



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR

Europe

**Report of the third
meeting of the
European
Environment and
Health Ministerial
Board (EHMB)**

Baku, Azerbaijan

16 November 2012



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Abstract

At its third meeting, held in Baku, Azerbaijan on 16 November 2012, the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB) discussed the determination of priorities within the European Environment and Health Process, and decided to continue that work in an intersessional process. It decided to develop further the “European Environmental and Health Gateway” in consultation with EHMB members from other United Nations organizations, and to invite the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition to participate in its meetings as an observer. The Board reviewed progress on a communication strategy and a proposed inventory of multilateral environmental agreements, and agreed that the work should continue. It further discussed governance of the EHMB and the Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF); agreed on the proposed structure of its draft report to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy; and discussed relations with the European Commission.

Keywords

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Agenda Item 1: Opening of the meeting, adoption of the agenda, election of a Co-Chair

Introduction

1. The European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB) held its third meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 16 November 2012, at the kind invitation of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan. See Annex 1 for the scope and purpose of the meeting, Annex 2 for the programme of work and Annex 4 for the list of participants. Mr Hussein Baghirov, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan, was unanimously elected Co-Chair of the meeting and chaired the afternoon session.
2. The meeting was opened by the Chair of the Ministerial Board, Dr Tomaž Gantar, Minister of Health of Slovenia, who welcomed participants and thanked the Government of Azerbaijan for its generous hospitality. The main business of the meeting, he said, was to agree on the main priorities for the environment and health process in Europe and the implementation of the Parma Declaration commitments within a revised conceptual framework.
3. The provisional agenda and programme of work were adopted.
4. Ms Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe, likewise welcomed participants, including Mr Capak and Mr Nies, the Co-Chairs of the Environment and Health Task Force (ETHF), and expressed her appreciation to the host Government. She briefly described the most important policy developments since the Ministerial Board's previous meeting in February 2012: the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and the adoption of the new European health policy, Health2020, and the European Action Plan for Strengthening Public Health Capacities and Services.
5. She also highlighted the strategic importance of the meeting in providing guidance on the proposed common framework for action, as well as on the identification of priorities that would shape the regional environment and health agenda in the years to come. She stressed the importance of acknowledging the diversities which existed in the Region in terms of the burden of disease attributable to different environmental risk factors, the capacities and resources needed to address them, and differing public perceptions. That called for the development of a flexible portfolio of practical actions that could be tailored by the Member States and the international partners of the environment and health process to fit their specific interests and needs, while at the same time addressing the "unfinished agenda" represented by persisting issues that needed national action, and global issues, as well as new priorities that required multisectoral approaches and international cooperation.
6. Mr Baghirov welcomed participants to Azerbaijan and described a number of current environmental projects in his country, dealing with drinking-water supplies, climate change, mitigation of coastal pollution and cleansing of land polluted by the chemical and oil industries.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of the report of the second EHMB meeting and follow-up to previous decisions

7. The draft report of the second meeting of the Ministerial Board (Bonn, Germany, 14 February 2012) (document EHMB3-4) was adopted..
8. Dr Srdan Matic, Coordinator, Environment and Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe, likewise expressing his appreciation for the hospitality of the Government of Azerbaijan and the excellent preparatory work done by officials from the Ministry of Ecology and National Resources, introduced the Secretariat report on the follow-up to the decisions taken at the

second meeting (EURO/EHMB3-5). In the area of governance, he noted that the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) had decided not to extend the mandate of the ministers of the environment who were members of the Ministerial Board, as the Board had suggested, in order to allow for a scheduled change in membership to take place as agreed by the 17th session of the CEP. In addition, the CEP had agreed to award permanent observer status to Germany. The WHO Regional Committee for Europe had extended the mandate of health ministers by one year, and would debate the issue of membership further at the 63rd session of the Regional Committee in September 2013.

9. He noted the establishment of the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition in 2012, designed to further the involvement of youth in the environment and health process.
10. Mr Alexander Nies, Co-Chair of ETHF, noted that, at its second meeting, the Board had called for a detailed schedule of future meetings of the Board and Task Force and a roadmap for further action, with clear indicators to assess progress. The Secretariat should propose a detailed programme of intersessional work which would enable the Board and Task Force to make real progress in the run-up to the next meeting of the Board. More work was needed to clarify the respective roles of the Board and the Task Force.
11. Ms Jakab said that a meeting would be scheduled between the Secretariat, the Co-Chairs of the Ministerial Board, the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy and the European Commissioner for the Environment. Environment and health would be a full agenda item at the next session of the Regional Committee. It would be possible to hold a meeting of the Ministerial Board back-to-back with the Regional Committee session, but it would need to take place at the end of the previous week, since the intervening weekend was already booked up with other meetings. Dr Matic suggested that the Board might wish to issue a standing invitation to the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition as a permanent observer of the Ministerial Board.

Agenda Item 3: Setting priorities for the European environment and health process

12. Dr Matic drew attention to the Secretariat Note on setting priorities for the European environment and health process (document EHMB3-6) and its three annexes (overview of environmental burden of disease; portfolio for action to advance progress on environment and health priorities in Europe; proposed European Environment and Health Gateway). While the agreed Parma targets could not be changed, the Ministerial Board should provide guidance on the priorities to be acted upon, taking into account the wider political and strategic context. The proposed portfolio for action to advance progress on environment and health priorities in Europe (see document EHMB3-6, Annex 2) reflected a number of possible priorities. The proposed Environment and Health Gateway (see Annex 3) would monitor data available in the public domain and act as a tool for action and networking.

Agenda Item 4: General discussion on priorities for the European environment and health process

13. Mr Nies said that the EHTF would welcome a specific list of around five Parma targets which the Ministerial Board considered to be the most important.
14. In the ensuing discussion, a German representative said that the Ministerial Board should identify a small number of the Parma targets as priorities rather than developing new ones. It was important to emphasize implementation of the targets over monitoring. The Slovenian representative said that the Board should seek to establish core common goals for all Member States of the Region, to supplement the country-specific roles which each Member State decided for itself, and should encourage international financial institutions to invest in

projects which had an impact on health. Mr Zaal Lomtadze Chief, Environment for Europe and Sustainable Development Section, UNECE, reminded participants that, according to its terms of reference, the Board has a role to play not only with respect to implementing the Parma priorities, but also in reviewing and proposing policy directions and strategic priorities.

15. Ms Jakab suggested that the identification of specific priorities was a task perhaps better suited to the Task Force than the Ministerial Board itself. Emerging issues such as climate change should be identified for attention in the period following the next Ministerial Conference. Dr Matic suggested that the identification of priorities should continue in an intersessional process, for which Ministers should nominate alternates or advisers.

16. Serbia offered to host the next meeting of the Ministerial Board in April 2013.

Address by Mrs Leyla Aliyeva of International Dialogue for Environmental Action

17. Mrs Leyla Aliyeva, founder of the Azerbaijani young people's environmental organization International Dialogue for Environmental Action (IDEA), addressed the meeting. Together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), her organization had put on Azerbaijan's first "Green Week", coinciding with the current meeting of the Ministerial Board, which had brought together 50 representatives from over 25 countries. IDEA aimed to give the next generation of young people a solid understanding of environmental problems and the basic tools required to overcome them. Ms Jakab commended the work of IDEA and looked forward to continued future collaboration between the organization and WHO.

Agenda Item 5: Role of the Ministerial Board in strengthening cross-sectoral and EU engagement in the EH process

18. Dr Matic said that engagement with the European Commission was still a problem, partly because it was not clear which directorate should be involved – the Directorate-General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) or the Directorate-General for the Environment.

19. Several members agreed on the need to strengthen the active participation of the European Commission in the environment and health process.

20. Participants made a number of suggestions, including the exploitation of Ministers' personal contacts and the targeting of relevant departments and individuals within the Commission.

Agenda Item 6: Draft report on the European health process 2010-2012 to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy

21. Ms Francesca Racioppi, Senior Policy and Programme Adviser, Environment and Health Governance and Partnerships, WHO Regional Office for Europe, introduced the first draft of the report of the Ministerial Board and EHTF to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and CEP (document EURO/EHMB3-8), dealing with the membership and terms of office of the Ministerial Board, membership of the Task Force, the current status of the two bodies' work and the priorities for environment and health in the WHO European Region. The report would be submitted to the 63rd session of the Regional Committee and the 19th session of CEP as a working document, accompanied by a draft conclusion, decision and/or resolution and by an information document, currently in preparation, entitled "European Environment and Health Process - Where?".

22. Participants suggested a number of amendments and additions to the report, which the Secretariat undertook to incorporate into the final version. They also agreed to work closely

with the Secretariat in the further development of the report, as part of the intersessional programme of work of the EHMB.

Agenda Item 7: EHP communication plan

23. Ms Racioppi introduced the proposed communication plan for the environment and health process (document EURO/EHMB3-9). The plan was intended to increase the visibility of environment and health issues and engage specific audiences in order to increase political and public support. An associated action plan would set out the timing, content, rationale and roles of each of the parties concerned.
24. The Secretariat proposed that a communication working group should be set up to work by e-mail in the run-up to the next meeting of the Ministerial Board. She called upon participants to nominate experts in communication strategy for membership of the working group.
25. Participants noted that the plan should describe more clearly the proposed role of individual Member States and emphasize the development of partnerships with youth and other stakeholder groups. The communication project would require a realistic work schedule and an adequate budget. Participants commented on the communication messages listed in Annex 1 of the document.

Agenda Item 8: Multilateral environmental agreements as tools for implementation of Parma commitments

26. Ms Racioppi introduced the report on multilateral environmental agreements (EURO/EHMB3-10). The Secretariat had continued its work on an inventory of international instruments of relevance to environment and health, which would be a searchable online database made freely available on the WHO Web site. Over 90 international instruments had been added so far. There were nine search criteria, including the title of the instrument, its parties, its main subject area and its relevance to the Parma Declaration and the Regional Priority Goals.
27. Mr Dusik drew attention to the United Nations Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (InforMEA),¹ facilitated by UNEP, which brought together information on multilateral environmental agreements. UNEP acted as the Secretariat to many of the agreements listed in the Information Portal and the proposed WHO inventory.
28. Mr Baghirov said that Azerbaijan wished to participate in future work on the project.

Agenda Item 9: Any other business and closure of the meeting

29. Ms Racioppi read out a summary of the main points of discussion and conclusions of the meeting, to which participants proposed a number of minor amendments. The Ministerial Board adopted the conclusions, which are reproduced in Annex 3.
30. Ms Jakab, summing up the day's discussions, said that the meeting had given participants a better understanding of the respective roles of the Ministerial Board and Task Force. The Ministerial Board must be fully accountable for its decisions and activities, particularly in respect of intersessional activities. She undertook to submit proposals for rotation of the membership of the Ministerial Board and the options for holding a meeting of the Ministerial Board back-to-back with the next session of the Regional Committee.
31. Mr Baghirov declared the meeting closed at 17:00 on 16 November 2012.

¹ www.informea.org.

Annex 1. Scope and purpose

The third meeting of the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB) is being convened in consultation with the Co-Chairs of the EHMB, in accordance with Rule 5 of its Rules of Procedure as adopted at the first meeting on 4 May 2011.

At the previous meetings, the EHMB acknowledged that there is need for clarity about environment and health issues on the conceptual level and for a clear set of priorities on which countries can focus attention. The EHMB requested the Secretariat to work on reviewing the scope of the work and the relative priority of specific environment and health issues. This should take into account: scientific progress in the understanding of the complex and interdependent relationships between environment and health; the most recent developments in global environment and health policies, notably with respect to sustainable development and governance, noncommunicable diseases, health security, energy, natural resources, human wellbeing and other areas of global importance; and the need for joint ownership of the agenda by the two sectors. The Board also shared the impression that there was a need to conceptualize those issues in a clear and understandable way, helping the advocacy for cross-sectoral action on environment and health. In line with this request and following up on previous decisions, the main objectives of the meeting are:

1. to review, discuss and endorse a renewed conceptual framework for environment and health in Europe addressing the major environment and health challenges of the 21st century as well as major policy developments and processes, including sustainable development, Health 2020 and WHO reform;
2. to review and agree on a proposal for priorities for the European Environment and Health Process (EHP) and the implementation of Parma Conference commitments within the revised conceptual framework;
3. to review the first draft and provide guidance for the further development of the EHMB's report to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy in 2013;
4. to review and adopt the proposed communication plan for the European environment and health process;
5. to review the paper on multilateral environmental agreements as tools for implementation of the Parma Conference commitments.

Annex 2. Programme

09:00 – 10:00 10:00 - 10:20	Registration Opening of the meeting, adoption of the agenda, election of a Co-Chair Tomaž Gantar, EHMB Co-Chair Zsuzsanna Jakab, Regional Director, WHO/Europe Hussein Baghirov, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Azerbaijan <i>Relevant documents:</i> <i>1. Scope and purpose</i> <i>2. Provisional programme</i> <i>3. Provisional list of participants</i>
10:20 – 10:45	Adoption of the report of the second EHMB meeting and follow-up to previous decisions <i>Relevant documents:</i> <i>4. Draft report of the 2nd EHMB meeting</i> <i>5. Secretariat report on follow up to previous decisions</i>
10:45 – 11:30	Setting priorities for the European environment and health process Introduction by the Secretariat <i>Relevant documents:</i> <i>6. Secretariat note: Setting priorities for the European environment and health process</i> <i>7. Draft paper: Environment and Health – Where Next?¹</i>
11:30 – 11:45 11:45 – 13:00	Coffee/tea break General discussion on priorities for the European environment and health process
13:00-14:00 14:00 – 14:30	Lunch Role of the Ministerial Board in strengthening cross-sectoral and EU engagement in the EH process
14:30 – 15:00	Draft report on the European health process 2010-2012 to the WHO Regional Committee and UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy <i>Relevant documents:</i> <i>8. Draft report on the European environment and health process 2010-2012 to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy</i>
15:00 – 15:30	Coffee/tea break

¹ This item not discussed.

15:30 – 16:00

EHP communication plan

Relevant documents:

9. EHP communication plan

16:00 – 16:30

Multilateral environmental agreements as tools for implementation of Parma commitments

Relevant documents:

10. Multilateral environmental agreements as tools for implementation of Parma commitments

16:30 – 17:00

Any other business and closure of the meeting

evening

Event hosted by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan

Annex 3. Main points of discussion and conclusions

Adoption of the report of the 2nd EHMB meeting

The EHMB adopted the report of its second meeting (Bonn, 14 February 2012);

Follow-up to previous decisions

The EHMB:

- Highlighted the need to strengthen cooperation with the European Commission;
- Agreed to set up meetings of the Secretariat and Co-Chairs of EHMB/EHTF with DG SANCO and DG Environment to enhance and clarify the collaboration with the European Commission;
- Requested the Secretariat to develop:
 - an intersessional programme of work (to be implemented with support of EHMB alternates);
 - a short discussion paper laying out the possible roles of the Task Force and Ministerial Board;
 - a proposal for a mechanism for rotation of membership in the Ministerial Board;
- Decided to extend a standing invitation to the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition to participate in the EHMB meetings as an observer;
- Supported the inclusion of Environment and Health as an agenda item in the next Regional Committee in 2013, with the possibility of holding the next meeting of the EHMB back-to-back with the RC (however, this would need to take place on the Friday before the meeting).

Setting priorities for the European environment and health process

The EHMB agreed:

- To continue the work on the definition of priorities, as part of the intersessional programme of work of the EHMB (supported by alternates of the EHMB members);
- To emphasize the importance of national implementation of the commitments made in Parma, making the best possible use of the many resources/tools/policy instruments that are already available at the international level;
- To emphasize the role of international collaboration and action to address issues of regional and global scope;
- To mainstream cross-cutting priorities as part of the work of implementation on priorities;
- To consider the new emerging priorities as part of the preparatory process for the Sixth Ministerial Conference on EH in 2016;

- To acknowledge the existence of diversity in issues, needs and priorities among Member States, and therefore allow for a flexible approach to national prioritization and action;
- To further develop the “European EH Gateway” in consultation with the EHMB members from other United Nations organizations, to account fully for the available resources that can support action, such as InforMEA;
- To develop a plan to engage the EHMB with international financial institutions with a view to orienting financing of activities towards EH priorities.

The EHMB

- Decided to hold its 4th meeting in April 2013;
- Thanked Serbia for offering to host the next meeting of the Ministerial Board.

Draft report on the European health process 2010-2012 to the WHO Regional Committee and UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy

The EHMB:

- agreed to develop the report further as part of its intersessional programme of work and provide specific comments to the Secretariat;
- agreed with the proposed structure of the report to RC63 and CEP19, and timetable;
- agreed with the proposed list of documents to be submitted to the RC.

Communication plan

The EHMB:

- agreed with the proposed structure of the communication plan;
- agreed to nominate communication focal points to further develop the work as part of the intersessional agenda;
- agreed to engage youth in the implementation of the strategy (including through the WHY network of young journalists);
- agreed to follow a cost-effective and staged approach;
- agreed to provide the Secretariat with feedback on the proposed key messages.

Multilateral environment agreements as tools for implementation of Parma commitments

The EHMB:

- agreed with the development of the inventory of policy instruments;
- agreed to work with the Secretariat to further refine the inventory, to ensure value added and coordination with other relevant initiatives (such as InforMEA) ;
- agreed to implement the project in a staged approach;
- agreed to re-discuss the scope of the proposed report on governance once the initial steps in the establishment of the database have been completed, to take into account the broader scope of the EHMB discussions.

Annex 4. List of participants

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Mr Hussein Baghirov, *EHMB member*

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**The WHO Regional
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Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Moldova
Romania
Russian Federation
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