

09 October 2009

## REPORT

### Seminar on Food Safety and the role of the European Food Safety Authority 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> July in Brussels

#### Introduction:

The Seminar on Food Safety and the role of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was organised in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP aims to forge closer ties with countries to the South and East of the EU. Through this policy, the EU seeks to strengthen prosperity, stability and security of all concerned countries.

#### Aims of the seminar:

The seminar was the first meeting between food safety experts from ENP countries and the EU (European Commission, EFSA and certain member States as speakers). The European Commission was represented by the Directorate-General Health and Consumers of the European Commission (DG Sanco), the Directorate-General for External Relations (DG RELEX) and the Directorate-General Enlargement (TAIEX instrument). The workshop aimed at establishing closer ties and networks between the experts from the EU and the ENP countries. It provided an overview of the EU food safety system including EFSA's role in risk assessment and gave information on food safety developments in the ENP countries. The seminar was considered as an opportunity to enhance cooperation between the EU and ENP countries in the area of food safety. The workshop was organised by EFSA, DG Sanco, DG Relex and DG Enlargement and financed via the TAIEX-instrument.

#### Participants:

ENP partners: Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) / CVO representatives and food safety authorities from Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belorussia, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, occupied Palestinian Territory, Tunisia, Ukraine.

EU side: food safety experts from the European Commission, EFSA and, as speakers, certain Member States.

#### Day I:

On the first day the meeting was chaired by Robert Vanhoorde and Jeannie Vergnettes from DG SANCO.

Ms. Diána Bánáti, chair of the EFSA Management Board, welcomed the participants and highlighted that the ENP enables neighbouring countries to gradually integrate into the EU's internal market of more than 500 million consumers. Furthermore, Ms. Bánáti underlined that the seminar provided not only a valuable platform to outline how the EU food safety system operates but also to gain insight into the priorities and expectations of ENP countries. The Council conclusion<sup>i</sup> from 5 March 2007 provided a framework for cooperation between ENP and EFSA and EFSA will work closely with the ENP countries in a manner similar to EFSA's activities with pre-accession countries: to build their risk assessment expertise and strengthen their understanding of how EFSA operates within the European food safety system. Ms. Bánáti stressed that EFSA is committed to working closely with neighbourhood countries to ensure that all our consumers are protected.

In her introductory speech Ms. Paola Testori-Coggi, Deputy Director-General of DG SANCO, stressed that DG SANCO attaches great importance to the relationship with the Eastern and Southern neighbours in the field of sanitary and phytosanitary measures. DG SANCO is convinced that sharing the same values in this field, will contribute to better trans-border management and control of the spread of animal and plant diseases and zoonoses on the one side and on the other to enhance food safety when processing and trading with food of animal and plant origin. The EU is the biggest international importer and exporter of food and has one of the most comprehensive and refined food safety systems in the world with the Regulations on general food law, hygiene, food control and feed control as its corner stone legislation.

Mr. Peter Nagy, Deputy Head of Unit European Neighbourhood Policy, Sector Coordination Unit, (DG RELEX) underlined that the ENP is a key EU foreign policy. He confirmed that food safety issues are an important area of cooperation under ENP. Progress in this area increases health of citizens and provides better perspectives for agricultural trade. All ENP Action Plans provide for food safety related cooperation. The EU and its ENP partners have, over the past years intensified food safety dialogue, but there is ample room to do more. The EU is assisting ENP partners in reforming and modernising the SPS/food safety sector including through twinning and training projects. The European Commission's April 2009 ENP reports acknowledged the progress made in the partner countries regarding SPS/food safety. However, it is crystal clear that much more is to be done. The European Commission stands ready to continue and strengthen cooperation under the ENP.

Mr. Nicolas Lilienthal (DG Elarg) presented the Technical Assistance Information Exchange Programme (TAIEX) of the European Commission. TAIEX organises and finances workshops, expert missions and study visits with EU experts to the benefit and upon request of ENP countries also in the field of food safety. More information is available under <http://taiex.ec.europa.eu/>.

Mr. Hubert Deluyker, Director of Scientific Cooperation and Assistance (EFSA) gave an overview of EFSA and its European and International Scientific Cooperation. In particular, he presented the procedure to adopt scientific opinions at EFSA as well as the four key objectives of the international activities of EFSA: support the EU in its international

commitments, ensure access to international scientific data, contribute to risk assessment at international level and promote coherence of risk communication at international level.

Representatives from each ENP country reported on their food safety system and presented the main food safety institutions, food safety legislation, risk assessment and control systems. A considerable number of countries intends to align their food safety legislation and practice with EU standards.

## Day II

The second day was chaired by Finn Sheye from EFSA.

Mr. Leif Busk, Swedish National Food Administration, Member of the EFSA's Advisory Forum informed the participants about the cooperation between EFSA and EU Member States. The role of the Advisory Forum as a bridge between EFSA and the EU Member States was discussed as well as the Focal Points in the EU Member States. Furthermore, the Expert Database was presented with scientific experts from the EU as well as non-EU countries.

Ms. Jeannie Vergnettes (DG Sanco) presented DG SANCO and its relations with EFSA. She described in which way the BSE and Dioxin crises led to the current EU food safety system with its integrated system. The role of EFSA as risk assessor and DG Sanco as risk manager was presented in detail as well as DG Sanco's main tools of action (legislation, crisis management, enforcement, veterinary control, Community Reference Laboratories, Better Training for Safer Food).

Ms. Stella Canna, Ministry of Health, Cyprus, Member of the EFSA's Advisory Forum. held a speech on "Meeting the challenges of the EU Food Safety System from a perspective of a small island". The activities of the State General Laboratory (SGL) within the Ministry of Health with regard to surveillance, monitoring and risk assessment were presented and the interaction of the SGL with other government bodies.

During the Roundtable and in the evaluation questionnaire, the participants suggested the following topics for future cooperation between EU food safety institutions and ENP-countries:

- implementation of food safety system in food establishments
- practical examples of EFSA risk assessment and EFSA cooperation with ENP-countries
- harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies
- EFSA's cooperation with international organisations like OIE, Codex alimentarius and WTO,
- specific seminar on risk assessment and risk management,
- handling of food crises,
- More detailed (step-by-step) explanation on how the ENP countries can get involved in EFSA activities and EC programmes,
- seminar on RASSF,

- regional seminars to be organized in the EU Member States,
- seminar on EU technical legislation and new EU food standards
- EFSA committees and decision-making process in EFSA.

### **Conclusions and future prospects:**

The seminar gave the participants from the EU and the ENP countries an excellent opportunity to enhance future cooperation. Furthermore, the ENP countries obtained an overview of the EU food safety system including the role of EFSA on risk assessment and risk communication. EU received a better insight in the food safety situation in the partner countries.

With regard to the topics mentioned by the ENP participants in the evaluation questionnaire (see above), the EU food safety institutions can provide the following assistance and training programmes:

It was highlighted that scientific experts from the ENP countries can register in the EFSA expert database and visits of delegations from ENP countries to EFSA can be organised. EFSA will collect information from the ENP countries and update the ENPs country profiles and distribute them to the involved in the Commission and the ENP countries. In addition EFSA will distribute EFSA Newsletter and other material to the ENP countries via the email network.

DG Sanco offers the possibility of training for experts from ENP food safety authorities within the "Better Training for Safer Food" programme(see [http://ec.europa.eu/food/training\\_strategy/intro\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/training_strategy/intro_en.htm) ). Visits of delegations from ENP countries to SANCO can be organised.

DG Enlargement (TAIEX, <http://taiex.ec.europa.eu/>) can organise and finance workshops, expert missions and study visits for ENP countries in all areas of food safety. It is planned to hold two regional workshops on ‘Handling of emergencies/crises in 2010. One of these two workshops will be addressed to the six Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and the other workshop to the Mediterranean ENP countries.

Under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, food safety related assistance (including through twinning) can be provided, taking due account of established procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> 1.32.1. Council conclusions on the European neighbourhood policy - Agencies and programme, see it at <http://europa.eu/bulletin/en/200703/p132001.htm>