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Statement

by

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at

**the Side event on “The Protocol on Water and Health: A practical tool for
realizing global commitments”**

**Wednesday, 9 October, 12:35-1:15 p.m.
Budapest Water Summit, BLF room**

Minister Szócska, Ambassador Thebault, distinguished participants in the Budapest Water Summit, dear colleagues,

I have the pleasure of addressing you today in this side-event dedicated to the first international agreement adopted specifically to ensure the adequate supply of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for everyone – the Protocol on Water and Health.

The Protocol on Water and Health is a protocol to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. It was adopted in 1999 and came into force in 2005. It is serviced jointly by UNECE and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe and currently has 26 contracting Parties.

When adopting the Protocol in 1999, the regional member States set an ambitious and noble goal of ensuring access to drinking water and the provision of sanitation for everyone.

They thus acted well ahead of the global community, which recognized the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation only in 2010.

The Protocol also provides a clear vision and framework for action by linking the protection of human health and well-being with better water management. That means enhanced intersectoral and interministerial cooperation to prevent, control and reduce water-related diseases.

The need for such an all-inclusive instrument as the Protocol on Water and Health is especially evident now, amidst the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda. In spite of recent progress, provision of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation continues to be a challenge even in the pan-European region. As of 2011, 19 million people in the region still did not have access to safe water and 67 million people lacked access to adequate sanitation. Disparities within and between the countries, between urban and rural areas, as well as between

high- and low-income groups are also of an alarming scale. For example, in the Caucasus and Central Asia, 22% of the rural population lacks access to safe drinking-water sources as opposed to only 4% of urban dwellers; more dramatically, 71% of the rural population lacks access to piped water on premises, whereas only 16% of town and city residents are similarly disadvantaged.

The Protocol on Water and Health recognizes that, to achieve access to water and sanitation, infrastructure interventions alone are not enough. Such interventions should be supported by relevant policy and governance frameworks. Financial investments come only when there is strong policy support and stable governance in water policy and water management.

The main pillar of the Protocol's implementation is the obligation for Parties to set targets and target dates in various aspects of the water cycle and to strive to achieve continuous progress in their implementation. The Protocol does not

prescribe “one-size-fits-all” targets – countries set their own targets, which are different from country to country and can differ also at local and regional levels.

Parties, and those States working towards accession to the Protocol, receive assistance through mechanisms to support national action set out in the Protocol. So far, projects on assisting countries in setting their national targets and implementing them have been carried out in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

In Moldova, for instance, a project implemented in 2010 by UNECE, with the support of Switzerland, led to the adoption of national targets under the Protocol. That success put the country at the forefront of the Protocol’s implementation in the Eastern part of the UNECE region and helped to attract additional funding for a larger follow-up project that started in 2012.

A new programme of work, for 2014-2016, will be adopted by the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol in November 2013. It is expected that, under the programme, Parties will continue to focus on providing policy advice, organizing capacity-building activities and fostering the exchange of experience on such important issues as setting national targets and reporting, prevention of water-related diseases, small-scale water supply and sanitation and wastewater management.

In addition, the Protocol will continue its pioneering work on producing tools and guidance materials for elaborating policies on equitable access to water and sanitation, to realize progressively the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

In the context of the global discussion on the post-2015 development agenda, including on possible water- and sanitation-related sustainable development goals, the Protocol

could continue to serve as a tool to achieve international commitments, just as it has contributed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, thanks to its flexibility and adaptability to the specific needs of countries.

Due to the wide range of issues covered by the Protocol, it can contribute not only to possible future targets on water, sanitation and hygiene, but also to those on wastewater, water quality and water resources management.

Finally, on behalf of the Protocol secretariat, I would like to thank the Government of Hungary for hosting this side event as well as for its support of activities implemented under the Protocol since its inception. I also invite all partners to actively take part in the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol to be held in Oslo in November.

Thank you.
