

18 November 2009

Seminar on EFSA in the EU Food Safety System

Budva, 04/05 November 2009

REPORT

Background information:

This seminar was organised as a part of EFSA Pre-Accession Programme 2009-2010 for Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries*.

The overall objective of the Programme is to promote the understanding of EFSA's work, share expertise and create information exchange mechanisms in order to ensure that the national authorities of the beneficiary countries can participate effectively in the activities of EFSA both prior to accession and following accession to the EU.

The participation in this Programme may contribute to the beneficiaries in familiarising themselves with the EU policies and working methods particularly focusing on "from field to plate" integrated approach to food safety.

This was the first seminar for the Potential Candidate countries within this Programme and the aim was to provide an introduction to the EU food safety system in general and the role of EFSA as the risk assessor in particular.

Relevance of the Seminar to objectives of the Programme:

- The seminar provided an overall knowledge on the role of EFSA in the area of risk assessment and risk communication. DG SANCO presented its role as the risk manager in the EU food safety system.
- In particular, the new initiatives in fostering the Pan-European scientific cooperation and harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies was presented. The representatives from the Potential Candidate countries were encouraged to apply for the EFSA Expert Data Base.
- Experts from the EU Member States and from a Candidate Country presented their approaches in the respected area sharing views on the importance of scientific cooperation particularly when data collection and information exchange is in question.
- This seminar provided a solid starting point for networking and creation of information exchange systems as the first step in preparation of the beneficiaries for their future participation in the EFSA networks.

* **Candidate countries:** Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey

Potential Candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia&Herzegovina, Kosovo (under UNSCR1244), Montenegro, Serbia

Attendees

Speakers

1.	Berger Bernhard	Head of Unit, Scientific Cooperation Unit, EFSA
2.	Jurković Zorica	Executive Director of Croatian Food Agency
3.	Kumrić Goran	Policy Officer, Legal and Policy Affairs Unit, EFSA
4.	Moon Jeffrey	Scientific Officer, Scientific Committee and Advisory Forum, EFSA
5.	Pavard Xavier	DG SANCO, The European Commission
6.	Popović Ivan	CVO of the Veterinary Administration, Montenegro
7.	Sheye Finn	Pre-Accession Coordinator, Legal and Policy Affairs Unit, EFSA
8.	Talbot Karen	Communication Advisor in the Communication Directorate Executive Office, EFSA
9.	Tsigarida Eirini	Directorate of Nutrition Policy & Research, Hellenic Food Authority and EFSA Focal Point

Participants from Albania

10.	Adelina Bistri	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, Food Safety Sector, Veterinary Medicine, Specialist of Food Safety Sector
11.	Ermal Hoxha	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, Consumer Protection Sector, Specialist of Consumer Protection Sector
12.	Flora Shkurti	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, Food Safety Sector, Specialist of Food Quality Sector
13.	Ismet Bici	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, Plant Protection Sector ,(PPS), Specialist of Plant Protection Products (PPP)
14.	Luljeta Çuko	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, Food Safety Sector, Head of Food Safety Sector
15.	Rudin Qehajaj	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, Animal Health Sector, Specialist of Animal Health Sector
16.	Sonila Çoçoli	Institute of Food safety and Consumer Protection, Food Safety Control Laboratory, Specialist of Food Safety Control Laboratory
17.	Valbona Paluka	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, General Directorate Food safety Consumer Protection, General Director

Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina

18.	Džemil Hajrić	Food Safety Agency of B&H, Sector for Crisis management, Assistant director
19.	Katica Arar	Food Safety Agency of B&H, Office of director, Head of department
20.	Ljiljana Gojić	Republic Administration for Inspection Affairs, Chief Veterinary Inspector
21.	Marko Ivanković	Federal Agro-Mediterranean institute, Director
22.	Nihada Ahmetović	Food Safety Agency of B&H, Risk analysis unit, Head of department
23.	Nijaz Uzunović	Federal Administration for Inspection Affairs, Inspectorate of Sanitary, Health and Pharmaceutical Inspection Chief Sanitary Inspector
24.	Sejad Mačkić	Food Safety Agency of B&H, Director

Participants from Kosovo

25.	Blerim Hajdari	Food and Veterinary Agency Veterinary Public Health Sector Inspection Coordinator
26.	Flamur Kadriu	Food and Veterinary Agency Veterinary Public Health Sector Chief of Veterinary Public Health Sector
27.	Nalina Berisha	Food and Veterinary Agency Veterinary Public Health Sector Human Medicine, Public Health Inspector

Participants from Montenegro

28.	Biljana Blečić	Veterinary Administration, Veterinary Inspection Department, Chief Veterinary Inspector
29.	Delan Laušević	Diagnostic Veterinary Laboratory, Director
30.	Ljiljana Jovičević	Ministry of Health, Sanitary Inspection Sector, Chief sanitary inspector
31.	Ljiljana Žižić	Institute for Public Health, Sector for nutrition and health ecology, Chief of the Sector for nutrition and health ecology
32.	Milka Petrušić	Phytosanitary Directorate, Senior Adviser
33.	Snezana Vučinić	Diagnostic Veterinary Laboratory
34.	Veselin Delević	Institute for Public Health, Chief of the Sector for Sanitary Chemistry
35.	Zorka Prijević	Phytosanitary Directorate, Director

Participants from Serbia

36.	Goran Simunović	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Division for the Management of EU-Funded Projects, Adviser
37.	Slavoljub Stanojević	MAFWM Veterinary directorate, Department of veterinary service, Head of Department
38.	Goran Stojković	Ministry of Health, Sector for Sanitary Surveillance, Adviser
39.	Marina Cvetković	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Phytosanitary Directorate

Delegation of the European Commission to Montenegro

40.	Velibor Spalević	Task manager, Operations Section
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Meeting Secretary

Maria Chiara Petrolini, Legal and Policy Affairs Unit, EFSA

Detailed Report:

Welcome and Introduction

The seminar was opened with a welcome speech by the chair of the meeting **Mr. F. Sheye** who gave introductory information on the first seminar for the Potential Candidate countries and explained the overall objectives of this EFSA Pre-Accession Programme. The speech was followed by a welcome note by **Mr. I. Popović** on behalf of the Montenegrin authorities who expressed his satisfaction for Montenegro hosting the first EFSA seminar for the Potential Candidate countries which will, by his words certainly strengthen the regional cooperation on one hand and communication with the EU institution on the other. He reiterated that Montenegro, being on its road towards Euro-Atlantic integration, makes significant efforts in harmonizing its legislation to the EU one. He concluded by saying that this seminar is one step forward in strengthening good relations with colleagues from the region as well as from the EU institutions and that, when the food safety issues are in question Montenegrin authorities will by no doubts benefit from participating in this Programme.

“From field to plate” Integrated approach to EU food safety, Part 1: Perspectives of the risk manager and Part 2: Perspectives of the risk assessor

Mr. X. Pavard of DG SANCO presented the Risk Analysis framework putting an accent on dividing risk management from risk assessment. He started by giving a short introduction to food crises and their consequences, presented the restructuring of the EU food safety system, and explained the rationale behind the establishment of EFSA as a major partner in the new system of food safety. The speaker, in particular explained the role and the competences of DG SANCO.

Mr. G. Kumrić presented how EFSA was established, the structure and its guiding operating principles as well as the future challenges.

Presentations on the latest developments in Risk Assessment, Risk Communication and Risk Management by the Potential Candidate Countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (under UNSCR1244), Montenegro and Serbia authorities

Representatives from the competent authorities in the 5 Potential Candidate countries presented the state of art in their food safety systems sharing their views of the importance of scientific cooperation as well as their needs and expectations from the future cooperation with EFSA under the Pre-accession Programme.

Albania:

An overview of present state of art in the area of food safety in Albania was delivered by **Ms. Valbona Paluka**. A brief introduction to the national legislation (e.g. Veterinary Law – 2004, Law on Plant Protection – 2005, Food Law – 2008), followed by presentation of the progress in transposition of the EU legislation was given. The Food Law lays down the principles for establishment of the National Food Authority with competences in risk management, risk assessment and risk communication. The National Food Safety Strategy 2007-2013 has been drafted and a working group is preparing an action plan for implementation of the strategy. It is expected the process of harmonisation of the national legislation with the EU one to be completed till 2013.

Bosnia and Herzegovina:

The presentation was given by **Mr. Sejad Mačkić**. The Food Safety Agency of the Bosnia and Herzegovina is the competent institution for the food safety matters. It was established by the Food Law of 2004, and is operating since 2006. The Agency is responsible for both risk assessment and risk management. It has established good working relations with several international organisations like WHO, FAO. The Agency is the contact point for the EC RASFF. It has an active role in the process of harmonisation of legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the EU legislation. In addition, all the risk communications initiatives in the country are coordinated by the Agency.

Kosovo (under UNSCR1244):

The presentation was delivered by **Mr. Flamur Kadriu**. The new structure of the food safety system in Kosovo was presented. The Food Law, harmonised with the EC Regulation 178/2002 was adopted on 9 April 2009. The Food and Veterinary Agency is the competent authority responsible for risk management, risk assessment and risk communication. Competences within the risk management comprises activities related to control of food of animal origin, animal disease control, animal welfare and veterinary and phytosanitary border inspection. Risk assessment capacities still have to be developed. Among the Food Agency's short term priorities the speaker mentioned drafting of the food safety strategy covering the improvement of capacities of laboratories and their accreditation, audit plan of risk management structures as well as a risk communication strategy.

Montenegro:

The presentation was jointly prepared by **Ms. Ljiljana Žižić, Ms. Ljiljana Jovičević, Ms. Biljana Blečić**. The new Food Law has recently been adopted following by set of secondary legislation (e.g. hygiene requirements for food of plant and animal origin and veterinary inspection and border control). As a positive example of cooperation with EU the TAIEX funded workshops and seminars mentioned were mentioned. Further strengthening of capacities in this area is expected under the IPA 2008 project entitled as "Development of Food Safety Services in Montenegro", starting early next year. Last month the Government adopted a resolution establishing the National Council for Food Safety Assessment. The main role of the Council is monitoring and assessing the food safety issues, giving scientific opinions on technical matters and providing assistance in drafting the legislative framework with an ultimate goal to improve protection of consumer health.

Serbia:

A comprehensive presentation on the food safety structure and distribution of competences between institutions was given by **Mr. Slavoljub Stanojević**. An accent was put on the recently adopted Food Law which gives a legal basis for separation between risk assessment, risk communication and risk management activities. Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and water Management and Ministry of Health have the shared responsibility for risk management. Under the Food Law the Expert Council for risk assessment in the area of the food safety was established. In the end, the speaker explained international obligations deriving from both the Food Law and the Law on veterinary matters.

The Member States and their Cooperation with the EU Institutions and EFSA on Food Safety, Perspectives of an EFSA Focal Point

A speech on the role of the Hellenic Food Authority (EFET) as EFSA Focal Point was delivered by **Ms. E. Tsigarida**. The structure of the food safety system in Greece and division of competences between institutions was presented. EFET is responsible for both risk assessment and risk management. The speaker presented collaboration between the Hellenic Authority and the EU institutions and EFSA on Food Safety explaining its tasks as an EFSA Focal Point particularly in the area of exchange of scientific information, support to the EFSA activities under the Article 36, support to EFSA's Expert Data Base and raising EFSA's visibility in general.

Progress toward accession: Croatian experiences on cooperation with the EU institutions on food safety as a Candidate Country

Ms. Z. Jurković presented Croatian experiences in cooperation with the EU institutions in the context of the accession negotiations. The very negotiation process as well as the state of art on the road to the EU Accession was explained. Croatian Food Safety System and the Role of the Croatian Food Agency were presented. Ms. Jurković listed major benefits of participation in EFSA Pre-Accession Programme, from a Candidate Country perspective stressing the importance of being informed on recent developments in the EU food safety arena and participating in EFSA networks (e.g. Advisory Forum, BSE Network, Focal Points Network). Taking an active part in EFSA initiatives on data collection (Task Force on Zoonoses Data Collection) as well as taking part in training seminars on topics of relevance for competent authorities is of utmost importance

for Croatia in the context of accession negotiations. In the end she shared her expectations for further development of cooperation with MS institutions and development of networks and collaboration with neighbouring countries – Candidates and Potential Candidate countries.

Why do we need risk communications?

Ms. K. Talbot presented EFSA's role in providing appropriate, consistent, accurate and timely communications on food safety issues, to all stakeholders and the public at large, based on the Authority's risk assessments and scientific expertise. EFSA's communicating tools and challenges were presented by using a practical example of melamine contamination of dairy products in China where EFSA's advice supported timely risk management action. EFSA initiative in building coherences in risk communication on the European level through the work of EFSA Advisory Forum Communication Working Group as a network of communications units from EFSA, Member States and Commission was presented. In the future more closer cooperation with the Potential Candidate countries in the area of risk communication is foreseen.

European Food Safety System and Pan-European Cooperation: views from the EFSA Advisory Forum

The role of EFSA Advisory Forum as the communication and cooperation platform between EFSA and the Member States was presented **Mr. J Moon**. The speaker explained the role of AF in forging close links between EFSA and the Member States as well as in facilitating the sharing of information and collaboration between the national authorities themselves. The latest AF initiatives in the area of plant health and animal health and welfare, dietary reference values, health claims and aspartame were presented. The speaker presented the role of the Steering Group on Cooperation as an interface between the Advisory Forum and the Scientific Committee in providing strategic oversight on the strategy on scientific cooperation and networking.

EFSA Fostering the scientific collaboration in Europe

In his speech **Mr. B. Berger** presented how EFSA works explaining in particular the role and work of Panels and Scientific Committee. The speaker presented EFSA scientific output and addressed all initiatives within the area of data collection and identification of emerging risks. He continued by explaining how the Member States are involved and about main tools that EFSA has established in order to improve the scientific cooperation in the EU. In the last part of the presentation **Mr. Berger** presented the Expert Data Base project explaining how the experts from Potential Candidate countries can get involved encouraging them to apply on-line.

The Pre-Accession Programmes today and what to expect in the future

Mr. F. Sheye gave an introduction to the Pre-Accession Programmes and the rationale behind the cooperation between EU Agencies and the Candidate and the Potential Candidate countries. He reiterated that food safety doesn't recognise national boundaries and stressed the importance of Pan-European cooperation when food safety is in question. Within the programme the beneficiaries will be given the possibility to participate in training seminars as well as different EFSA networking meetings with the aim to support them in becoming familiar with EU policies and instruments on food safety and to further enhance the co-operation with the EU Member States before accession. He presented a historical overview of EFSA involvement in the pre-accession programmes explaining the benefits for both the beneficiary countries on one hand and EFSA on the other. EFSA cooperation with the beneficiaries of the European Neighbourhood Policy was explained. In conclusions the future perspectives and expectations as well as a roadmap for possible further involvement of the Potential Candidate countries in EFSA were presented.

Conclusions

This seminar gave a solid platform for exchange of views and experiences between the representatives from the five beneficiary countries, EFSA, DG SANCO, the Member States and a Candidate Countries. The participants took an active part in discussions on the different topics related to scientific cooperation and harmonization of risk assessment methodologies.

Representatives from the five Potential Candidate countries presented the state of art in the food safety in their countries, explained the structure of the system, and presented the scientific activities and the difficulties they are facing. The contacts established during the seminar together with the gained knowledge will help EFSA in planning the future collaboration with those countries under the Pre-Accession Programme. In the conclusions *Bernard Berger* reiterated that scientific cooperation in the field of data collection and the harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies is essential.

Possible future participation of the Potential Candidate Countries as observers in EFSA networks (e.g. Expert Group on Food Consumption Data, Expert Group on Chemical Occurrence Data, BSE/TSE Contact Points Network as well as Task Force on Zoonoses Data Collection) will be further discussed. The aim of participation in such EFSA Networks is to help the beneficiaries in adjusting the data collection approaches in their countries to the one recognised by the EU Member States and EFSA.

The participants were informed about and encouraged to apply for the EFSA Expert Database. The participants were also invited to apply for the EFSA call for expressions of interest for Seconded National Experts within EFSA, particularly to work in EFSA Pesticide Risk Assessment Peer Review Unit.

The contacts established between participants and EFSA representatives and Member States' experts during the seminar will provide a starting point for possible future information exchange and collaboration.

Results of the satisfaction questionnaire

30 representatives of different competent authorities from the five Potential Candidate countries attended the seminar. 24 participants answered to the evaluation questionnaire. Hotel facilities including meeting room were considered as excellent by the majority of the participants (**95%**). Presentation skills of the speakers (**91%**), the content of speeches (**87,5%**) as well as responsiveness to the questions (**83,3%**) were on the highest level. **87,5 %** of the participants found presentations being on the right level and all of participants felt they had enough opportunity to express their opinion. The participants considered that this seminar was an excellent (**29,1%**) or very good (**41,6%**) opportunity for improving their knowledge on this topic. Additional topics they would like to see addressed in the future seminars include topics such as risk assessment procedures, packaging materials, handling crises, microbial risk assessment, food additives and flavourings, dietetic products, nutrition, health claims, pesticide residues, food born diseases, risk communication, GMO. **37,5%** of participants found the overall value of the seminar as excellent while **58,3%** considered it as very good.
