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Directorate C - Public Health and Risk
Assessment

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
OFFICE AT THE EUROPEAN UNION

ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTE
BUREAU AUPRES DE L'UNION EUROPEENNE



**SEVENTH SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING OF
THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC) AND THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)**

BRUSSELS, 23 OCTOBER 2008

SUMMARY MINUTES

1. Introduction

The seventh EC-WHO Senior Officials Meeting was held on 23 October 2008 in Brussels. It was co-chaired by high-level representatives from both organizations: a) on the EC side, the Director-General for Health R. Madelin, together with the Director for Public Health A. Rys and b) on the WHO side, M. Danzon (Regional Director, WHO/Euro) and S. Weber-Mosdorf, the Assistant Director-General representing the Director-General on EU Affairs. The agenda is attached at Annex 1.

In total, 40 EC officials attended, representing the Directorates-General for Health and Consumer Protection, Research, External Relations, Employment and Social Affairs, Development, EuropeAid, Trade, Enlargement, and Eurostat. 18 WHO officials from both WHO Headquarters and the WHO Regional Office for Europe attended the meeting.

The meeting was structured to permit (i) a review of cooperation between the Commission Services at WHO HQ, WHO-EURO and at country-levels, (ii) discuss all health aspects of food – security, quality/nutrition, and safety, and (iii) agree on ways and areas where we can work together in the future. Extensive background documentation is available as are copies of presentations.

Robert Madelin, commending good cooperation in 2008 urged all to look to the future, where 2009 brings a new European Parliament and a new Commission at a time of economic crisis and against a back drop of change highlighted in the SANCO futures report. He particularly welcomed the willingness of WHO to cooperate with Commission actions on youth health and asked how the Marmot report would change the work of the WHO, particularly in light of the recession. He reported that the Commission had not yet reached a view on how best to address mental health and suggested that a scoping meeting be organised with WHO participation.

Susanne Weber-Mosdorf, expressed the best wishes of WHO Director-General Chan who looks to the EU to continue to show global leadership. Mark Danzon, extolling the positive trend in the relationship and its direction, noted that we didn't just need to work together; we also needed to be seen to be doing so.

The meeting reviewed the EC/WHO cooperation worldwide, in the European Region and at country level at political, technical and financial levels. At political level, cooperation was noted at high-level meetings, the activity of the Commission in WHO governing bodies, the FCTC, the IHR, IGWG, the PIP/IMG and WHO ministerial Declarations. Technical cooperation is already well-established and works in both directions (see also Annex 3 for 2008 tables of EC/WHO

priorities and emerging issues). The EC financial contribution to WHO had increased from 24M USD in 2002/3 to 128 M USD in 2006/7 – the latest year for which information was available.

It was noted that the EC and the WHO have (i) shared values and often speak with one voice e.g. commitment to multilateralism, the MDGs, country-ownership etc., and (ii) a shared vision in health as a basic right, with solidarity, equity and universal access principles. We need to and are succeeding in moving the EC/WHO relationship from a recipient/donor one to a mutual partnership approach not just in strategic programming but all the way down to individual project funding. There are many sectoral dialogues and these generally work well.

Nonetheless there remain challenges e.g. the agreements at senior level often do not get adequate buy-in at operational level. For various reasons EC-WHO cooperation at country-level is generally weak. There is scope and a need to continue working together to improve matters. We could, for example, work on topics rather than on individual projects and this could help break down organisational boundaries. We could better define our mutual objectives and the tools available. We should continue, as it were, to move away from the past relationship to a mutually supportive one.

On both sides health systems are a priority for the future. WHO sees Tallinn follow-up in third countries as important as it does migration and the follow-up to the Social Determinants report. On the first two of these, the Commission has set inequalities in health as a 2009 priority and will publish a Green Paper on the European workforce for health in December 2008; it will also support health as a priority in the proposed blue card scheme. Finally, A. Rys stated that the Commission is exploring ways to join the Observatory.

There were presentations and discussions in selected technical areas including Food Security, Food Quality and Nutrition, and Food Safety

Both sides agreed that the level of cooperation was unprecedented and that it had improved again during the last year (high-level meetings, IGWG process, Tallinn meeting, visibility for joint projects, follow-up of previous SOM).