



Final Minutes

79th MEETING OF THE EFSA ADVISORY FORUM

Meeting details

Venue: Virtual meeting, Teams

Meeting hours: 9:30 – 13:00 (03.03.2021)

9:30 – 13:00 (04.03.2021)

Members	
Austria (AT)	Klemens Fuchs
Belgium (BE)	Fabien Bolle
Bulgaria (BG)	Iliyan Kostov (1 st Day) Donka Popova (2 nd Day)
Croatia (HR)	Darja Sokolić
Cyprus (CY)	Charitini Frenaritou
Czech Republic (CZ)	Jikta Götzová
Denmark (DK)	Christine Nellemann
Estonia (EE)	Piret Priisalu
Finland (FI)	Pirkko Tuominen
France (FR)	Moez Sanaa Salma Elreedy
Germany (DE)	Andreas Hensel
Greece (EL)	Stavros Zannopoulos
Hungary (HU)	Akos Józwiak
Ireland (IE)	Pamela Byrne
Italy (IT)	Pierdavide Lucchini Alessandra Perella
Latvia (LV)	Vadims Bartkevics
Lithuania (LT)	Jurgita Bakasėnienė
Luxembourg (LU)	Marc Fischer
Malta (MT)	Ingrid Busuttil
Netherlands (NL)	Dick Sijm
Poland (PL)	Jacek Postupolski
Portugal (PT)	Pedro Portugal Gaspar Filipa Melo de Vasconcelos
Romania (RO)	Simona Radulescu
Slovenia (SI)	Urška Blaznik
Slovak Republic (SK)	Mylo Bystricky
Spain (ES)	Ana Canals
Sweden (SE)	Per Bergaman Cecilia Hultén



Observers & Other Participants	
Albania (AL)	Pamela Radovani
Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA)	Dzemil Hajric
Iceland (IS)	Hrönn Ólína Jörundsdóttir
Kosovo ¹ (XK)	Naser Krasniqi (2 nd Day)
Montenegro (ME)	Ana Velimirovic
Norway (NO)	Cecilie Rolstad Denby Danica Grahek-Ogden
Republic of North Macedonia (MK)	Nikolche Babovski
Serbia (RS)	Tamara Bošković
Switzerland (CH)	Vincent Dudler
Turkey (TR)	Serap Hanci
European Commission (Observer)	
	Anastasia Alvizou
European Commission (Observer)	
	Athanasios Raikos
European Commission (Guest Speaker)	
	Heidi Moens
European Commission (Guest Speaker)	
	Rada Chehlarova
The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (Guest Speaker)	
	Fatima Hachem
The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (Guest Speaker)	
	Maria Xipsiti

EFSA Representatives	
Bernhard Url (Chair)	Mary Gilsean
Juliane Kleiner	Valeriu Curtui
Guilhem de Seze	Sérgio Potier Rodeia (Advisory Forum Secretariat)
Barbara Gallani	Maria Azevedo Mendes (Advisory Forum Secretariat)
Claudia Heppner	Cristina Alonso Andicoberry (Advisory Forum Secretariat)
Marta Hugas	Doina Tiganu (Advisory Forum Secretariat)
Victoria Villamar	Angéline Camus (Advisory Forum Secretariat)

1. Opening of the meeting & adoption of Agenda

Bernhard Url, Chair of the meeting, welcomed all participants to the 79th Advisory Forum (AF) virtual meeting. The Chair particularly welcomed:

- **Fabien Bolle** - Director-General for Animals, Plants and Food Chain Safety, new AF member for Belgium.
- **Milo Bystrický** - Acting Director of the Department of Food Safety and Nutrition, new AF Member and FP Alternate for Slovak Republic.
- **Athanasios Raikos** - who recently joined DG-SANTE Unit D1.

The Chair also:

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.



- noted that **Katarina Kromerova** had been nominated as Slovak AF Alternate and remains FP Member;
- farewelled **Cecilie Rolstad Denby** for her last AF meeting, and indicated that a new AF member would soon be nominated.

The Chair informed that the minutes from the 78th Advisory Forum had been published on EFSA's website and MS Teams on 21.01.2021 and that this meeting would be recorded for minute-taking purposes. No objection to the recording of the meeting was raised.

No additional items were raised under AOB and the Agenda was adopted. At the end of the meeting an AOB regarding the publication of data submitted to EFSA was raised by NL.

■ Follow-up on ongoing actions

The Chair informed the Plenary that from the 10 action items agreed at the previous AF meeting (78th AF meeting), 8 were concluded and that the 2 ongoing concern *vanadium*. Action Point 7² is still pending as no input had been received from MS.

Regarding Action Point 8 – EFSA to liaise with US-NTP to gather information on the progress of the studies on vanadium - after contacting US-NTP, EFSA was informed that the study report would not be available before the end of this year / early next year.

The chair informed the Plenary that 5 MSs (ES, NL, LV, FR, CZ) expressed interest in joining an EFSA Working Group (WG) on extending EFSA's publishing capacity to national agencies (i.e. MS publications in the EFSA Journal) and encouraged more expressions of interest by the 26.03.2021.

Reminder of previous ongoing actions items:

Action Point: MS to share available studies on the determination of the levels of *vanadium* (or vanadium-containing compounds) in drinking water and foods.

Action Point: MS to express interest in joining an EFSA WG on extending EFSA's publishing capacity to national agencies. Deadline 02.04.2021.

2. Update on the implementation of the new Transparency Regulation in the Food Chain

■ 2.1 - Introduction

The Chair opened the agenda item by reminding the importance of this topic for EFSA but also emphasizing its ramifications for the MS. The update on the implementation of the new Transparency Regulation (TR) in the Food Chain tools included presentations on: 1) Tools and documents (eg. practical arrangements, IT tools etc.) produced to prepare the entry into force of the TR; 2) Presentations on initiatives aiming at ensuring the sustainability of the Risk Assessment through Partnerships; 3) An update on SPIDO.

■ 2.2 - Implementation of Transparency Regulation – 1st phase

The Chair gave the floor to Guilhem de Sèze to debrief the Plenary on the latest developments of the 1st phase of implementation of the TR. Guilhem provided an update on documents and tools concerning the TR provisions for transparency in RA (e.g. practical arrangements, guidance documents, IT tools for enhanced transparency, engagement with stakeholders, new features on EFSA website).

² MS to provide any information to AF Secretariat on studies they may have on vanadium at national level



Guilhem reminded that the deadline for the entry into force of the TR is approaching and that the current stage reflects the work achieved for 2 years. He also emphasized that it is the end of the first phase, but a second phase will follow namely including the setting of a new Management Board (MB). He informed the plenary that all four practical arrangements³ have been adopted and published on EFSA's website on 11th January 2021. On these practical arrangements, stakeholders formulated questions which are all being processed. As a result, a Q&A will be published by the 27th March. In addition, the update of the 27 guidance documents have been completed. Only the guidance on pesticides still needs to be reviewed by the PAFF committee before its finalization. Therefore, all the finalised administrative and Scientific guidance documents will be published by 27th March.

Guilhem reminded that to fulfil the TR requirements, EFSA has put in place two portals accessible to external parties: 1) connect.EFSA ("customer relationship management" by *Salesforce*) which will enable interaction with the public, regulatory authorities, stakeholders and applicants and will give the possibility to engage with EFSA on a variety of topics (e.g. to perform pre-submission activities, read FAQ, take part in EFSA's public consultations, and submit requests for information or public access to documents), and 2) the dissemination portal – OpenEfsa portal, which will be fed by Microsoft Azure and where all data underpinning the risk assessment will be stored.

Concerning the submission of dossiers, two systems will be used i) IUCLID (*International Uniform Chemical Information Database*) for pesticides ii) FSCAP, called "e-submission food chain" platform (developed by DG SANTE) will be used for any other type of dossiers. In addition, APPIAN will be used as EFSA's internal tool for the Risk Assessment workflow. Guilhem stressed that all this new technology will improve security and confidentiality and provide more opportunities to interact with external partners.

Regarding the security aspect concerning the IUCLID implementation, the AF members were informed that organisations need to put in place a VPN to secure the connection with the cloud where the pesticides dossiers will be stored. On this regard, most organisations have been contacted. However, contact is missing for 16 organisations in 10 different countries. Therefore, support will be requested from MS, through their Permanent Representations, to identify and share the survey link with any organisation that should be reached by EFSA on this regard⁴.

Moreover, training and webinars organised for the applicants and interested stakeholders have been organised. It was noted that video-recorded training materials are also available.⁵ Guilhem de Sèze recalled that dissemination by MS of these training opportunities would be appreciated.

In order to ensure a smooth onboarding, a system called "Hypercare" has been put in place, which is a sort of helpdesk aiming at start supporting external users.

The Plenary was informed that a joint DG SANTE-EFSA information session on the TR with the ENVI committee of the European Parliament is tentatively planned for April 2021. In addition, to mark the entry into application of the TR, the EC and the PT Presidency, in collaboration with EFSA, will jointly organise a celebratory virtual event on 30th March 2021.

Looking ahead, the second phase will be driven by the continuation of the processes and IT improvements (such as redaction software or a new separate portal for confidentiality assessment). The preparation for the new Management board in 2022 and for the selection for the new Scientific Panels is also foreseen.

The Chair thanked Guilhem for a comprehensive overview of current work status as well on work ahead. He recalled that, in 2020, 55 EFSA staff members were working full time in this process while this number is expected to increase in 2021. It reflects for EFSA the opportunity to increase transparency, sustainability but also digitalisation and trust. The Chair underpinned that expectations

³ Master documents detailing the implementation of specific aspects of the TR.

⁴ A letter from EFSA's executive director was sent to the Permanent Representations and to the PAFF committee.

⁵ Link to the training material available : <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/stakeholders/transparency-regulation-implementation-training-programme>



need to be managed as this is a continuous improvement process. It was also stressed that it represents a much broader initiative illustrated by the reinforcement of partnerships and that with the TR a new foundation has been set, not only for EFSA. The Chair opened the floor for comments.

Germany raised concerns about the extra administrative work that could hinder efficacy. It was highlighted that all these achievements and the increase of EFSA's internal work might not be visible to the public thus possibly jeopardising the envisaged transparency perception. The need for adequate communication and thus the necessity of having a change in the strategy to enable the message to be absorbed, was stressed.

Guilhem recalled that the two portals will allow more interaction with the external parties, allowing public access to documents, consultations and visibility on the progress of the dossiers, making all data available to the public. The Chair complemented by highlighting that the actions undertaken towards transparency are a huge step, enabling not only the availability of all non-confidential information throughout the entire RA process, but also the scrutiny by EFSA's partners and the possibility of its use to create knowledge which should result in trust building and accountability.

The European Commission (EC) referred to the importance of accountability and the need to address the problem of risk perception. Therefore, it was highlighted that the TR structure is revolutionary as it will make everything public and will contribute to the data ecosystem. The EC pointed out that this work will also be key in the EU chemical strategy aiming at transposing that model of transparency in the field of chemicals.

Spain remarked that a huge effort was made and that all members play a key role in communication on EFSA's transparency implementation. France noted that the provision of too much information could give the impression of unclarity. Therefore, the essential tools developed would need to be complemented by other actions to strengthen trust. In this context a communication strategy considering the diversity of targets and a way to monitor perception would be needed. The EC reminded that this aspect will be addressed in the general plan on risk communication (planned in 2023).

It was also referred that MS want to help disseminate EFSA's achievements towards transparency, but they would need to know how EFSA wants to do it and how they could contribute.

The Chair agreed that different messages for diverse audiences are crucial. Nevertheless, he highlighted that the work should be done in cooperation and to that end EFSA would need the AF support in this distributed communication⁶. Barbara Gallani replied that some infographics and material are under development, in cooperation with DG SANTE and that this point would be further elaborated during the Update on Engagement and Communication (Item 3).

At the end of this agenda item, France prompted a question concerning the MS membership in the future MB, more precisely the timeline for MS to nominate their representatives (and alternates) for the MB and the procedure to do so. The EC replied that it is for the Council to set the process and deadlines for the nomination of the MS representatives. The Council will inform MS when they need to nominate one member and one alternate, following internal procedures in each MS. The EC will forward additional information, if applicable, at the next AF meeting. Regarding the two representatives from the European Parliament, the process will be managed by the European Parliament itself. On the representatives of the Food chain's interests, the new MB will include four members (and four alternates). The EC will launch a call for applications early in May 2021 (indicative timeline). Subsequently a list of qualified candidates will be established and will be submitted to the Council for nomination.

⁶ Link to ongoing communications on the Transparency Regulation implementation and stakeholder engagement: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/stakeholders/transparency-regulation-implementation#transparency-regulation-implementation-training-programme>



Action Point 1: AF members to support the dissemination of the training material⁷.

Action Point 2: AF members to support communications on the implementation of the Transparency Regulation⁸.

■ 2.3 - Update on partnerships

2.3.A – Introduction

Bernhard Url reminded the AF of EFSA’s purpose with its ecosystem of partnerships and provided an overview of the challenges ahead, namely, 1) the increasing complexity of risk assessment, 2) the new societal expectations, 3) market trends, including innovation, globalisation and mobility of people and hazards, and 4) trust erosion. Addressing these questions is important for the risk assessment community to remain relevant, continuing to provide fit-for-purpose scientific advice in the future. The TR provides the regulatory framework and the means for intensifying collaboration between EFSA and the MS, which is essential for the risk assessment system to remain relevant.

The intention is to move from *ad hoc* cooperation, which is being done successfully, to partnerships, i.e., trustful long-term collaboration, where the win-win for participants is a given, co-creation with shared risks and shared values. This initiative is not EFSA-centric but EU-centric, and it is the result of deeper collaboration, leading to a common risk assessment culture, also providing the opportunity to the co-shape the future of risk assessment in Europe. EFSA also envisages to enable MS partners to maintain and expand their capacity, also getting access to EFSA funds. The proposed approach would allow MS partners to identify synergies with topics of national strategic importance, therefore reducing scientific divergencies through this process.

The Chair received positive feedback from MS on this approach.

2.3.B - AF DG on Future of Partnerships

The Chair gave the floor to Victoria Villamar to provide the Plenary with follow-up information on the 1st meeting of the AFDG on the Future Partnerships.

Victoria mentioned that the newly formed group is building on the experience of the groups on Data and Capacity Building. Partnership is an evolving process and sustainability of the system is at the heart of the Discussion Group. Following the expression of interest from 8 AF members⁹ during the 78th AF meeting, the AF Discussion Group on the Future of Partnerships (AFDGFoP) was established. The Plenary was informed that Salma Elreedy (FR) has been designated co-chair of the group, together with Victoria Villamar. The kick-off meeting of the Group took place on 26th January 2021 and the ToR have been shared with the AF members for comments ahead of this meeting. The second meeting will take place on 10th March.

The importance of adopting an inclusive approach and the added value of reporting back regularly to the AF was reiterated. The support of the FP will help ensure that practical challenges are sufficiently identified. It was reaffirmed that the desired objective is, for all actors involved in the food safety system, to deliver around 3 main streams: efficiency, complexity of science and innovation, and preparedness.

The scope of the work will involve engaging with the MS, increasing responsiveness in reaching existing expertise. Depending on the topic in question, synergies with sister EU agencies may also be feasible. The timing of this discussions’ group work will coincide with the provisions of the TR’s second

⁷ See footnote 4

⁸ See footnote 5

⁹ FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, NL, PT and ES



pillar on sustainability entering into force, including changes in the MB and the increased possibility for EFSA to outsource work to Art. 36 organisations.

Victoria Villamar concluded by thanking FR and all MS who volunteered to be part of the group with the aim of strengthening pan-European risk assessment and invited Salma Elreedy to take the floor. Salma, in turn, acknowledged the frame of work of the Discussion Group and reiterated that feedback will be regularly provided to the AF.

The Chair intervened underlining the essential character of MS's input to help ensure that the approach is inclusive, representing the views and interests of all.

Action Point 3: AF members to provide comments on the draft ToR of the AFDGFoP

2.3.C - Update on Article 36 Survey

Juliane Kleiner delivered a quick update on the results of the Art. 36 survey which was designed to collect feedback on working with EFSA, specifically in relation to partnering & engagement, the administrative and financial aspects of grants and procurement and the involvement of experts in EFSA Panels and Working Groups. Detailed results were already presented in the 78th AF Meeting in December.

The survey feedback has helped EFSA to appreciate the obstacles faced by Article 36 organisations, and concrete and operational actions have been identified to address them, along four areas:

- 1) Facilitate strategic alignment of EFSA & Art. 36 activities.
- 2) Ensure leaner application processes and reduce the administrative burden (e.g. avoiding repetitive submission of documents).
- 3) Improved dissemination of call information, with a more targeted approach. A longer term and more detailed planning of the EFSA activities should also allow to overcome the obstacle of the mismatch of EFSA and MS strategic activities identified in the survey's feedback.
- 4) Offer a more attractive expert scheme, including finding the right balance between virtual and physical meetings and increasing attractiveness for experts thanks to the EFSA's Journal impact factor. It was recalled that the expert compensation scheme was improved last year and one additional preparatory day for each working day with EFSA was implemented.

The Chair concluded by reminding the importance for EFSA of the feedback provided.

2.3.D – Update on pilots

The Chair gave the floor to Guilhem de Sèze to provide updates on the two pilots which both ambition to evolve as more structural partnerships.

Guilhem highlighted the 3 pillars needed for an efficacious structural partnership:

- Science – all partners need to agree on how to do the assessment, to have the same understanding (harmonisation of guidance, training, data, methodology);
- Contractual definition – what is the financial instrument and legal aspects;
- Operational definition – how do we concretely work together.

➤ MS Partnership on Food Enzyme Safety Assessment: update

Guilhem outlined that the first experience is very positive, taking a step towards harmonized approach and data requirement for enzyme safety evaluation in Europe.

The group participating in the pilot on enzymes consists of experts nominated by seven European countries (BE, DK, EE, FR, DE, ES, NL), following a call made by EFSA. The enzyme pilot has kicked



off its work in January 2021, when a group of MS scientists met with the EFSA WG experts to give in-depth feedback to the draft enzyme guidance.

On this regard, a public consultation is ongoing¹⁰ and will close on 9th May. Moreover, MS experts will be invited to a stakeholders' event (June 2021). The final guidance is expected to be adopted in September or November 2021. As a next step, MS scientists from this group, upon needs, will have the opportunity to join the EFSA ENZ WG. The purpose of this process is to give more autonomy to experts doing the assessments, working towards the same goal of more risk assessment capacity in the EU.

➤ **EFSA and MS collaboration on Novel foods safety assessment: update**

Guilhem recalled that the final goal is as well to have partners managing the Novel foods assessments, from receiving the application to producing a draft opinion that should go to the NDA panel. A call for a grant will be issued in order to build groups to work on the draft or parts of the draft opinion. In the first stage these drafts will still go through the WG. In the long run, this process aims at developing a sustainable collaborative model that builds and reintegrates the competences of the Member States into the EU risk assessment for novel foods, strengthening the EU risk assessment capacity of novel foods and guaranteeing sustainability of the risk assessment model.

Expressions of interest were received from 5 MS (HR, FR, DE, EL, ES), some of whom need to provide the names of one contact expert. After having contacted these designated experts, EFSA will start the consultation with the interested parties to co-design a proposal of partnership model, which will lead to the launch of a partnering grant (planned for the summer 2021 and open to all MS).

Action Point 4: MS who expressed interest in joining the partnership on Novel foods pilot to designate contact experts, if not already done

Relevant comments on both presentations were received. Norway referred that it would be important that organisations could be aware in advance of the strategies and work foreseen by EFSA as to be strategically and financially prepared, noting the difficulty of predicting burden of work that could come from EFSA's requests.

The Chair acknowledged that considering the different planning, financial and research cycles, the process can be quite complex. Bernhard Url pointed out the importance of predictability for member partners so they know what will come up in the next years thus enabling them to plan. He noted that it should be ensured in a multiannual plan in order to allow working in a coordinated way. To that end, Norway raised the idea to have a meeting outside of the AF Plenary, to discuss potential solutions, such as staff exchanges.

Guilhem de Sèze pointed that longer-term visibility for MS is being considered through the work of an existing internal Task force to identify all possibilities for partnerships, with June as a tentative timeline for the Task Force to present the results.

The Chair acknowledged that inclusiveness and coordination should be a priority.

■ **2.4 - Update on the Advisory Group on Data**

The Chair gave the floor to Mary Gilsean to provide an update on activities concerning the implementation of the AF TF (Task Force) on data recommendations and elaborate further work of the new Advisory Group on Data.

Mary gave an update on the 2 brainstorming sessions which took place in December 2020 with the participation of HU, FR, DE and NL. The main aim of the sessions was to transform static recommendations into tangible project ideas. As a result, the group managed to establish a list of 14 ideas organised into 3 pillars: 1) "quick win" solutions (e.g. reusing existing catalogues (e.g. EFSA

¹⁰ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/fr/call/public-consultation-draft-scientific-guidance-submission-dossiers-food-enzymes>



FoodEx2 matrix catalogue, EFSA PARAM catalogue of substances) in the next stage development of iRASFF); 2) Pilot project ideas (e.g. new approach to data collection and to translate existing national lab data to EFSA SSD2 format); 3) Medium to long term project ideas (e.g. Data collection platform owned by MS and Food Safety Data Knowledge Platform).

Mary reminded that the ToR of a new Advisory Group on Data have been circulated prior to this meeting. The key stated objectives are to act as a guardian of the AF TF recommendations, as a think tank, as a channel providing knowledge and expertise in MS, as well as to provide strategic input on EFSA's data roadmap. Following this update, endorsement of the ToR was sought and discussions on the nominations of the Chair and members took place.

Several MS expressed interest in joining the new Advisory Group on Data¹¹. Mary reminded that members of the group need to be active and committed, and time investment is required.

Following-up on comments received by the MS, the Chair gave the floor to the EC's representative who recalled that monitoring remains an important aspect of the work, as well as ensuring that all the elements will interact coherently with each other in the new data ecosystem.

The ToR were endorsed by the Plenary during the meeting. Ákos Józwiak (HU) was appointed Chair of the group after having received support from several MS.

The Chair concluded on the idea that data is a key to the partnership approach and raised the question on how will the EC be involved in this process, to which EC replied it will follow up on this point after the meeting.

■ 2.5 - Update on Science Studies Project Identification & Development Office (SPIDO)

The Chair gave the floor to Claudia Heppner who highlighted two important milestones achieved last year: 1) From the "future of science themes", four were prioritized by EFSA and DG SANTE in consultation with the AF; and 2) Agreement with DG SANTE on a framework document which outlines the process of selecting new themes.

In her presentation, Claudia reminded the criteria to select a candidate theme and recalled that a consultation process is foreseen on the candidate themes. DG SANTE has already been consulted, but at this meeting the view of the AF is sought on the initial EFSA proposal.

In an internal exercise and following the application of the criteria, three candidate themes have been proposed for 2021: i) *application of omics and bioinformatic approaches: next generation risk assessment (omics)*, ii) *advancing the environmental risk assessment of chemicals for insect pollinators (insect pollinators)*, and iii) *evidence-based risk communication in the EU food safety system (risk communication)*. The concept of a level of maturity was introduced which means EFSA has a good overview on the challenges and risk assessment work needed in a specific area. This was summarised in three scoping papers which have been shared prior to the meeting¹². Claudia elaborated further on each topic and on the needs for a strengthened work.

Because of time constraints, there were no in-depth discussions on multiannual plan for the proposed themes. It was agreed to follow-up by written exchange. Claudia Heppner informed the Plenary about the organisation of a workshop and proposed that MS express interest in supporting the scoping of proposed future candidate themes (nutrition and health, exposure science, animal welfare, microbiomes in food/environment and sustainable food systems).

As a conclusion, MS generally supported in plenary two proposed candidate themes for 2021: OMICS and insect pollinators.

In the discussion that followed, questions were raised regarding the timeline.

EC clarified that the proposal to consider the topic of sustainable food systems in 2024 is linked to the intention for it to act as a support to the implementation of the new legislative framework foreseen for adoption in 2023. The EC also introduced a proposal for EFSA to further consider the organisation

¹¹ Before the AF meeting: FR, DE, HU, NL, IT; during the AF meeting: AT, SE, IE, HR, FI.

¹² Email sent on the 15th February 2021.



of workshops to allow further reflection and stimulate discussions on the multi-annual development plan. Finally, the EC remarked, on the risk communication theme, that there will be consultations in 2021 aiming at identifying data gaps. 2022 was thus regarded as a more appropriate timeline for this proposal.

The Chair closed this item by reminding the foreseen benefits of SPIDO to avoid divergencies and fill the gaps with initiatives under Horizon Europe.

Action Point 5: AF members to express interest in supporting the scoping of proposed future candidate themes for 2022-2024 (e.g., through workshops in 2021 and beyond) or propose other future candidate themes by the 31.03.2021.

3. Engagement and Communication Update

The Chair gave the floor to Barbara Gallani to update AF members on recent communications and engagement highlights.

Barbara emphasized that the Annual Work Plan for 2021 includes three main objectives: 1) Coordinated communication, 2) Sharing best practice, and 3) Targeted Risk Communication.

The priority topics for 2021 were presented: TR implementation, Bee Health, sustainable and healthy diets, and animal health and welfare. She noted that the African Swine Fever Campaign will continue in 2021, with the material created last year as a starting point. The main campaign in 2021 will be on choosing food with confidence and will aim to increase awareness of the science behind food safety, encourage critical thinking and inspire user generated content.

The World Food Safety day 2021 will also present a good opportunity to have a coordinated communication with member states, WHO and FAO.

Barbara Gallani also provided an update on the progress of the EC Mandate on the *Provision of Technical Assistance in the Field of Risk Communication*, which will comprise four reports to be published soon after the end of March 2021.

The Communications around 27 March 2021 will be articulated with two main audiences in mind: 1) concerned citizens, academia and Media 2) applicants, stakeholders' groups, EFSA's partners.

A number of materials are under development to support the communications to the first group including a media relations kit, a fact sheets, an animated video, FAQ's, the EC-EFSA celebratory event on 30 March etc.

The question on the involvement of MS in the communication around the TR was discussed. The CEN is providing input in the reports that will inform the General Plan on risk communication.

Due to time constraints, the stakeholders' engagement initiatives were not presented but the Plenary was informed of the possibility to raise questions by email after the AF meeting.

Finally, Barbara Gallani informed AF members of the progress of the EU-FORA review, noting that the timing for this evaluation is linked to the implementation of the Transparency Regulation and the adoption of EFSA Strategy 2027. Following a round of internal and external consultations on the draft concept note, the final updated proposal will be shared with AF members ahead of the meeting in June for final discussions and possible endorsement.

4. Risk Assessment Activities

■ 4.1 - EuroCigua Project



Ana Canals (ES) was given the floor to provide information on the EuroCigua project and its main outcomes. The EuroCigua Project is a 4-year cooperation between EFSA and fourteen European institutions from six Member States, coordinated by the Spanish Food Safety and Nutrition Agency (AESAN), with the objective of characterizing the risk of ciguatera poisoning (CP) in Europe. The project started in 2016 and finalized in January 2021. Ciguatera is an underreported foodborne disease, and results show that it seems to be an emerging risk well established in Europe. In her presentation, Ana Canals reiterated the importance to keep raising awareness on ciguatera cases and outbreaks, as well as the need for harmonized methodologies and the collection of data with a One Health approach. The EuroCigua project has allowed to develop methods to identify CTXs in order to characterize the risk on CP. In addition, the constitution of EuroCigua Consortium within the project has made it possible to create a network for scientific excellence.

NL thanked Ana Canals for outlining this issue and referred to another marine biotoxin, tetrodotoxin (TTX), originally known in tropical regions, that was detected in Europe around 5 years ago. Several MS referred to the link of this issue with climate change.

Juliane Kleiner indicated that the outcome of the project will be analysed by the Scientific Committee in April to possibly identify follow-up actions. The Chair pleased the promising outcome of the project, being a great example of collaboration and raised a question on the likeliness for the risk to increase in the future. Ana Canals acknowledged it is difficult to see trends but there is a steady increase in the number of outbreaks in the Canary Islands. Modelling and capacity building would allow to follow up on the project.

5. Thematic Discussion on Healthy diets from Sustainable food systems

■ 5.1 – Introduction

The Chair introduced the discussion and reminded that presentations and discussions aim at facilitating the sharing of relevant information on activities that can support the F2F strategy and future action plans, while focusing as well on specific activities relating to front-of-pack labelling and nutrient profiles. The topic is impactful for citizens, therefore giving a particular importance to awareness raising, sharing experiences and explaining the scientific work of EFSA.

■ 5.2 - F2F upcoming activities related to nutrition

The Chair welcomed Heidi Moens and Rada Chehlarova from the European Commission (EC) and passed them the floor to inform AF members on the latest developments and upcoming activities related to nutrition in the context of the Farm to Fork Strategy.

The EC provided more information on overarching actions relating to healthy and sustainable diets and reminded that the Farm to Fork strategy is accompanied by an action plan of 27 actions leading the path for sustainable food systems. One of the flagship initiatives is the legal framework for sustainable food systems planned for adoption by the Commission in 2023, whose preparatory work has already started and will include consultations of public and private stakeholders. As part of the preparatory reflections, the EC initiated a project carried out by the policy lab of the Joint Research Centre (January to July 2021). The outcome of this project, together with the results of consultations foreseen in line with the better regulation guidelines, will be used in the preparation of the legislative proposal. The inception impact assessment is planned to be published for feedback in the course of 2021. Subsequently, a study supporting the impact assessment will be launched. Consultations will take place throughout the process until the adoption of the legislation.

Then, the EC provided information on the EU code of conduct and monitoring framework for responsible business and marketing practices in the food supply chain. The target being to encourage



this middle part of chain actors to improve sustainability practices. The Code of Conduct is a voluntary initiative which should be ready for signature by stakeholders by end of June 2021. The EC reminded that the purpose of the Code of Conduct is to ensure a commitment to the most ambitious actions and therefore it will be accompanied by a monitoring framework. If progress is considered insufficient, the EC will have the possibility to take legislative action. A list of examples of concrete actions was presented, although the industry has not yet committed to these proposals. This list also includes examples of commitments that could be made by school institutions or retailers. Potential actions in the areas of marketing and reformulation are also included.

In addition, the EC provided more explanation on Farm to Fork actions related to nutrition, namely the action to launch initiatives to stimulate reformulation, the setting of nutrient profiles and the proposal for harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling.

Regarding the setting of nutrient profiles and front-of-pack nutrition labelling, the EC referred to two reports on these topics, which were published together with the Farm to Fork Strategy. The EC further explained that the inception impact assessment outlining the different policy options had been published¹³, that a study to support the impact assessment will be launched and stakeholder consultations will be held. The EC also explained that the Commission has mandated EFSA to provide scientific advice¹⁴ and has requested the Joint Research Centre to update the previous literature review¹⁵ taking into account the latest scientific publications and papers.

The Chair thanked the speakers for the comprehensive presentation and mentioned the need for EFSA to find the right scientific framework in order to best support policy makers.

Concerns were expressed over EFSA's involvement, where scientific evidence might enter into political considerations. The Chair clarified that EFSA will work within the scientific realm. The latter statement was reiterated by the European Commission. Though, the need to bring in other parts of science was mentioned by some MS and reiterated by the Chair.

A question was raised on the plan to involve SMEs in the process of elaboration of the code of conduct. The EC reassured that representatives of SMEs are also among the stakeholders consulted.

■ 5.3 - EFSA scientific advice to inform harmonised front-of-pack labelling and restriction of claims on foods

Valeriu Curtui took the floor to highlight the elements related to EFSA scientific advice in the mandate referred to above. He reminded that the provision of advice on nutrient profiles is not new for EFSA. In 2008, EFSA provided its scientific advice to assist the Commission on the setting of nutrient profiles, however, the risk management process with respect to establishing nutrient profiles was not concluded.

In the context of the F2F, EFSA has been mandated to provide scientific advice for the development of harmonised mandatory front-of-pack (FOP) nutrition labelling and the setting of nutrient profiles for restricting nutrition and health claims on foods, which is scheduled by 31st March 2022. The Mandate includes advice on the following: 1) nutrients of public health importance for European populations (including non-nutrient components of food) 2) Food groups which have an important roles in diets of European population and subgroups, and 3) Choice of nutrients and other non-nutrient components of food for nutrient profiling.

Yet, it was underlined that developing or select a particular nutrient profiling model; or advising on current profiling models already in use for different purposes remains outside the remit of the mandate and that this choice stays with the risk managers.

¹³ On the 23rd December 2020 – with consultation running until 4th February 2021.

¹⁴ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/efsas-scientific-advice-inform-harmonised-front-pack-labelling-and-restriction>

¹⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/front-pack-nutrition-labelling-schemes-comprehensive-review>



Concerning the timeline, the Protocol is expected to be endorsed by the NDA panel by March 2021. In the protocol, the ToR are interpreted in discussions between experts leading to the identification of questions to be answered, the needs for scientific evidence are defined and the sources of information are identified. The endorsement of the draft opinion by the NDA Panel is planned during the open plenary in October 2021. The draft opinion will then be subject to a public consultation planned for November/ December 2021. It was reminded that the timeline will coincide with the finalisation of the opinion on sugars from which some conclusions could also be of use in this scientific advice.

AF members were informed that EFSA is seeking information on diet-related chronic diseases considered by EU MS in setting national Food Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDG)¹⁶.

Action Point 6: AF members / FPs to disseminate a survey questionnaire to the national competent bodies in charge of setting national FBDGs – Deadline for answers 26.03.2021

■ 5.4 - Guiding principles for sustainable healthy diets

The Chair then gave the floor to Fatima Hachem, from FAO, to provide a global perspective on sustainable healthy diets.

Malnutrition in all its forms and sustainability remain the two major challenges of the 21st century and Fatima recalled that there is no agreement on what constitute a sustainable diet. Food production globally has a large impact on water, soil, biodiversity, and greenhouse gases. Nevertheless, consumers, through their food choices and diets, can be active stakeholders in the transition of food systems towards more sustainability.

In this context, FAO commissioned a paper on the health and environmental aspects of diets. The Organisation works on assessing suitable indicators to be used under 16 Guiding Principles and on updating the methodology to develop Food-Based Dietary Guidelines with sustainability considerations. Fatima reminded the importance of these guidelines, which should take into consideration updated scientific evidence. Matrix and indicators are also central in assessing the quality of diets from a health point of view. However, she acknowledged the existence of trade-offs and that the same solutions cannot fit all the countries.

Sustainable healthy diets should have a low environmental pressure, should be accessible, affordable, equitable, safe and culturally acceptable. Indeed, they should also respect local culture and consumption patterns.

Importance of creating an enabling environment in line with the approach developed by the EC and the coherence between policies is key. Fatima also illustrated these above aspects by mentioning a project on school meals, where FAO will be developing a global methodology for nutrition guidelines and standards for school meals anchored in a food system approach.

After the presentations from the EC, from EFSA and FAO, the Chair gave the floor to MS to present their experience related to the thematic discussion.

■ 5.5 - MS activities

5.5.A - New dietary guidelines in Denmark

Christine Nellemann (DK) presented the scientific background for revising the official Danish food-based dietary guidelines 2021.

Following an assignment received from the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, the national dietary guidelines have been reassessed in the perspective to lessen the carbon footprint without compromising the requirements for a healthy diet. A transition to sustainable food systems does not

¹⁶ The questionnaire was sent to the MS in an email from the AF secretariat on the 08.03.2021.



only refer to the diets but includes sustainable food production, and reduction of food waste and food losses.

DK presented data on the relation of different food products and carbon footprint and highlighted that in general, different diets have different environmental impact on what concerns carbon footprint, land use and biodiversity, and water use.

The process for the development of “Danish-adapted plant-rich diet” was based on both evidence on health and evidence on climate effects. It resulted in a summary of the main points to consider when adopting a more sustainable healthy plant-based diet. The method to develop this model involved the calculation of the nutrient content and the use of the Danish food composition data. The importance here of the Danish national dietary survey, which allowed to take into account relevant food consumption patterns, is to be noted.

Subsequently the report was shared with risk managers who invited a lot several different stakeholders to provide input on the wording. In January 2021, the official dietary guidelines consisting of seven recommendations¹⁷ was published.

The overall feedback to this initiative was positive although there have been critics mainly from the meat sector and consumers.

Some research needs have also been identified, and the need of continuously updated data, and of implementation research and collaboration was highlighted.

The Chair thanked DK for the very interesting research and implementation efforts.

5.5.B - Experiences from The Netherlands on front-of-pack nutrition labelling

Dick Sijm (NL) took the floor to present the experiences of The Netherlands on front-of-pack nutrition labelling and the setting of conditions for using nutrition and health claims on foods.

From 2013 to 2019, two major check marks existed in the Netherlands, one on better informed choice (blue) and one on healthier choice (green). As a conclusion from the implementation of these check marks, not all operators were willing to make use of them because of the costs incurred and it led to confusion between products with and without the check marks.

Because of their misleading character, the Ministry of Public Health decided to no further allow their use in October 2019. Subsequently and after a survey was carried out among consumers, the Nutri-Score was implemented as of 2021, since it had been considered the best option to help consumers make the best choice. Thus, 70 food business organisations agreed to cooperate within a “National Prevention Agreement”. However, the Nutri-score is not yet aligned with the Dutch nutritional guidelines. Therefore, an International scientific Committee has been tasked to evaluate the alignment of the Nutri-score and the nutritional guidelines in different countries (including NL). Results are expected by mid-2021.

Overall, the visual format of the Nutri-score is considered favourable to provide a quick overview and compare products within the same category. Yet, one of the emerging issues was the non-involvement of nutritionists in the process.

Finally, NL also mentioned an app (Kies ik gezond?) as an additional initiative in place to help consumers make better choices through a variety of communication tools.

However, it was recalled that labelling on sustainability is still missing.

Several MS indicated recently published or soon to be papers on dietary guidelines¹⁸.

¹⁷ 1) Eat plant-rich, varied and not too much 2) Eat more vegetables and fruits 3) Eat less meat - choose legumes and fish 4) Eat whole grains 5) Choose vegetable oils and low-fat dairy products 6) Eat less of the sweet, salty and fatty 7) Drink water

¹⁸ IE: Scientific Recommendations for Food Based Dietary Guidelines in Older People in the coming weeks. We publish recommendations for 1-5-year old late last year. Further information on www.fsai.ie
PT: Ministry of Health - through PNPAS- Programa Nacional de Promoção de Alimentação Saudável, launches the Manual Food and Nutrition in Pregnancy, which includes the latest recommendations on Macro and Micronutrients during pregnancy and lactation from EFSA.



The discussion was concluded on the fact that consumers' behaviour is slowly changing and that a faster change could come from the importance now given to the environmental perspective. Both The Netherlands and Spain suggested EFSA to carefully consider the composition of the NDA Panel or the list of the experts that are to be consulted for the task to provide scientific advice for the development of harmonised mandatory front-of-pack (FOP) nutrition labelling and the setting of nutrient profiles for restricting nutrition and health claims on foods, i.e. to include nutritionist and other relevant experts.

6. Risk Assessment Activities

■ EFSA Mandates, MS RA Plans, upcoming public consultations

Guilhem de Sèze and Juliane Kleiner highlighted some of the mandates received by EFSA.

First, and as already mentioned during the meeting, EFSA was mandated to provide scientific advice for the development of harmonised mandatory front-of-pack (FOP) nutrition labelling. Guilhem reminded the interplay of the latter with the ongoing work on the opinion on sugars, for which publication is planned in August-September 2021 and adoption is expected in December 2021.

Secondly, a mandate was received on health claims in organic foods and how they contribute to the protection of body cells and molecules, like lipids and DNA, from oxidative damage.

As announced during the previous AF meeting, a request was received for scientific opinion on synthetic cannabidiol as a novel food.

Finally, on the pesticides area, a request was made for an opinion of the PPR panel on the toxicity profile of two metabolites common to several pyrethroid substances, biological-based pesticides.

Juliane Kleiner highlighted that an extension was received (until 2026) for two mandates in the area of plant health: 1) related to the media and literature monitoring in view of crisis preparedness of plant health in the EU territory, and 2) related to the update twice a year of the *Xylella fastidiosa* database.

Another mandate is expected soon related to acrylamide, based on new evidence available.

A new mandate was received to update health-based guidance value for inorganic arsenic, which includes a Risk Assessment with the new exposure.

Guilhem informed about the upcoming public consultation on the draft opinion on the relationship between the intake of alpha lipoic acid and the risk of insulin autoimmune syndrome.

In perspective of the opinion on an updated assessment on the safety of titanium dioxide (E-171) as a food additive due to be adopted by end of March, an information session with MS will be organised on the 16th March 2021. EFSA will present its approach in the development of the opinion, explaining the wide set of data used in the assessment and the criteria used for selecting and appraising the body of evidence. Therefore, the support from MS was requested in identifying experts at national level that would have an interest in participating in the information session. It also intends to provide the participating experts with an opportunity to clarify any relevant questions and to debate on any information deemed pertinent.

Regarding the pilot on Enzymes, a webinar on the toxicological studies for the submission of the dossier on food enzyme will take place on the 29th March. Another webinar will be organised on the 31st March on the food enzymes intake model.

Juliane Kleiner informed that the public consultations on the draft opinion on the scientific criteria for grouping chemicals for assessing the risk of combined exposure to multiple chemicals has been delayed to May 2021.



The Chair opened the floor for comments from MS, and AF members were informed that MS (FPs) will be contacted on MS RA plans where additional information is required, and that EFSA will share with MS the full set of EFSA mandates (extract) for written comments.

Action Point 7: EFSA to share with MS the list of EFSA mandates (extract) for any written comments once available

Action Point 8: EFSA to contact MS(FPs) on any MS RA plans if additional information is required.

Action Point 9: MS to express interest to participate in the information session on titanium dioxide (E-171), indicating a max. of 2 experts, including name / surname, affiliation and email address by the 10.03.2021 – **concluded**

7. AOB

■ 7.1 - Update from the AFDG on Capacity Building

The Chair gave the floor to Nicole Gollnick (DE) to brief the Plenary on the final report of the AFDG on Capacity Building.

Nicole Gollnick recalled the reasons behind the work of the group, namely the avoidance of a future shortage of risk assessment professionals and the establishment of a harmonized approach to risk assessment capacity building, by managing synergies in the area of Capacity Building and creating a pool of highly qualified professionals.

Since the 77th AF Meeting, the Discussion Group has focused mostly on the creation of all necessary documents for EFSA to commission a feasibility study on the creation of an Excellence Label for Education in RA, as well as on developing criteria for courses awarded with the excellence label and on elaborating a core curriculum in parallel of the feasibility study.

A Steering Committee was established back in November 2020 and, upon recommendation of the Discussion Group, will accompany the implementation of the study, which is expected in the second half of 2021. Nicole Gollnick concluded thanking the Group for the good work achieved for delivering according the ToR about to expire, including input in the EU-FORA review.

Ana Canals (ES) expressed her hopes that the AF will engage in the follow-up work on risk assessment capabilities.

The Chair closed this item by noting the synergies between partnerships and Capacity Building.

■ 7.2 – Update on RARA21

The Chair gave the floor to Pamela Byrne (IE) for an update on the RARA21 event. She reminded that the main objectives of the event are the promotion of synergies, fostering the alignment of research and innovation investment, and networking and relationship building in a wider food safety ecosystem.

Due to the COVID pandemic and considering the importance of the networking objective, it was decided to postpone RARA tentatively to December 2021 (back to back with AF and FP meetings). The draft programme, including three Parallel sessions, is under finalisation.

The Programme Committee suggested to outsource in the future the maintenance of national funding overviews (e.g. through FoodSafety4EU) to ensure a continuous and up-to-date information.

Moreover, MS were encouraged to support the collecting of information on National Funding Opportunities ahead of RARA.

Action Point 10: MS (FPs) to provide information on national funding opportunities by 01.06.2021



■ **7.3 – Update on Scientific Conference 2022**

Marta Hugas presented the state of play in relation to the Scientific Conference 2022. The organisation of the Scientific Conference is articulated around three bodies: Scientific Program Committee (SPC), Member States Advisory Board (MSAB) and External Advisory Board (EAB). A hybrid format for the event is foreseen in line with the sustainability dimension. The call for abstracts for posters and oral presentations is expected to be opened at end May 2021, while public registrations are foreseen to be opened in the beginning of next year.

Moez Sanaa (FR) provided feedback from the first meeting of the Member State Advisory Board, involving 9 AF members/alternates representing 8 different countries.

The Chair praised the integrated approach adopted in the preparation of the next Scientific Conference in 2022.

■ **7.4 – Other items**

■ **Publication of data submitted to EFSA (NL)**

NL raised concerns over the tensions between transparency and privacy. A request was made to consider this topic as an agenda item for next AF meeting. NL provided background information on the emergence of the issue. During a recent EFSA’s network meeting, where NL provided data on mineral oils in food, EFSA mentioned that the latter data will be made public. NL indicated that they were not aware of this and would not have shared it otherwise, since it could allow to point at the businesses involved whereas the samples were not taken from all the businesses. NL reminded that following national legislation, possibilities of being required to share data are foreseen but highlighted the different character of the current situation. As a consequence, NL emphasised the risk of no longer providing EFSA with the data because of the privacy issues and raised hopes to find common grounds.

The Chair replied that this is an important point coming from the fact that the legal service of EC has decided, in the interpretation of the TR, that not only data coming via applications falls under its remit but also data collected from the MS. These data are thus open to the public in a proactive way. However, it was recalled that there exist several possibilities for confidentiality claims, where confidentiality can be requested providing justifications to be assessed by EFSA.

The Chair concluded by highlighting the importance of finding a common ground to maintain the ability to collect data from the MS.

Closure of meeting

After an overview of upcoming AF meetings in 2021, the Chair closed the 79th AF meeting summarizing the main action points agreed during the two-morning AF sessions and thanking participants for their contributions and productive meeting. The meeting was concluded by a family picture.

LIST OF ACTION ITEMS

Ref	Who	Agenda topic	What
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Previous ongoing action	AF Members	1	To express interest in joining an EFSA WG on extending EFSA's publishing capacity to national agencies by 02.04.2021
Previous ongoing action	MS	1	To share available studies on the determination of the levels of vanadium (or vanadium-containing compounds) in drinking water and foods.
Action 1	AF members (& FPs)	2.2	To support the dissemination of the training material.
Action 2	AF members (& FPs)	2.2	To support communications on the implementation of the Transparency Regulation.
Action 3	AF members	2.3.B	To provide comments on the draft ToR of the AFDGFoP.
Action 4	Interested MS	2.3.D	To designate experts for partnership on Novel foods pilot.
Action 5	AF members	2.5	To express interest in supporting the scoping of proposed future candidate themes for 2022-2024 (e.g., through workshops in 2021 and beyond) or propose other future candidate themes by the 31.03.2021 .
Action 6	AF members (& FPs)	5.3	To disseminate a survey questionnaire to the national competent bodies of your EU Member State in charge of setting national FBDGs – Deadline for answers 26.03.2021 .
Action 7	EFSA	6	To share with MSs the list of EFSA mandates (extract) for any written comments once available.
Action 8	EFSA	6	To contact MS (FPs) on any MS RA plans if additional information is required.
Action 9	AF members	6	To express interest to participate in the information session on titanium dioxide (E-171), indicating a max. of 2 experts, including name / surname, affiliation and email address by the 10.03.2021.
Action 10	MS (FPs)	7.2	To provide information on National Funding Opportunities by 01.06.2021