

**JOINT MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP  
ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND THE  
PLATFORM FOR ACTION ON DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND  
HEALTH**

**14<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2012  
14.30 - 17.00**

**VENUE: CHARLEMAGNE BUILDING  
[ROOM: JENKINS]**

**CHAIR: DESPINA SPANOU**

**FINAL MINUTES**

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**1. INTRODUCTION BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, "WHAT'S NEW"**

The Chair opened the meeting welcoming the participants. The Chair highlighted the presence of Mrs Paola Testori Coggi, Director General of Health and Consumers Directorate-General.

The Director General referred to the last year's joint meeting, at which Commissioner John Dalli encouraged Member States and stakeholders to step up efforts to promote physical activity for all ages, especially since 2012 was declared the "European Year of Active Ageing". In that meeting Platform members were also encouraged to scale up their actions on responsible advertising and marketing, press ahead with the development of food reformulation, focus on core business, and ensure that substantive changes. Since that time, Member States and stakeholders achieved a lot. A significant progress was made in the implementation of the Salt Reduction Framework and new members (who presented their work at the Platform meeting prior to the joint meeting) joined the Platform.

**Mr Philippe Roux** (European Commission) presented recent developments and publications, including the Canadian proposal regarding a Sodium Reduction Strategy, which is similar to the EU Framework on Salt Reduction. Mr Roux informed that the evaluation of the EU School Fruit Scheme was published and underlined that the Scheme has had great importance on education and health promotion towards children. Finally, Mr Roux informed the participants that Council Conclusions on healthy ageing and health-enhancing physical activity would be adopted soon. These conclusions will give credit to the activities set out in the Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related health issues.

## 2. KEY ADDRESS BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL, PAOLA TESTORI COGGI

The Director General for Health and Consumers stressed that it is a crucial time for the Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related health issues with its external evaluation. The Director General underlined the importance of the continuation of this fundamental instrument in the fight against obesity. The Director General also recognised significant progress made by both fora in the areas of food reformulation, responsible advertising and physical activity. With the Salt Reduction Framework now in place, there is still need to set reduction targets for other nutrients. This could be done by looking at portion size and food settings, such as work places and schools or elderly people's homes.

The Director General further called upon the participants to scale up actions on advertising, food reformulation and core issues of their business; substantive measurable changes are needed. The Director General highlighted the fact that the evaluation of the Strategy will enable to see whether self-regulation is adequate. Building on the recent initiatives on health-enhancing physical activity, but also due to the increased focus within the Platform and health partnerships at local and regional level, we will have to take a real step forward.

The Director General then concluded that only through joint action and effort progress can be made. The obesity rates are not diminishing, and with the exception of one Member State, the number of children suffering from overweight and obesity is increasing.

The Director General put forward four priorities for the future:

- Food reformulation -we need to set strong targets for the reduction of certain nutrients in line with the ambition of the UN High Level meeting in 2011.
- Advertising - we need to set the right standards and criteria to ensure the relevant protection of our children.
- Physical activity - we need to be serious about creating health friendly environments.
- Prevention advocacy - we need to increase efforts to demonstrate how prevention is a crucial instrument for reducing the economic burden of chronic diseases on our health care systems, and to contribute to the financial sustainability of the health care budgets.

The address was followed by a "Questions & Answers" session:

**Italy** commented on reformulation and stressed that we need to tackle sugar as the levels are high, in particular in beverages. In Italy, there is currently a lively debate on sugar tax. It is also important to focus on reducing the calorie intake, in particular from beverages. Italy has called upon the industry stakeholders to work on reformulation. Finally, it was mentioned that nutrition for elderly in Europe is an issue that must be addressed, and that we should have specific foods with special formulations for that age group.

The Director General replied that the High Level Group members have to agree on nutrients they would like to work on. Regarding the Italian point on special food for elderly, the Director General explained that at European level we are moving towards the use of claims to identify the foods that are beneficial for the elderly, rather than specific food products for particular nutritional purposes. The Director General acknowledged that soft drinks are an area where we need to take more action.

**The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)** commented that with regards to sugar, it is necessary to think about pregnant women, infants and toddlers. IBFAN called for policy coherence. During Codex Alimentarius sessions, it seems as if the EU is pulling backwards on baby foods and sugar. The 30% levels of sugar in baby foods in the Codex Guidelines should be changed.

**The World Federation of Advertisers (WFA)**, speaking on behalf of the Union of European Soft Drinks Associations (UNESDA) assured participants that the average calorie contribution of soft drinks is below 3%. However, the soft drink industry has committed to contribute in promoting healthy lifestyles, for example by reducing calories using Stevia [natural sweetener].

The Director General replied that some population groups may consume a lot more soft drinks than the average European.

### **3. EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGY FOR EUROPE ON NUTRITION, OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY-RELATED HEALTH ISSUES**

The European Commission presented the evaluation process of the Strategy, which is based upon three pillars: case studies, analysis of statistics and trends, and evaluation according to instruments. The evaluators will combine desk research with interviews with the Members of the High Level Group and the focus groups with the Platform members. The desk research phase and the interviews of the High Level Group and Platform members are almost completed by the external contractors. The European Commission called for the remaining Members of the High Level Group to participate in interviews. They will also analyse how far the European Commission has progressed regarding integration of EU policies and EU legislation related to the implementation of the Strategy.

Participants were informed that the next Joint meeting is scheduled for June 2013. The aim of the meeting will be to discuss the results of the evaluation. A first preliminary report will be examined by the Evaluation steering group on 18 December 2012 in Brussels. The steering group shall not censor the report, but rather check that the external evaluator has assessed what it has been asked to assess.

**FoodDrinkEurope** asked what would happen after the publication of the report.

The Director General highlighted the importance of the evaluation which does not in any case mark the end of the Strategy. A positive evaluation is expected, which will be used to boost the Strategy and set it into the wider framework of chronic diseases.

### **4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU SALT FRAMEWORK – MEMBER STATES PROGRESS**

**Ms Stephanie Bodenbach** (European Commission) presented the main findings and achievements regarding the EU Salt Framework focusing on Member States' progress in the period 2008-2012. The 27 EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland have implemented the framework from mid-2008 until mid-2012. This follows the mandate of the EPSCO Council Conclusions on action to reduce population salt intake for better health of 8 June 2010. In these conclusions, the Council called on the European Commission's services to

provide an analysis of the situation and actions taken in the EU and its Member States, and report the findings in 2012.

The European Commission compiled contributions from the members of the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity and the results of the survey were published 7 December 2012, the day of the EPSCO meeting.

The preliminary findings from this survey show that salt reduction is a priority among Member States and that the EU Salt Framework has affected action for a number of Member States and also strengthened pre-existing action, with new initiatives being introduced across the EU. The Salt framework has also proven to be a model for some national programmes. Member States have also reported that the Framework helped to increase dialogue between government authorities and the industry. About half of the countries have developed public awareness campaigns particularly on salt; a few of them have evaluated their campaigns.

The reduction of salt intake in populations is a step-by-step process as technological barriers and food safety concerns need to be addressed; initiatives will continue to be developed in the Member States in the coming years. Despite challenges that Member States face, increased momentum for salt reduction initiatives is clearly present.

The Chair informed participants that there will be more details once survey results are available and opened the floor for questions.

**The European Public Health Alliance** (EPHA) asked which countries already had the framework in place before the EU Framework was implemented; **Finland** inquired about the next steps, and **IBFAN** asked if countries that dealt with salt reduction legally displayed faster results.

The European Commission replied that there was not a competition between those countries who had a framework in place and those who had not before the Framework was agreed, but that there was shared learning and exchange of best practice among countries active in salt reduction. Further, the salt reduction initiative in the High Level Group is a part of the EU Nutrition Strategy, which is currently being evaluated. It is difficult to predict the future since the result of this evaluation will influence the future of the salt reduction initiative at EU level. Although the Salt Framework is voluntary, a number of countries also have legislation in place, for example regarding maximum salt levels or nutritional criteria for catering facilities (school meals, Kindergartens or hospitals) etc. Half of the countries already had such legislation in place before the EU Framework.

**Denmark** voiced general support for the continuation of this program. The EU salt reduction is important in the framework of the internal market. In Denmark, only 11% of the salt is added by the consumer, and the rest comes from processed foods. Therefore, reformulation has to take place in order to reduce salt intake. Denmark will evaluate their salt programme in 2014.

The Chair concluded that the example of the EU Salt Framework is unique and that other countries, such as the US, have asked how this work has been developed. The reformulation work is important in order to achieve the objectives in the Strategy.

## CONCLUSIONS OF THE CHAIR

The Chair referred to the EC and the OECD Health at a Glance Report 2012, which was published on 16 November 2012. The Chair highlighted that obesity is unfortunately increasing in adults and in children and therefore the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity and the Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health must continue their efforts.

The Chair concluded that:

- as the Director General noted, the work on the two major risk factors - unhealthy diets and physical inactivity - remains a priority in the healthcare agenda and is linked to the prevention of chronic diseases, which impose a great burden on healthcare systems. Given the need for more sustainable healthcare systems, the work of the High Level Group and the Platform is of great significance in this respect;
- the positive outcomes from the national initiatives on the EU Salt Reduction Framework would be published shortly and would be presented to the Council of Ministers of Health in December. The report demonstrated that Member States are very committed to reducing salt, and are continuing their efforts even though resources are scarce;
- the members of the High Level Group and Platform stakeholders are encouraged to actively and substantially participate in the external evaluation of the Strategy in order to provide meaningful guidance on the stocktaking exercise on the implementation of the EU Strategy on Nutrition, as well as guidance for future actions. The evaluation will demonstrate what needs to be done in the future;
- as indicated by the presentations on the renewed commitments on GDA and the EU Pledge, the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health is effective and is relevant not only to the objectives of the Strategy, but also in relation to the global fight against obesity.

The next joint meeting will take place in June 2013.