terms of reference (paragraph 13) and to make full use of the partnerships built up during the preparatory process of the London Conference, as well as those with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, EEHC should be composed in the following way:

- four country representatives appointed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy;
- four country representatives appointed by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe;
- representatives of intergovernmental bodies and international organizations (e.g. the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EC, EEA, the International Labour Organization, OECD, the United Nations Development Programme, UN/ECE, UNEP, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the World Bank, and WHO);
- six representatives of major groups, including NGOs, local government, business, trade unions, environment and health professionals, nominated by their appropriate organizations.

The chairperson and vice-chairperson should be elected from among the country representatives. One should be from the environment side and the other from the health side. Since the present EEHC chairman comes from the health side, the first chairperson of the new EEHC should come from the environment side.

All memberships should be for a two-year period, with a possibility of being reappointed once.

Secretariat

15. The WHO Regional Office for Europe will continue to provide the EEHC secretariat.

Funding

16. Salaries of EEHC secretariat staff members have so far been covered by WHO/EURO.

17. Operational funds for the EEHC secretariat in support of two annual EEHC meetings have been provided by the Swiss Government. The budget has amounted to approximately US \$70 000 per year. It has been spent on:

	US \$
• Office expenses (e.g. stationery, photocopying, postage, couriers, phone, fax)	17 000
• Expenses related to EEHC meetings	2 000
• Travel (air fares, per diem, local transport) for EEHC members from countries of central and eastern Europe/newly independent states	12 000
• Travel for secretariat related to EEHC meetings	16 000
• Other EEHC-related travel by secretariat staff (consultations, briefings)	8 000
• Participation in EEHC meetings by special invitation (e.g. NGO representatives)	5 000
• Consultancies	6 000
• Miscellaneous	4 000
Total	<u>70 000</u>

18. Sufficient funding for the EEHC secretariat for the full lifetime of the new EEHC should be secured. Funding should also cover salaries if the host of the secretariat does not offer to pay. The present workload of the secretariat has been serviced by approximately 0.5 professional staff and 0.5 secretarial staff, corresponding to approximately US \$90 000 annually. The total funding requirement to run the secretariat is thus approximately US \$160 000 annually. The budget requirements for the first year's activities of the EEHC and funding possibilities will be discussed at its first meeting.

