

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE AND ADVISORY FORUM UNIT

Parma, 1 September 2010
EFSA/AF/M/2010/344/PUB/FIN

Minutes

**THIRTY SIXTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM
LIMASSOL (CYPRUS), 19-20 MAY 2010**

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

Chair: *Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle*, Executive Director, EFSA

Austria	<i>Roland Grossgut</i>	Latvia	<i>Gatis Ozoliņš</i>
Belgium	<i>Benoît Horion</i>	Lithuania	<i>Zenonas Stanevicius</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Stefka Petrova</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Nathalie Welschbillig</i>
Cyprus	<i>Popi Kanari</i>	Malta	<i>Ingrid Busuttil</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Jitka Götzová</i>	Netherlands	<i>Evert Schouten</i>
Denmark	<i>Arne Büchert</i>	Poland	<i>Jan Krzysztof Ludwicki</i>
Estonia	<i>Hendrik Kuusk</i>	Portugal	<i>Maria João Seabra</i>
France	<i>Valérie Baduel</i>	Slovenia	<i>Ada Hočvar Grom</i>
Germany	<i>Andreas Hensel</i>	Spain	<i>Ana Canals</i>
Greece	<i>George-Ioannis Nychas</i>	Sweden	<i>Leif Busk</i>
Hungary	<i>Maria Szeitzné Szabó</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Andrew Wadge</i>
Italy	<i>Giancarlo Belluzzi</i>		

OBSERVERS

Croatia	<i>Zorica Jurković</i>	Switzerland	<i>Michael Beer</i>
Norway	<i>Anne Finstad</i>	European Commission	<i>Jeannie Vergnettes</i>

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Advisory Forum secretariat: *Gian Luca Bonduri, Georgi Grigorov, Elena Marani, Jeffrey Moon and Torben Nilsson.*

<i>Bernhard Berger</i>	<i>Christine Majewski</i>
<i>Franck Berthe¹</i>	<i>Frederic Paeps (Consultant)²</i>
<i>Hubert Deluyker</i>	<i>Tobin Robinson</i>
<i>Anne-Laure Gassin</i>	<i>Vittorio Silano (Chair of EFSA's Scientific Committee)</i>
<i>Djien Liem</i>	<i>Karen Talbot</i>
<i>Riitta Maijala</i>	<i>Tomas Öberg</i>

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle opened the meeting by thanking the State General Laboratory for hosting the meeting and passed the floor to Popi Kanari, Director of the State General Laboratory, for a welcome speech on behalf of the Minister of Health. She briefly outlined the Cypriot food safety system and highlighted the importance of small Member States in the international cooperation. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked for the kind and supportive words from the Minister of Health and for sharing the vision on their work. She then welcomed the new AF member from Greece and substitutes from Norway, Luxembourg and Spain. She also mentioned that apologies were received from Finland, Ireland, Romania and Slovakia.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle explained the intention to further strengthen the focus on effective strategic discussions in the AF. Regarding the handling of emerging issues, she suggested discussing the approach under agenda item 6.3. The agenda was adopted without changes.

France offered to inform the AF about the creation of a new agency in France. Belgium suggested discussing the follow up on the exchanges between four AF members and the MB in January 2010. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed that this would be covered under agenda item 4.2 on medium term planning. Luxembourg announced that they would sign the “Seville declaration” on the pan-European food consumption survey (please refer to the minutes of the 35th AF meeting).

¹ Attended agenda item 5.1 (via telephone).

² Attended agenda item 4.6.

3 UPDATE ON MEETINGS AND VISITS SINCE THE 35TH ADVISORY FORUM MEETING

3.1 Management Board meeting in Toledo on 18 March 2010

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked AESAN for hosting the MB meeting and informed the AF that the MB adopted EFSA's preliminary Management Plan 2011 (please refer to agenda item 4.5), impact assessment indicators (please refer to agenda item 6.1), and a simplified Decision concerning the establishment and operation of European networks of scientific organisations operating in the fields within EFSA's mission. The MB also endorsed EFSA's draft Communications Strategy 2010-2013 (please refer to agenda item 4.7) for public consultation and discussed EFSA's interaction with Member States and stakeholders.

3.2 Visit of the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy to EFSA on 12 March 2010

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle briefed the AF on the visit of the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli, to EFSA. The visit had offered a good opportunity for EFSA to present its activities and hear the views of the Commissioner. The Commissioner had among other issues shown an interest in post marketing monitoring of GMOs and the system in place to ensure the independence of EFSA's scientific advice.

3.3 Visit of the President of the European Commission to EFSA on 12 April 2010

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed the AF about the visit of the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, to EFSA where he met the Executive Director and addressed EFSA staff. He highlighted that EFSA has established itself as a well-recognised organisation and said that cooperation with the Member States is key to promote synergies, avoid duplication of efforts, and ensure that messages to consumers are consistent and coherent. He further acknowledged the importance of the dialogue between EFSA and the European Commission services.

3.4 Visits of EFSA's Executive Director to the United Kingdom and Poland

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle briefed the AF on her fruitful visits to the United Kingdom and Poland and thanked for these opportunities to discuss future cooperation.

3.5 Scientific Committee meeting in Parma on 28-29 April 2010

Dijken Liem informed the AF about the outcomes of the SC meeting and referred to agenda item 4.1 for further information and discussion on the work of the SC. Regarding EFSA's ongoing work on endocrine active substances, he referred to agenda item 5.1.

3.6 AFCWG meeting in Parma on 25-26 February 2010

Anne-Laure Gassin informed the AF about the outcomes of the AFCWG meeting and explained the close interaction between the AF discussions on emerging issues and the AFCWG discussions on the related communications aspects. She also briefed the AF on the agenda of the next AFCWG meeting in Madrid on 26-27 May 2010 and the Eurobarometer on food-related risks that would be fielded in June 2010 with the report on the findings to be shared in the autumn 2010. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that the AFCWG could advise on how to better communicate the independence of the risk assessment process and the fact that scientific opinions are prepared by independent scientists.

The United Kingdom agreed on actively promoting that the work is based on advice by independent scientists and suggested that EFSA should be more robust in its communications on this topic than in the past. The United Kingdom also shared a recent article entitled *“Let common sense guide you in the saga of bisphenol A”* as an example of a rational assessment of science and how the scientific process can be explained to lay audiences. Germany commented that the aim is to communicate science; thus it is important to distinguish between good and bad science.

3.7 Update on the Focal Point work

Bernhard Berger thanked AESAN for hosting the Focal Point meeting and updated the AF on the Focal Point work, including new features of the IEP tool, a new article 36 database and Extranet site to foster networking between article 36 organisations, and activities to expand EFSA’s expert database. He also informed the AF about the establishment of a working group to support EFSA in developing technical specifications for training on principles and methods of food safety risk assessment. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle added that Focal Points could also support medium term planning, *e.g.* through the sharing of national work plans.

Spain and Sweden requested statistics on their national article 36 organisations that apply for grants. Austria said that statistics on the number of applications submitted by different article 36 organisations should be related to the number of calls in their areas of competence. The Netherlands asked if inactive article 36 organisations could be withdrawn from the article 36 list and when the next update of the list was foreseen. Bernhard Berger explained that for data protection reasons only information on successful applicants could be shared. Hubert Deluyker suggested that EFSA could explore how best to address the issue of inactive article 36 organisations, including options for their withdrawal from the article 36 list. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed on this proposal, while the decision on whether to keep an organisation on the article 36 list would depend on the Member States (represented by the Permanent Representations) that submit

the nominations and the MB that adopts the article 36 list. She proposed that the next update of the list could take place at the MB meeting in June 2010.

Action 1: EFSA to share the mandate of the working group on training.

Action 2: AF members to propose participants for the working group on training with expertise in the design of training activities.

4 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION ON EFSA'S WORK WITH MEMBER STATES

4.1 Work of the SC

Vittorio Silano, Chair of the SC, presented the role and work of the SC as well as various examples of fruitful cooperation in the area of the SC.

France found that the areas identified by the SC for cooperation were all of high priority. Upon request from Germany, Vittorio Silano confirmed that the recommendations of the SC are generally implemented. Germany then asked about the situation regarding 90-day toxicity tests. Vittorio Silano explained that the SC often addresses major scientific advances. In the case of 90-day toxicity tests, the approach has not yet been harmonised at EU level, so the methodology proposed by EFSA and the methodology of some national agencies may differ. Hence, there is a need to pursue the harmonisation. Likewise, EFSA has liaised with the OECD regarding their recommendations on 90-day toxicity tests. Riitta Maijala explained how EFSA and its SC have a role in supporting the European Commission in the *Codex Alimentarius* and in taking a horizontal approach and proactively liaising with international bodies like the OECD. Sweden thanked for the good overview of SC work and asked about the experiences with ESCO working groups as an interaction between the SC and Member States. France said that it is important to cooperate between national agencies in Member States and EFSA to unite and promote European experiences in international activities. Vittorio Silano said that the experience with working groups with Member State experts, *e.g.* the ESCO working group on botanicals, was good and important in order to move from individual work by Member States to a European harmonisation. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded that the SC is doing an important work on methodologies and that the priorities identified by the SC could be considered for further strengthening the cooperation in the framework of the discussion on medium term planning under agenda item 4.2.

4.2 Medium term planning

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle introduced the discussion on medium term planning by recalling the overall aim to boost the risk assessment capacity in Europe through planning for a better use of resources in EFSA, the European Commission and the Member States. The purpose of the discussion was to define concrete actions and also to reflect on the role and work of the AF in this context.

Vittorio Silano provided an overview of the history of scientific advice in the EU and shared some thoughts on further strengthening cooperation in areas such as the development of new risk assessment methodologies, data monitoring through centres of excellence, and identification of emerging risks. While underlining the good progress made so far, the presentation reflected on how to establish a better structured and more integrated risk assessment system in the EU and how to establish a more effective cooperation between EFSA and the national food safety agencies.

The European Commission presented an overview of projections for medium term risk assessment needs in the different scientific areas, based on existing legislation and the annual work programme of the European Commission. While EFSA's work is in most cases based on requests from the European Commission, these requests often result from discussions in the European Parliament and the Member States. So while some risk assessment activities can be foreseen and planned, there will still be a need to address *ad hoc* requests also in the future.

Hubert Deluyker explained that the SGC meeting, which should have taken place in Bratislava on 20 April 2010, had been cancelled due to the air traffic disruptions following the eruption of the Icelandic volcano. For this reason, the preliminary discussion on medium term planning envisaged in the SGC had not taken place. The different inputs were therefore presented at this AF meeting. His presentation focused on the experiences gained with grants and procurement as "tools" to seek the support of Member States in addressing EFSA's workload. He provided detailed information on the experiences gained so far and outlined the way forward on grants and procurement, not least the increased use of framework and multiannual service contracts for better flexibility and continuity leading to improved efficiency and effectiveness. He mentioned the recent article 36 project on the development of harmonised schemes for the monitoring and reporting of Q-fever in animals as an example of successful cooperation, which had been valuable when addressing the urgent request on Q-fever (please refer to agenda item 5.1). Finally, he said that the role of the SGC would need to be considered and that a dedicated AF working group on medium term planning could be established.

Austria supported the idea of involving Member States in the development of risk assessment methodologies and requested an overview of areas where inputs would be needed. Austria also noted that a substantial part of EFSA's resources are used for authorisations and asked if fees were being considered. Germany supported interaction between EFSA and national agencies and agreed that cooperation is needed to share resources. However, a strategy to guarantee the scientific quality would be needed and the ideas regarding centres of excellence would need to be looked into. Germany further said that some good national experts are presently not being made available to EFSA for various reasons, *e.g.* funding issues would need to be discussed and the assessment of the

independence of experts would need to be clarified. France supported the objective to cooperate and emphasised the importance of building mutual confidence through networking with national agencies on risk assessment methodologies. France further said that planning is a challenge at national level too and agreed with the Austrian request on defining the needs. Finally, while being in favour of outsourcing, this should not lead to monopolies, since there is a need to involve all Member States that know their national context. The cooperation in the pesticide area was mentioned as a positive model. Belgium applauded the idea of cooperation, but mentioned that not all Member States have national agencies, *i.e.* the expertise can be spread over various institutions. The idea of specialisation was questioned, since this would require choosing only some areas of work, which may not be feasible in practice. Belgium suggested building on the existing structures for cooperation, whereas the EFSA contract conditions would need to be simplified, since the current level of administrative complexity discourages institutions from becoming involved. Finally, Belgium asked about the expertise in relation with new developments in the novel foods area. Sweden said that in order to respond properly, Member States would need multiannual work plans that should be linked with the European planning. Bilateral meetings with Member States could be useful to discuss this further. Sweden supported the idea of centres of excellence, even though risk assessors would still need to cover all aspects to some extent in order to advise risk managers. Denmark supported the idea of centres of excellence, referred to the existence of centres of excellence recognised by the WHO, and saw no contradiction between centres of excellence in certain scientific areas and general support to national risk managers. The United Kingdom appreciated the historic perspective in Vittorio Silano's presentation and said that EFSA's role as a European centre of excellence is important, since one cannot rely only on national agencies. Therefore, a harmonised approach is important and the United Kingdom supported cooperation on risk assessment methodologies and in the area of emerging risks. The United Kingdom further suggested that the work would need to be prioritised from a consumer protection perspective and expressed support to the proposed AF working group. The Netherlands highlighted differences between Member States, *e.g.* much risk assessment expertise is found in research institutions in the Netherlands. Hungary appreciated the cooperation, since Member States receive much useful information from EFSA, but also warned that the cooperation would need to be tailored to reflect the different Member States' capacity. Bulgaria suggested considering the best approach for the identification and involvement of experts. Slovenia said that scientific experts are often too busy to be interested in applying for EFSA's grants and procurements, so risk assessment training of younger scientists could be useful. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded that there was consensus on the importance of planning for EFSA and the Member States and that there is a willingness of Member States, depending on their capacity, to become more involved in EFSA's work, both regarding methodologies and routine work. She suggested discussing further how the AF could work more effectively to define the direction. In particular, she said

that it would be interesting to consider an AF working group that would prepare a clear proposal.

France agreed. The United Kingdom suggested that there would be a need to prioritise which tasks to involve the AF in due to the busy schedules of its members. Hubert Deluyker suggested that modes of cooperation should be defined in an overview that would be reviewed by the AF. Germany said that the scientific cooperation had developed during recent years, so what was needed now was a strategic discussion on the future objectives and how to reach them. This could be addressed by the SGC. Germany also emphasised the difference between EFSA and national agencies and referred again to the need to ensure the quality of risk assessment. France agreed with Germany on the need to define strategic objectives first and then agree on the approach for cooperation, *e.g.* networks. France further welcomed the proposed overview on cooperation modes and asked for interagency cooperation to be included as well. Sweden said that the AF had been successful mainly when discussions were based on a good proposal from EFSA. Sweden also saw a need for more time for the national dialogue on medium term planning, so commitments could not be made already by September 2010. Riitta Maijala offered that EFSA could map the existing cooperation as a basis for a discussion on whether all needs are met. The Netherlands said that these discussions should take place in the AF and not in the SGC, since not all SGC members are mandated to express a standpoint on where their national agencies and EFSA should go. Austria agreed with Germany to use the SGC instead of creating a new working group and said that it would not be realistic to complete a proposal by September 2010. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that a lot had been learned from the experiences and tools for cooperation, so the objective would now be to move from annual information sharing towards a joint medium term planning. A Member State commitment by September 2010 could not be expected, but the aim would be within six months for EFSA to provide a clear overview of work in the coming years and for the Member States to commit to support in certain areas, for example as centres of excellence. Belgium found that the vision was now clearer and said that EFSA would need to take the lead in defining where to go and then seek advice from the AF, since the mandate of the AF is clearly to advise EFSA in this manner. Hence, a document from EFSA providing an overview of existing and planned cooperation would be useful, while no AF working group would be needed at this stage. Cyprus agreed on the need for a road map on cooperation from EFSA in order to ensure national resources that would be required before Member States could make any commitments. France complimented the clear work by the European Commission and invited EFSA not to wait too long, since it would already be possible for EFSA to identify key challenges as a basis for a strategic discussion on priorities and objectives. France acknowledged the financial limitations of the Member States, while emphasising that the purpose of the medium term planning is not to do more work, but rather to cooperate better for increased mutual confidence and reduced duplication of efforts. Hubert Deluyker explained that an AF working

group was proposed due to the limited time available and because the SGC sometimes duplicated AF discussions. The United Kingdom suggested an improved use of the existing group instead of creating a new group and requested the overview on cooperation to address the linkage between EFSA networks and the AF. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded that, for the next AF meeting, EFSA would prepare a document on EFSA's main tasks in the coming 3-5 years and the different models for cooperation used so far. The next AF meeting would be dedicated to discussing these two aspects in order to agree on priorities for the future cooperation. She invited the assistance of a few interested Member States for preparing the AF discussions. Hubert Deluyker referred to the review of EFSA's Strategy on Cooperation and Networking that highlighted some priority areas for the work on harmonised methodologies. Germany found it optimistic to complete this preparation for the next AF meeting and said that for some important areas without legislation, discussions were needed also in the political sphere. Germany, Czech Republic and Denmark offered to assist in the preparatory work. Belgium said that more time would be needed for discussion at national level. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle replied that the intention would be to provide an overview and agree on priorities and tools at the AF meeting in September 2010, while there would subsequently be more time for discussions at national level prior to the endorsement by the AF. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle also reiterated the intention to focus on strategic discussions in future AF meetings. Germany commented that the presentation from the European Commission was lacking information on the budgetary situation and said that the burden of work was out of proportion with the available resources, so there would be a need to set realistic milestones and to take a structured approach to requests from the European Commission in order to avoid continuing the overload of EFSA. The European Commission informed that a report on fees for EFSA is expected by the end of June 2010. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed that the question of resources is essential and said that it will be addressed.

4.3 Preliminary work programme on grants and procurement for 2011

Bernhard Berger presented the preliminary work programme on grants and procurement for 2011.

France found that the average funding for each project seemed low and that there is a tendency to launch the bulk of the calls in the middle of the year. Germany informed that they work on many of the same themes and asked how to avoid duplication of efforts. Bernhard Berger informed that EFSA tries to spread the launching of calls as well as possible over the entire year and also intends to move towards bigger projects. He invited the AF members to liaise on their ongoing activities in order to decide whether the proposed EFSA projects were needed. Hubert Deluyker mentioned that EFSA will move further towards multiannual contracts. Denmark mentioned the usefulness of sharing information on risk assessments via the IEP and on planned and ongoing work through the

Focal Point Extranet site. Upon requests from Belgium and Sweden on the classification of the preliminary work programme, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that it could be shared with national institutions. Germany said that some areas were closely linked with ECHA work, so there would be a need for EFSA to coordinate with ECHA. Djien Liem confirmed that EFSA liaises with ECHA. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle referred this discussion to agenda item 5.2 and added that EFSA will formally consult ECHA, EMEA and ECDC on the preliminary work programme on grants and procurement for 2011.

Action 3: AF members to submit possible comments on the preliminary work programme on grants and procurement for 2011 by 15 June 2010.

4.4 Data collection and sharing

The European Commission presented the rules on use, disclosure and reuse of data collected by Member States in the framework of the risk assessment and risk management of the safety of the food chain, which were submitted to the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) for endorsement on 19 May 2010. [The AF was subsequently informed that the SCoFCAH endorsed the proposed rules with minor changes].

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle fully supported the proposed approach. France said that the data collection approach is very important, *e.g.* the sampling plan, and that it is important to obtain data from the private sector too and to ensure good coordination between risk managers and risk assessors. Hubert Deluyker said that the requests for reuse of data are increasing, so data collection and sharing would be discussed also in the monitoring networks. Upon request from Sweden, he confirmed that country-specific data could be extracted from national reports.

Hubert Deluyker then presented EFSA's activities on data collection. He emphasised the importance of the dialogue with the European Commission and the Member States and said that the monitoring networks are absolutely essential for success.

Austria asked for further information on the standard description model and suggested that the criteria used for validation and cleaning of data could also be applied for quality assurance at national level. The Netherlands complimented the work, noted that Member States would have access to their own data, and requested access to all data. Sweden asked how cleaning of published data could be performed. Greece drew the attention to an important database on pathogens. Belgium requested more information on EFSA's data cleaning for transparency purposes, since national data were sometimes not recognised in EFSA's opinions. Belgium also mentioned that the technical comparability of data would need improvement and asked about data on additives, nutrients and novel foods that were not addressed in the EFSA report. The United Kingdom stated that some databases have policy implications and that work on data collection methods is

very useful. Germany commented on the varying quality of data, since data from non-accredited laboratories cannot be given the same weight as accredited data. The involvement of Community Reference Laboratories (CRL) is therefore important and EFSA should address data quality. Hubert Deluyker mentioned positive experiences with cooperation with CRL in some areas, while there was still a need for improvement and validation by the Member States in other areas. EFSA is cooperating with the JRC in this field, where there is a need for the JRC to support national laboratories. He agreed that the scrutiny of EFSA in data cleaning is higher than for publications. Riitta Maijala mentioned a new call in the food additives area. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that it is the first time EFSA issues such a report on data collection, so missing areas can be covered in future discussions on data collection. Bulgaria reiterated the importance of data quality. Sweden requested an update on the funding situation regarding the pan-European food consumption survey. Hubert Deluyker replied that EFSA is committed to start the pan-European food consumption survey in 2011 for supporting the development and implementation of the agreed standard format. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle confirmed that funding was ensured for 2010 and 2011, subject to approval by the European Parliament.

4.5 EFSA's preliminary Management Plan 2011

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle presented EFSA's preliminary Management Plan 2011. With reference to the ongoing discussion on fees for EFSA, she mentioned that 40 % of EFSA's resources are spent on the assessment of applications. She highlighted a number of new tasks and challenges of EFSA in 2011 in support of sustainable innovation where health and environmentally friendly solutions bring benefit backed by science. She further said that EFSA's key priorities for 2011 would be to boost the risk assessment capacity (as discussed under agenda item 4.2), promote the use of an integrated approach for scientific advice (as expressed in EFSA's Science Strategy 2010-2013 that would be submitted to the AF and MB before the end of 2010), and strengthen the effectiveness of EFSA's communications (please refer to agenda item 4.7). The Management Plan 2011 would be finalised only after the approval of EFSA's budget for 2011, which was estimated to be approximately 79 millions EUR.

Upon request from Denmark, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle confirmed that the focus on environmental aspects would be further strengthened. Germany asked about the position of the MB on fees. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle explained that the MB had issued a position on fees some years ago. However, since then the number of applications significantly increased, so in the context of the proposal of the European Commission on fees, the MB may revise its previous position. Upon request from Austria, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle confirmed that the number of temporary agents at EFSA had now reached its expected level and would not increase any further. The United Kingdom saw scope for cooperation on a number of topics, such as nanotechnology and emerging risks, and said that

risk-based meat inspection was an important issue in the United Kingdom. The Netherlands agreed on the importance of this issue and Riitta Maijala informed that EFSA had received a mandate from the European Commission on modernisation of meat inspection. This work would involve several Panels and units in EFSA.

Action 4: AF members to submit possible comments on EFSA's preliminary Management Plan 2011 by the end of August 2010.

4.6 Target audience research

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked the AF members who had been interviewed and introduced Frederic Paeps (consultant) who had conducted the qualitative target audience research on the image of EFSA through in-depth interviews with key representatives of EFSA audiences. He presented the findings that were overall positive and showed a marked increase of the awareness about EFSA and its work compared to the previous study carried out in 2004. A number of strengths of EFSA were highlighted, including the European dimension, independence, scientific basis and quality of EFSA's scientific opinions, good communications, and competent and committed staff. Opportunities for improvement were identified in the areas of timeliness, transparency of the scientific processes, clearer communications, the clarity of EFSA's standpoint on sensitive issues, and simplification of working processes. In addition, Parma was seen as a difficult location for EFSA.

Commenting on the presentation of these findings, Denmark said that public consultations on EFSA's scientific opinions could be used more, while it is important for the free scientific discussions that Panel meetings remain closed. The United Kingdom challenged this view stating that experience in the United Kingdom shows that holding open Panel meetings works and that this contributes to raising trust. The United Kingdom further said that EFSA's scientific opinions could be bolder and use less technical language. The United Kingdom advocated that no special approach should be applied for sensitive topics like GMOs, since a risk-based approach should still be used, not a hazard-based approach. Finally, the United Kingdom suggested that national agencies have a responsibility to assist raising the profile of EFSA. Austria noted that EFSA's image had improved immensely over the last years and said that EFSA, being a scientific body, should communicate in a scientific language when addressing other scientists, while simplified messages were needed if targeting other non-specialised audiences. With respect to consumers, one should be clear as to who was the target: all consumers or the informed consumer. The Netherlands questioned whether EFSA should address the public at large and asked how far EFSA could go in advising on different risk management options. Frederic Paeps clarified that the special approach, which might be required for sensitive topics, was intended regarding communications, not from a scientific point of view. He also stated that the remark regarding EFSA's use of technical language and the complexity of

EFSA's advice and related communications was an issue for many people, even those close to EFSA. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that the review of EFSA's Communications Strategy (please refer to agenda item 4.7) offered a unique opportunity to address the communications aspects, possibly including more communications on the way EFSA's scientific opinions are developed and the independence of the scientific experts involved. She said that openness is a key issue, so she would not exclude public meetings; for instance discussions on risk assessment guidance could be opened through webcasting, while it would be difficult to open some other meetings due to confidential data. Also further meetings between Panel experts and stakeholders could be considered. Belgium found that the qualitative research was useful. However, only perceptions were expressed and all expectations would not necessarily need to be addressed as such. It would be useful to conduct also quantitative research on perceptions by different target audiences. France said that confidentiality issues can be handled, but that collective decision-making of Panels protects individual members; this should be considered before opening Panel meetings. Denmark agreed with France and added that open Panel meetings could possibly lead to pre-mature conclusions. Bulgaria complimented EFSA and the study and emphasised the importance of consulting Member State experts and consider practical aspects more, *e.g.* reference values for micronutrients. Germany suggested that since the Panels are composed of volunteer experts, they should be consulted on the idea of opening Panel meetings. Germany further found that there is room for improvement of EFSA's excessive administrative procedures, that EFSA could consider risk management options, that consultations on EFSA's scientific outputs should take place prior to finalisation, and that EFSA's scientific opinions should be clear and understandable for those who need them. With respect to risk communications, Germany stated that EFSA should go beyond translating the science and accept that there can be loss of information. EFSA should be bolder and stand up for science. Italy mentioned the support from Italy for the establishment of EFSA in Parma and said that the image of EFSA is good in Italy. Italy further said that scientists should work without pressure. Sweden agreed with Belgium on the need for quantitative target audience research. Riitta Maijala said that the assessment of risk management options is part of the Panel work, but only from a scientific perspective, *i.e.* not taking into account economical or social considerations. She explained that all guidance documents are subject to public consultation and that it takes approximately three to five months to do public consultations properly, so this would not be possible for all scientific outputs given the timetables for delivery of advice to risk managers. She said that EFSA is increasing the number of consultations, both with the Member States and as public consultations on the EFSA website. Finally, she said that a third of EFSA's scientific opinions are accompanied by press releases or web stories to explain them in a simple and clearer language. Anne-Laure Gassin said that EFSA will follow up with quantitative target audience research in 2011 in order to quantify some of the findings from the qualitative research and test some possible options.

4.7 EFSA's Communications Strategy 2010-2013

Anne-Laure Gassin presented EFSA's draft Communications Strategy 2010-2013 on which a two-month public consultation had been launched on 5 May 2010. She highlighted EFSA's achievements in the communications area so far and said that the key strategic priorities for 2010-2013 would comprise improving the simplicity and relevance of EFSA communications for key target audiences and informed lay audiences in cooperation with the Member States, enhancing the outreach and recognition of EFSA, further increasing the coherence of risk communications across Europe and beyond, and enhancing the dialogue with stakeholders. Based on findings from the target audience research, inputs received during the public consultation and the outcomes of the Eurobarometer on food-related risks, EFSA's Communications Strategy 2010-2013 would be finalised and submitted to the MB for adoption in October 2010.

The United Kingdom congratulated EFSA on its communications work and suggested that there should be transparency from the scientific opinion to the final communications; it should be possible to drill down from simple summaries into the scientific opinions. Germany found that EFSA's Communication Strategy 2010-2013 was a good plan for the strategic approach and suggested to work with experts on perception to consider also psychological and social aspects, since fears are not always logical and perception issues are often linked with uncertainties. Germany also suggested reflecting on EFSA's role as a European reference body and said that the simplicity of messages is not a value in itself. Germany also highlighted the role of Member States in helping EFSA to communicate to wider audiences. Anne-Laure Gassin agreed that communication messages should be substantiated and that risk perception is important. She informed that EFSA already works with social scientists in this area and also emphasised the important cooperation with the Member States on communication issues through the AFCWG. Cyprus complimented the work and stated that EFSA should communicate both to scientists and consumers with tailored messages. This would enhance EFSA's image. The Netherlands expressed strong support to EFSA's approach and asked how possible attempts from the European Commission and Member States to influence EFSA's risk communications were dealt with. Anne-Laure Gassin replied that the European Commission respects EFSA's independence, while discussions can sometimes arise regarding the contextualisation of the risk assessments and how these will ultimately be used by risk managers. EFSA does not often receive feedback when it sends communications under embargo to the European Commission and the AF. However, any comments fed back to EFSA in the context of pre-notification of its communications can potentially help address possible weaknesses, information gaps or lack of clarity. Karen Talbot said that risk communication is a joint responsibility between EFSA, the European Commission and the Member States. She added that sometimes there is a gap between communications on risk assessments and related risk management measures and that more transparency

on the risk management side would be desirable. Italy emphasised the importance of the cooperation between EFSA and the Member States in risk communications. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle invited the AF members to comment further on EFSA's draft Communications Strategy 2010-2013 during the public consultation and said that the revised version would subsequently be shared with the AF. Likewise, EFSA would inform the AF about the outcome of the Eurobarometer on food-related risks in the autumn 2010.

5 EMERGING ISSUES

5.1 Follow up on emerging issues raised at the previous AF meeting

Bisphenol A

Riitta Maijala updated the AF on EFSA's work on bisphenol A, including the Member State consultation in Parma on 26 March 2010. The opinion of the CEF Panel will be finalised by July 2010 to ensure that all information is taken into account. She added that communicating on bisphenol A is a challenge.

Austria complimented the approach taken with the Member State consultation. Germany saw the Member State consultation on bisphenol A as an example of good coordination between the Member States and EFSA, which could be used to illustrate how the cooperation can work. Germany further said that many studies exist on bisphenol A, so there is a need to analyse and distinguish the good from the bad science and to stand by the scientific risk assessment criteria.

Endocrine active substances

Tomas Öberg updated the AF on EFSA's ongoing work on a technical report on endocrine active substances, which will clarify the current state of play and provide recommendations for future activities. The report would be submitted to the AF for discussion at the AF meeting in September 2010.

Germany insisted on the time pressure for legislative reasons and the importance of involving the Member States and ECHA in the work to avoid duplication of efforts. Tomas Öberg confirmed that EFSA is aware of the German work on endocrine active substances and invited other Member States to share information as well. Djien Liem emphasised that the technical report is intended as a starting point for the AF discussions and that it will also reflect the work of international agencies.

Q-fever

Franck Berthe presented EFSA's scientific opinion on Q-fever and stressed the excellent cooperation with ECDC on this topic. Germany commented on the route of transmission. The Netherlands shared information on the current situation and measures taken to limit the effects this year in the Netherlands.

5.2 Germany: Hazard assessment for substances evaluated by EFSA and ECHA

Germany elaborated on the importance of a close cooperation between EFSA and ECHA as well as cooperation at Member State level between national food safety agencies and national chemical agencies.

Djien Liem fully agreed and provided examples of areas where EFSA and ECHA already cooperate. He also thanked Germany for having identified additional issues for the cooperation with ECHA. Germany said that the REACH Regulation will have an impact on toxicological assessments due to the huge number of substances to be assessed. Malta informed that ECHA is working on a database with information on the substances. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded that the AF would address this issue again with an overview of the cooperation by the end of 2010.

5.3 Lithuania: Pine nuts

Lithuania updated the AF on the pine nuts issue previously discussed by the AF and the lack of conclusive risk assessments.

Tobin Robinson confirmed that EFSA is monitoring the situation and will share any new information with the AF.

5.4 Hungary: Energy drinks

Hungary briefed the AF on recommendations resulting from a stakeholder conference on the safety of energy drinks in Hungary on 13 April 2010 and provided an overview of existing risk assessments regarding energy drinks and energy shots. The risks associated with the combination of energy drinks and alcohol consumption were highlighted. Hungary thanked the Member States for having shared information on national risk assessments.

Riitta Maijala mentioned that, in addition to EFSA's scientific opinion from 2009 on the use of taurine and D-glucurono- γ -lactone as constituents of energy drinks, some health claims related to taurine had recently been assessed negatively by EFSA's NDA Panel. Sweden agreed on the need to examine further the combination of energy drinks and alcohol consumption. Cyprus shared this concern and said that the consumption data reported in EFSA's scientific opinion were not representative for the consumption pattern of adolescents in Cyprus according to a pilot study on the consumption of energy drinks in Cyprus. Denmark agreed that the energy drink consumption pattern is changing. Austria agreed on the lack of up-to-date consumption data and said that average consumption could be significantly exceeded by some groups, also due to new products with even higher caffeine content. Lithuania informed that its parliament was working for a ban on energy drinks for adolescents. Belgium said that the lack of harmonisation between Member States on health measures poses a

problem due to the free trade between countries taking different health measures. Riitta Maijala agreed that the current consumption of energy drinks by specific groups could be higher than indicated by the data available at the time when EFSA's scientific opinion was prepared and that the combination with alcohol consumption had not been addressed in the EFSA opinion. Hubert Deluyker suggested to consider the energy drinks as an emerging risk and address this issue through the network on emerging risks (please refer to agenda item 6.3) as well as data collection involving stakeholders.

5.5 Hungary: Hungarian food consumption survey

Hungary briefed the AF on a Hungarian food consumption survey conducted in 2009. Taking note of the large proportion of the population being either obese or overweight, Hungary suggested considering whether the standard body weights applied in risk assessments would need to be adjusted.

Sweden and Bulgaria found that modelling for exposure assessments taking into account the fat solubility of substances should be considered. Denmark suggested using probabilistic intake estimates. Hubert Deluyker informed that the SC is working on default values and said that descriptive statistics from the Member States could be useful to set realistic default values.

5.6 Cyprus: Exposure assessment – Initiatives from the perspective of small Member States

Cyprus shared findings on two lipids (cafestol and kahweol) in various types of coffee and the occurrence of Southampton colours³ in various foods and drinks.

Upon request from Sweden, Cyprus confirmed that it would be possible to calculate the likelihood of a child being exposed to all the colours on the same day. Riitta Maijala informed that EFSA's scientific opinion from November 2009 advised to reduce the acceptable daily intake for three colours.

5.7 France: Critical blood concentration levels for PCB

France briefed the AF on its toxicological assessments of PCB and an ongoing national study of PCB concentration levels in fresh water fish consumers.

³ Six colours (E102, E104, E110, E122, E124 and E129) and benzoic acic considered in a study conducted by McCann *et al.*, Southampton University in 2007 and previously discussed by the AF.

5.8 Denmark: Risk assessment of inorganic arsenic in rice flour for use in infant food

Denmark shared some considerations on inorganic arsenic in rice flour and whole grain rice flour for use in baby food, based on EFSA's scientific opinion from October 2009 on arsenic in food.

Sweden agreed on the need for further investigation of this issue. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that EFSA would consult its CONTAM Panel to address the Danish considerations.

5.9 Other emerging issues

France announced that AFSSA would merge with AFSSET to become the French Agency for Food, Environment and Occupational health (ANSES) on 1 July 2010. ANSES will refer to five different ministries.

Spain informed the AF about a workshop on food supplements that took place in Madrid on 8 March 2010 under the Spanish EU Presidency. It resulted in a recommendation to the European Commission to establish a working group on food supplements to address the current lack of harmonisation in this area. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed that the European Commission foresees an update of the food supplements regulation.

The Czech Republic offered to share a document on Czech experiences with BT maize cultivation.

Norway briefed the AF on an opinion of the Norwegian Scientific Committee for Food Safety from March 2010 on the assessment of the fish silage processing method for treatment of category 2 and 3 material of fish origin. The method was regarded as safe. Norway would share the opinion through the IEP.

6 OTHER MATTERS RAISED BY EFSA AND THE MEMBER STATES

6.1 Impact assessment indicators

Christine Majewski presented the impact assessment indicators adopted by the MB in March 2010 and explained that the aim was to measure the impact of EFSA's work on EU legislation and looking at the added value of EFSA for better food safety. The annual status reports would be shared with the AF.

France supported the interesting work and the relevance of the indicators, although some doubts were expressed about the feasibility of measuring the indicators in practice. Germany offered to test the indicators also at Member State level and suggested adding two more indicators on the economical savings through the prevention of food crises and the scientific quality of opinions, respectively. Christine Majewski elaborated further on how EFSA intends to

measure the different indicators in practice, but she agreed with France that it is very complicated. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle welcomed the idea of involving Member States and would consider this German proposal further.

6.2 Food classification

Leif Busk (Chairman of the working group on food classification) presented the work on developing a common food classification system to enable exchange of data on consumption and occurrence at EU level. The envisaged system is not intended to replace current national systems, but to be used when transmitting data to EFSA. Nonetheless, it might be an attractive option for Member States presently defining their systems to align with the proposed food classification. The work will also be of support in connection with the pan-European food consumption survey (please refer to the minutes of the 34th and 35th AF meetings). Finally, he said that the work benefits tremendously from the experiences of Member States and thanked the members of the working group for their valuable contributions.

Germany asked if interfaces between food classification systems would need to be redefined and said that data from EUROSTAT should be brought into line. Leif Busk confirmed that EUROSTAT has been involved in meetings and said that the adaptation of national systems would be gradual. Austria stressed the importance of liaising with the European Commission. Leif Busk agreed. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded that the AF is very appreciative of this work.

6.3 Network on emerging risks

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle suggested linking the discussions on the network on emerging risks and the future structure of AF meetings. Tobin Robinson outlined EFSA's approach to identifying emerging risks and presented the new network on emerging risks consisting of representatives from the Member States, third countries, EU and international agencies, and the European Commission.

Austria asked if the new network on emerging risks would substitute the AF discussions on emerging issues, *i.e.* the issues raised under agenda item 5 at this meeting, in order to focus more on strategic issues in the AF. France raised the same question and further said that considering the very broad mandate of the network on emerging risks, subgroups should be considered to ensure the right participation. Tobin Robinson explained that the main focus of the network on emerging risks would be on methodologies for the identification of emerging risks in a medium to long-term perspective and sharing experiences from national systems, whereas the AF discussions were often addressing "hot topics". He also said that the Member State representatives in the network should be seen as national contact points for the liaising on emerging risks. Hubert Deluyker found that it would be odd to address "hot topics" in the AF and other emerging risks in

the network. The United Kingdom supported the proposed network on emerging risks and saw a link with the strategic outlook for the coming years. Hubert Deluyker said that the network would play a concrete role in identifying emerging risks and constitute a platform for dialogue with international organisations like the OECD. The Netherlands and Belgium supported the network, although it could be a challenge to identify a representative covering its broad scope. The Netherlands also mentioned that some issues could re-emerge due to media attention only. These issues would not be relevant for consideration by the network on emerging risks, but rather from the communications perspective. Belgium said that emerging issues discussed by the AF in the past had often led to follow up and asked how this would be handled in the future. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle replied that the new network on emerging risks would not deprive the AF of discussions on emerging issues, but rather filter the issues of relevance for the AF and structure the AF discussions on emerging issues in a more strategic manner. Hubert Deluyker drew a parallel to the Focal Points addressing the operational side of the cooperation, while the AF is consulted on strategic issues. Djien Liem said that the discussions in the network on emerging risks and the AF would be complementary and could be supported by other sources of information, *e.g.* the Rapid Alert System on Food and Feed, as well. Spain found that the members of the network should be experts on emerging risks. France supported an approach starting by defining the methodology and exchanging experiences as well as the proposed interaction between the network on emerging risks and the AF. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle confirmed that the methodology is the first priority. Tobin Robinson said that EFSA is keen to learn from national experiences. Germany warned against establishing costly systems of limited use and suggested limiting the terms of reference to a one-year test period as the basis for a decision on whether or not to continue. Belgium noted that interaction would be needed also at national level in case of interaction between the network and the AF. Hubert Deluyker shared the German concerns and said that the work of the network would be discussed at least annually by the AF. Tobin Robinson and Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle both confirmed that the initial mandate is intended for one year. The mandate was thus endorsed by the AF.

Regarding the structure of future AF meetings, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded that the feedback from various meetings and visits would be provided in a brief document prior to the AF meeting in order to focus on essential strategic discussions in the AF. Emerging issues would be addressed by the network on emerging issues, so that AF discussions on emerging issues would be based on feedback from this network instead of a long list of specific issues. Finally, “hot topics” could still be addressed under the agenda item on other matters raised by EFSA and the Member States. This would allow shortening the AF meetings.

Sweden said that it is important to remember that the AF is where the national agencies meet to exchange views. Germany suggested that the AF should discuss content and science, not administration.

6.4 National expert report on aspartame

Jeffrey Moon presented the national expert report on aspartame. Since the scientific literature review had been addressed at the previous AF meeting, an analysis of repeatedly reported symptoms had been conducted. While the national experts noted that caution was needed in analysing and interpreting anecdotal data due to the collection of data in a non-scientific way, the resulting information could be useful in guiding the design of any future investigative study that may be undertaken to determine individual sensitivity to aspartame. He also provided a feedback on the comments received during the consultation on the national expert report and said that the comments would be published together with the national expert report. The AF took note of the national expert report and the consultation feedback and agreed to defer further consideration of the issue until results of the ongoing pilot study in the United Kingdom become available.

The United Kingdom said that the intention had been to try to consider the anecdotal data in a structured way. The pilot study aims at affirming or otherwise whether there is something that the classic toxicology does not detect. Upon request from Denmark, the United Kingdom confirmed that the pilot study depends on the participation of a sufficient number of volunteers.

6.5 Exchange of experiences on assessing the independence of scientific experts

Riitta Maijala provided an overview of EFSA's experiences in assessing the independence of scientific experts from policy to implementation. She emphasised that having an interest does not necessarily imply that there is a conflict of interests, since the declared interest should be evaluated in relation with the role of the expert and the mandate of the group that the expert contributes to. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle invited the AF members to share any relevant information from Member States, *e.g.* documents or procedures.

Germany said that this issue is the very basis for transparency in EFSA's work and requested time to think about it. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed to discuss further on this issue at the future AF meetings.

6.6 Other matters raised by EFSA

No other matters were raised by EFSA.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Torben Nilsson informed the AF about the AF meeting dates and venues in 2011:

- Parma, 15-16 March 2011 (back-to-back with a MB meeting)
- Hungary, 25-26 May 2011
- Poland, 28-29 September 2011
- Parma, 30 November-1 December 2011

Germany questioned the decision to hold two AF meetings in Parma in 2011. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed to reconsider this proposal.

8 CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked Cyprus for the good meeting organisation. She also thanked the AF members and observers as well as the interpreters, technicians and EFSA staff.