

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE AND ADVISORY FORUM UNIT

Parma, 17 February 2009
EFSA/AF/M/2009/211/PUB/FIN

Minutes

**TWENTY NINTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM
COPENHAGEN (DENMARK), 20-21 NOVEMBER 2008**

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

CHAIR: Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EFSA

Austria	<i>Roland Grossgut</i>	Italy	<i>Agostino Macrì</i>
Belgium	<i>Herman Diricks</i>	Latvia	<i>Gatis Ozoliņš</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Stefka Petrova</i>	Lithuania	<i>Zenonas Stanevicius</i>
Cyprus	<i>Stella Canna-Michaelidou</i>	Netherlands	<i>Evert Schouten</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Miroslav Elčkner</i>	Poland	<i>Jan Krzysztof Ludwicki</i>
Denmark	<i>Henrik C. Wegener</i>	Portugal	<i>Manuel Barreto Dias</i>
Estonia	<i>Hendrik Kuusk</i>	Romania	<i>Liviu Rusu</i>
Finland	<i>Kirsti Savela</i>	Slovakia	<i>Zuzana Birošová</i>
France	<i>Valérie Baduel</i>	Slovenia	<i>Urška Blaznik</i>
Germany	<i>Reiner Wittkowski</i>	Spain	<i>Ana Troncoso</i>
Greece	<i>Spyridon Ramantanis</i>	Sweden	<i>Leif Busk</i>
Hungary	<i>Maria Szeitzné Szabó</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Judith Hilton</i>
Ireland	<i>Raymond Ellard</i>		

OBSERVERS AND INVITEES OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Norway	<i>Kirstin Færden</i>	FYROM	<i>Marina Popovska-Domazetova</i>
Switzerland	<i>Michael Beer</i>	Turkey	<i>Hatice Uslu</i>
Croatia	<i>Zorica Jurković</i>	European Commission	<i>Jeannie Vergnettes</i>

STAFF OF THE EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

<i>Bernhard Berger</i>	<i>Djien Liem</i>
<i>Gian Luca Bonduri</i>	<i>Riitta Maijala</i>
<i>David Carlander</i>	<i>Elena Marani</i>
<i>Ermanno Cavalli</i>	<i>Jeffrey Moon</i>
<i>Hubert Deluyker</i>	<i>Torben Nilsson</i>
<i>Stefan Fabiansson</i>	<i>Steve Pagani</i>
<i>Anne-Laure Gassin</i>	<i>Ralf Reintjes</i>
<i>Georgi Grigorov</i>	<i>Victoria Villamar</i>
<i>Kerstin Gross-Helmert</i>	

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director of EFSA, opened the meeting and passed the floor to Ib Byrge Sørensen, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, who welcomed the participants, explained the transitions of the Danish food safety system, and emphasised the importance of EFSA. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked for the nice words and welcomed the new AF members of Greece and Spain and the new AF observers from FYROM and Turkey. She also mentioned that apologies were received from Luxembourg, Malta and Iceland.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted without changes. France and Hungary raised additional issues that were referred to agenda item 9.3.

No other interests than those already identified in the annual declarations of interests were declared by the AF members and observers. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle reminded those AF members who had not yet submitted their annual declaration of interests electronically to do so as soon as possible.

Action 1: AF members and alternates who have not yet submitted their annual declaration of interests electronically to do so as soon as possible.

3 MATTERS ARISING SINCE THE 28TH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

3.1 Management Board meeting in Paris on 2 October 2008

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle briefed the AF on the Management Board (MB) meeting in Paris on 2 October 2008, which was the first meeting for the new members of the MB. The MB elected Diána Bánáti as new Chair and Marianne

Elvander and Bart Sangster as new Vice-Chairs. The MB discussed EFSA's draft strategic plan for 2009-2013 and received an update on EFSA's situation in Parma.

3.2 Scientific Committee meeting in Parma on 25-26 September 2008

Djen Liem informed the AF that the Scientific Committee (SC) adopted its draft opinion on nanotechnology for public consultation and discussed its draft guidance document on transparency in risk assessment. He referred to agenda items 4 and 6, respectively, for more detailed updates and discussion of these two issues. The SC also discussed EFSA's draft strategic plan for 2009-2013.

3.3 Special AF meeting on plant health in Parma on 8-9 October 2008

Riitta Maijala briefed the AF on the outcomes of the first special AF meeting on plant health. It had been an interesting meeting where the European Commission and EFSA presented and discussed their roles and work within plant health with the Member States. Plant health is an area in rapid development and EFSA's Plant Health Panel has so far issued 36 opinions on the evaluation of pest risk assessments from Member States, the European Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO) and third countries. Some Member States expressed a fear of duplication with EPPO and EFSA explained the relation between its work and EPPO activities. Also the cooperation between the research project "PRATIQUE" under the 7th Framework Programme and EFSA in the area of plant health data collection had been discussed. The next special AF meeting on plant health will take place in the autumn 2009. Germany and the United Kingdom encouraged EFSA to cooperate closely with EPPO.

Action 2: EFSA to share the minutes of the special AF meeting on plant health with the AF.

Action 3: EFSA to share its role paper on plant health with the AF when it becomes available in the spring 2009.

3.4 AFCWG meeting in London on 23 October 2008

Anne-Laure Gassin briefed the AF on the outcomes of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications (AFCWG) meeting in London on 23 October 2008. The AFCWG had shared a learning experience from the United Kingdom and discussed the communication perspectives on upcoming scientific issues, including nanotechnology. The AFCWG also discussed developing guidelines in risk communications and agreed on dates and venues for four AFCWG meetings in 2009.

Other matters arising since the 28th meeting of the Advisory Forum

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle mentioned that EFSA's draft strategic plan for 2009-2013 was presented at the joint EU meeting of chief veterinary officers and chief officers of plant health in Brussels on 7 November 2008. Their views on the strategic plan were positive with a wish to see more emphasis on the scientific outputs and underlining the importance of EFSA's international cooperation. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that EFSA would share its international strategy and discuss its international cooperation with the AF in February 2009. Upon request from the Netherlands, Torben Nilsson clarified that the input from the Member States on specific arrangements they have in place with international bodies or with agencies and organisations outside the EU in the fields of food and feed safety, nutrition, animal health and welfare, plant health, plant protection and risk communications requested by EFSA on 7 November 2008 would serve in providing EFSA with an overview of ongoing activities that would enable EFSA to avoid duplicating efforts and develop further its own international activities.

Djen Liem briefed the AF on the outcomes of the fourth meeting of the Chairs and Secretariats of the Scientific Committees and Panels of the European Commission and EU agencies involved in risk assessment hosted by EFSA in Parma on 4-5 November 2008. The meeting was co-chaired by Robert Madelin, Director General, DG Health and Consumer Protection, and Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle. The participants discussed challenges and areas of cooperation and harmonisation in risk assessment, best risk assessment practices, data collection and emerging risks, as well as upcoming developments in risk assessment.

Action 4: EFSA to share the report of the fourth meeting of Chairs with the AF.

4 NANOTECHNOLOGY

David Carlander presented the background and conclusions of the draft opinion on nanotechnology that was published for public consultation on 17 October 2008 with a deadline for comments on 1 December 2008. He emphasised that the draft opinion is not a risk assessment of any specific application of nanomaterials in the food and feed area. He invited the Member States to share their experiences in assessing risks associated with nanomaterials and to provide suggestions for collaboration. Djien Liem added that the limited information available on nanotechnology makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions. He informed that DG Health and Consumer Protection has requested an update of the SCENIHR opinion on nanotechnology and that the fourth meeting of Chairs in Parma on 4-5 November 2008 had suggested looking at risks and benefits of nanotechnology.

Denmark asked for clarification of the term 'cautionary risk assessment approach' referred to in the draft opinion and said that there is an urgent need for scientific risk assessments and research cooperation, since nanomaterials are already in use. The Netherlands complimented the well written draft opinion, suggested labelling

of products containing nanoparticles as a possibility, mentioned the migration of nanoparticles from food contact materials into food as a source, and agreed on the need for coordination. Austria called for broad cooperation with ECHA, EMEA and national working groups on nanotechnology. The United Kingdom welcomed the draft opinion and mentioned that they have commissioned two research projects looking at market developments in food ingredients and packaging materials and that the latter included some initial migration tests. The findings of this work could be shared with EFSA. The United Kingdom also mentioned the importance of working with the OECD working group on nanotechnology. Norway was pleased with the draft opinion, but expressed concerns over the lack of data for risk assessments, so a need for further research was identified. Norway also suggested that information and data could be made available by the producers of nanomaterials. Belgium suggested a need to consider overseas experiences. Germany asked for a clear definition of the terms used in the draft opinion and suggested that EFSA could play a role in coordinating research. Romania agreed on the need for a clear definition. Austria informed that the draft novel food regulation being discussed in a Council working group is taking into account nanotechnology, so there is a need to follow this work closely and also to monitor what is already available at the market.

David Carlander explained that the term 'cautionary risk assessment approach' was used in the draft opinion to indicate that some assumptions were on the conservative side. This would be clarified in the final opinion, since it was not the intention to introduce a new term. He confirmed that EFSA is working broadly with the various partners mentioned. Migration depends on the food contact material and is generally low. He informed that EFSA had deliberately not made a clear definition of nanomaterials, since this is more of a risk management issue. However, for risk assessment purposes EFSA uses the SCENIHR definition of a nanoparticle, *i.e.* less than 100 nanometres. Hubert Deluyker concluded that there is a need for more emphasis on applied research and suggested taking a look at the DG Research work programme. Riitta Maijala agreed that this is very important due to the increasing number of applications of nanotechnology. Anne-Laure Gassin mentioned that consumer concerns are both about the safety and usefulness of nanotechnology. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed that both aspects should be considered. She concluded that it is very important for EFSA to receive information from the Member States on risk assessment methodologies, the presence of nanoparticles in food, and ongoing nanotechnology activities at national level. This would allow EFSA to interact with DG Research and the Member States to coordinate research activities.

Action 5: Member States to provide information on ongoing nanotechnology activities at national level through their focal points and the Information Exchange Platform.

5 AFITWG

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle introduced the discussion of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Information Technology (AFITWG) by recalling that it had been established in 2004, so it was now the right time to review its results and discuss its future. Ermanno Cavalli presented the achievements of the AFITWG and proposed revised terms of reference for its continuation. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle emphasised the need to improve the videoconferencing facilities and to identify reasons for the difficulties in attracting participants to the AFITWG meetings.

Denmark, Sweden and Belgium mentioned that the nature of the discussions in the AFITWG, ranging from purely technical to more generic, makes it difficult to identify the most appropriate participant.

Hubert Deluyker suggested that specific working groups or networks with a clear mandate and timeframe could be established for specific tasks. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed with this suggestion and proposed to have revised terms of reference prepared accordingly.

6 TRANSPARENCY IN RISK ASSESSMENT

Djien Liem presented the work of the Scientific Committee on transparency in risk assessment and informed the AF that the draft guidance document is expected to be adopted for public consultation in December 2008.

The Netherlands asked why transparency is so important. France asked if EFSA would publish the requests at the same time as the opinions, how to deal with diverging views, and whether the purpose of stakeholder consultation is not more to ensure the quality than for transparency reasons. Denmark said that it is a challenge to ensure quality and make risk assessments transparent. Norway mentioned the difficulty if some background information is confidential. Austria asked for clarification on EFSA's quality assurance process. Sweden mentioned differences in transparency in risk assessment and risk management.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that many of the issues raised would be covered by EFSA's presentation on ensuring scientific quality of risk assessments under agenda item 7. Djien Liem referred to EFSA's Founding Regulation that asks for a transparent approach. He said that the stakeholder involvement is very valuable already in the beginning of the risk assessment process to obtain all relevant scientific information and also during the public consultation of draft opinions. He further said that deviation from previous opinions or opinions from other scientific advisory bodies should be clearly stated and explained.

7 ENSURING SCIENTIFIC QUALITY OF RISK ASSESSMENTS

Riitta Maijala presented EFSA's work on ensuring scientific quality of risk assessments. She stressed that the quality of risk assessment outputs is influenced by the clarity and preciseness of the request for the risk assessment. Furthermore, she highlighted the role played by experts with relevant experience on the specific scientific issue and underlined the importance of ensuring the independence of the experts. Clear procedures also contribute to enhance the quality of risk assessment outputs. The United Kingdom presented their system for quality assurance of national risk assessments. France shared experiences on the general competence requirements for an expertise activity. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle encouraged the sharing of national reference documents on the quality assurance of risk assessments.

8 UPDATE ON SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

8.1 Review of the implementation of the strategy on cooperation and networking, including work under article 36

Bernhard Berger presented the review of the work under article 36 and informed that EFSA's Management Board would adopt the article 36 work programme in December 2008. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed the AF that more than 100 organisations would be added to the article 36 list in December 2008 and said that it would be useful to have an overview of the institutions by means of expertise, *i.e.* not only by country.

France said that article 36 should not be the only way to work with the organisations in Member States and suggested that EFSA should work with a network of national agencies. The European Commission asked about EFSA's vision as regards article 36. Belgium agreed with France, arguing that EFSA uses article 36 as a way of supporting research, while Belgium would see it more as a network of organisations. Belgium regretted that institutions consider article 36 more as a financing mechanism than a cooperation mechanism and said that there is a need to distinguish between article 36 and procurement. The United Kingdom suggested an evaluation of the impact of the work under article 36 on EFSA's objectives. Italy agreed that there would be a need to clarify the purpose of article 36, since institutions believe that its purpose is to fund research, while it is really about collecting existing information. Denmark presumed that the Joint Research Centre will be encouraged to work on research that would underpin EFSA's activities and asked how to ensure complementarity with national research funding. Sweden emphasised that the purpose of article 36 is to work on proposals from EFSA, *i.e.* not to fund general research. The Netherlands requested an overview on the percentage of article 36 institutions that respond to calls.

Hubert Deluyker said that the article 36 work needs to be conducted in accordance with EFSA's Founding Regulation, that article 36 goes beyond the institutions represented in the AF, and that where there is a legal basis for it, *e.g.* pesticides, EFSA cooperates with Member States outside article 36. He also confirmed that EFSA liaises with DG Research and the Joint Research Centre on priority research areas. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle underlined that article 36 serves a dual purpose of allowing EFSA to benefit from the expertise available in the Member States and developing further this expertise. She also said that while EFSA's opinions are prepared by independent experts, different tools are used for the cooperation with national institutions, and this cooperation has been strengthened since last year and will increase further. Since the first article 36 calls were launched only in 2007, it would still be early to assess the impact, but an in-depth review of article 36, addressing the issues raised, could take place in the spring of 2009 in connection with the preparation of the article 36 work programme for 2010.

Bernhard Berger, Anne-Laure Gassin and Hubert Deluyker then presented the results of the review of the implementation of the strategy on cooperation and networking. Bernhard Berger presented the achievements within scientific cooperation so far, mentioning also that the AF members now had access to the expert database. The top priorities for further cooperation highlighted by the Member States through the review questionnaire comprised harmonisation of risk assessment approaches, data collection and focal points. Proposals for additional initiatives comprised further developing EFSA's cooperation with international organisations, developing procedures to address the workload from new legislation, establishing training programmes, and pre-notifying press releases earlier. Anne-Laure Gassin presented the results on promoting coherence in risk communications, which showed that all the Member States who answered the questionnaire would like the cooperation on communication activities to continue. Finally, Hubert Deluyker presented the key lessons learnt, including the importance of a close cooperation between AF members and focal points, the need for a strategy to further streamline data collection and data exchange, and the importance of clear terms of reference with profiles of the required experts for future ESCO working groups.

The Netherlands found that it should be examined why one third of the Member States has not replied to the review questionnaire. Denmark supported the proposal for training activities, but flagged the need for coordination with the European Commission before EFSA embarks on any training activities. The European Commission confirmed that general risk assessment training is provided already, so precise objectives of the proposed EFSA training would need to be defined. Austria asked how the recommendations of this review would be reflected in EFSA's strategic plan. Bulgaria supported the review conclusions on priorities for further work and asked how EFSA would support general data collection. Sweden said that there is a clear wish for training from new Member

States and pre-accession countries: bilateral contacts have been made already and EFSA could play a coordinating role.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked the Member States for their contributions to the review and took note that no major changes were recommended on the strategy on cooperation and networking. She agreed to further develop activities for data collection and harmonisation of risk assessment approaches and said that training would be considered, but would need to be focused and have a clear objective.

Action 6: EFSA to prepare an operational training proposal involving also Member States as trainers.

8.2 Focal points – consolidated annual report and proposed continuation

Kerstin Gross-Helmert presented the consolidated annual report on focal point activities in 2008. She further indicated that the feedback provided on the focal point work by the Member States in the questionnaire on the strategy on cooperation and networking was very positive. Hence, EFSA proposed a renewal of the focal point agreements for another year.

Bulgaria said that the focal points were very useful and dynamic, but asked for EFSA to be more flexible on the disbursement of focal point funding, since not all Member States can pre-finance the focal point activities for half a year. France found the focal point network very important and suggested that it should work as a network between institutions. Furthermore, France said that there is a need for clarity on EFSA's financial support, that requests to the focal points and information shared on the Information Exchange Platform should be prioritised, and that focal points should not deal with potentially controversial issues. Cyprus asked for more concrete information on the role of the focal point network and fact sheets on EFSA activities. Finland supported a continuation of the focal point activities that also help in building national networks, agreed that future tasks should be defined, and suggested the possible involvement of focal points in data collection. Denmark supported the proposed continuation of focal points as a support to the AF members and emphasised that focal point activities in different Member States would need to be tailored to reflect their differences. Germany expressed strong support to the focal points that are crucial for EFSA's work. Hence, Germany suggested constituting focal points as permanent arrangements. Portugal strongly supported focal points and said that the focal point work could be facilitated through an overview of tasks. Norway agreed with Portugal and mentioned difficulties in downloading documents from the Information Exchange Platform. The Netherlands expressed support to the proposed continuation, said that there is a need for longer term implementation, and requested a better balance between EFSA's and national resources deployed, since the focal point tasks comes on top of ordinary tasks. Sweden agreed that long term financing is important for stability and in order to hire a person to act as focal point. Austria

agreed on the importance of planning well in advance and asked about the duration of the funding. Poland supported that the focal points would need to be more permanent and suggested a minimum funding period of three years.

Bernhard Berger thanked the AF for its support to a continuation of focal points. He explained that the Information Exchange Platform is a part of the Extranet, so IT colleagues would help solving any technical difficulties. He agreed that the Information Exchange Platform should not duplicate publications, but be used for sharing of national documents that would otherwise not be available. He confirmed that EFSA is studying a solution to the Bulgarian request for upfront funding, but emphasised that EFSA needs to comply with the European Community legislation. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle asked if the AF would agree to continue with focal points and the AF unanimously agreed. She then informed that EFSA would propose focal point agreements for 2009 in December 2008, including a medium term visibility through a reference to have focal points for at least some years, while respecting that EFSA's budget is approved on an annual basis. Since the funding situation differs from one Member State to another, EFSA would propose the funding level for 2009, which could be adjusted annually based on the activities. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle further suggested conveying to the focal points that their work has been very useful. Hubert Deluyker promised that the AF would receive regular updates on the work of the focal points and agreed that priorities for the focal point work should be discussed at the next AF meeting.

8.3 Steering Group on Cooperation meeting in Berlin on 23-24 October 2008

Hubert Deluyker briefed the AF on the outcomes of the SGC meeting in Berlin on 23-24 October 2008. He referred the discussion of the individual ESCO working groups to agenda items 8.4 – 8.7. He reported that the SGC had discussed its terms of reference, which were agreed by the AF on 19 April 2007 and by the SC on 9-10 July 2007. He also mentioned that the SGC had discussed a proposal for a new ESCO working group on isoflavones. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle emphasised that the strategic role lies with the AF and SC, while the SGC should monitor the implementation of the strategy on cooperation and networking. She therefore suggested deleting the word “strategic” in the terms of reference to avoid misunderstandings.

The United Kingdom disagreed with this proposal, questioning the need for the SGC if its strategic role was abolished. The Netherlands, on the contrary, agreed with the proposal, saying that the wording of the terms of reference did not reflect what was originally meant when the SGC was established. The United Kingdom explained its view that a coherent work programme would need to derive from a strategy. Austria mentioned that the original idea was that the SGC would consider new ideas, provide inputs to the AF, and monitor the progress of ongoing projects.

Hubert Deluyker suggested that the role of the SGC should be to discuss if new ideas fit within EFSA's strategy. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that the SGC serves to monitor the ESCO working groups and as a liaison between the AF and the SC. She suggested continuing the SGC for another year and then assessing its added value. The AF agreed with this conclusion.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle also explained that the proposal for an ESCO working group on isoflavones was prompted by a German request to EFSA. Germany replied that their request had the aim to gain European consensus on their opinion on isoflavones, so Germany would wish a rather quick statement by EFSA's scientific panel and would support an ESCO working group only if it would not lead to loss of time. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle suggested continuing the discussion on the basis of draft terms of reference for the proposed ESCO working group at the next AF meeting.

8.4 ESCO – Safety assessment of botanicals and botanical preparations

Djen Liem updated the AF on the progress of the work of the ESCO working group on the safety assessment of botanicals and botanical preparations that was progressing according to the plan and would be completed in May 2009.

Sweden commented on the importance and high relevance of the work and asked for additional information from the European Commission. Italy referred that a national meeting on botanicals in Milan on 20 November 2008 had revealed very different views and emphasised the need for good contact with EMEA. The United Kingdom welcomed the work and underlined the importance of consulting the SC on the ESCO report before a decision is made on next steps. Hungary suggested that a negative list of botanicals that should not be used as food supplements, such as that drafted at national level, would be useful if established at European level. Bulgaria agreed with Hungary and said that such a list already exists in Bulgaria, but the great discrepancies between Member States represent an obstacle. Lithuania said that the ESCO reflected a real need for advice from EFSA to the Member States. The European Commission informed that a note on the legal situation had been prepared and shared with the ESCO working group, while no new legislation is under way. Some botanicals are considered as medical products, some as food supplements. The decision is made at Member State level and the Member States have very different views, so the situation is not simple and there have even been some court cases.

Djen Liem confirmed that EFSA cooperates closely with EMEA through the ESCO working group. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked the ESCO for its good work and said that it is her intention to submit the final report to the SC for consideration.

Action 7: Note from the European Commission on the legal situation as regards botanicals and botanical preparations to be shared with the AF members.

8.5 ESCO – Horizon scanning to identify emerging food safety risks

Ralf Reintjes updated the AF on the work of the ESCO working group on emerging risks that would finalise its final report in December 2008. The further cooperation with the Member States in this field would take place in an emerging risks network and a scientific colloquia on emerging risks would be organised in 2010. Hubert Deluyker added that the network and scientific colloquia would also involve other international organisations.

The Netherlands informed the AF about a Dutch project on new technologies that would produce its final report by the end of 2009. The report would be shared with the AF.

8.6 ESCO – Risks and benefits of fortification of foods with folic acid

Ireland updated the AF on the work of the ESCO working group on folic acid. A meeting of international experts would take place in Uppsala on 21-22 January 2009 to review data on potential risks associated with folic acid and the final ESCO report would be ready by June 2009.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle complimented the ESCO working group members on the quality of the interim report and the interesting overview of the situation in different Member States. Romania drew the attention to the European Regional Flour Fortification Consultation in Bucharest on 21-23 October 2008. The conference materials were shared already with the focal points. Anne-Laure Gassin suggested considering communications on folic acid carefully. Sweden informed that the expert meeting would be followed by a press session and also said that it is likely that the ESCO working group will recommend an EFSA opinion on folic acid. Norway asked who would participate in the expert meeting. Sweden replied that 60 experts from both Member States and non-EU countries had been invited. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle suggested sharing information on the expert meeting participation with the AF and to publish the meeting report.

8.7 ESCO – Fostering harmonised risk assessment approaches

Roland Grossgut (Austria), Chair of the ESCO working group on fostering harmonised risk assessment approaches, presented the final ESCO report and recommendations on further harmonisation activities.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle found the report clear and comprehensive and invited the AF to comment on the recommendations. France supported the recommendations to proceed with harmonisation of both scientific and procedural aspects. France emphasised that harmonisation is not the same as standardisation, but aims at generating mutual trust in order to benefit from the work of others. Sweden appreciated the work and asked for more information regarding the scientific differences. Riitta Maijala found the report excellent, but asked why plant health and animal health were mentioned in the report when these areas had

not been included in the ESCO questionnaire to the Member States. Austria elaborated on the distinction between procedural and scientific aspects in the ESCO work and also mentioned that harmonisation within GMOs, animal health and plant health had been addressed already by special AF meetings.

Action 8: The AF to discuss the implementation of the ESCO recommendations on harmonisation at its meeting in February 2009.

9 UPDATE AND EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON MATTERS RAISED BY THE MEMBER STATES

9.1 Germany: Phytosanitary data collection

Germany referred to the discussion under agenda item 3.3 and the consensus on the need for phytosanitary data collection, suggesting that EFSA could valuably assist Member States in this task in cooperation with the research project PRATIQUE.

Riitta Maijala reiterated that EFSA is fully aware of PRATIQUE and informed the AF that the Head of EFSA's Plant Health Unit is a member of PRATIQUE's Advisory Board. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle reassured the AF that there is no risk of overlap, since EFSA will benefit from PRATIQUE's work and cover gaps, if any, by article 36. In addition, EFSA has regular contacts with EPPO.

9.2 France: *Anisakidae* in fishery products

France presented its opinion on *Anisakidae* in fishery products, recommending collecting data to better evaluate the infestation rate of wild fish species, making professionals and the public aware of the sanitary rules, and performing human health investigations to gain better knowledge of the annual incidence of *Anisakidae*.

The United Kingdom informed that work done on farmed salmon in the United Kingdom converged with the French findings, *i.e.* confirming a low risk for fish whose feeding is under strict control. Italy said that freezing of fish before consumption to kill parasites had become more difficult due to the popularity of sushi. The Netherlands asked if labelling of products that were not treated as required had been considered. Norway thanked for the good report and said that parasites in fish constitute an increasing problem linked with seals. The European Commission would discuss the French opinion from a risk manager perspective. France said that labelling had not been considered, but could be useful.

9.3 Other issues raised by the Member States

Hungary shared experiences from a national crisis exercise and informed the AF about an evaluation of the Hungarian food safety situation.

France proposed the sharing of an Austrian study on GMO corn. Riitta Maijala informed that the study had already been considered by EFSA's GMO Panel. Austria informed that the study had been carried out by the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture and offered to share the study report through the Information Exchange Platform.

Upon request from France, Hubert Deluyker clarified that the nominations for EFSA's zoonoses network were made some time ago and that requests regarding the ongoing cooperation on zoonoses would go through these nominees.

Action 9: Austria to share study report on GMO corn through the Information Exchange Platform.

10 UPDATE AND EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON MATTERS RAISED BY EFSA

10.1 EFSA opinion on nitrate

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle introduced the presentation by saying that EFSA's opinion on nitrate in vegetables is a good example of the usefulness of Member States' data collection and sharing. Stefan Fabiansson presented the opinion, mentioning that nitrate is not the toxic compound, but adverse effects can occur from its metabolic conversion to nitrite. The opinion concluded that there is no need to revise the ADI for nitrate and that estimated exposures to nitrate from vegetables are unlikely to result in appreciable health risks. The recognised beneficial effects of consumption of vegetables prevail. He said that further data from Member States on vegetable consumption, especially for *rucola* (rocket salad), would be welcome. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle mentioned that this opinion was a good example of the need to weigh risks against benefits, an approach that EFSA would develop further.

France found the work useful and said that some consumer groups in France exceed the ADI for nitrate. Cyprus drew the attention to the need to consider children's exposure carefully, since children are often more sensitive to toxicity and since their intake/body weight ratio is higher. Hungary agreed with Cyprus. Austria asked if EFSA would prepare an annual report for the European Commission. Lithuania pointed to the need for a dialogue with Russia on imported products.

Stefan Fabiansson confirmed that EFSA agrees on the importance of considering children and said that an article 36 project would address the need for additional data. He also said that there would be a need for EFSA and the European Commission to agree on data collection for nitrate, since the aggregated data collected by the European Commission cannot be used for EFSA's work. Hubert Deluyker informed the AF of the recent visit of a Russian delegation to EFSA with the aim to explain the EU MRL system to Russia.

10.2 Risk perception project

Anne-Laure Gassin updated the AF on risk perception research and the proposed next steps as regards EFSA activities in this area. Building on the research conducted in collaboration with the European Commission, EFSA aims to understand how consumers' perception evolved over the time. Attention will be paid to the trends related to people's level of concern as food consumers and to the level of confidence they have towards the institutions called to protect them as food consumers. The outcomes of this project are planned to be delivered in 2010. To conclude, Anne-Laure Gassin said that EFSA would welcome the secondment of a national expert to become involved in the project. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that EFSA wishes to work closely with the AF in this important field and that the terms of reference of the project would be finalised in 2009.

Denmark underlined the importance of not confounding risk perception and risk acceptance. Norway invited interested parties to join a Norwegian risk communication seminar, including risk perception, which would be conducted in English on 9 January 2009.

10.3 Crisis handling manual

Ralf Reintjes informed the AF that EFSA's crisis handling manual had been finalised and briefed the AF on the preparation of a crisis exercise in 2009, including the establishment of a working group with Member State experts. He also mentioned that EFSA would join an ECDC crisis exercise in November 2008. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle added that the European Commission would be involved in EFSA's crisis exercise.

Denmark asked if the crisis exercise would address also risk management. Belgium said that the crisis handling manual had little reference to national risk managers and that the role of the AF members as national contact points was not clear. Sweden agreed on the need for a crisis exercise and suggested that it should be conducted with participants being in their own offices. The United Kingdom found that the crisis handling manual could be more precise on timelines instead of more vague statements using the word "rapidly". Hungary found that the crisis handling manual had improved a lot since the previous version.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle confirmed that the crisis exercise would address the link to the national risk managers. The AF members would be reachable also outside normal office hours through their emergency contact details.

Action 10: Member States to nominate experts for the working group preparing the crisis exercise before 10 January 2009.

Action 11: AF members to inform the AF secretariat of possible changes to their emergency contact details.

10.4 Other issues raised by EFSA

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked Finland for the very useful conference on health claims in Helsinki on 19 November 2008.

Riitta Maijala updated the AF on EFSA's work on article 13 health claims and thanked the Member States for their assistance.

Hubert Deluyker informed that a joint event would take place in Warsaw on 27 November 2008 to encourage experts to apply to EFSA's SC and Panels. A similar event took place in Budapest on 30 October 2008. Hubert Deluyker thanked all parties involved in organising these two events, including the AF members.

11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Jeffrey Moon updated the AF on the preparation of the national expert meeting on aspartame.

Hubert Deluyker informed the AF about the scientific colloquia planned for 2009.

Action 12: AF members to nominate national aspartame experts for the national expert meeting on aspartame as soon as possible.

12 CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle closed the meeting by thanking the Danish host for the good meeting organisation, the AF members and observers for their contributions, the interpreters for their excellent work, and EFSA staff for preparing the meeting and presentations. She wished all participants a happy new year and looked forward to continuing the cooperation in 2009.

OVERVIEW OF AGREED ACTION POINTS

Action number	Agreed action	Responsible	Deadline
Action 1	AF members and alternates who have not yet submitted their annual declaration of interests electronically to do so as soon as possible.	AF members and alternates	As soon as possible
Action 2	EFSA to share the minutes of the special AF meeting on plant health with the AF.	EFSA	
Action 3	EFSA to share its role paper on plant health with the AF when it becomes available in the spring 2009.	EFSA	Spring 2009
Action 4	EFSA to share the report of the fourth meeting of Chairs with the AF.	EFSA	
Action 5	Member States to provide information on ongoing nanotechnology activities at national level through their focal points and the Information Exchange Platform.	Focal points	
Action 6	EFSA to prepare an operational training proposal involving also Member States as trainers.	EFSA	
Action 7	Note from the European Commission on the legal situation as regards botanicals and botanical preparations to be shared with the AF members.	EFSA	
Action 8	The AF to discuss the implementation of the ESCO recommendations on harmonisation at its meeting in February 2009.	AF	February 2009
Action 9	Austria to share study report on GMO corn through the Information Exchange Platform.	Austria	
Action 10	Member States to nominate experts for the working group preparing the crisis exercise before 10 January 2009.	AF members	10 January 2009
Action 11	AF members to inform the AF secretariat of possible changes to their emergency contact details.	AF members	
Action 12	AF members to nominate national aspartame experts for the national expert meeting on aspartame as soon as possible.	AF members	As soon as possible