



Second session of the meeting of the Parties to  
the Protocol on Water and Health  
Bucharest, Romania 23 – 25 November 2010

---

**Second session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE/WHO-EURO  
PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH  
23–25 November 2010 Bucharest, Romania**

Opening remarks by Mr. Srdan MATIC, Coordinator Environment and Health,  
World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe

On behalf of Ms Zsuzsanna Jakab, the Regional Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, I wish to thank the Romanian authorities for hosting this event and the participants for coming so numerously to this important meeting.

Time is limited, and an enormous amount of work awaits us – I shall therefore be brief, and limit these remarks to a review of the work done, an indication of the areas where WHO wishes to concentrate its efforts in future, and a highlight of some problems that require our urgent attention in the days ahead.

The Protocol is undeniably a successful multilateral agreement. Its provisions now affect the lives of over five hundred million people in twenty four countries, equally distributed over the eastern and western part of the pan-European region. The signs of growing interest to accede to



the Protocol especially from countries in the eastern part of the pan-European region bode well for its future growth.

**IN THE FIRST INTERSESSIONAL PERIOD**, WHO has supported the core bodies to the Protocol (Bureau, Working Group on Water and Health...), and led the joint secretariat's assistance to the Task Force on Water-related Disease Surveillance and the Task Force on Extreme Weather Events. WHO also hosted the *ad hoc* Project Facilitation Mechanism on behalf of both organizations and organized a number of targeted activities such as the workshop on small scale water supplies and karstic water. The outcome of this work will be presented to you later on in this session.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we will be discussing the **PROPOSALS FOR THE 2011 – 2013 WORK PROGRAMME** developed by the subsidiary bodies of the Protocol, I would like to now give a few highlights of WHO priorities for the next intersessional period.



- **Water-related diseases** Generally, the period since the signing of the Protocol showed a decrease in the number of people affected by water-related diseases singled out for priority attention at the time of the signing of the Protocol in 1999, and an increase in the number of countries reporting to WHO.

Nevertheless, it is clear that still not all countries are operating reliable and consistent **SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS**, and that significant effort will be required to strengthen the basic health systems in the intersessional period. This will require work at the national level, but will also necessitate the harmonization of legal frameworks and the promotion of a better synergy among relevant national networks in the pan-European region.

- **Water supply and sanitation** are primary components of any health system. **QUALITY OF SERVICE** is equally important as mere physical access. In the pan-European region, small scale water supplies form the



backbone for the very significant portions of the population but have not always received the attention they deserve. In many parts of the pan-European region, aging water treatment and distribution systems are particularly susceptible to weather extremes posing a significant vulnerability of the drinking water supply. Resilience assessment needs to be undertaken urgently, and adaptation mechanism strengthened, to ensure that these primary defenses for human health hold true.

- **Addressing inequity** has been the subject of many WHO activities, within and outside the framework of the Protocol, lastly in the Parma ministerial conference. More and more we see that the price of water and sanitation services at full cost recovery becomes an economic barrier to the fulfillment of the basic human right to water recently recognized by the UN General Assembly. Urgent action is required also in this area

---

Ladies and Gentlemen,



The work done since the first meeting of the Parties, and the manifest need for further work in the intersessional period before us, makes it necessary to face the **CHALLENGES** that exist with a clear mind.

**FINANCING** has been based on voluntary donations from a few countries, and has arrived in an unequal basis and in a piecemeal manner. This has caused serious problems for the continuity of staff, and for the operational implementation of the work. There is an urgent need for stable, adequate and predictable funding mechanisms and this will undoubtedly be one of the key areas in which this meeting will follow-up on the recommendations made at the first session of the Meeting of the Parties.

---

Our Agenda is full, and many important items await our attention. Let me therefore stop by wishing you all a successful meeting and an enjoyable stay in Bucharest.