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European countries meet to curb water-related diseases

Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes met for the first time on 17-19 January to launch ambitious programmes to prevent, control and reduce water-related diseases. The region has several hundred transboundary water bodies, including rivers, lakes and groundwaters, and countries depend on their neighbours for up to 90% of their water. International cooperation is thus crucial to ensure the sustainable use of such resources.



“This meeting of the Protocol Parties represents a key step of a process intended to increase the number of European citizens with access to safe drinking-water and basic sanitation,” says Dr. Roberto Bertollini, Director of the Special Programme for Health

and Environment of the WHO Regional Office for Europe. “Access to safe water is a basic human right ensuring the physical and social well-being of populations, but it is still not attained in today’s Europe. How can we accept to lose 37 of our children to diarrhoea each day for lack of access to safe water? We therefore call on all countries to be bold in the adoption of an Action Plan that will significantly reduce the current water-related disease burden.”



“Water on tap is taken for granted in the developed world, but the truth is that over 100 million Europeans still do not have access to safe drinking water. Such a situation is unacceptable at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Moreover, especially in the poorest part of our region, the quality of water is declining,” says Kaj Bärlund, Director of the UNECE

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Mobilizing wood resources

Can Europe’s forests satisfy the increasing demand for raw material and energy under Sustainable Forest Management?

Forests have always played a major role in the supply of wood as a raw material for the traditional forest products industry, as well as wood for energy purpose.



More recently, in the framework of climate change discussions and energy security, wood gained greater attention as a carbon neutral energy to

replace non-renewable energy sources. Policy- and decision-makers started promoting the use of wood as an energy source. This, combined with rising energy prices, is leading to an increase in wood demand. The traditional use of wood in Europe (sawmills, paper, panels) continues to expand as well. Thus, the competition for wood for bio-energy versus wood for traditional industry is an increasing challenge in many European countries.

On the other hand, forest inventories have shown that in most European forests, annual growth exceeds by far the volume of



wood harvested. Governments and stakeholders are therefore now considering how best to mobilize additional wood resources to satisfy demand for both raw material and energy. But this has also raised questions about the impacts of increased wood mobilization: How to handle emerging conflicts? How to elaborate ‘win-win’ solutions for all stakeholders without threatening sustainable forest management?

In order to discuss these questions, over 100 decision-makers from governments, industry,



Aarhus membership reaches forty

On 15 January 2007 Germany became the 40th country to ratify the UNECE Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Parties to the Convention, which entered into force in 2001, now include most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and nearly all EU member States.

The Convention is the world’s most far-reaching treaty on environmental rights. It seeks to promote greater transparency and accountability among government bodies by guaranteeing public rights of access to environmental information, providing for public involvement in environmental decision-making and requiring the establishment of procedures enabling the public to challenge environmental decisions.

Mr. Kaj Bärlund, Director of the UNECE Environment, Housing and Land Management Division, expressed satisfaction with the progress enjoyed by the



Convention: “With the latest ratifications, the Convention moves much closer to creating a means by which citizens from across the entire region can enforce their rights to protect and enhance the environment. With the number of Aarhus Parties rising to 40, attention may now shift to deepening implementation of the agreement, while countries outside our region stand to gain from the valuable lessons of UNECE’s experience with environmental democracy.”



For more information visit <http://www.unece.org/env/pp> or contact Jeremy Wates (jeremy.wates@unece.org).

European countries meet to curb water-related diseases (continued)

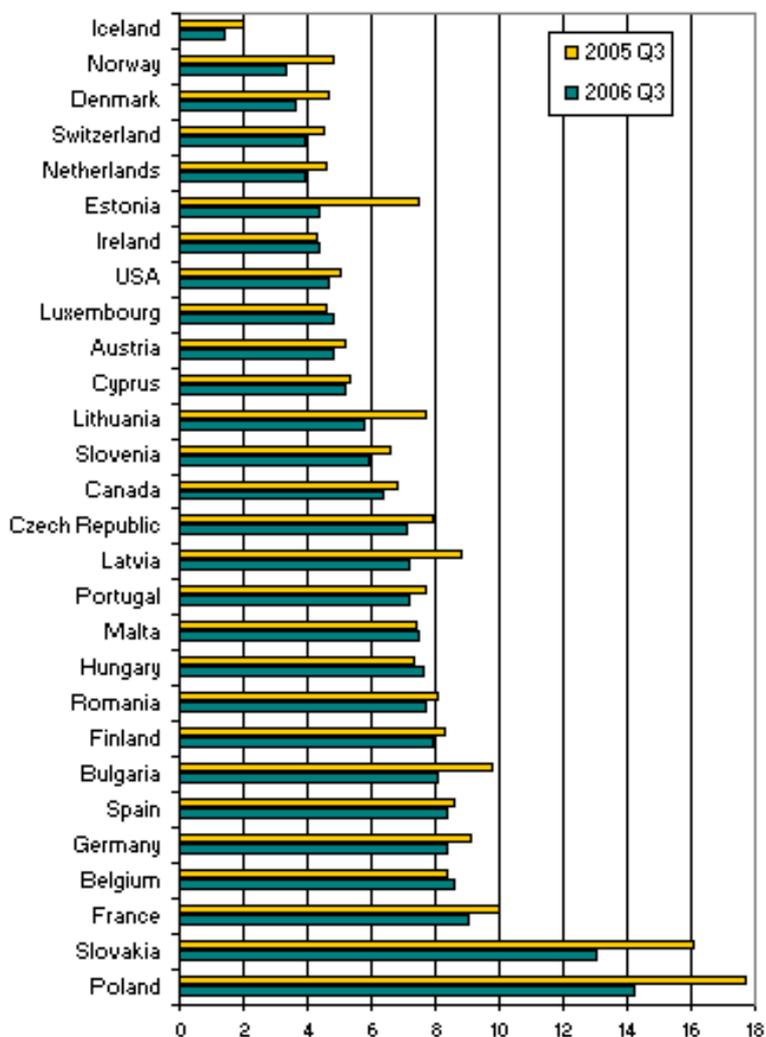
Environment, Housing and Land Management Division. "Water is a renewable resource with a limited capacity to recover from unsustainable human activities. Any failure to respect those limits today will have a high cost in terms of health and well-being tomorrow. If we do not want to hold back human development, concrete actions need to be taken." ♦

For more information see the UNECE website (http://www.unece.org/env/water/text/text_protocol.htm) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe website (<http://www.euro.who.int/watsan>).

Facts and figures

Slight tension relief on labour market

Unemployment rate (%) in selected UNECE countries, 2005-2006, 3rd quarter



Source: UNECE Statistical Database.

Most of the selected countries registered a lower unemployment rate during the third quarter of 2006 compared to the same quarter one year ago. This reveals that in those countries, there has been a relief on the labour market which was most sensitive in new EU member countries such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia, while in the traditional western countries, the improvements are less remarkable.



(continued)

forest owners and NGOs came to Geneva on 11-12 January for a 2-day workshop. Speakers

from different sectors gave presentations on relevant background information, case studies in Europe and possible strategies to approach the issue. This was the basis for fruitful, although sometimes controversial, discussions in working groups on the second day. Participants then drafted recommendations to policymakers and the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe.

Main conclusions are to acknowledge a potential to harvest more wood on a sustainable basis in most parts of Europe. However, there is an urgent need to improve the knowledge on how much wood is available and in what conditions, and there are certain obstacles to the mobilization of these resources that were addressed in the final recommendations. ♦

Further information, including the final recommendations, can be found at: <http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/workshops/2007/wmw/mobilisingwood.htm>.

Gas meetings



The Working Party on Gas will meet in Geneva on 23-24 January, starting at 10 a.m. in Conference Room VII, Palais des Nations. It will review the Blue Corridor project, aimed at wider use of natural gas as a motor fuel in international freight and passenger traffic. A Round Table on Securing reliable natural gas supply in the context of the sustainable development in the UNECE region will be held the same day, 23 January at 3 p.m. Senior managers and leading experts representing major European gas companies will present their views on the issue of secure gas supply in the ECE region. Open discussion will follow.

Coming up

23-24 January

Joint Meeting of Experts on the Regulations annexed to the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterways (ADN)

22 January

Gas Centre Executive Board

23-24 January

Working Party on Gas

25 January

Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Supply and Use of Gas