

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

FIRST HIGH-LEVEL DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Friday, 6 April 2001, WHO/HQ, 12.30-13.00

- Present:**
- WHO:** Dr G.H. Brundtland, Director-General
Dr D. Nabarro, Executive Director, DGO
Dr. D. Heymann, Executive Director, CDS
Dr Y. Suzuki, Executive Director, HTP
Dr D. Yach, Executive Director, NMH
Mr D. Aitken, Senior Policy Adviser to the DG
Dr B. Kean, Director ECP
Ms N. Pradhan, DGO
Dr W. Kreisel, Executive Director WEU
- EC:** Mr D. Byrne, Commissioner Health and Consumer Protection
Mr J Bell, Cabinet Commissioner Byrne
Mr F. Sauer, Director, Public Health,
Mr Wilkinson, EC Delegation, Geneva
Mr C. Dufour, EC Delegation, Geneva

The first high-level meeting in the context of the new Exchange of Letters was held at WHO Headquarters on 6 April.

The Director-General and Commissioner Byrne agreed on the importance of close cooperation between the European Commission and the World Health Organization in areas of health covered by the Exchange of Letters. This cooperation could bring about many synergies for the good of WHO and EU-Member States.

In the area of **communicable diseases** it was agreed to particularly address the following issues:

- International Health Regulations (IHR)
- Surveillance and Monitoring
- Antimicrobial Resistance

Regarding IHR it was agreed to engage the European Commission in view of its competence in this area. The Commission would be briefed on the current status of the IHR during a proposed visit to Luxembourg or Brussels by WHO, and a decision would then be taken on how and at what stage to engage the Commission.

The European Commission agreed to appoint a focal point as the point of contact for the revision process.

The WHO Office in Lyon on communicable diseases would play an important role in the context of strengthening capacities for communicable disease surveillance and the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network. The technical details on how to link up the European actions in this area

with WHO work was supposed to be elaborated and to be decided on at the Technical Meeting between the Commission and WHO in the context of the Exchange of Letters to be held in Brussels in October this year.

On the issue of **Pharmaceuticals**, the Commission reported on the establishment of a high level group comprising representatives of EU Member States, the pharmaceutical industry and other stakeholders to improve the framework for competitiveness in the pharmaceutical industry and to reconcile the needs of industry and patients. This group will report to President Prodi in April 2002. It was considered crucial to inform WHO as soon as possible on these developments.

In the light of the accelerating crisis of HIV/AIDS and TB in Eastern and Central Europe, the issue of affordability of essential drugs and medicines in this region, and the particular role of the Directorate General on Health and Consumer Protection (SANCO), was raised. Clearly, following the Communication of the Commission on the Programmes for Action and the ensuing preparation of the WHO-EC Collaborative Work Programme for accelerated action on communicable diseases, the collaboration between the two institutions in this area was considered crucial and needed to be extended to the European region.

As regards **Tobacco** a lot of synergies between WHO and the Commission were possible. Mr Byrne informed the meeting that the Commission would submit a new draft Directive on banning the advertisement of tobacco to the Health Council in May this year. It was agreed to take into account the American Legacy Foundation funded meeting on counter-advertising to counter the initiatives of the tobacco industry.

As regards the focus on children, it was considered feasible and important to use the Convention of the Rights on the Child as a basis for child protection against tobacco consumption; WHO and UNICEF are carrying out this work., Commissioner Byrne requested WHO for advice on how to spend € 15.000.000 available to SANCO for tobacco control activities. He saw a particular emphasis here on advancing youth activities.

On the issue on funding expenses of the International Negotiating Body (INB), particularly at developing country level, Mr Byrne confirmed that this funding would likely to be from the Directorate General Development. In furthering this question, discussions would be held between DG Sanco and DG Development.

Regarding scientific aspects of product regulation, it was agreed to closely interact. While no participation by WHO in the Commission's Regulatory Committee could be foreseen (as this was only open to Member States), discussions could nevertheless take place prior to such a meeting between WHO and the Commission.

Moreover it was agreed to provide information on the membership on the WHO Scientific Advisory Committee on Tobacco to DG Sanco.

On the issue of **food safety** several concrete possibilities for collaboration existed. Regarding new vCJD, the existing network of the European Commission needed to be linked with the four regional centres established by WHO on TSE surveillance. In general, the scientific issues related to the transfer of BSE to humans were an area where many synergies were possible. In this context WHO asked whether it could be accepted as an observer in the European Union *Ad-hoc* Committee on BSE/TSE.

Generally, it was important to link the work of the European Food Authority to be established in 2002 closer with the Codex Alimentarius work. In this context, Commissioner Byrne thanked the Director-General for her support in helping the European Commission to participate in Codex.

It was pointed out however that the EU/Codex relationship should be broad based, to ensure that developing country issues are addressed.

Regarding the Precautionary Principle, in looking at its role in the SPS agreement context, it was considered important that the greatest possible legal clarity and scientific rigour be brought to bear in its definition and application. Practical Guidelines could be considered setting out how a clear rules based approach to the issue of the precaution could be pursued. Generally, this would be better understood if the term "Principle" would be replaced by 'approach'. This was important regarding its usefulness and credibility, particularly in the context of ongoing trade disputes.

On the issue of outstanding **financial incompatibilities**, particularly regarding the application of the EU-UN Financing Agreement in the context of §4.2 of the Exchange of Letters, it was agreed to push for a resolution soonest. A high level meeting of WHO and EC officials concerned was envisaged in this context, taking into account the ongoing discussions on this issue in the context of the preparation of the EC Communication on "Building an effective partnership with the UN".

The meeting was held in a cordial and constructive atmosphere. The next high level meeting will take place in Brussels in April 2002, considering the dates proposed jointly.

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