



EUROPE

Fifteenth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe First session

Belgrade, Serbia, Thursday, 20 September 2007

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Report of the first session

Introduction

1. The Fifteenth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee (SCRC) held its first session at the National Assembly in Belgrade, Serbia on Thursday, 20 September 2007, immediately after the closure of the fifty-seventh session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC57).
2. The newly elected Chair of the Fifteenth SCRC welcomed the new members from Slovakia, Switzerland and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and thanked the Minister of Health of Serbia for the marvellous hospitality extended to participants in RC57. The Secretariat was commended on the excellent preparation and arrangement of the session.
3. Dr Bjørn-Inge Larsen was unanimously chosen as Vice-Chair of the Fifteenth SCRC.

Outcome of the fifty-seventh session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

4. The SCRC made a preliminary analysis of the outcome of RC57. Never, it felt, had a session of the Regional Committee been so imbued with the values and ethics underlying the work of the Regional Office. Nonetheless, some of the interventions from the floor had been lengthy and focused on issues that were predominantly of national interest. It might be interesting to explore whether such statements could be delivered as part of the discussions following the Regional Director's address; alternatively, they might be submitted in writing or in electronic format.
5. The agenda had included a number of items that related to various aspects of the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs): not only the substantive technical item devoted to the Second European Action Plan for Food and Nutrition Policy, but also the European NCD strategy itself and the Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity (both of which had been considered under the agenda item concerning follow-up to issues discussed at previous RC sessions). For conceptual as well as organizational reasons, the SCRC recommended that all such subjects should in future be taken up together under the broad heading of NCDs.

6. The SCRC welcomed the extended and innovative format of the discussion on health workforce policies in the WHO European Region but felt that the debate could have been better structured, if participants had been informed of the new approach in advance.

7. More generally, the agenda had been somewhat ambitious; the SCRC recommended that at future sessions, the Regional Committee should continue to focus on a limited range of issues (it was felt that three was the right number), and that efforts should be made to avoid taking up a large number of other topics under the "Follow-up" agenda item or in the Regional Director's address. There was no obligation to include a separate agenda item for each subject that the Secretariat had to report back on; written reports would be sufficient.

8. Similarly, the number of technical briefings outside the session should be reduced, perhaps to two; each technical briefing should last no more than one hour, and the subjects should be chosen as late as possible before the session, to ensure that they were really topical.

9. Grouping of subjects during the session could also be revisited, to concentrate issues of political importance on the first or second day so as to allow attendance by ministers of health.

10. Lastly, it might be worth organizing the private meeting (at which elections and nominations took place) early in the session, to make it easier for senior members of delegations to attend.

Plan of work of the Fifteenth SCRC

11. The Fifteenth SCRC confirmed that its second session would be held in London on 8 and 9 November 2007; members could be represented by their alternates, if they had to attend the second session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property Rights (Geneva, 5–10 November 2007).

12. The third session of the Fifteenth SCRC would be held at the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen on 14 January 2008; the fourth session would be in the same location on 31 March and 1 April 2008. The remaining sessions in the work year would be in Geneva on 18 May 2008 (the day before the opening of the Sixty-first World Health Assembly) and in Tbilisi, Georgia on 14 September 2008 (the day before the opening of RC58).

13. The SCRC asked the Secretariat to provide information on the process of appointing a regional search group (RSG) to identify candidates for the post of WHO Regional Director for Europe. It would consider that paper at its November 2007 session. On that occasion, it also wished to be informed about preparations for European regional involvement in the Global Forum on Human Resources for Health (Kampala, Uganda, 4–7 March 2008).

14. Progress reports on preparations for the WHO European Ministerial Conference on Health Systems and on the Regional Director's discussions with the Greek government concerning the establishment of a geographically dispersed office in Athens should be on the agenda of each session of the SCRC during the work year.

15. Before its next session, the Secretariat would send all SCRC members a full briefing pack on the role of the Standing Committee, including the report of the small working group established by the Fourteenth SCRC and the information note annexed to that report. In addition, just before the start of the next session, the new members would be briefed on the SCRC's and the Secretariat's ways of working.

Other matters

16. On the occasion of his forthcoming retirement from the Organization, the SCRC paid tribute to the exemplary professional role played over the years by Dr Guðjón Magnússon, Director, Division of Health Programmes.