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HEALTH & CONSUMERS DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

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SECOND MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

DRAFT MINUTES

25 APRIL 2008

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted without any changes.

2. INFORMATION FROM THE PLATFORM MEETING.

The Platform has just celebrated its third anniversary and will release its Annual report in May 2008. The Platform is delivering results of interest for policy-makers. There is some interesting research and monitoring work which will emerge later this year. One such example is a survey of food processors commissioned from an independent consultant, on the extent to which reformulation and better labelling practices are being implemented across the different Member States. In the autumn, another new study will explore how consumers in several countries interact with nutrition information, and it will cross reference self-reported actions at the point of sale with questionnaires at home. Food manufacturers and retailers in the Platform have reaffirmed their willingness to be partners for Ministries of health and other stakeholders on initiatives on reformulation including salt. This is a clear and positive message from EU level organisations which can be passed to national structures to encourage them to engage.

3. UPDATE ON RELEVANT POLICIES FROM COMMISSION SERVICES

- Presentation by DG AGRI on health check of the CAP : School Fruits Project
Tomas Garcia Azcarate, Head of unit AGRI.C2;

The school fruit and vegetable scheme is a combined strategy to tackle public health concerns and provide support for agriculture and farming. A public consultation in 2007 resulted in more than 130 responses from the education, agriculture and health sectors. The feedback from the consultation is that existing instruments could be improved and there is an appropriate and legitimate role for the Commission to support a programme to promote fruit in schools. The message from stakeholders was that for an EU scheme to be effective, the programme needs to be substantial, comprehensive and appropriate for each Member State to implement according to their timetable and target age range. Within certain criteria defined at European level (no added sugar, no distribution of unsold produce under the guise of health) the modality of the schemes shall be developed at

national or regional level by actors from the agriculture, education and health official bodies. The choice of products and the integration with education programmes can be tailored to local needs. For example, children might be taken to see fruit trees and taught about the diversity of different species. Member States would submit a programme with details on how socio-economic inequalities will be addressed and the accompanying educational measures and commitments of schools to take part. The European Commission would finance the purchase of the fruit and vegetables, logistics of distribution, evaluation activities and EU level promotion. The key criteria for success are:

- participation by health and education authorities;
- obligatory educational measures;
- specific support for convergence regions, and
- flexibility and adaptability for the local environment.

The Commission is finalising the Impact Assessment for the proposal and the draft Regulation should be published in July so that it can be adopted by the Council before the end of the year. The goal is to implement the programme in the 2009-2010 academic year. The cost of the scheme is expected to be €100 million per year. On 15 December 2008, a European conference will be convened to share experience of school fruit schemes and promote the initiative. The Commission invited the members of the HLG to build support for the EU scheme among colleagues in education, agriculture and health Ministries. The new programme would be implemented at a time of changeover of the EU institutions (Parliament and Commission) so it will be important to gather data on the uptake of the scheme and highlight the results for new policy-makers.

The CIRCA website is available to be used as an electronic library.

Feedback from Member States:

The initiative received broad support from Member States, a number of whom have already implemented similar initiatives. They emphasised the importance of setting clear objectives for the programme, and the involvement of health, education and agricultural authorities. More details of the proposed scheme were requested – particularly on the promotional tools and logos. Some Member States shared their experiences of implementing school fruit schemes, including involving parents and children in the development of activities, and the opportunities for targeted support for disadvantaged communities.

- DG INFSO on follow up to the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMS),
Joanna Wrona, INFSO.A1;

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMS) which will be transposed into national legislation by the end of 2009 was more than just an update of the Television without Frontiers Directive (TVwF). It has a broader scope covering all audiovisual services including on demand services (non linear) but using a lighter, flexible approach which allows for better financing for media services. It also addresses in some detail the issues of co-regulation and self-regulation. The protection of children is a key theme in the Directive. The basic rules of the TVwF are unchanged but two new rules have been introduced: limits on product placement and a code of conduct on advertising of high fat foods (definition taken from the Regulation on nutrition and health claims).

- Product placement – this is regulated for the first time. Unlike sponsorship, it must be part of the plot, not jeopardise the editorial independence of the service provider, involve no direct encouragement to buy a product, and be clearly indicated for consumers at the beginning and end of the programme.
- Code of conduct – Member States are required to encourage service providers to develop codes of conduct on commercial communication. The current situation in Member States is very diverse and there are varying opinions as to how the requirement to ‘encourage’ should be interpreted. The Commission has the obligation to report on the Directive and specifically to monitor and assess this aspect of the legislation.

The European Commission envisages a consultation with Member States and stakeholders during the transposition period. DG SANCO has offered to co-organise a seminar with DG INFSO to explore implementation mechanisms because of the potential relevance for the nutrition strategy and other health determinants.

- RTD on research opportunities
Nathalie Vercruyse, RTD.F;

The EU framework research programmes have funded projects on diabetes and obesity for many years. The focus has been on identifying modifiable risk factors for individuals and the population. In FP5, €42 million was spent on diabetes and obesity research. This increased to €200 million in FP6 and for FP7, obesity is a defined research topic. So far, two Calls for Proposals has resulted in €40 million of projects being awarded. The European Commission is discussing with the health advisory group and Member States about two further Calls for this year.

Two examples highlight the type of research being funded:

- A project designed to map diabetes research at national level to create a coherent overview of where the synergies and gaps lie in diabetes research.
<http://www.diamap.eu>
- EXGENESIS – explores the interaction between exercise and key health indicators such as fat and sugar levels in blood, muscle mass and fitness levels.
<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/lifesciences/exgenesis/>

The message is that there are significant funds at European level for research on key nutrition and health issues and an increasing output of this research. This is a valuable resource for policy-makers at national and European level.

- SANCO on labelling.

The European Commission launched a review of food labelling legislation after an extensive consultation exercise. The Commission proposal, published in January 2008, sets out a number of general principles for food labelling and introduces additional requirements compared to the present legislation such as allergy information for non pre-packaged foods. It is proposed that nutrition labelling, including information on the content of energy, salt, fat, saturated fat, carbohydrates, also with specific reference to sugars should become mandatory on the front of food packages. In addition an indication of the percentage of the reference intakes of the content present in the food per 100g or 100 ml or, in some cases per portion is proposed. Alcoholic drinks should also provide

ingredient and nutrition information but there is a derogation from these requirements for beer, wine and spirits. After 5 years, a study will be commissioned to review the labelling alcoholic drinks. Research evidence shows that consumers appreciate alternative forms of presenting the information such as simple pictorial labels. The Commission acknowledges that such schemes may be innovative, therefore the draft legislation allows for the introduction of non binding schemes to be introduced at national level. They must be based on sound scientific evidence and comply with the essential requirements provided in the legislation. The development of the scheme should be through a process that involves wide and active involvement of stakeholders, . National authorities must mutually recognise other national schemes and the Commission reserves the right to introduce harmonising legislation if one system emerges as the most beneficial and effective for the European Community citizens as a whole.

4. SALT REDUCTION

Follow up of salt workshop and presentation of proposed next steps from the Commission services, Stephanie Bodenbach, DG SANCO

The first meeting of the expert working group on salt was held on 31 January 2008, attended by 23 countries and the WHO Regional Office for Europe. Participants shared their experience of national initiatives and explored the role of the Commission, for example, negotiating with multinationals and liaising with the Platform. The next meeting is foreseen to take place on 19 June with a view to presenting their conclusions to the HLG and Platform meetings on 1/2 July. A joint meeting of national platforms, the EU Platform and the HLG is foreseen for the second half of 2008.

The revised presentation will be circulated to the HLG. Deadline for comments on it and input on the way forward, structure and timetable: 15 May 2008

The UK volunteered to establish a European Salt Action network, open to all countries in the WHO EURO region. The goal is to assist participating countries to move forward on setting targets, measuring salt intake, identifying good practice, communication and monitoring. In order to participate, countries must demonstrate their capacity to engage and their commitment to work on salt reduction.

The Commission is proposing a salt reduction framework including 5 elements. Also, a benchmark of a minimum of 16 % salt reduction over 4 years for all food products, encompassing also salt consumed in restaurants and catering, is proposed. 2008 levels are taken as the baseline and at least a 4 % cut each year is proposed. This benchmark is calibrated to be both feasible and ambitious. Member States can set their own benchmarks and targets within a strategic plan, in view of the specific situation in the individual country. One option being explored by the Commission is to focus on 5/6 food groups, possibly those that have already been successfully reformulated in some countries or which represent the major sources of salt for the population. These might be bread, meat products, ready meals (such as soups or pizza), breakfast cereals, cheese.

Feedback from Member States

Politically it is important to have concrete plans for Ministers to endorse, however performance indicators may be better than the specific targets outlined by the Commission. Success on salt reformulation could be used to demonstrate what could be done for sugar fat or on the strategic goals of tackling obesity. However, the 4% annual reduction requirement may be too restrictive, some companies might prefer a single step of salt reduction by 16 % causing a single investment rather than incremental, yearly

costs for decreasing by 4 % every year. Certain countries have preferred to work on the overall profile of food products rather than a single nutrient approach. Others have long experience of salt reduction and have already achieved the easy gains. The timetable is ambitious and may need to be revised. Experience shows that there needs to be both information for consumers and incentives for manufacturers. The importance of bringing on board supermarkets was stressed, to ensure that reformulation efforts include 'own-brand' products which represent an important element in consumption by lower socio-economic groups. The potential for salt reduction differs for certain categories of food and for SMEs. It would be helpful if the Commission could indicate the best/worst achievements for food categories. A positive EU role could be to negotiate with multinational manufacturers so that any salt reductions could be rolled out across all product ranges in all markets. EU support for research, networking, updating food composition tables, encouraging a supportive regulatory framework and exchange of experience on salt reformulation, was requested.

Next steps:

The European Commission will update the supporting presentation and distribute to Member States in advance of the 19 June expert meeting. The Commission will explore with the Slovenian Presidency the possibility of this being a discussion point in the Health Council meeting on 10 June 2008.

5. PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

First discussion of lessons learnt (building on from RIVM report of national experiences)

RIVM has analysed questionnaires from 18 countries which list 40 examples of public private partnerships (PPP). This is an increasingly common mechanism to implement strategies in the field of nutrition and physical activity. Many of the PPP work on education, with smaller numbers of PPP aimed at policy development, drafting guidelines, agenda setting and reformulation. Three countries: Cyprus, Poland and the Czech Republic have reported that they have established a national platform that is analogous to the EU Platform for Action on diet, nutrition and physical activity. The goal of gathering the data is to share experience and lessons learned. The mapping of PPP is still ongoing so Member States still have the opportunity to provide information to the Commission. The mapping will be completed and compiled as a preparatory document for a planned joint meeting between the High Level Group and national platforms in October 2008.

6. PPPs IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Presentation of EPODE European Network & Debate

The EPODE network began in 1992 with 10 pilot cities and is now being implemented in 167 cities in France, Belgium and Spain, and soon in Canada, Greece and Australia. EPODE is a public private partnership with methodology for sustainable behaviour change through community based interventions delivered at local level. The structure ensures consistent messages for families and children in all of their interactions in daily life. Initial results after 5 years have demonstrated a 10-15 % reduction in obesity and overweight. EPODE partners include the pharmaceutical and food industry, insurers, private foundations and institutional partners. The average estimated cost of the intervention is 2 € per person, half of which is financed by the private sector. The European Commission has now awarded EPODE some funding for 2008-2010 to facilitate implementation in other European countries. A congress on the EPODE

methodology will be organised in Brussels on 27 June 2008 with the European EPODE Mayors network.

Feedback from Member States

EPODE can fit within national political frameworks and makes the link between strategy and local action. Social marketing campaigns need to be accompanied by reformulation and other actions by the private sector. The involvement of economic operators may be useful but attention should be paid to potential conflicts of interest between marketing messages by companies and education campaigns.

Next meeting: 1st July (all day) and 2d July jointly with the Platform (morning only)