

OPENING STATEMENT OF MR. MIHALY KADAR, CHAIRMAN OF THE WORKING GROUP ON WATER AND HEALTH UNDER THE UNECE WATER CONVENTION, HUNGARY

Mr. Executive Secretary, Mr Director, Most distinguished delegates, dear guests, ladies and gentlemen!

It is almost exactly ten years ago that having recognised the significance of water management in the promotion of human health a couple of enthusiastic experts first set off thinking about effectively addressing the issues of water related health on the European dimension. The late Alan Pinter and his co-workers, Hungary has been among the designers and architects of the emerging instrument. The justification has since been clear and received a lot of reinforcement, though the emphasis can be quite diverse in parts of Europe representing a widely different stage of development. Also thanks to the joint efforts of the WHO regional office and the UNECE, the envisaged instrument called Protocol on Water and Health was finally brought under cover.

It is unprecedented for its legally binding character, which has been seen the only warranty to an effective mechanism of safeguarding the progress, though somewhat slowing the process of signing up.

For practical reasons, the case of the Protocol was assigned to the care of the 1992 Helsinki Water Convention which installed a Working Group on Water and Health to promote the interim implementation and ratification since the festive signature in 1999 by the health and environmental ministers of 36 European states. The progress since then has been slow and met some misunderstanding and distraction but – upon understanding its real significance both on the pan-European and the domestic domain – necessary number of Signatories ratified the Protocol and has brought it into effect by the 4th of August, 2005.

I am pleased to represent here a country that has been an engine of the process from very beginning, leading us up to this stage of the first meeting of the Parties.

The meetings of the Working Group on Water and Health and the technical meetings have seen a gradually growing activity of the participants which were by no means limited to the Parties. Issues which have been explored by it were, among others, the evidence base and surveillance of water-borne diseases, health risks in aquifer recharge, health and water quality aspects of the man-made recreational water environment, indicators, target setting and progress monitoring of water and wastewater services.

Realizing the crucial role of the availability of financial resources a Roundtable of utmost importance was organised in Oslo by the government of Norway to bring together the potential donor and beneficiary partners. It has to be emphasised also as the essential example of the solidarity as one of the leading principles of the Protocol.

All the above activities contributed to the interim implementation and provided a solid basis for the period after entering into force of the Protocol.

Now we arrived at a milestone: the implementation must switch to a higher gear. All the Parties have undertaken obligations which are accountable both on the domestic democratic playground and before the international community of the Meeting of the Parties.

That's why I am convinced the first meeting of the Parties having a far-reaching importance over the plain meaning of it. It will hopefully add force to the means the Protocol relies upon, and vitalises the progress which is still badly needed. Data collected by global environmental and sanitary organisations show that water related health impairment is still burning issue in every part of Europe although in far unequal extent. The bodies that will have to come to existence during this meeting hopefully pave the way of effectively addressing these problems accurately identified by the well-known Article 6 paragraph 2, and raise the level of cooperation of Parties both needing and yielding assistance to relevant development schemes.

I will however only be reassured of the seeds planted by Hungary and others do not go in waste if we see the paths laid down widening and the tree of solidarity under the Protocol cherishing in all segments of the UN ECE and WHO European region.

When summarising the past period, we should not forget about the invaluable job performed by Mr. Thomas Kistemann, the vice Chairman of the WG Water and Health and the joint secretariat. We all are indebted to the wholehearted work of Francesca Bernardini, Roger Aergeerts, Rainer Enderlein, Hiroko Takasawa and Francesca Cenni and a bit back in the years Jamie Bartram. Without their zeal and generous service we could not have arrived even at a small portion of the recent achievements.

As the last chairman of the dissolved WG on Water and Health under the Water Convention, I wish a successful meeting to all Parties and a substantial progress in the implementation. Until the first Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties will be elected I

continue chairing the meeting but I would like to wish her in advance a productive period of three years and a good and cooperative company of the Protocol Parties and partners.