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Agenda item 5 (a) – Environment and Health in the WHO European Region: progress challenges and lessons learned

First of all our thanks to WHO for the very comprehensive document on progress and challenges concerning in particular environment and health, that I want to address specifically, supporting the Resolution.

I would like to reaffirm the importance of intersectoral action based on the EU strategy of Health in all policies. Climate changes and air pollution represent a serious threat for health and have a great impact on national health services' clients. The actions undertaken so far are not fully satisfactory and much has still to be done. Nevertheless, they represent important steps towards a growing awareness and accountability to protect our fragile environments.

Following the Fifth Ministerial Conference in 2010, held in Parma, Italy developed several programs, and integrated environment in the National Prevention Plan. A dedicated macro-area for environmental health has been included in the National Prevention Plan 2014-2018 and regional plans focusing on the environment are being outlined and are ready for implementation.

In addition, a National Plan on asbestos was drafted in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and is ready for implementation. Regarding air pollution, we have collected quantitative data concerning the most important pollutants in different areas of the country. Moreover, the National Institute of Health is working in close collaboration with WHO/EURO as WHO Collaborating Centre for Environment and Health in contaminated sites.

One of our global goods, water, is monitored by water authorities and the Ministry of Health has launched a water portal where real time data on pollutants and quality of surface and drinkable water are published to ensure all Italians are informed actively.

Waste disposal is another national concern where intersectoral collaboration is fundamental, with the inclusion of police and investigation sectors to combat criminal infiltration in the waste

management industry. Two major contaminated areas have been identified to be of Central State's interest in our otherwise decentralized system. We have established a standing committee monitoring a specific State investment to reclaim such areas as Naples and Taranto, hosting the largest steel plant in Europe.

You may also be aware that Italy rejected nuclear energy production plants in favour of renewable sources: in 2013 almost 40% of internal gross consumption of energy came from water, sun and wind. This contributes to the progressive closure of polluting plants as the trend looks very positive.

As for climate change, the evident tropicalization of our latitudes is confirmed by a recent (and duly contained) outbreak of Chickungunya fever and the diagnosis of one possibly autochthonous case of dengue confirmed yesterday.

We have established a national alert and a dedicated surveillance system on heat waves. I can confirm what Director General said on the high number of lost lives due to heat in Italy.

We cannot ignore environment protection, as it is possibly the most important factor influencing the health profile of our communities. We are now advocating to include health impact assessment in the environmental impact assessment procedures, which are compulsory in a large number of productive activities, if not all, in Italy.

We also advocate for an environmental protection projection following migrants' trajectories, from their countries of origin to their destination, throughout their itinerary.

We cannot focus on macroenvironmental issues at the detriment of microenvironmental questions, that should be considered in their own population context, in a primary environmental care paradigm equivalent to primary health care.

We are convinced that the WHO European Health Policy framework (Health 2020) and the post 2015 development Agenda are unique chances and opportunities for a stronger consideration to be given to climate changes within national public health strategies. Italy also advocates for a strengthened European common vision in view of the preparation of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2017 and wishes to play a very active role in this regard.

Thank you Chair.