



Summary Report

Meeting of the extended "HIV/AIDS Think Tank"

5 April 2005 14:00–17:45

6 April 2005 09:00–13:15

**Bâtiment Jean Monnet, Meeting Room M1
Kirchberg, Luxembourg**

1. OPENING

Mr di Bartolomeo (Minister of Health and Social Security, Luxembourg) opened the meeting by stressing that fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a top priority of the Luxembourg Presidency and that the issue belongs at the top of the political agenda.

The meeting was conducted in a constructive atmosphere. The representatives of the 15 Member States, four other countries, six international organisations and two NGOs engaged in vivid discussion and debate on main current challenges, best and less effective practices as well as on policy priorities. The mainstream position was apparent quite often, but sometimes participants expressed substantially diverging opinions. The proposals from the Commission Services were well received.

2. TOUR DE TABLE

An initial tour de table described the current rise in levels of HIV/AIDS and STDs in Europe as a "new wave". Other key issues raised included: the HIV/AIDS pandemic requires comprehensive solutions; public prevention campaigns and awareness raising; continuing severity of epidemic in some European countries; counteracting stigma and discrimination; targeting high risk groups; capacity building and policy development, especially in Eastern Europe; evidence-based approach; alarming epidemiological situation in CIS countries; moving HIV/AIDS to top political level; development of national HIV/AIDS plans/strategies and implementing a harm reduction approach.

3. INTRODUCTION OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission Services described the development of the new policy document defining the Commission's HIV/AIDS strategy beyond 2005 (to be adopted in October 2005). The Think Tank will be consulted during the drafting process.

The Commission Services highlighted the importance of moving HIV/AIDS to the top of the political agenda and emphasized that already there has been success in this respect. The Commission's work is currently being extended to neighbouring Balkan, Caucasus and

Mediterranean countries. Furthermore participants were informed that a separate open-ended civil society consultation will be organized before the next meeting of the Think Tank.

Several participants highlighted the importance of Commission leadership in moving HIV/AIDS to the top of the political agenda and of ensuring that an evidence based approach, focussed on harm reduction, remains on the political agenda.

4. INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

Participants were informed on HIV/AIDS social multimedia campaigns in Poland, described as successful thanks to a comprehensive and multilayered approach, as well as of results from advertising for testing sites in Estonia. In the latter context a proposal for the development of cross-border symbols, slogans and logos as well as for the drafting of a common EU communication strategy on HIV/AIDS prevention were put forward.

Furthermore, the campaign conducted by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, under the key slogan “STOP AIDS” was presented. The campaign, currently re-focused on health promotion under the brand “LOVE LIFE STOP AIDS” is based on the presumption that keeping a high level of public awareness is only possible through continuous campaigns, ensuring long-term visibility of a common brand, and that a sustained level of public awareness is needed to put pressure on the political level to prioritize the issue.

The Commission Services introduced the work of the Commission in the development of pan-European campaign activities and moved on by explained that the Commission continues to explore possibilities to organize an umbrella type information campaign. In this regard the budgetary issue was brought up. Participants were asked to suggest what the Commission should do from now on. Existing suggestions were outlined, including a publicity campaign linked to the next HIV/AIDS day in December 2005, taking the form of a “multi-layer happening”, or the development of something more sustainable.

The Commission Services asked participants to consider what added value an EU-wide effort could have. Participants were also asked to discuss the usefulness of a pan-European media campaign, how to engage top political decision makers as well as advantages and disadvantages of a Europe-wide HIV/AIDS campaign united under a common brand.

During the discussion the following standpoints were expressed: an EU-wide campaign should focus on harm reduction, safe sex and condom use, especially where this is *not* possible to do at the country level (this would amount to an added value of a pan-European campaign); a single event would not be sustainable; there is a need for a pan-European campaign with a recognizable and visible brand/logo to raise awareness, possibly with sub-headings adapted to specific country situations; a pan-European media campaign directed at youth would be useful, but overlap should be avoided through liaising with UNAIDS.

Different opinions were expressed on the following issues: usefulness of a pan-European campaign, if campaigns should be left to individual countries and whether local “cultural sensibilities” should be taken into account or not. However, after all the discussion was supportive of the general idea of a pan-European information campaign.

5. ACCESS TO ANTI-RETROVIRAL TREATMENT

Participants were informed on the HIV/AIDS situation in Spain, with a special focus on IDUs' access to treatment. The UK described its HIV health promotion approach for African communities living in the UK. In both contexts the need for an approach based on harm reduction as well as for direct cooperation with affected community organisations was emphasised.

Furthermore, different price-reduction strategies in purchasing ARVs were presented. In this context the issue whether generic competition is prohibited by WTO/TRIPS rules was raised. The Think Tank was asked to consider ways to reduce costs of ARVs through use of generics.

6. PREVENTION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION

Participants were informed on the work of the UNICEF in preventing HIV infection in infants in Central and Eastern Europe, CIS, and the Baltic States. Within this area the country situations are very diverse. Sweden's approach to the prevention of mother-to-child transmission was also presented.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Commission Services informed the participants that the purpose of the Think Tank is to contribute to the drafting of the new Commission policy document, outlining policy, strategy and future actions, also in relation to neighbouring countries. The forming of a Working Group (WG) within the Think Tank was proposed. The composition of the WG: five members of representative geographical distribution, one UN member (UNAIDS) and one NGO representative, chosen among participating NGOs. Its aim would be to give expert advice for the Commission in the drafting of the document. Participants agreed to this approach.

The Commission Services continued by clarifying questions on the purpose, legal basis and scope of the new policy document, which most probably will take the form of a Commission Communication. The main aim would be to outline the added value of EU action.

The Commission Services asked all participants to send any ideas and suggestions on priorities and conclusions to the Commission Services. The Commission Services will take note of participants' follow-up proposals.

The Commission Services informed that the Working Group taking the information campaign further will consist of Belgium/Walloon Region, France, Spain, Lithuania, UNDP and the World AIDS Campaign, as well as Germany, who expressed interest in taking part.

8. NEXT MEETING AND END OF THIS MEETING

The Commission Services expressed their gratitude to Switzerland for offering to host the next meeting of the Think Tank. The meeting will be held in September or October, with precise time and venue to be defined.