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Twenty-second Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe – report of the fifth session

This document contains the report of the fifth and final session of the Twenty-second Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC), held in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 13 September 2015, the day before the opening of the 65th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe. This document should be read in conjunction with the consolidated report on the work of the Twenty-second SCRC (document EUR/RC65/4 Rev.1).

Introduction

1. The Twenty-second Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC) held its fifth and final session at the LITEXPO, Vilnius, Lithuania, on Sunday 13 September 2015, the day before the opening of the 65th session of the Regional Committee (RC65). Apologies for absence were received from the members for Austria and Turkmenistan.
2. The Chairperson noted that the report of the Twenty-second SCRC's fourth session had been approved electronically and that the SCRC had held a number of intersessional teleconferences during the year (Annex 1).
3. In her introductory remarks, the Regional Director reported that since the SCRC's previous session the Secretariat had concentrated on preparations for RC65 and on the acceleration of the implementation of workplans. A meeting of ministers of health of the South-eastern Europe Health Network and the 35th plenary meeting of the Network had been held in Belgrade, Serbia, at the end of June 2015, and the second high-level meeting under the small countries initiative (bringing together representatives of the eight countries in the WHO European Region with a population of less than 1 million people) had taken place in Soldeu, Andorra, in early July. In addition, she and the Director-General of WHO had attended an international health forum in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on 21–22 July 2015.
4. Changes to the senior management team at the Regional Office included: the reassignment of Dr Guenael Rodier (Director, Division of Communicable Diseases, Health Security and Environment) to be Director, Coordination of the International Health Regulations (2005) at WHO headquarters, and his replacement by Dr Nedret Emiroglu; and the forthcoming retirement of Dr Agis Tsouros (Director, Division of Policy and Governance for Health and Well-being) and his temporary replacement by Dr Piroška Ostlin.

Provisional agenda and provisional programme of RC65

5. The Regional Director introduced the provisional agenda (annotated) of RC65 (document EUR/RC65/2 Rev.2 Add.1). Under provisional agenda 2(c), the Regional Director and the European Commissioner will present future collaboration between their two Organizations. Under provisional agenda item 3, separate discussions would be held on three technical topics referred to regional committees by the World Health Assembly: global health sector strategies on HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections (2016–2021); development, monitoring and evaluation of functional core capacity for implementing the International Health Regulations (2005); and global strategies on integrated, people-centred health services and on human resources for health. Information documents had been prepared on each of those topics.
6. Under provisional agenda item 5(a), the Regional Committee would be invited to review a paper on “Promoting intersectoral and interagency action for health and well-being in the WHO European Region” (document EUR/RC65/16), which had been redrafted in the light of comments made at the Twenty-second SCRC's fourth session and a subsequent web-based consultation with Member States. A partnership panel

discussion would be held under provisional agenda item 5(g), with the participation of the Regional Director, the Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the GAVI Alliance.

7. General discussion of WHO reform under provisional agenda item 5(h) would be followed by specific consideration of three aspects: accountability and compliance; global governance reform; and WHO's work in outbreaks and emergencies with health and humanitarian consequences (category 5 of the Organization's programme budget 2014–2015). The first two aspects would be covered by briefings, while it was expected that the third would give rise to more substantive discussion.

8. The topic of "Migration and health in the WHO European Region" had been retained for discussion at one of the ministerial lunches during the session and had been added as the subject of a technical briefing. On both those occasions, attention should be focused on the health and public health aspects of migration.

Nominations and elections, including technical committees

9. The Chairperson recalled that the Standing Committee had agreed on a shortlist of candidates at its previous session. That shortlist would be distributed to heads of delegations the following morning. The Secretariat had received official withdrawals of candidatures from the Republic of Moldova for the Executive Board, and from Slovakia and Uzbekistan for the Standing Committee.

Credentials Committee

10. The Standing Committee agreed that a credentials committee should be established with a similar composition as the previous year and decided that for RC65 it should consist of the officers of the SCRC and a member of the Standing Committee, supported by the WHO Legal Service.

Draft resolutions and decisions for RC65

11. The Chairperson drew attention to a number of revised draft resolutions for RC65 dated 13 September 2015, which incorporated proposed amendments submitted (within the deadline laid down in the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee) by member countries of the European Union and Norway. The Standing Committee endorsed the substance of those revised draft resolutions. The Regional Director informed the SCRC that the revised draft resolutions would be uploaded to the Regional Committee website, in the working languages of the European Region, by the start of the session.

12. With regard to process, however, SCRC members expressed concern about the late submission of those amendments, their availability in English only, and the fact that several of them made reference to European Union directives without the latter giving reciprocal treatment to resolutions adopted by WHO's governing bodies. The Standing Committee therefore recommended that, in future, the draft Regional Committee

resolutions presented to the Standing Committee at its May session should be submitted to all Member States in writing for consultation during the month of June, after the end of the World Health Assembly.

13. The Director, Division of Health Systems and Public Health, clarified that the purpose of the draft resolution on “Priorities for health systems strengthening in the WHO European Region 2015–2020: walking the talk on people centredness” (document EUR/RC65/Conf.Doc./7 Rev.1) was to express the Regional Committee’s support for those strategic priorities and for mid-term reporting in 2018 focused on financial protection. The Director, Division of Information, Evidence, Research and Innovation, cautioned against the use of the term “quality-assured” with reference to health information and health information systems, as contained in a proposed amendment to paragraph 4(c) of that draft resolution.

Statements to be made by SCRC members during RC65

14. The Chairperson informed the Standing Committee that statements to be made by its members during RC65 had been drafted and circulated to all SCRC members. Having reviewed those statements, members proposed a number of minor changes: for provisional agenda item 4, to make reference to the three meetings and two teleconferences held by the SCRC subgroup on governance; for provisional agenda item 5(a), to refer to WHO training courses on health diplomacy; for provisional agenda item 5(c), to refer to development of the Tallinn Charter report; for provisional agenda item 5(g), to refer to the tool developed by the Twenty-first SCRC for the evaluation of candidates for membership to WHO committees, and to the two teleconferences held by the SCRC subgroup; and, more generally, to shorten the statements on provisional agenda items 5(d) and 5(e).

15. The member for Portugal agreed to replace the member for Austria and deliver the statement under provisional agenda item 5(d).

Other matters

16. Acknowledging the support provided by the Secretariat and the Regional Director, the outgoing members of the Standing Committee welcomed their term of office as a period of substantial professional enrichment. The Director, Division of Information, Evidence, Research and Innovation, looked forward to the nomination of a representative of the Standing Committee to the regional expert group on the cultural contexts of health.

17. The Standing Committee drew attention to the importance of public health but noted that the deadline for submitting proposals for items to be included on the agenda of the 138th session of the Executive Board had passed. Furthermore, the European Region had argued (in the context of WHO reform) for shorter agendas for meetings of WHO’s governing bodies. Under those circumstances, the Regional Director was requested to raise the matter in discussion with the Director-General, and to work towards including the item on the Executive Board’s agenda at a subsequent session.

Annex 1. Report of teleconferences with SCRC members

During 2014–2015 the Twenty-second Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC) held four intersessional teleconferences to discuss pending issues. In October 2014, SCRC members continued their discussion on the need for and membership of SCRC subgroups. In December 2014, they received a briefing on the global-level discussions on strategic resource allocation. In July 2015, SCRC members reviewed updated versions of working documents and draft resolutions and finalized the provisional agenda and programme for RC65. Lastly, at the beginning of September 2015 the SCRC held a teleconference to consider the nominations received from Member States in Group C for candidates for membership of the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee, and to agree on a shortlist. The Standing Committee also discussed and approved changes to the provisional agenda and programme of RC65, including details of some agenda items, and further reviewed the draft resolutions.

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