Report of the third special session of the Regional Committee for Europe

Virtual session, 15 May 2023
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OPENING OF THE SPECIAL SESSION

1. In a letter dated 20 April 2023, signed by representatives of 30 Member States in the WHO European Region, the WHO Regional Director for Europe was requested to convene a special session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, pursuant to Rule 5 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe (EUR/RCSS3/INF./1). A draft decision was attached to this letter, which invited the Regional Committee to consider the closure of the WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD Office) in Moscow, Russian Federation, and the relocation of its functions and management of activities to the main office of the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) in Copenhagen, Denmark (EUR/RCSS3/CONF./2).

2. In consultation with the President of the 72nd session of the Regional Committee (RC72) and based on a decision by the Thirtieth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC), the Regional Director called this special session of the Regional Committee, to be held in a virtual format on Monday, 15 May 2023.

3. In accordance with Rules 10 and 11 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe, the special session was conducted by the officers of RC72:
   - Executive President: Ms Nora Kronig Romero (Switzerland);
   - Deputy Executive President: Dr Marat Shoranov (Kazakhstan).

4. The third special session of the Regional Committee was officially attended by 224 representatives of 50 Member States in the Region as well as by one observer from an invited State that is not a member of the Regional Committee, five invited representatives of the United Nations and specialized agencies, nine representatives of regional international organizations, and one representative of non-State actors in official relations with WHO or accredited by the Regional Committee (Annex 2). The special session was livestreamed.

5. The meeting was opened by Ambassador Ms Nora Kronig Romero from Switzerland, in her capacity as President of the third special session. She thanked the Regional Director for having convened the special session so swiftly and implementing rigorous procedures for its conduct.

6. The Regional Director outlined the various steps he had followed after he had received the formal request to convene a special session of the Regional Committee under Rule 5 of its Rules of Procedure. He had also received and communicated two proposals for substantial amendment of the proposed decision, from the Russian Federation and Tajikistan, respectively.

7. The Regional Director reiterated his strong commitment to safeguarding the technical and policy support of noncommunicable disease (NCD) prevention and control for all 53 Member States in the Region, subject to sustainable financing of the programme. With NCDs causing 90% of deaths and 85% of disabilities in the Region, and considering the current rate of progress as well as the striking inequalities, it was very unlikely that Europe and central Asia would achieve the targets related to premature mortality, tobacco and obesity by 2030 or the intermediate targets by the 2025 United Nations High Level meeting on NCDs. This premature mortality was largely preventable and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries bore the highest burden. As the economic costs of NCDs and the returns of investing in NCD prevention and control were high, the NCD acceleration agenda was becoming increasingly critical.

8. The President said that the third special session followed from the resolution that was adopted at the previous year’s special session, when the Regional Director was asked to explore options to safeguard the work of the NCD Office, including potentially relocating the functions and management of activities carried out by the office to a location outside of the Russian Federation. Based on informal consultations she had conducted prior to the session, it was clear that the proposal did not aim to maintain the NCD Office as a geographically dispersed office (GDO) in Denmark, but to have its functions and management of activities re-integrated into the main office of WHO/Europe.
9. The President recalled that, pursuant to Rule 5 of the Rules and Procedures of the Regional Committee, by virtue of which the session was called, the agenda would be restricted to the issue for which the special session was called and requested that delegates would adhere closely to the single subject matter on the agenda and refrain from any digressions or statements that would unnecessarily politicize the debate.

Adoption of special rules and procedures

(EUR/RCSS3/CONF./1)

10. The President said that the members of the Thirtieth SCRC, having been consulted by the Regional Director, had decided through a written silence procedure that the special session would take place on 15 May in a virtual format.

11. To accommodate the virtual format of this special session, the Secretariat had drafted special rules and procedures, which had been reviewed by the SCRC through its sub-group on WHO/Europe’s governance and distributed to all Member States on 2 May, inviting them to share any observations by 10 May. As no comments had been received, the President assumed Member States were ready to adopt the special rules and procedures.

12. The representative of the Legal Counsel provided a brief summary of the main items contained in the special rules and procedures. The officers elected at RC72 were still the officers of the current session. Since the President of RC72, Mr Nitzan Horowitz, was no longer available, Executive President Ambassador Ms Kronig Romero was chairing this session, supported remotely by Deputy Executive President Dr Marat Shoranov. She also reiterated that because of the virtual setting, only two voting mechanisms would be available; namely, show of hands and roll call. A secret ballot vote would not be possible via the virtual platform and this conformed to past practice.

13. The President said that in accordance with paragraphs 3 and 4 of the special rules and procedure, credentials had been submitted electronically before the opening of the session. Through a written silence procedure, the Thirtieth SCRC had approved the composition of the Credentials Committee, which met on 13 May and submitted a report confirming that all credentials were submitted by Member States. All requirements were met. Pursuant to Rule 22 of the Rules and Procedures of the Regional Committee, a quorum for the session had been achieved.

14. The representative of the Russian Federation said that, given the nature of the draft documents and with a view to avoiding the politicization and political risks incurred during their adoption, he believed that voting should be conducted by secret ballot, which he considered as the most appropriate voting method in this situation. Resorting to a previous practice was not rational and could serve as a basis for disregarding a universally accepted mechanism for adopting such significant decisions.

15. The representative of the Legal Counsel explained that a vote by secret ballot was not possible, owing to the fact that the security of voting by secret ballot could not be technically ensured through the Zoom platform. Since the inception of virtual meetings in 2020 at the Seventy-third World Health Assembly, Member States had accepted that no vote by secret ballot would be held during virtual or hybrid meetings. As a result, the special rules and procedures had consistently excluded that voting method. She also emphasized that the special rules and procedures had been submitted for the consideration of all Member States prior to the meeting and no objection had been made.

16. The representative of the Russian Federation said that his delegation did not believe that the decisions of the pandemic-era Health Assembly still applied to the ongoing situation, given that the pandemic was officially ended. While decisions and resolutions of the Health Assembly are generally recommendations, today the Regional Committee was supposed to be taking a legally binding decision that would underpin its work in the foreseeable future. The current platforms for holding virtual meetings had
the capability for conducting online votes. The choice of a specific platform could not justify the choice of certain legal instruments guiding the Regional Committee’s work.

17. The President asked whether the representative called the proposed special rules and procedures into question. If so, she would need to proceed to a vote on the issue. The representative of the Russian Federation stated that his delegation indeed agreed with proceeding to a vote.

18. In accordance with Rule 41 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe and in line with paragraph 15 of the proposed special rules and procedures, the Regional Committee adopted decision EUR/RCSS3(1) through a vote by a show of hands. The results of the vote were as follows:

- number of Members with the right to vote: 50
- number of delegations absent: 2
- number of abstentions: 4
- number of Members present and voting: 44
- votes in favour: 41
- votes not in favour: 3.

19. After the vote had been closed and the outcome communicated by the President, the representative of the Russian Federation noted that two Member States, namely Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, had participated in the vote with more than one representative, which is not in line with the procedure. In addition, he also noted that not all representatives voting had turned on their cameras.

20. The representative of the Legal Counsel explained that where more than one delegate per Member State had raised their hand in the system, only one hand per Member State had been counted. According to the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe, each Member State was allowed only one vote. Thus, the calculation was accurate.

21. Based on longstanding practice and at the proposal of the President, the Regional Committee agreed to grant the delegation of the European Union the status of observer in the special session, for it to be invited to attend and participate, without the right to vote, in meetings of committees and subcommittees related to the session, as well as in any drafting groups and other subdivisions addressing matters falling within European Union competence.

Adoption of the provisional agenda
(EUR/RCSS3/1)

22. Pursuant to Rule 5 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe, the agenda of the third special session contained a single item based on an official request, sent to the Regional Director by 30 Member States relating to the closure of the NCD Office in Moscow, Russian Federation, and the relocation of its functions and management of activities to Copenhagen, Denmark.

23. The representative of the Russian Federation stated that his country did not agree with the proposed wording of the agenda item and wished to replace that item with a discussion on the future modalities of the work of the geographically dispersed WHO Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases. His delegation also believed it was necessary to discuss whether it fell within the competence of the Regional Committee to make the decision to close a GDO.

24. The President confirmed that the Regional Committee would consider the various amendments proposed by the Russian Federation and Tajikistan during the discussions. The President thus believed that modifying the wording of the agenda would constitute a duplication of a discussion that would come up later during the special session.
25. Since no consensus could be reached on the formulation of the single agenda item, the President invited the Regional Committee to proceed to a vote by show of hands on the provisional agenda and its proposed formulation.

26. During the voting proceeding, the representative of the Russian Federation raised a point of order, stating that the conduct of the vote was in flagrant violation of the voting procedure as certain delegations did not turn on their cameras, and therefore proposed to restart the voting.

27. The President said she was committed to ensuring clarity of the proceeding and to excluding any doubt as to the results and therefore ordered to restart the vote on the adoption of the agenda, with the explicit request to all delegations to turn on their cameras. Votes would be counted only if the cameras were turned on.

28. In accordance with Rule 41 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe and in line with paragraph 15 of the special rules and procedures (decision EUR/RCSS3(1)), the Regional Committee adopted the provisional agenda as contained in document EUR/RCSS3/1. The results of the vote were as follows:

- number of Members with the right to vote: 50
- number of delegations absent: 4
- number of abstentions: 4
- number of Members present and voting: 42
- votes in favour: 38
- votes not in favour: 4.

29. The representative of the Russian Federation thanked the President for taking into account his delegation’s position. He noted that the vote on the first item had also taken place with similar violations. He asked the representative of the Legal Counsel whether that vote was valid.

30. The representative of the Legal Counsel reminded that the Russian Federation had raised the issue of cameras only after the first vote had been concluded, while in the second vote, it was contextual. The first vote by the Regional Committee had been regarded as valid.


31. The draft decision was proposed by the 30 Member States in the Region that had sent the letter: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Moreover, Georgia, Montenegro and North Macedonia had also expressed interest in co-sponsoring the draft decision.

32. Proposals for substantive amendments had been submitted by letters sent, respectively, by Tajikistan and the Russian Federation.

33. The representative of Denmark, speaking on behalf of the group of 32 like-minded Member States that requested the special session, as well as Andorra, Georgia, Israel and Monaco, said that a year had
passed since the Regional Committee had requested the Regional Director to explore options to preserve the work of the NCD Office, including by relocating it to an area outside the Russian Federation. The group had appreciated the efforts of the Regional Director and the Secretariat to fulfil that request. It was now up to the Regional Committee to take a final decision on whether or not the NCD Office in Moscow could be maintained.

34. The proposed decision submitted for the consideration of the Regional Committee was of great importance. NCDs were a major challenge to public health and excess mortality in the Region. An effective and coordinated WHO response required safeguarding the work of the NCD Office and securing a sustainable, long-term solution. The representative thanked the Regional Director and the Secretariat for the opportunities to discuss and consult on the alternative options set out in the related paper, which constituted a solid basis for the decision the Regional Committee was about to take.

35. The group shared the Secretariat’s assessment that a continuation of the work of the NCD Office from Moscow would challenge its ability to both provide timely technical support to Member States and work with international partners. Such a scenario would risk the implementation of the current grant and the achievement of the desired outcomes for the prevention and control of NCDs. In addition, the group considered the current interim arrangement unviable because it would not safeguard the NCD Office’s work in a sustainable, long-term manner.

36. Decisions regarding the NCD Office should have minimal impact on WHO/Europe’s capacity to deliver on its mandate through policy and technical support to Member States in the Region and beyond. The group noted the Secretariat’s assessment that a relocation of the NCD Office’s functions and activities to the main office of WHO/Europe in Copenhagen would allow it to continue its leadership role in NCD prevention and management while enabling the uninterrupted delivery of the signature roadmap for NCDs. In the light of that assessment, a group of Member States including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden had joined a co-financing solution, rendering the closure of the NCD Office in Moscow and the relocation of its functions and management of activities to the main office of WHO/Europe in Copenhagen viable.

37. It was neither appropriate nor reasonable that a GDO of such importance would remain under the auspices of the Russian Federation. The NCD Office could not remain in a country waging a brutal war of aggression against another country in the Region, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, and causing widespread human tragedy, a tremendous health crisis and unforgivable loss of lives. The group condemned the Russian Federation’s unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, including attacks on health facilities, and reiterated its full solidarity with Ukraine and its people. Therefore, the group wholeheartedly supported the adoption of the decision to relocate the functions and management of activities of the NCD Office to the main office of WHO/Europe in Copenhagen, opposed the two new amendments and urged all Member States in the Region to follow suit.

38. The representative of Ukraine said that, presently, 28 countries in the Region were accepting patients with war injuries from his country, and more than 40 countries accepted temporarily displaced people from Ukraine. He thanked partners for their political and financial support to enable the transfer of the functions and management of activities of the NCD Office from Moscow to the main office of WHO/Europe in Copenhagen, as well as the governments of the countries that had confirmed their financial contributions for the next three years.

39. The proposed decision demonstrated a strong and unified vision of the Region and aimed not only to achieve justice, but also to preserve critical NCD programmes. His Government was motivated by fostering conditions for the development of policies for those who put life and health at the core of their values. A country that destroyed civil infrastructure, including health facilities, and that would deprive people from access to health services, should not be given the honour of hosting offices of an international organization and participating in the development of its key strategic areas. It should not be allowed to organize meetings and conferences for health workers while killing at least 106 of them in Ukraine. The transfer of the functions and management of activities carried out by the NCD Office in Moscow would be the first successful example
of the exit of an office of an international organization from the Russian Federation, which would constitute a powerful signal.

40. Ukraine would make every effort to ensure that the experiences of its health care system and its heroic health workers contributed to global solutions for combating noncommunicable diseases.

41. The representative of the Russian Federation said that the pretext for this special session was a politically motivated request by Ukraine and a group of its allies, which did not contain a rational explanation for the need to convene a special session and the closure of the NCD Office in Moscow. It was based exclusively on political motives, which fully contradicted with the WHO Constitution. One of the fundamental principles of that document was to provide all peoples the opportunity to benefit from all achievements in the fields of medicine, psychology and related areas, which was a prerequisite for attaining the highest levels of health. As the sole provider of funding for the NCD Office's projects, the Russian Federation had allocated over US$ 50 million to assist many countries in preventing noncommunicable diseases.

42. GDOs were fundamentally useful entities that fostered public health. Thus, it was necessary to preserve existing WHO offices and establish new ones. The NCD Office employed approximately 15 staff and was assisted by hundreds of experts to fulfil its mission according to the GDO strategy. Prematurely closing the NCD Office during the extended COVID-19 pandemic would create unjustified risks to the population’s lives and health.

43. The issue of the continuity of the work was unresolved and work on significant projects would be stopped halfway, which would have an adverse impact on all NCD activities in the entire Region, and in central Asia and eastern Europe in particular. There were also risks that the agenda would change drastically. According to the European strategy for GDOs, Member States in the Region must be constantly informed, by the Regional Committee, of any significant changes in those offices' work. In emergency situations, the SCRC must be the first point of contact, and on the basis of the SCRC’s recommendation, other Member States must be informed, in the form of written consultation. Options for the modalities of continuing the work of the NCD Office had been discussed by the SCRC in December 2022, however, in March 2023 the SCRC did not discuss this issue, which he considered contrary to the procedure on this matter. Moreover, it would create an adverse precedent for the work of WHO/Europe, which would undermine the trust in the entire WHO.

44. The donor agreement provided for the NCD Office to run until 1 November 2024, and there were no other mechanisms to end this agreement. There was no legal ground to end the activities of the GDO and WHO/Europe did not have any established procedure to forcibly close a GDO. He also wondered what would happen to its staff and experts. Consultations should be held to consider the possibility of continuing work in Moscow. He requested that a subcommittee be created by the Regional Committee to study the issue of the future work of the NCD Office in Moscow.

45. The representative of Belarus said that his Government valued its cooperation with WHO. In that regard, the NCD Office was a key mechanism for lowering the incidence of NCDs in the Region and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals pertaining to lowering premature deaths from NCDs. His delegation believed that the location in Moscow was ideal. The Russian Federation consistently provided comprehensive financial, technical and expert assistance to Member States in the Region on issues related to NCDs. His delegation was concerned by the politicization of cooperation in the health care sphere. Transferring the NCD Office to another country would lead to expenditures that would have an impact on the effectiveness of the preventive work in the entire Region.

46. The President said that the Regional Committee would then proceed to the consideration of the draft decision submitted by 30 Member States. Pursuant to Rule 33 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe, the Regional Committee would first consider the amendments to the draft decision, starting with the one that deviated the most in substance from the initial proposal, which she considered to be the proposal by the Russian Federation. Once the amendments had been considered, the Regional
Committee would be invited to vote on the actual draft decision. In the interest of clarity, she requested that voting take place by roll call with the cameras turned on so that the delegates could be seen and identified.

47. The representative of the Russian Federation said that any decision-making required a balanced discussion of all the options declared at the current session. In addition, Tajikistan’s position regarding its proposal had to be considered and he sought clarification as to whether the question of transferring the NCD Office to Tajikistan would be considered. He requested that the floor be given to the delegation of Tajikistan.

48. The President clarified that both the amendments would indeed be considered. The Regional Committee would first consider the amendment proposed by the Russian Federation and then the amendment proposed by Tajikistan. Lastly, the Regional Committee would proceed to a roll call vote on the initial draft decision, which would either be amended or not depending on the outcome of the first two voting rounds.

49. The representative of Tajikistan said that his delegation was grateful for the transparent conduct of the proceedings. He expressed his gratitude to WHO/Europe for its assistance in alleviating the burden of NCDs. The NCD Office aimed to enhance the capabilities of WHO/Europe and focus on areas with unmet needs by attracting additional resources for work carried out for the benefit of the entire Region. The NCD Office had operated in the Region since 2014 and had proven to be reliable and effective.

50. His delegation was concerned that the NCD Office’s closing and the transfer of its functions and management of activities to the main office of WHO/Europe in Copenhagen would negatively impact on the effectiveness and quality of the assistance provided by WHO to countries in need of preventive measures for NCDs. In particular, ongoing consultations for projects would be interrupted. In that regard, Tajikistan had informed the Regional Director that it was ready to host the NCD Office in the city of Dushanbe, as it considered to meet all the conditions required by the GDO strategy to host the NCD Office, namely political stability, qualified personnel, transport accessibility and relatively lower real estate rental cost compared to European countries. This could be ensured in a cost-effective manner given its proximity to the main recipient countries in central Asia. His delegation was ready to set forth a detailed plan on continuing the work of the NCD Office in Dushanbe. Medicine and health should always be separate from political issues.

51. The representative of Armenia said his delegation was very concerned about the conflicts and humanitarian crises in Europe, which had resulted in loss of life, destruction, mass displacement and atrocities in violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. The deliberate targeting of civilians and critical civilian infrastructure, obstruction of supplies, food, medicine and other essential goods, disruption of gas and electricity supply and denial of humanitarian access to conflict zones had a detrimental impact on the general health care situation, including in the Region. Everyone was entitled to the right to health and that was even more pertinent to people living in conflict zones. Their human rights and fundamental freedoms and, in particular, the right to life and health should be protected in all circumstances. WHO should be given safe and unimpeded access to any conflict zone in line with humanitarian principles.

52. At the same time, his delegation highlighted Armenia’s existing positive cooperation with the NCD Office. Armenia was a beneficiary of the technical support provided by the NCD Office and therefore believed that the activities of the NCD Office should not be impaired. In that respect, it did not support its relocation.

53. The President said that the Regional Committee would then proceed to voting on the proposal of a substantive amendment submitted by the Russian Federation as contained in EUR/RCSS3/INF./3.

54. The representative of the Legal Counsel announced that the vote would take place by roll call and urged representatives voting to turn on their microphone and camera when they were called.
55. The representative of the Russian Federation requested that his delegation’s position regarding the violation during the first vote would be recorded.

56. In accordance with Rule 41 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe and in line with paragraph 15 of the special rules and procedures (decision EUR/RCSS3(1)), the Regional Committee rejected the substantive amendment submitted by the Russian Federation as contained in EUR/RCSS3/INF./3. The results of the vote were as follows:

- number of Members with the right to vote: 50
- number of delegations absent: 4
- number of abstentions: 3
- number of Members present and voting: 43
- votes in favour: 3
- votes not in favour: 40.

57. The President then said that the Regional Committee would proceed to a vote on the proposed amendment submitted by Tajikistan as contained in EUR/RCSS3/INF./2.

58. The representative of the Legal Counsel announced that the vote would take place in the same manner by roll call and urged representatives voting to turn on their microphone and camera when they were called.

59. In accordance with Rule 41 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe and in line with paragraph 15 of the special rules and procedures (decision EUR/RCSS3(1)), the Regional Committee rejected the substantive amendment submitted by Tajikistan as contained in EUR/RCSS3/INF./2. The results of the vote were as follows:

- number of Members with the right to vote: 50
- number of delegations absent: 4
- number of abstentions: 3
- number of Members present and voting: 43
- votes in favour: 4
- votes not in favour: 39.

60. Following a recess for lunch, the Regional Committee proceeded to a roll call vote on the draft decision in its entirety, as contained in EUR/RCSS3/CONF./2, and without any amendments.

61. The representative of the Legal Counsel announced that the vote would take place by roll call and urged representatives voting to turn on their microphone and camera when they were called.

62. In accordance with Rule 41 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe and in line with paragraph 15 of the special rules and procedures (decision EUR/RCSS3(1)), the Regional Committee adopted decision EUR/RCSS3(2). The results of the vote were as follows:

- number of Members with the right to vote: 50
- number of delegations absent: 1
- number of abstentions: 5
- number of Members present and voting: 44
- votes in favour: 40
- votes not in favour: 4.
63. Making use of its right to make an explanation of vote, the representative of the Russian Federation regretted that the proposal by Tajikistan had not been properly considered. He also requested that the Secretariat would prepare a report documenting the NCD Office’s activities over the past 10 years.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

64. The Regional Director thanked the Member States for their commitment and continued support to WHO, and especially to the NCD programme. He said that the Secretariat would take appropriate action to implement the decision that had just been adopted by the Regional Committee. In that context, he announced that the administrative and financial implications would be discussed at the next meeting of the SCRC on 7 June 2023.

65. The President thanked the Regional Director for his responsiveness to the request of the Members who called for this special session and for the professional way it was organized. She also thanked all the delegations for their contributions to the discussion and for their cooperation in ensuring the smooth running of this special session as well as for their trust vested in her.

66. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the President declared the third special session of the Regional Committee closed.
DECISIONS

EUR/RCSS3(1). Special rules and procedures

The Regional Committee,

Agreeing with the recommendation of the Thirtieth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe to hold this third special session of the Regional Committee (RCSS3) in a virtual format, and having considered the report on special rules and procedures,¹

1. DECIDES to adopt the special rules and procedures set out in the Annex to this decision in order to regulate the conduct of the virtual session of the Regional Committee, which is convened pursuant to Rule 5 of its Rules of Procedure, and which opens on Monday, 15 May 2023 and closes no later than Monday, 15 May 2023.


Annex. Special rules and procedures to regulate the conduct of the virtual special session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe

1. The Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe shall continue to apply in full, except to the extent that they are inconsistent with these special rules and procedures, in which case the Regional Committee’s decision to adopt these special rules and procedures shall operate as a decision to suspend the relevant Rules of Procedure to the extent necessary in accordance with Rule 48 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe.¹

Attendance

2. Attendance by Members,² invited States that are not members of the Regional Committee, invited representatives of the United Nations, specialized agencies and other regional international organizations, and non-State actors in official relations with WHO or accredited by the Regional Committee shall be through secured access to the videoconferencing platform that has been identified for this session, allowing representatives to hear other participants and to address the meeting remotely.

Credentials

3. In accordance with Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure, the names of Members’ representatives, in the form of credentials, shall be communicated electronically to the WHO Regional Director for Europe before the opening date of the special session of the Regional Committee.

4. In accordance with Rule 14.2.10 (h) of the Rules of Procedure, a subdivision of three members of the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe shall assess, before the opening of the special session, whether the credentials of Members are in conformity with the requirements of the Rules of Procedure, and shall report to the Regional Committee accordingly during the opening meeting with a view to the Regional Committee making a decision thereon. The subdivision will assess whether credentials

¹ This will affect notably the relevant provisions of the following Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe: Rule 41 (voting by show of hands).
² As per Rule 1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe, the term “Members” includes Member States and Associate Members in the WHO European Region.
received after the opening meeting are in conformity with the requirements of the Rules of Procedure and will report immediately to the Regional Committee.

**Public nature of the meetings**

5. Consistent with Rule 6 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe, the virtual session of the Regional Committee shall be held in public. In line with usual practice it will be broadcast on the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) website.

**Officers of the Regional Committee**

6. In accordance with Rule 10 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe, the officers and rapporteur elected by the Regional Committee for Europe at its 72nd session will hold office for this special session of the Regional Committee, if available.

**Quorum**

7. It is understood that virtual attendance of Members shall be taken into account when calculating the presence of a quorum in accordance with Rule 22 of the Rules of Procedure.

**Addressing the Regional Committee**

8. During the virtual special session, only Members shall be provided with the opportunity to take the floor. Individual statements will be limited to three minutes. Group statements will be limited to five minutes. Delegates wishing to take the floor should signal their wish to speak. Prerecorded video statements will not be allowed.

9. Members, invited States that are not members of the Regional Committee, invited representatives of the United Nations, specialized agencies and other regional international organizations, and non-State actors in official relations with WHO or accredited by the Regional Committee shall have the opportunity to submit written statements of no more than 600 words in one of the working languages of the Regional Committee for posting on the WHO/Europe website under the related agenda item. A written statement may be submitted in lieu of an oral intervention or to complement it.

10. Any such written statements, with the exception of those submitted in the exercise of a right of reply, may be submitted until the closure of the special session of the Regional Committee and shall remain posted on the WHO/Europe website in the language of submission until the adoption of the report of the special session. The content of the written statements will be summarized/reflected, in accordance with the usual practice, in the report of the special session.

11. Member States may provide translations of their submitted written statements into one or more of the working languages of the Regional Committee, if they so wish. Such translations shall be posted alongside the submitted written statement and shall be clearly marked with the words “unofficial translation”.

12. Consistent with Rule 25 and Rule 26 bis, any Member wishing to raise a point of order or exercise a right of reply in relation to an oral statement made at the Regional Committee should signal its intention to do so. It is understood that, in accordance with well established practice, any right of reply to such a statement shall be exercised at the end of the meeting.

13. Any Member wishing to exercise a right of reply in relation to a written statement should do so in writing as soon as possible and, in any case, no later than five working days after the closure of the relevant virtual session. Any Member wishing to exercise a right of reply in relation to a written statement submitted in reply to its previous written statement should do so in writing as soon as possible and, in any case, no later than five working days after the posting of the statement in reply. Any Member wishing to exercise a further right of reply in relation to a written statement submitted in reply to its previous written
statement should do so in writing as soon as possible and, in any case, no later than five working days after
the posting of the statement in reply. Written statements submitted in the exercise of a right of reply shall
remain posted on the WHO/Europe website in the language of submission until the adoption of the report
of the session. The content of statements thus submitted will be summarized/reflected, in accordance with
the usual practice, in the report of the special session.

Decision-making

14. All decisions of the Regional Committee taken during its special session should, as far as possible, be
taken by consensus.

15. In the event that a vote is required, voting shall take place by show of hand, except if any
representative would request a roll-call. Members shall be invited by the presiding officer to use the “raise
hand” feature of the videoconferencing platform that was identified for this session.

16. In the event that a roll-call is requested, should any delegate fail to cast a vote for any reason, that
delegate shall be called upon a second time after the conclusion of the initial roll-call. Should the delegate
fail to cast a vote on the second roll-call, the delegation shall be recorded as absent.

17. Brief statements consisting of explanations of vote may, if not made orally, be submitted in writing
no later than three working days following the closure of the virtual special session. The content of the
statements consisting of the explanations of vote will be summarized/reflected, in accordance with the
usual practice, in the report of the special session.

EUR/RCSS3(2). Closure of the WHO European Office for the Prevention and
Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD Office) in Moscow, Russian
Federation, and relocation of its functions and management of activities to
Copenhagen, Denmark

The Regional Committee,

1. DECIDES to close the WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable
Diseases (NCD Office) in Moscow and to request the Secretariat to relocate its functions and management
of activities to the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen, Denmark, as soon as possible and no
later than 1 January 2024.
Annex 1. Agenda

1. Opening of the special session
   (a) Adoption of special rules and procedures
   (b) Adoption of the agenda

2. Closure of the WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD Office) in Moscow, Russian Federation, and relocation of its functions and management of activities to Copenhagen, Denmark

3. Closure of the session
Annex 2. List of representatives and other participants

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V. Representatives of non-State actors in official relations with WHO

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