ECDC Management Board

MB8/Minutes
21 March 2007

Minutes of the Eighth meeting of the ECDC Management Board Stockholm, 12-13 December 2006

Adopted by the Management Board at its 9th meeting in Stockholm, 20 March 2007

Table of Contents

Page

Summary of decisions

The Management Board:

- Approved the draft minutes of the its seventh meeting;
- Approved the proposed budget and establishment for 2007 subject to approval by the budget authorities;
- Approved the proposed revised budget for 2006;
- Agreed to the composition of a Steering Committee for the external evaluation of ECDC (one representative from Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden, the European Commission and the European Parliament) and that it should meet before the Board's meeting in March to draft its terms of reference for consideration by the Board;
- Agreed on the dates for its meetings in 2007 and accepted the invitation of Austria to host the June meeting in Vienna;
- Agreed in principle to the proposal to pay €300 per day to experts attending meetings in their personal capacity (with a maximum of 30 days);

The Management Board also:

- Took note of the Director's briefing on progress made in the Centre's work;
- Took note of the budget projections for 2008;
- Took note of the outcome of the 5th meeting of the Audit Committee and took positive note of the set of Internal Control Standards for ECDC as recommended by the Audit Committee;
- Welcomed the draft annual report of the Centre's activities for 2006 and looked forward the final version to be presented at its meeting in March 2007;
- Requested the Director to include comments made on the programme of work for 2007 in particular to include an executive summary outlining strategic orientations for 2007 and to send to the members a revised version by 15 January for approval thru written procedure;
- Commended the Centre on the draft of the first annual epidemiological report to be finalized by end April 2007;
- Took note of the outcome of the first meeting of the MB Working Group and requested that it continues its work and presents a final, consolidated report to the Board in June 2007;
- Took note of the steps taken by the Centre towards a Multiannual staff policy plan;
- Supported the proposal that each Member State should appoint a "gate-keeper" through whom requests for scientific opinions from ECDC should be directed;
- Took note of ECDC ongoing negotiations with EMCDDA and CDC China.

Opening and welcome by the Chair

1. The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all participants. A special welcome was extended to the representatives attending for the first time, notably Ms Anna Lönnroth, new alternate appointed by the European Commission. Ms Dace Viluma, new member appointed by Latvia, Mr Athanasios Skoutelis, new alternate appointed by Greece, Ms Katalin Rapi, new member appointed by Hungary, Dr Dirk Ruwaard, new alternate appointed by the Netherlands, Mr Oscar Gonzalez, new alternate appointed by Spain, and the two Observers from Bulgaria Dr. Snejana Altankova and Dr. Angel Kunchev whose country would be represented as a full fledged member of the Board at the next meeting in March 2007.

2. Apologies were noted from Denmark and the United Kingdom, who were unable to attend this particular meeting.

Adoption of the Agenda *(document MB8/2)*

3. The agenda was adopted with no changes. However, during the meeting, and due to the time pressure faced in completing the agenda in time, the Board decided however to defer Item 12*:"Strategic Multiannual programme 2007 – 2013"* to its 9th meeting, scheduled for March 2007.

4. The Chair declared a potential interest in agenda item 19: *"Member States capacities and contracting with ECDC"*, as his Institute could be a potential candidate for future grant agreements with ECDC. As such he requested the Vice Chair to take his seat when that item were to be taken up. No other declarations of interest were made.

Director's briefing on progress made on the work of the Centre

5. Before starting the presentation, the Director briefed the Board on the outcome of the 7th meeting of the Advisory Forum, which met on 22-23 November, in particular with regards to the work plans for 2007. The priorities were not challenged, but the plans were considered to be ambitious. The Director clarified that these ambitious work plans resulted from the high expectations placed upon the Centre's work by the European Parliament in order to approve the budget, and from the preparations required to succeed in the external evaluation of 2007. Therefore, the Centre is aiming at consolidating all activities started since its foundation and covering all functions set out in the founding regulations. It was acknowledged that this had repercussions in the workload for the Member States, but the Director reassured that a balance in the work from the different bodies that compose the Centre's forum –Management Board, Advisory Forum and competent bodies– is being sought.

6. Following this introduction, the Director briefed the Management Board on the main activities of the Centre since the last meeting.

7. The Director reported on different activities that have been carried out with the Commission in an atmosphere of good and close collaboration. Regular and weekly videoconferences are held with DG SANCO (C3/C6 units) and with others as needed. A strategic discussion with DG SANCO took place during the visit of Commissioner Markos

Kyprianou to ECDC on 31 October, with emphasis on future priorities, communication and collaboration. Additionally, the first of a series of regular videoconferences on strategic issues was held with the Commission on 11 December.

8. An overview of ECDC's involvement in the activities of DG Research followed. The Director participates in its Advisory Group, which has held already two meetings, with a third one planned for March 2007. In this meeting, ECDC will present its view on research priorities on communicable diseases, for which input from the Member States will be sought.

9. The Board was briefed on the contacts held with the European Parliament, with regular consultations on different issues. A first visit from the European Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee took place on 29 June, with a briefing on ECDC developments, as well as discussions on multi annual strategic plans and premises. The annual hearing of the Director at the ENVI Committee took place on 3 October. After being informed about the Centre's priorities, the collaboration with the Commission and the streamlined use of budget, this Committee expressed its support for ECDC's activities. It was informed also that the Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Status Report has been sent to the European Parliament.

10. The Director then informed about different activities that took place in the context of the Centre's collaboration with other bodies and institutions, such as the current and upcoming EU Presidencies, other EU Agencies, WHO and the industry.

11. The Court of Auditors visited the Centre on 4-8 December. The Director informed that the auditors had assessed that good progress has been achieved since last year's audit. Their concluding remark was: "Observations and findings are those of a mature agency and not those of a start-up agency". The Report of this audit will be ready early 2007 and will be sent to the Audit Committee.

12. On internal ECDC's activities, it was highlighted that intense efforts have been made to prepare the 2007 work plans and the multi annual plan. Furthermore, a new internal forum has been introduced to involve staff in all of the Centre's activities. The Director reminded the Management Board of the Newsletter, a new initiative launched in September that was sent to the members to keep them updated on activities between meetings. Comments regarding its usefulness and content were welcome.

13. An overview of the activities of the Centre's units then followed.

14. The Scientific Advice Unit set up two Ad hoc Scientific Panels to respond to questions regarding influenza vaccination to young children and pneumococcal vaccine, with replies ready. This unit has also answered a number of scientific questions, set up two expert advisory groups on human H5N1 vaccines and is participating in the Advisory Board of six EU-funded research projects. An overview of the work by this unit on specific diseases followed.

15. Progress in the work of the Surveillance and Communication Unit was then described. Information was shared regarding the status of the Zoonoses Report and it was stated that the data on human diseases of zoonoses was delivered to EFSA. The final version of the case definitions was sent to the Commission. Information was given also on the progress of the

evaluation teams and surveillance networks. Great progress has been achieved in the database development and a working group of IT and epidemiologists responsible for national surveillance systems will be set up. Finally, it was announced that details on the Annual Epidemiological Report would be given later, as a separate agenda item.

16. The Preparedness and Response Unit has organized 3 sub-regional workshops on Pandemic Influenza in Stockholm. A Pandemic Preparedness Status Report for Europe has been finalized and, with a foreword by Commissioner Kyprianou, is scheduled to be made public together with the Commission in January. Furthermore, this unit plans to hold two simulation exercises in 2007.

17. Activities related to threat detection and EWRS were then presented. Guidelines will be issued following the meeting on mass gatherings organized by ECDC, and the Centre will assist Austria during the 2008 Euro soccer cup. The transfer of the EWRS operations is on-going and a working group for the risk assessment communication platform (EPIS) has been established jointly with DG SANCO C3.

18. The Board was also briefed on the progress of the Emergency Operation Centre (EOC). Plans foresee that it will be fully operational in mid 2007 and one of the planned exercises next year will serve to test this facility.

19. Different activities related to outbreak investigation and response were presented: In January 2007 the Centre will implement its system of 24/7 officers on duty, a meeting was held on norovirus outbreaks in cruise ships, and a toolkit for investigation of human cases of avian influenza was completed.

20. Additionally, the Board was briefed on the current status of the EPIET training programme, with details on participating fellows and courses held.

21. The presentation ended with a relation of the three main alerts that ECDC followed up since June: 43 episodes of norovirus outbreaks on board cruise ship (June), the exposure to Lassa fever by a patient on board an aircraft (July) and a cluster of sudden deaths in Israel following flu vaccine (November).

22. The Management Board took note of the presentation on the progress made in the Centre's work, and input was received from several participants.

23. On behalf of the current EU Presidency, Finland thanked ECDC for the good collaboration and mentioned another important event that took place: the International Meeting on H5N1 and Pandemic Preparedness in Bamako, Mali, on December 5-9, where comments were made regarding the excellent presentation that the Centre did on pandemic preparedness in Europe. The Director expressed thanks for this comment and agreed that very positive feedback was received after the presentation in Bamako.

24. Comments were made regarding the heavy agenda and extensive documentation presented to the Management Board. The importance of having strategic discussions with the Commission was regarded as positive, but the importance of the Management Board as a forum for strategic discussions should not be forgotten. More space should be made in the

programme for discussing strategic issues. In response to this, the Director agreed that the Management Board should be more involved in strategic discussions, an issue which has been addressed by the Working Group set up by the Board. The issues on the agenda of the meeting which called for a strategic discussion were then highlighted by the Director but it was also acknowledged that in the March and December meetings some standard issues always had to be included.

25. Other members stated that the Director's briefing demonstrated that ECDC was following the right track in its development, with an abundance of activities. The importance of the assessment visits was stressed, as opportunities for mutual learning and evaluation of the situation in ECDC and in the Member States. Furthermore, the Management Board needs to be involved in the discussions about ECDC's relationship with other bodies, like DG Research for example. The Director agreed that more dialogue is needed between the Management Board and ECDC after each meeting. Advice on this is sought from the Working Group, and initiatives could comprise for example videoconferences.

26. One member also highlighted the impressive list of activities presented to the Board, and suggested to include also the positive input that ECDC has given to the Vaccine Advisory Group for Central and Eastern Europe.

Adoption of the draft minutes of the 7th meeting of the Management Board in Athens, 20-21 June 2006 *(document MB8/5*)

27. The minutes were adopted with no changes.

Audit Issues: Internal Control Standards *(document MB8/6)*

28. The Director recalled that the Audit Committee had had its 5th meeting in the morning of 12 December 2006, immediately prior to the opening of the meeting of the Board.

29. The agenda had focused on the budget execution for 2006, which in terms of earmarking and legal commitments currently stood at 96% but was likely to increase to 99% before the end of the year. The Audit Committee had set a target of 60%+ for actual payments for 2007.

30. Another item on the agenda had concerned ECDC's Internal Control Standards, and the inclusion of two new standards to reflect current efforts at the Centre to develop a strategic multiannual programme (No 8), and the setting up of an internal evaluation capacity (No 23). The Audit Committee had recommended that the full set of 24 Internal Control Standards be adopted by the Management Board.

31. A detailed review by the Audit Committee had also been made of the Centre's Action Plan for implementation of Audit Recommendations. The Committee had endorsed the plan, subject to some relatively minor modifications.

32. Activity-based Management at ECDC had been the 4th and final agenda item, and the Committee had noted the substantial progress made by the Centre in this important area.

Further progress reports would be provided to the Audit Committee in this regard, particularly as the Centre moved into the implementation phase of its 2007 work plans through the SAP software.

33. The Management Board took positive note and endorsed the progress made.

Revised Budget 2006 *(document MB8/7)*

34. In accordance with the Financial Regulations, "the Director may make transfers from one title to another and from one chapter to another within the limit of 10% of the appropriations for the financial year". That mechanism had been used in the course of the year to optimize work plan and budget implementation, which, as the Board had been informed under an earlier agenda item, currently stood at 96%.

35. An overview was provided to the Board of the budget transfers thus far carried out, including a proposal for further selective transfers beyond the 10% limit, which would bring overall budget implementation for 2006 to 99+%.

36. The Board approved the Director's proposals.

ECDC Programme of Work for 2007 *(document MB8/8)*

37. In presenting the document, the Director recalled the work programme for 2005-2006, elaborated by the Management Board to facilitate ECDC's start-up phase. The 2007 work programme built on that earlier initiative, and represented a logical next step in the process to improve the Centre's management tools.

38. As called for by the Commission already in 1999, and by several of the relevant Internal Control Standards, ECDC's work programme followed a comprehensive activity-based approach in order to facilitate proper oversight and control of all the Centre's activities. As such, the approach taken would eventually fully meet the requirements of 6 of the adopted control standards.

39. The 2007 work programme had been developed through both a top-down process outlining main priorities, and bottom-up through an intensive participative and consultative process. All technical staff at the Centre had been fully engaged through several iterations over the 2 month period September – November 2006. As such, there was complete commitment and buy-in among the staff with all aspects of the work programme presented to the Board.

40. The programme for 2007 included activity-based plans for all the functional units, as well as for the 7 disease-specific projects, grouping the 49 diseases set out in Decision 2119/98. While the full operational work plans, setting out all the details of budget provisions, partnerships, core staff involvement etc, were available in the room on request, the Director urged the Board to focus on the broader strategic issues and key products to be delivered, as set out in document MB8/8. In this regard, the Board's attention was drawn to the fact that the work programme included a rolling plan horizon, providing projected outcomes for the 2-3

year medium term. As from 2008, it would also be linked to the Strategic Multiannual Programme for 2007-2013, currently under development.

41. The projections of the financial resources required for each product in the work programme had been reconciled with the budget lines under Title 3 in ECDC's official budget (ref. agenda item 8) i.e. for a total of € 13,16 million for 2007.

42. In conclusion, the Director stated that while the 2007 work programme for ECDC was certainly ambitious, it was also entirely doable. Both the Centre's management team and its technical staff were in fact fully committed to it, through the extensive consultative process she had earlier referred to.

43. The Board was unanimous in complementing the Centre on the structure of the 2007 work programme and the level of ambition demonstrated. For the sake of transparency, and in view of the size of the document, an executive summary would have been useful, in order to outline the main strategic orientations for 2007.

44. The Board stressed the importance of ECDC creating "added value" for Member States in communicable disease prevention and control in Europe. This should in fact be the key yardstick of performance, rather than implementation simply based on the availability of human and financial resources.

45. An important question remained however as to whether the level of ambition of ECDC would put excessive strains on its collaborating institutions in the Member States. Was the 2007 work programme realistic in that sense? With regard to individual countries' capacities, the collaborative work foreseen might be entirely doable for some countries, difficult for others and perhaps even impossible for some of Europe's smaller Member States. A clearer picture of ECDC's expectations from the Member States, as a result of the 2007 work programme was therefore required.

46. Some members of the Board also raised the question of flexibility and the ability of ECDC to respond to unforeseen events, as the work programme seemed to commit 100% of all resources available to the Centre in 2007. In the case of new and unforeseen communicable disease threats, how would the Centre respond, if such were to happen during the course of the year?

47. On a more technical nature, questions were raised about planned activities linked to norovirus outbreaks in cruise ships, and whether this was a role for ECDC or rather for national CDCs. In addition to the Centre's disease-specific approach, it was suggested that attention should also be paid to the effect of communicable diseases on Europe's vulnerable populations. A key raison d'être for ECDC was to harmonize and to promote coherence and economies of scale to Europe's disease surveillance networks. It was not entirely clear from the 2007 work programme how this core function was being met. ECDC's role in research was also questioned, as well as the apparent lack of attention to hepatitis in the work programme, in spite of the priority that disease warranted. Finally, questions were raised regarding the Centre's international work beyond Europe's borders, and activities focusing on collaboration with countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and Africa.

48. In reply, the Director welcomed the rich contribution to ECDC's work which the discussion had produced. She fully understood the legitimate concerns of Member States regarding the demands placed on them from a Centre with an ambitious mission, and with growing staff and financial resources.

49. She pledged to produce a revised, prioritized programme for country missions and meetings, in order not to put undue pressure on the Member States. In addition, a review would be made by ECDC's management team of what additional relief could be identified, notably through selective cut-backs in the disease-specific projects. While the pressure on collaborating institutions would be greatest in the build-up phase of the Centre, she was confident that Member States would indeed come to see significant "added value" from ECDC, once surveillance and response systems, scientific guidelines and manuals were operationalized for national uptake. Grant agreements with competent bodies in Member States (Agenda item 19) would also reduce the pressure.

50. She welcomed the suggestion for an executive summary to the work programme, outlining key priorities and strategic thrust for 2007, and agreed that this would be added.

51. On the question of activities linked to norovirus outbreaks, she stressed that ECDC's role would be purely technical and advisory, as the Centre did not have a regulatory role. A key priority of the Centre was indeed to build up European-wide surveillance based on standard operating procedures, and with the adequate databases in place. It had to be appreciated that activities in this regard would take time, and would go beyond 2007.

52. As far as ECDC's mandate in research was concerned, the Centre would be continuing its discussions with DG Research to ensure that research needed to support actions relevant to ECDC are given due attention in calls for proposal of the Seventh Framework programme for research. Regarding the geographical scope of the Centre's work, ECDC needed at the very least to link-up and exchange information with communicable disease centers outside Europe. The continuing Avian Influenza outbreaks in Asia were a telling reminder of this need.

53. On the important question of flexibility, she fully agreed with the Board's observation. Initially, plans had been made to include a reserve provision in the 2007 work programme for contingencies, precisely for this purpose. It had turned out, however, that such a contingency reserve would be contrary to the Financial Regulations, and the Centre was therefore currently looking into other modalities to meet this need.

54. In conclusion, she pointed out the dilemma faced by the Centre: on the one hand it was still in a rapid growth phase with an expanding work programme and potential strain on collaborating institutions in Member States, and on the other hand the Centre was duty-bound to ensure the best possible coverage of all main functions set out in the Founding Regulation. The 2007 work programme had to reflect that mandate.

55. In summing up the discussion, the Chair stated he felt the Board‘s concerns could be met through the following 6 additional steps to the work programme for 2007:

- Country visits should be restricted through an integrated approach and endorsement by Member States. Meetings should also be restricted through the same means;

- The "added value" to Member States of ECDC's planned work should be made more explicit;
- Selective cut-backs should be made in the disease-specific projects;
- ECDC's key focus should be the European Member States, but with exchange of information foreseen with non-European countries in vital areas;
- The wording of the document should be selectively reviewed, focusing on major versus minor products and activities;
- A new Executive Summary should be produced, outlining key priorities and strategic thrust for 2007, principles for scientific work, and also covering the need for flexibility in responding to unexpected events.

56. In agreeing to the Chair's summary, the Board also requested that for next year's programme, i.e. for 2008, a section on "added value" and indicators of what would be expected from the Member States, should also be built into the work programme for each individual product.

57. The Board was informed that a revised work programme for 2007, incorporating the Chair's summary, would be circulated to Members by 15 January 2007. Formal approval could thus be through written procedure, in time for the 31 January deadline, as foreseen in Article 14.5 (d) of the Founding Regulation. It was so agreed**.**

Budget 2007 and outlook for 2008 *(document MB8/9)*

58. In presenting the document, it was recalled that the detailed budget and establishment plan for 2007 needed to be approved by the Board in accordance with Article 27 of the Financial Regulation of the Centre, subject to final adoption of the budget envelope by the Budgetary Authority.

59. At its 5th meeting in December 2005, the Board had endorsed the Centre's proposal for a budget of € 26,5 million for 2007, a figure later to be confirmed by the Commission.

60. In its first reading, the Council had however proposed a reduction of € 2,4 million of the core funding for the Centre. In turn, however, the European Parliament had restored the core funding to the initial level, but decided to establish a reserve of € 1,14 million in the administrative titles and € 1,29 million in the operational title. The Parliament is expected to release these reserves in early 2007, provided that the Centre (a) presents a multiannual staff policy plan and (b) consults with the Parliament on its work programme. Both those conditions will be fully met by the Centre.

61. With the inclusion of the EEA/EFTA contribution, the overall budget for ECDC for 2007 will be € 27.045.000, of which € 13.160.000 (49%) has been programmed for operational activities under Title 3. For 2008, the projections are for an overall budget envelope of € 39,9 million, of which € 18,75 would be earmarked for Title 3.

62. In the ensuing discussion, the point was made that careful planning of the gradual build-up of staff and financial resources would be required for ECDC to take over responsibility for the surveillance systems in 2007, and that the logistical challenges in that regard should not be underestimated.

63. The Board approved the budget and establishment plan for 2007 as set out in document MB8/9, and took note of the projections for 2008.

Draft Annual report of the Director: 2006 (*document MB8/13)*

64. In accordance with the Founding Regulation, the Board shall adopt by 30 March the Director's Annual report on the Centre's activities for the past year. Therefore, the ECDC Director presented a first draft of the 2006 report for guidance on its content. The report was submitted already in December for two reasons:

- As a good management practice that allows for evaluation of progress and failures in the activities of the previous year before starting to plan for the coming year.
- To allow the Board to give input regarding content and layout between this meeting and the next one in March.

65. The Management Board was asked to express if the report is on the right track, fulfills the expectations of this body and has an acceptable structure. Comments on the content were also sought. The Director informed that comments could be made after the meeting via email. Input is welcome any time up to the March meeting, when the report has to be discussed and approved.

66. The Director informed the Board that a change in format was introduced: the comments of the Management Board had been taken in consideration, therefore the format follows components of ECDC's programme of work rather than the organizational structure. As for accountability, the main conclusion was that all activities expected by the Management Board in the work plans 2005-2006 have been implemented.

67. The Chair stated that the fact of having this first draft already available was impressive, and invited the members of the Board to send written comments and suggestions.

68. One member regarded the structure of the report as positive and welcomed the fact that the suggestions made by the Board on the previous report were taken into account.

69. The management Board took note of the draft Annual Report of the Director 2006.

ECDC language regime *(document MB8/10*)

70. Karl Ekdahl, Strategic Advisor to the Director, presented the paper on language regime which follows up on the initial discussion held in the previous Management Board meeting. This is done so to comply with the Centre's Founding Regulation, which calls for a unanimous decision from the Management Board on the language regime to be implemented.

71. A package of 3 issues was presented for discussion, which included English as language to be used in all technical documents, multi-lingualism in the information destined for general public and different possible regime options for future meetings of the Management Board. It was informed that the work plans 2007 foresee a multilingual website, with core texts on ECDC and basic public health information in all languages. Additionally, a

standard terminology on communicable diseases prevention and control is being developed, to allow searches in the web content in all languages. Furthermore, the Centre will publish a multilingual brochure, which entailed a great effort in quality control and costs that have yet to be assessed.

72. Multi-lingualism as a core value of the EU was acknowledged, but it was explained that the related costs had to be considered. Therefore, details of the costs for various language regime options were presented.

73. No objections were made regarding the first two of the three elements of the language strategy raised for discussion after the presentation: English as language for technical documentation and multi-lingualism for documents targeted at the general public. The third element related to the language regime for the Management Board meetings was subject of a lengthy discussion.

74. Some members of the Board stated their commitment to multi-lingualism, as this represents a vital part of the European construction. It was highlighted that this approach would contribute to the quality of the discussions. Therefore, ECDC's proposal of having 3 active languages with up to 3 passive languages was regarded as the most suitable, as it corresponded to Europe's political reality.

75. The Deputy Chair reminded all participants that a decision had to be taken unanimously, taking into account the different options presented. A large number of the members were in favour of the option of using only one language (English), acknowledging however the importance of language diversity. Some arguments presented were the need to reduce costs and to use resources for priority matters.

76. The representative of the European Parliament explained that the argumentation behind opting to have several languages cannot be based only on serving the optics, because the costs of this have to be taken into account.

77. Following this discussion, the Chair proposed an interim decision for the future Management Board meetings. The current situation (simultaneous interpretation in English, French, German and Spanish) will continue in the next meeting of the Management Board. He highlighted the fact that 85% of the participating countries and the European Parliament representative favour the option of using only one language (English). Therefore, he called upon the members that are not in favour of this option to reconsider their position until the next meeting. He regarded this also as an act of solidarity, since most participants are not expressing themselves in their native tongue in these meetings.

78. This appeal to the solidarity was challenged from some members of the Board. One member also reminded the Board that these meetings were not only of technical nature, since participants had responsibilities towards their establishments. It was stated that this discussion showed that a reasonable solution for this kind of problems has to be found by the EU institutions, which certainly have debated extensively on this problem.

79. The Deputy Chair agreed to this suggestion that the institutions offer advice, and therefore asked the participating representatives of EU institutions for input.

80. The representative of the Commission, Andrzej Jan Rys, stated that it was positive to reflect on this issue. He informed that a new Commissioner has been appointed, who will be in charge of multi-lingualism. This represented a good opportunity to assess how other Agencies have dealt with this issue, in order to follow a standard. It was then proposed to the Management Board to send a formal letter to this Commissioner to asses the policy that should be followed, but also calling attention on budget issues involved.

81. The Chair asked the Board if agreement can be reached as to continue with the current interpretation practices until the next Management Board meeting, to see if then a solution to this sensitive issue can be reached. It was agreed to postpone the discussion to the meeting in March 2007.

Multiannual Staff Policy Plan *(document MB8/20*)

82. Jef Maes, Head of the Administration Unit, presented the Multiannual Staff Policy Plan to the Board for guidance and agreement on the main principles covered by it.

83. This plan has been made in accordance with the Commission's guidelines on staff policies for EU Agencies. It foresees that core and sensitive functions be covered by temporary agents (TA). No recruitment of officials is intended. Strong emphasis will be made on internal staffing capacity; with two thirds of the TA posts foreseen for technical and scientific administrators. Core support functions and sensitive assistant posts will be covered by TA. The technical and administrative support will be provided by contract agents. Grant agreements will allow the Centre to rely on Member State capacities to complement expertise in specific operational areas. Non-core functions will be outsourced.

84. Members of the Board then asked for information about the Seat Agreement with Sweden, highlighting that this is a matter of great importance for ECDC's staff and that a deadline should be set to solve this problem. The Director of ECDC explained that the Centre is making progress in the discussions. The issue was discussed with Commissioner Kyprianou during his visit to the Centre, and the relevant authorities of the new Swedish Government have been already contacted.

85. The representative of Sweden in the Management Board then explained that efforts are being made, in discussion with the Ministries of Finance and of Foreign Affairs, as it is a problem that also affects staff of other international organizations with offices in Sweden. It was stated that by spring several issues could be solved, but the matter of the social security number could take more time.

Annual Epidemiological Report (*document MB8/15*)

86. Andrea Ammon, Head of the Surveillance and Communication Unit, presented the first draft of the Annual Epidemiological Report, which was handed out to the members of the Board. They were asked for guidance on the following topics: Do direction and content meet their expectations? Do they have suggestions for special analyses? Does the Board agree with the timetable, which foresees that by April 2007 the report will be finalized and sent send to the Member States for consultation?

87. It was explained during the presentation that this report is a first draft for most of the chapters, following the outline that was discussed by the Management Board in June 2006. Andrea Ammon mentioned that the demographic trends and health care services are incorporated, as well as the description of available data by disease. She also remarked that not all recent updates received from Member States have yet been incorporated. The information on national surveillance systems for each disease will be included as well, since this is relevant for the interpretation of data.

88. This draft had been presented to the Advisory Forum on 22-23 November, and an overview of the comments made on that occasion was included in the draft. The Advisory Forum regarded the report as an important document which showed the added value ECDC offers. Some improvements were suggested by the Advisory Forum, like adding a description of the underlying surveillance systems and guaranteeing a final scientific review of the content. The classification of diseases was questioned, but it was explained that it had been done following the Commission's Decision.

89. Andrea Ammon then explained the further steps to be taken for the finalization of this report, taking into account suggestions made by the Advisory Forum. Additionally, a chapter will be added with overall trends and patterns for certain population groups, while another will focus on actions, based on data and aligned with the multi-annual plan.

90. The timeframe was also presented. The next version will be presented to the Advisory Forum and Management Board in their upcoming meetings in 2007. The country consultation and final check will take place in April 2007. An executive summary and short leaflet will be published in May 2007.

91. For the future, questions are still open regarding the frequency of detailed reports and the content of annual reports.

92. After this presentation, the Chair expressed that this document constituted a huge challenge. He then invited the members of the Board to send written comments.

93. Numerous congratulations and comments as to the quality of this report were expressed by members of the Board. The work that such a report demanded was acknowledged, as well as the fact that this constitutes a core product and an expression of the useful contribution that ECDC can make. It also conveys an excellent image of the Centre and can be used by countries to improve the public health surveillance and communication.

94. Regarding the placement of graphs and tables, the majority of comments considered that these should stay in the content. This makes the document more readable and is useful for teaching or presentation purposes. Nevertheless, graphs have to be reviewed, because they not always show clearly the status of certain countries. An appendix could be added with more detailed maps that clarify the demography and the geographical location of the countries. Another idea presented was to additionally publish the graphs in a more readable format on the website.

95. Some members of the Board had observations regarding the balance of the diseases, with some rare ones occupying more space than frequent ones.

96. Some comments were made regarding the possibility to publish the report yearly, as this entailed a heavy workload but would certainly be expected. It was suggested that following reports could present, alongside with updated data, a focus on one specific strategic issue. Andrea Ammon explained that a yearly data collection was envisioned, and it seemed feasible to focus each next report on certain priorities after discussing it with the Member States.

97. One member remarked that a deadline has to be set for the discussions, so as to guarantee that it can be published. Improvements could then be made in following reports. As for the classification of the diseases, it complies with specifications and will guarantee that not each time all information has to be updated. This member then stressed the importance of Chapter 11 (Actions to strengthen prevention, control and surveillance in the EU). The Director informed that as soon as the analysis of all information is ready, more work will be done in the section dedicated to actions.

98. Several comments were received regarding the comparability of data, which cannot be guaranteed given the differences in national sources. Therefore, the data collection system should be explained in the report. The situation in certain countries could even be misinterpreted due to the fact that for some diseases data is not collected. Member States also have to receive precise guidance on what data is needed and must be urged to complete missing data. One member suggested that after each disease section ECDC should include a comment on which country did not supply data and how data was collected. Andrea Ammon agreed to the difficulty of comparability. The lesson learned during the process of compiling data from different national sources is that it is important to have one data source at European level in the future.

99. The Deputy Chair cautioned that journalists could use the data as a sort of “ranking” of performance, and the interpretations that the general public will make could affect certain countries. Additionally, the section dedicated to summary and conclusions should not only provide a scientific analysis of the data, but also take into account the political point of view, highlighting for example best practices, so that it serves as a guide for actions.

100. The representative of the European Parliament stressed the significance of this report as a reference work and the importance of publishing it on an annual basis. He welcomed the linkage between the actions and the multi-annual plan of ECDC.

101. Other suggestions raised from the floor included the possibility to translate the summary to the different languages, in order to reach a broader audience. A summary of approximately 20 pages could help media capture the most important information. The Director agreed that the messages for the general public were missing. Therefore, a next step will be to reflect on what messages have to be presented to the broader audience.

102. One member stated interest in more work on the burden of disease. The Director agreed to the importance of this section, which also will serve as a useful tool of action for Member States.

103. After the round of comments, the Chair expressed that this report constitutes a keystone of ECDC’s work.

Conclusions of the 1st meeting of the MB Working Group *(document MB8/19)*

104. The Vice Chair presented the conclusions of the first meeting of the MB Working Group. A key item which had been discussed concerned the need to enhance the information exchange between the Advisory Forum and the Management Board, in order to ensure that technical and scientific issues are properly integrated into the Centre's strategies, with systematic feedback by the Director to the Board of the work of the Advisory Forum.

105. The Working group had also discussed the Board's own working methods, including voting procedures, election of chair and vice chair, terms of office, replacement of members, languages and publications of the Board's minutes. A paper on those and other related issues would be submitted to the Working Group at its next meeting.

106. Communication channels between Member States and ECDC had been another area of concern. In that regard questions had been raised regarding the designation of an "ECDC coordinator" for each Member State to facilitate communications and/or the designation of "gatekeepers" for scientific questions (ref agenda item 17)

107. The Board took note of the progress report, and looked forward to a consolidated, final report on the Working Group's deliberations at its 10th meeting in June 2007.

External Evaluation of ECDC *(document MB8/11)*

108. In introducing document MB8/11, the Director drew the Board's attention to Article 31 of the Founding Regulation which called for the commissioning of an independent external evaluation of the Centre's achievements by 20 May 2007, based on terms of reference issued by the Management Board in agreement with the Commission. The evaluation would (a) *"assess the possible need to extend the scope of the Centre's mission to other relevant Community-level activities in the field of public health, in particular to health monitoring"*, and (b) *"the timing of such further reviews*."

109. While the evaluation would be carried out by a contractor, selected through an open and transparent call for tender, it would be the Board's role to examine the conclusions of the evaluation and make its own recommendations thereon to the Commission on potential changes to the Centre's scope and working practices. In turn, the Commission would consider both the evaluation results and the Board's comments, and make its own recommendations to the European Parliament and the Council for changes, if any, to the Founding Regulation.

110. It was proposed that a sub-group of the Board be constituted as a Steering Committee, to provide strategic oversight and to ensure that the evaluation progresses according to plan. On the other hand, the proposal in document MB8/11 to also set up a Technical Advisory Board was being withdrawn, as this proposal had met with some skepticism from the Commission. A Technical Advisory Board with independent public health specialists would tend to blur the roles and responsibilities of it versus the contractor, and could also raise question of objectivity and independence. A better way forward was felt to be incorporation of public health experience as an absolute requirement in the specifications for tender.

111. ECDC had budgeted € 150.000 for the evaluation, but based on feed-back from EFSA and the Commission, it was probable that this would have to be increased to € 200.000. That amount would also cover the costs of meetings of the Steering Committee.

112. If the Board agreed in principle to proceed in the manner outlined, the next step would be to constitute the Board's Steering Committee, which would then be charged with the tasks of drafting terms of reference for the evaluation and specifications for the call for tender. In view of the tight deadline foreseen in Article 31 of the Regulation, both those tasks would have to be completed between January and March 2007, in time for the next meeting of the Management Board. The Audit and Evaluation Unit of DG SANCO had offered to help in that process.

113. In March 2007, the Board could then discuss and agree on the terms of reference, and initiate a consultation with the Commission thereon, as foreseen in Article 31. Based on feedback from the Commission, the Steering Committee should meet again to finalize the terms of reference and the specifications for tender, with final approval by the Board through written procedure. Alternatively, should the Commission have major changes to the drafts prepared by the Steering Committee, an extraordinary meeting of the Board might be required in April 2007, dedicated to this issue only.

114. In view of the provisions of Article 31, the target date for the formal launch of the tender should not be later than 20 May 2007.

115. In its discussion, the Board stressed the need to empower the Steering Committee to independently perform an oversight role in ensuring that the process evolves at it should, and that the contractor performs exactly the functions foreseen by the terms of reference The Committee should therefore be constituted with members of the Board possessing both public health expertise as well as competencies in communicable as well as non-communicable diseases. In addition, health policy experience would be a valuable asset.

116. It was pointed out by the Commission that the 3 Member States France, the Czech Republic and Sweden would constitute the "troika" with special responsibility for EU-wide policy over the next 12 months. Perhaps those countries should therefore be on the Steering Committee.

117. The Management Board agreed to proceed in the manner outlined, and nominated the following 6 Members to serve on the Steering Committee: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Luxemburg and Sweden. It was also agreed that the Steering Committee would itself select its own Chair from amongst its Members.

118. On a final question concerning the award of the contract, it was clarified that it would be signed by the Director, as the Centre's authorizing officer, but that it would be done in consultation and agreement with the Steering Committee.

Clarification of process for scientific questions put to ECDC *(document MB8/18*)

119. Johan Giesecke, Chief Scientist and Head of the Scientific Advice Unit, presented a document which seeks clarification on the process of raising scientific questions from a Member State, Commission and European Parliament. ECDC proposed that each Member State and the Commission nominate one "gatekeeper" for scientific questions to the Centre. This person could –if a Member State so wishes– be the same as the coordinating Focal Point. Terms of reference for this figure were outlined in the document presented. Additionally, the Board was asked for suggestions regarding the publication of questions and opinions, to assess whether these should be published in the website once they are made or after they have been answered.

120. On the appointment of a gatekeeper, suggestions included the issuing of guidelines by ECDC for this activity, since this person could face a heavy workload, and the authority of this person to express when a question posed is irrelevant.

121. On the publication of questions, it was discussed that it is positive for the gatekeepers to know what questions are in the process of being answered, so as to avoid duplication of efforts. But if questions are sensitive, it is more appropriate to publish them once the answer is ready. Johan Giesecke stated that it could be difficult to assess different levels for the questions, but clarified that a procedure is only needed for questions that require a scientific assessment, like for example the two recently answered questions about vaccines. He explained that other types of questions are answered daily by ECDC. He agreed that a solution has to be found for the publishing of sensitive questions. The Director of ECDC suggested that, in order to keep gatekeepers informed, the questions could be published on a restricted part of the website.

122. One member of the Board suggested that ECDC clarifies from a juridical perspective how to proceed when questions are raised by private persons, so as to avoid being over-flooded with queries. Another member suggested that these kinds of questions be referred to the Focal Point in each Member State, because the "clients" of ECDC are basically the Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States, not individual citizens. Furthermore, it was stated that the Centre could not be responsible for answering questions that do not require a scientific analysis. The representatives of the Commission stated that the first address for questions from the general public would be the Member States and the Commission, which then could forward them to ECDC if a scientific procedure is needed; he also recalled the principle that anyone can put questions to the Commission which has to be replied within 15 working days.

123. Following a request from the floor regarding the possibility to speed up procedures when a question to ECDC not only dealt with scientific but also with political issues, it was confirmed by the Chief Scientist and by the Director of ECDC that mechanisms are in place to handle questions related to public health actions which require a prompt response.

Indemnities for ECDC Experts (*document MB8/17*)

124. Experts participating in meetings and scientific panels organized by ECDC are currently only reimbursed travel and per diem. The absence of a reasonable indemnity for the work performed has led to some limitations on the proper functioning of some of the panels.

125. A proposal is therefore being advanced to allow the payment of an indemnity to experts participating in meetings in their personal capacity, but not when representing their home country or an institution from which they draw a salary.

126. The draft proposal in front of the Board would limit the indemnity to € 300 per day and for a maximum of 30 working days per year, in line with similar practice in some other agencies.

127. If the Board were to agree to the principle outlined, the Director would come back to it with clear rules of procedure on how the indemnity would be used. The matter would also be presented to the Audit Committee for its review and eventual endorsement.

128. The Management Board agreed in principle to the proposal.

Member States' capacities and contracting with ECDC *(document MB8/16)*

129. In introducing this item, it was explained that the Centre's Financial Regulations foresee two main instruments for contracting: (a) through public procurement aiming at purchasing goods and services against market conditions under open, competitive conditions and (b) through grant agreements which essentially are co-financing actions between an institution and ECDC, promoting or forming part of an EU policy. It was noted that several of ECDC's precursor activities were funded by the Commission as grant agreements, e.g. the surveillance networks and the EPIET programme.

130. Since the Founding Regulation requires the cooperation with nominated "competent bodies" in Member States, document MB8/16 proposed to bring the concepts of competent bodies and grant agreements together, i.e. to consider grant agreements within the pool of recognized Member States' structures and institutions possessing the required independent technical and scientific expertise in the field of prevention and control of human disease.

131. Grant agreements could thus be awarded through a 3-staged approach: either the required competency was available in the open market, in which case it would be solicited through public procurement. If, on the other hand, there were a limited number of actors in any given Member State which possessed the required competence, grant agreements should be based on a competition restricted to these institutions. A third option would arise in cases where a particular institute had a de facto monopoly situation in a country, in which case a direct grant agreement could be foreseen without competition.

132. In the discussion, the Board drew attention to the sensitive nature of this issue. Transparency and equity of access were inviolable principles of contracting in the European Union system, and also laid down in the Financial Regulations. The 3-tiered approach in Document MB8/16 had to be reviewed closely from that perspective, as it could deny access to some potential tenderers who might feel that they had the required competence to bid. A further complication in that regard was that grant agreements defined terms of reference and deliverables in a much looser manner than for public procurement.

133. In responding to the Board's concerns, the Director suggested that the Centre continue its consultations with the Commission on the issue. It would also review the 2007 work

programme to identify those areas where grant agreements would be applicable, and then return with a set of concrete proposals for the Board's 9th meeting in March 2007. It was so agreed**.**

Dates of meetings of the Management Board in 2007 *(document MB8/12)*

134. The Chair informed that some changes were proposed to the timing of the meetings. The next meetings would start in the morning, with an informal get-together the night before.

135. As to the proposed dates for the meeting in March, the ECDC Director explained that these had to be changed (instead of 19-20 March the meeting will take place 20-21 March). The change was due to practical reasons, to allow for the meeting of the Audit Committee, since the original dates foresaw a Monday as starting day.

136. The new dates and timing as proposed were approved and will be circulated to all participants shortly after the meeting.

137. The representative of Austria extended an invitation to host the June meeting in Vienna. This invitation was warmly accepted by the Board.

Other matters *(document MB8/21*)

138. The Director of ECDC presented to the Management Board a draft Cooperation Agreement between the Centre and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and a draft Memorandum of Understanding between ECDC and the Chinese Center for Disease Prevention and Control. These were presented for information purposes, and their background was explained. If no objections were raised from the Board, these memorandums of understanding would be signed.

139. One member of the Board suggested that ECDC explore the possibility of reaching similar agreements, like the one foreseen with China, with other countries in neighbouring areas of the EU, like Russia. The Director of ECDC informed that discussions with Russia have already started and more information will be communicated to the members of the Board as things progress. It was also suggested that paragraph 5 of the Memorandum of Understanding with EMCDDA be revised by the Centre's Legal Advisor, as it presents a contradiction with paragraphs 3 and 4. The Director agreed to check this.

140. The Director of ECDC agreed to a another suggestion raised from the floor to present in the next Management Board meeting an inventory of European organizations with which similar agreements as with EMCDDA could be reached. It was informed that discussions are advancing with WHO/EURO, the European Medicines Agency (EMEA) and the CDC in Atlanta. In the next Management Board meeting, another issue to be discussed is how to strengthen coordination between ECDC's international activities and the work of other international organizations.