

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Eighteenth session

Geneva, 17–20 April 2012

Item 8 (d) of the provisional agenda

Cross-sectoral activities: environment and health

Information paper No. 5

5 April 2012

Environment and Health Process: activities of the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board

Note by the secretariat in cooperation with WHO/Europe secretariat

Summary

The European Environment and Health Ministerial Board was established in accordance with a decision by the Fifth Ministerial Conference (Parma, March 2010) to serve as a political driving force for the Environment and Health Process. The Board is accountable to the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for Europe and to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy.

The present document provides an overview of the progress of Board's work as well as future perspectives.

The Committee will be invited to consider the information provided and take decisions, as necessary.

Background

1. In accordance with the *European Environment and Health Process (2010–2016): Institutional framework* (EUR/55934/7) endorsed by the Parma Ministerial Conference, the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB) is composed of eight ministers or their high-level representatives appointed by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe from the health sector and the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy from the environmental sector, so as to ensure equal sectoral and geographical representation.
2. Other members of the EHMB include the WHO Regional Director for Europe, the Executive Secretary of the ECE, the Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe, and the European Commission.
3. Furthermore, the Parma Institutional framework stipulates that Ministers will serve a two-year term of office. Annual meetings of the EHMB will be arranged back-to-back to the sessions of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy in alternating years, to facilitate attendance and to ensure the link to the two bodies that are its source of legitimacy. The Secretariat for the EHMB will be provided by the WHO Regional Office for Europe in close cooperation with the ECE and UNEP Regional Office for Europe.

4. The Parma Ministerial Declaration stipulates that the EHMB will report annually to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy (EUR/55934/5.1/Rev.2, paragraph 11).

I. Progress of work of the EHMB (2011–2012)

5. At its seventeenth session in November 2010, the Committee on Environmental Policy appointed four members from the environment sector for the first term of the Board (2011–2012)¹. These four members are the Ministers of Environment from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Romania and Turkey. From the health sector, the WHO Regional Committee for Europe appointed four members at its sixtieth session in September 2010. These four members are the Ministers of Health from France, Malta, Slovenia and Serbia.

6. The first EHMB (2011–2012) held two meetings thus far. The first meeting was convened in Paris on 4 and 5 May 2011, and the second meeting was held in Bonn (Germany) on 14 February 2012. The Minister of Environment and Forests of Romania and the Minister of Health of Slovenia have been elected as Co-Chairs of the EHMB.

7. At its first meeting, the EHMB agreed on its rules of procedures², which ensure that the Board is fully transparent and accountable to WHO's Member States. Furthermore, the EHMB discussed the next steps in the European environment and health process, emphasising the need to clarify the priorities within that process, its links to existing multilateral environmental agreements and its contribution to the sustainable development agenda. The EHMB also considered the approaches and tools that could be used to monitor and follow up the implementation of the Parma commitments, as well as the progress made towards establishing the European Environment and Health Task Force. The report of the meeting is available on the WHO/Europe website³.

8. The second meeting continued the discussion on the role of the EHMB and worked to identify best ways for conducting its work so as to fulfil effectively its mandate. At the meeting, the EHMB agreed to: (a) invite the European Commission to be more involved in its work; (b) organize a consultation on environment and health priorities; (c) develop a common statement linking health to sustainable development, for the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held from 20 to 22 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil); (d) develop strategies on communication and resource mobilization; and (e) support the engagement of young people. The report of the meeting will be made available on the WHO website⁴ in the nearest future.

9. In addition, at its second meeting, the EHMB proposed to extend its mandate from a two-year term to a three-year term with a view to organise its work in a more efficient way, given that the Environment and Health Ministerial Conferences take place every five to six years (following a decision of the Parma Ministerial Conference, the next Conference

¹ For the period of January 2011–December 2012.

² The Rules of Procedures have been posted on the WHO/Europe sharepoint of the Environment and Health Process as well as distributed to the WHO/Europe Focal Points for the Environment and Health Process (including representatives of both environment and health sectors) for comments. Since the WHO/Europe sharepoint is not a public domain, the Rules of Procedures have been posted on the ECE dedicated webpage for the Committee's eighteenth session.

³ En (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/149699/e95681.pdf), Fr (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/149699/e95681.pdf), and Ru (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/152399/e95681R.pdf).

⁴ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/environment-and-health/european-process-on-environment-and-health/governance/european-environment-and-health-ministerial-board-ehmb>

should be organized in 2016), and that a mid-term review is organized in between two conferences. Thus, a three-year term would allow for the preparation of the mid-term review by one EHMB, while the next EHMB will prepare the ministerial conference.

10. Since Germany is, through its Federal Ministry of Environment Protection, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, the single largest donor to the Environment and Health Process, and has recently signed an agreement with WHO providing expanded long-term financial support to the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health in Bonn, which provides the core technical capacity supporting EHP, the EHMB proposes that Germany is invited to be a permanent observer in EHMB.

11. The third meeting of the EHMB will take place in Malta on 8-9 September 2012, back-to-back to the sixty-second session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (10-13 September 2012).

12. In line with the provision of the Parma Ministerial Declaration, the EHMB annual report is currently under preparation by the EHMB with support from the WHO/Europe secretariat with a view to be submitted to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its session in September 2012. The Committee on Environmental Policy will receive this report at its session in 2013.

II. Appointment of the next EHMB

13. During the process of appointment of four members from the environment sector for the first term of EHMB (2011–2012), two special agreements were reached among interested countries that were also agreed by the Committee on Environmental Policy.⁵ These are as follows:

(a) The Belgian delegation had asked the Committee on Environmental Policy to accept a solution crafted between Romania and Belgium, and supported by the European Union (EU), regarding selection of a candidate for EHMB from the EU “subregion”. Belgium was ready to allow Romania to take up a seat in the 2011–2012 term of EHMB, insofar as that was considered as the first half of a split ticket, by virtue of which a seat was guaranteed for the Belgian candidate in the 2013–2014 term of EHMB, subject to reconfirmation of interest by that candidate.

Belgium had requested the Committee on Environmental Policy’s acceptance of the foregoing arrangement. Belgium took note of the statement of the Chair, and subsequent agreement by the Committee, that a seat in the 2013-2014 EHMB would be available for the EU as a “subregion”, and agreed with the Chair that that, combined with the internal understanding within the EU on the Romanian-Belgian split ticket, offered a sufficiently firm commitment in that respect. The Committee agreed with that solution

(b) Belarus and the Republic of Moldova agreed that Belarus should take up a seat on the 2011–2012 EHMB, with the understanding that the candidature of the Republic of Moldova for a seat in 2013–2014 EHMB would receive favourable consideration by the Committee, subject to reconfirmation of interest by that candidate. The Committee agreed with that solution.

14. The Committee will be invited to consider possible arrangements for the next appointment of the EHMB. When considering this issue, the Committee may wish to take into account the following:

⁵ The report of the seventeenth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (ECE/CEP/161, paragraphs 100–107).

(a) The EHMB proposed to extend its mandate from a two-year term to a three-year term with a view to organise its work in a more efficient way (refer to paragraph 9 of the present document). Both, the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy will be invited to take a decision on this matter;

(b) Furthermore, the EHMB proposed to invite Germany as a permanent observer to the EHMB (refer to paragraph 10 of the present document). Both Committees will be invited to take a decision on this matter;

(c) From the health sector, the Standing Committee⁶ of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe decided at its meeting in March 2012 to propose to the Regional Committee for Europe at its session in September 2012 to extend the mandate of EHMB to a three-year term and to postpone the elections of the four members from the health sector to September 2013, as well as to invite Germany as a permanent observer to the EHMB. The Standing Committee also suggested considering a “rolling” election schedule, where not all health or all environment ministers are elected in the same year;

(d) The WHO/Europe secretariat is proposing the following option for consideration and decision by the Regional Committee for Europe and by the Committee on Environmental Policy: to extend the mandate of this EHMB till September 2013, and appoint four ministers of environment at the 19th session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (in April 2013) and four ministers of health at the 63rd session of the Regional Committee for Europe (in September 2013). The length and beginning of the term of the second EHMB will be in accordance with the decision taken on the length of the mandate.

(e) As for the general length of the EHMB terms (two-year – at present, or three-year – as proposed by EHMB itself), the WHO secretariat is proposing to postpone the final decision on the length of mandate of future EHMBs to 2013, after a full report is submitted to both Committees.

⁶ The Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe is the equivalent of the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy.