

**Invitation - seminar for Nordic and Baltic countries on the 7th and 8th of November, to be held in Oslo, Norway, on the subject of:**

***“Drinking water and sanitation in a Nordic and Baltic perspective – common challenges and collaboration”.***

The Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services, in cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers, hereby wishes to invite Nordic and Baltic decision-makers from ministries with responsibilities in the fields of drinking water and sanitation, development and aid (for instance the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Ministry of Environment), and their relevant subordinate agencies, to this seminar to be held the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2012 in Oslo, Norway. The seminar is also linked to the programme of work of the UNECE/WHO-Europe Protocol on Water and Health.

**Introduction**

Access to clean and safe drinking water is vital and it is recognized as a basic human right by the United Nations General Assembly (Resolution A/HRC/15/L.14 of 28th July 2010) and affirmed by the Human Rights Council in its resolution of 30th September 2010 (A/HRC/15/L.14). Recognizing that there are many ways in which drinking water could be polluted; high occurrence of microbes in water with inadequate purification, inflow of microbes caused by leaking water- and sanitation pipelines or chemical pollution, often caused by agriculture and/or industry, these challenges still create problems – also in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Some of the Nordic countries have requested a closer collaboration in the field of drinking water and sanitation. As part of the Norwegian Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2012 Norway wishes to use this opportunity to follow up on this request.

Amongst the Nordic and Baltic countries Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway have all ratified the 1999 UNECE/WHO-Europe Protocol on water and health, while Denmark, Iceland and Sweden have signed the Protocol, but not yet ratified it. The objective of the Protocol is to protect human health and well-being by introducing improved water management, better protection of water ecosystems, improved surveillance and disease control. The meeting will explore how the Protocol can be a useful tool to deal with our common challenges.

The Protocol invites the Parties to engage in support and assistance to enable all Parties to implement the overall goals of the Protocol and by this improve the number of people having access to clean water and adequate sanitation, the sustainability of water resources management and human well-being. We therefore suggest that the seminar also could exchange views on how the special mechanism under the Protocol on project facilitation can be instrumental in aid and assistance policies in our countries.

**“Scope and purpose” for this seminar:**

- What challenges do we have in the Nordic and Baltic countries in this area? (national organization of the drinking water and sanitation sectors in the different countries, intersectoral coordination, vulnerability of our water supply systems, climate change, Water Safety Plans, health surveillance and combating illnesses caused by polluted drinking water.)
- How can the UNECE/WHO-Europe Protocol on Water and Health help to address these challenges?
  - To develop integrated policies and bring forward actual objective areas and targets (target setting)
  - To point out any common challenges
- How can the Nordic and Baltic countries benefit from the competence and project facilitation developed under the Protocol to establish a better and coordinated targeted aid and assistance policy in the water and sanitation sector
- Is there a basis for closer Nordic/Baltic collaboration in the field of drinking water and sanitation, and water management, nationally and internationally?

Please do not hesitate to communicate any comments or suggestions you might have as to possible themes, in particular for Session 3 “The way ahead/What do we do now? Benefits from cooperating” in the draft programme.

## DRAFT PROGRAMME

### Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> of November

#### 09.30 – 10.00 Registration and coffee

#### 10.00 – 10.30 Opening remarks and introduction

- State Secretary Mrs. Nina Tangnæs Grønvold, the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services
- Introduction of all participants

#### 10.30 – 12.45 **Session 1: Presentation of the Nordic and Baltic countries' challenges/sharing of experience on the area of drinking water and sanitation**

Representatives of Nordic and Baltic countries will share information on the water and health challenges in their countries: how is the field of drinking water and sanitation organised in the different countries, how does intersectoral coordination work, what are the vulnerability risks for the water supply systems, climate change impacts, Water Safety Plans implementation, health surveillance and combating illnesses caused by polluted drinking water etc.

- 10.30 Norway
- 10.50 Sweden
- 11.10 Denmark

#### 11.30 SHORT BREAK

- 11.45 Iceland
- 12.05 Finland
- 12.25 Lithuania
- 12.45 Latvia

#### 13.05 LUNCH

- 14.10 Estonia

**14.30 – 17.00 Session 2: How the Protocol on Water and Health might assist in working to remedy the challenges in this area.**

- 14.30 Introduction to the Protocol on Water and Health

(By Mr. Roger Aertgeerts, former Programme Manager Water supply and Sanitation and Co-Secretary Protocol on Water and Health at WHO-Europe)

Improving water and health through the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health; its main obligations, in particular related to setting targets and target dates and surveillance of water-related disease.

**15.15 SHORT BREAK**

- 15.30 The Protocol on Water and Health and the EU *acquis communautaire*

(By Dr. Mihaly Kadar, Member of the Bureau of the Protocol on Water and Health and Counsellor at the National Institute of Environmental Health, Hungary.)

How the Protocol on Water and Health and EU regulations can work together in reaching their common aims.

- 16.00 The Protocol and small scale water supply and sanitation facilities

(Presentation yet to be confirmed)

How the work and the products developed under the Protocol can assist countries in better dealing with the challenges of small scale water supply and sanitation facilities

- 16.15 The Protocol on Water and Health as a political tool in aid policies

(By Carola Beatrice Bjørklund, Coordinator for Council of Europe/Ambassador, The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)

**17.00 End first day**

**19.00 Dinner (arranged by the organizers)**

**Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> of November**

**09.00 – 09.10 Introduction to the day**

**09.10 – 11.00 Continuing session 2: How the Protocol on Water and Health might assist in working to remedy the challenges in this area.**

- 09.10 Status of implementation of the Protocol and measures implemented in different countries to improve water and health and achieve the Protocol's targets, including financing aspects.

Short presentations of 5 minutes will be expected from Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway, who are all Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health, on their implementation of the Protocol, in particular vis-à-vis target setting; as well as from Denmark, Iceland and Sweden on their future plans regarding Protocol ratification and implementation.

- 10.30 Next steps: preparing for the second reporting under the Protocol on Water and Health building on the experience of the first reporting exercise. (By Nataliya Nikiforova, UNECE secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health.)

10.45 SHORT BREAK

**11.00 – 17.00 Session 3: Discussion/ team work: The way ahead/What do we do now? Benefits from cooperating**

- 11.00 Team work. Participants will be divided into groups with national stakeholders from each country. Each group will discuss the following questions:
  - *Are the water and sanitation challenges well addressed in your country? Which additional measures would be needed?*
  - *Benefits in creating a Nordic/Baltic network?*
  - *How can the implementation of the Protocol further strengthen action on water and sanitation issues?*

13.00 LUNCH

- 14.00 Report on the outcomes of the discussions in each group. What are the thoughts on creating a Nordic/Baltic network on drinking water and sanitation?

15.30 SHORT BREAK

- 15.45 Participants are invited to give their views on creating a Nordic/Baltic network and proposals for a next meeting and/or other forms for cooperation.
- 16.45 Summing up

**17.00 End of seminar.**