Report of the special session of the European Environment and Health Task Force

Budapest, 4 July 2023
Abstract

A special session of the European Environment and Health Task Force was convened in Budapest, Hungary, on 4 July 2023, immediately before the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, to approve the final draft of the Budapest declaration, to be submitted to the Ministerial Conference for adoption. One Member State dissociated itself from the draft declaration.

Keywords: ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH, NATIONAL PRIORITIES

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Report of the special session of the European Environment and Health Task Force

Budapest, Hungary, 4 July 2023
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The meeting was generously hosted by the Government of Hungary.

Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>EHP</td>
<td>European Environment and Health Process</td>
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<td>EHTF</td>
<td>Environment and Health Task Force</td>
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<td>YHO</td>
<td>International Youth Health Organization</td>
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<td>THE PEP</td>
<td>Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme</td>
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</table>
Introduction

1. A special session of the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF) took place in Budapest, Hungary on 4 July 2023, immediately before the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held on 5–7 July. The meeting was generously hosted by the Government of Hungary. The meeting was chaired by Ms Brigit Staatsen, Chair of the EHTF, and Professor Raquel Duarte-Davidson, Co-Chair. See Annex 1 for the scope and purpose of the meeting, Annex 2 for the programme of work, Annex 3 for a statement by the Russian Federation and Annex 4 for the list of participants.

Opening and adoption of agenda

(Documents EURO/EHTFSS/1; EURO/EHTFSS/2; EURO/EHTFSS/3; EURO/EHTFSS/4)

2. Dr Tamás Pándics, Head of Department, National Public Health Centre, Hungary formally opened the meeting and welcomed 46 representatives of EHTF Member States and stakeholders. Over 600 participants, including over 30 Ministers, were expected to attend the Ministerial Conference, which would consider the draft Budapest declaration.

3. Dr Nino Berdzuli, Director, Division of Country Health Programmes, WHO Regional Office for Europe, likewise welcomed participants and thanked the Government of Hungary for hosting the meeting. The draft declaration was a strong, practical document and the result of a long, transparent and inclusive process of negotiation.

4. Ms Francesca Racioppi, Head of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH), outlined the scope and purpose of the meeting (see Annex 1).

5. The agenda and programme of work (Annex 2) were adopted.

Outcome document of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health

(Document EURO/EHTFSS/6)

6. The Secretariat briefly summarized the process of negotiation of the draft declaration.

7. The Chair noted that the wording of the draft declaration had been finalized following the latest meeting of the officers of the EHTF on 9 June and the subsequent deadline for written comments on 14 June. Substantive changes to the wording were therefore no longer possible, although minor editorial changes and corrections would be considered. Some comments had been received after the 14 June deadline, but had not been taken into consideration. Two Member States had lodged reservations to the draft.

8. The representative of the Russian Federation delivered a formal statement listing his country’s concerns about the draft declaration. They related to the inclusion of many cross-sectoral issues going beyond the mandate of the EHTF; the risk of disruption of established international processes and the technical mandates of United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies; the dilution of the focus on health in the draft by non-core issues; the lack of clarity about the financial implications of the commitments; the references to instruments such as the European Green Deal, which were not inclusive and could not serve as a universal basis for cooperation on health in the WHO European Region; and recommendations which prejudged the political outcome of the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (Bonn, Germany, 25–29 September 2023). The full text of the statement is reproduced in Annex 3.

9. One participant suggested the addition of a general statement or footnote making it clear that States that were not party to other international agreements mentioned in the declaration (for instance the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessments under the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context) were not bound by any provisions relating to those
agreements. It was agreed that appropriate wording would be added in the commitments section and a footnote added in Annex 1.

10. The Chair highlighted the most recent changes and corrections to the draft. An acknowledgement of the need for peace as a precondition for sustainable development and of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment had been added to the preamble. In paragraph 7 of the roadmap (Annex 1 of the draft declaration), members agreed to delete the term “fossil-free”. A reference to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity had been added to paragraph 10.

11. With reference to paragraph 55 on the reduction of land-take by motorized road transport and parking infrastructure, the Co-Chair, speaking as the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, said that she was not currently authorized to withdraw her country’s proposal that the paragraph should be deleted. The United Kingdom therefore dissociated itself from that paragraph at present, but hoped to receive the necessary authorization before the Budapest declaration was formally adopted by the Regional Committee for Europe in September 2023. Other members expressed support for the paragraph in its current form.

12. A reference to health impact assessments had been added to paragraph 67 on the use of existing WHO tools and approaches.

13. The EHTF approved the final version of the draft declaration, with those amendments, and agreed to transmit the draft to the Ministerial Conference for adoption.

**European Environment and Health Process Partnerships**

*Document EURO/EHTFSS/7*

14. The Secretariat described the structure and main objectives of the proposed European Environment and Health Process (EHP) partnership mechanism. Partnerships would be established under the aegis of the EHTF by a group of interested Member States and/or other stakeholders, with one stakeholder or more stakeholders taking the lead. The first four partnerships were due to be formally launched during the Ministerial Conference.

15. The representative of Germany (lead stakeholder) introduced the partnership on human biomonitoring, which would provide an open-ended, permanent platform for the exchange of information and expertise. One area of interest was work to promote the use and acceptance of human biomonitoring data in political decision-making. Georgia was the co-lead of the partnership, and Austria, Belgium, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Spain had also confirmed that they would join.

16. The representative of Ireland (lead stakeholder) introduced the partnership on health-sector climate action, which Austria, Belgium, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway and the United Kingdom had also joined. The partnership was intended to build capacity in the health sector to take action to reduce its own climate footprint and support other sectors in climate action that included a health dimension.

17. The representative of Austria (lead stakeholder) introduced the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP)/EHP Partnership on Healthy Active Mobility, which was intended to strengthen the health focus and the involvement of the health sector in active mobility and contribute to the implementation of the Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion and the development of a pan-European master plan on mobility. A total of 14 stakeholders had joined so far.

18. The representative of the International Youth Health Organization (YHO) introduced the partnership on youth in the WHO European Region. The partnership, led by Slovenia and YHO, was intended to create a permanent and sustainable platform for collaboration and exchanges of information

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1 Paragraph numbers refer to the draft considered during the session and may vary slightly from the final version of the Budapest declaration, as adopted.
between young people, Member States and civil society organizations as well as a common agenda for advocacy.

19. The Chair, speaking as the representative of the Netherlands (Kingdom of the), drew attention to a potential future partnership involving the WHO Healthy Cities Network, the Regions for Health network and other local networks, which would continue the work of the EHTF Working Group on Collaboration of Local and Subnational Authorities. Discussion of the issue was ongoing.

20. The EHTF approved the proposed partnerships.

Conference programme

(Documents EURO/EHTFSS/8; EURO/EHTFSS/9; EURO/EHTFSS/10; EURO/EHTFSS/11; EURO/EHTFSS/12; EURO/EHTFSS/13; EURO/EHTFSS/14; EURO/EHTFSS/15)

21. Ms Racioppi introduced the provisional programme of the Ministerial Conference. The opening session, with statements from high-level representatives of the host country, the Director-General, the Regional Director and institutional stakeholders and a dialogue between the Regional Director and youth representatives, would take place on the afternoon of 5 July. It would be followed by a panel discussion on the “triple crisis” of climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss.

22. The sessions on 6 July would be devoted to further discussion of the health effects of environmental pollution, the protection of health through nature and biodiversity (featuring a video message from Jane Goodall, United Nations Messenger of Peace) and health in climate change. A ministerial lunch would take place focussing on climate change and health. In the afternoon, there would be a formal ceremony for the adoption of the Budapest declaration, endorsement of a youth declaration and the launch of the EHP Partnerships. The final day, 7 July, would be devoted to enabling implementation of the declaration: promoting healthy and resilient settings, strengthening governance, knowledge and competencies and acting in partnership. A total of 20 parallel sessions would take place on the morning of 5 July and during the lunch break on 6 July.

23. The Secretariat briefly described the planned communications and publicity activities for the Ministerial Conference. They included a press package, media advisory and information pack. A roving photo and video team would circulate in the conference venue throughout the session. Member States were encouraged to publicize the Ministerial Conference through social media and a dedicated media corner for the filming of interviews.

24. The representative of Ukraine drew attention to the destruction of the Kakhovka dam in Ukraine June 2023, which would have immense consequences for health and the environment both in Ukraine and throughout the European Region. Over 15 billion tonnes of water had been lost from the reservoir near the dam and 150 tonnes of machine oil had been released into the country’s largest river and hence into the Black Sea. Ukraine and many other Member States would issue a joint declaration on the incident at the Ministerial Conference.

Youth activities

(Document EURO/EHTFSS/16)

25. The Secretariat introduced the youth activities planned for the Ministerial Conference, including a pre-event on the morning of 4 July attended by the Regional Director and 50 participants from 20 Member States. Youth representatives noted that the pre-event had been organized to finalize the youth declaration, build capacity and raise awareness of the Ministerial Conference. The youth declaration was the result of extensive consultations, including the youth position paper issued in connection with the Fifth High-level Ministerial Meeting of THE PEP (Vienna, Austria, 17–18 May 2021) and the outcome of the Health and Well-being Forum for Youth (Tirana, Albania, 25–27 October 2022).

Any other business, summary of decisions and closure of meeting

26. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the Chair declared the session closed.
Annex 1. Scope and purpose

The Special Session of the EHTF is convened to conclude the preparation of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, which will take place in Budapest, Hungary, on 5−7 July 2023.

The main purpose of the meeting is to finalize the drafting of the political outcome of the Conference, the Ministerial Declaration and the Conference programme, and the approval of the EHP Partnerships.

In particular, the discussion will focus on the following main areas.

- Draft Budapest Declaration: the EHTF will discuss and provide final input to the outcome document, following the online consultation with the WHO National Counterparts, which was open until 1 June, and the EHTF Bureau extraordinary meeting, which was held on 9 June.
- The approval of the proposals for the EHP Partnerships.
- The Programme of the Ministerial Conference: participants will be informed about the Conference programme, including parallel sessions, exhibitions and posters, as well as the communications package for the Conference.
- Outcomes of youth activities: the EHTF will be informed on initiatives led by youth alongside the preparations of the Conference, including the development of the Youth Position Paper.

The expected outcome of the meeting includes the attainment of a finalized Conference outcome, alongside with a full agreement of the Ministerial Conference workflow, which is scheduled to commence on the subsequent day following the Special Session of the EHTF.
Annex 2. Programme of work

14:30–15:00  
**Registration**

15:00–15:15  
**Session 1 – Opening, adoption of the agenda**

The EHTF is invited to adopt the agenda and the programme of the meeting.  
Relevant documents:

EURO/EHTFSS/1 Provisional list of documents  
EURO/EHTFSS/2 Scope and purpose  
EURO/EHTFSS/3 Provisional agenda  
EURO/EHTFSS/4 Provisional programme

15:15–16:30  
**Session 2 – Outcome document of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health**

The Secretariat will update the EHTF on the development of the Budapest Declaration, following the online consultation with the WHO National Counterparts and the EHTF Bureau extraordinary meeting held on 9 June. The EHTF is invited to discuss the final draft of the Declaration.  
Relevant document:

EURO/EHTFSS/6 Draft Declaration of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health

16:30–17:00  
**Health break**

17:00–17:30  
**Session 3 – EHP Partnerships**

The EHTF is invited to approve the EHP Partnerships that will be launched at the Conference.  
Relevant document:

EURO/EHTFSS/7 Information sheet on the EHP Partnerships

17:30–18:15  
**Session 4 – Conference Programme**

The Secretariat will present and guide on the Conference programme, including programme for parallel sessions. Also, the EHTF will be informed about exhibitions, posters and the communications package for the Conference.  
Relevant documents:

EURO/EHTFSS/8 Provisional programme of the Ministerial Conference  
EURO/EHTFSS/9 Provisional list of documents of the Ministerial Conference
Annex 3. Statement by the Russian Federation

The draft declaration of the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health prepared by the European Environment and Health Task Force contains a number of concerns of the Russian Federation.

The inclusion of a huge number of cross-sectoral issues in the draft declaration does not correspond to the mandate of the European Environment and Health Task Force and the WHO in general. In case of adoption, this document will disrupt or jeopardize many established international processes and erode the technical mandates of the UN programmes, funds and specialized agencies, including on the issues of biodiversity, climate change, environment, energy and transport. The focus on health in the draft declaration was substantially diluted by non-core issues.

Financial implications of the “commitments” suggested by this document were never discussed or assessed, which makes its implementation hardly feasible.

Many of the instruments and initiatives such as the European Green Deal, the Gothenburg Protocol of 1999 of the UNECE Convention on Transboundary Air Pollution of 1979 and the Aarhus Convention dated 1998 are not inclusive and cannot serve as the universal basis for cooperation on health for the European region at large.

Finally, some of the recommendations of the draft declaration prejudge the political outcome of the Fifth International Conference on Chemicals, which will be held in Bonn from 25 to 29 September this year.

Therefore, the Russian Federation cannot support the proposed draft document nor consider itself bound by its provisions, and requests to include in the text of the Declaration a footnote stating that the Russian Federation did not join consensus on this document.
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Kyrgyzstan
Latvia
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Monaco
Montenegro
Netherlands (Kingdom of the)
North Macedonia
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Moldova
Romania
Russian Federation
San Marino
Serbia
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Tajikistan
Türkiye
Turkmenistan
Ukraine
United Kingdom
Uzbekistan

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