

ECDC Management Board



**MB9/Minutes
14 June 2007**

**Minutes of the Ninth meeting of the ECDC Management Board
Stockholm, 20–21 March 2007**

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Summary of decisions

The Management Board:

- Approved the draft minutes of its 8th meeting held in Stockholm, 12-13 December 2006;
- Approved the report of the Centre's activities for 2006 and congratulated the Director on the work accomplished
- Approved the terms of reference and the tender specification for the external evaluation of ECDC under article 31 of the Founding Regulation
- Approved the proposal to pay an indemnity of € 300 per meeting day to an expert invited to attend an ECDC panel, working group or committee and requested to deliver an additional and specific task for the meeting (e.g. writing a discussion paper, minutes, etc.). The total number of expert indemnities received by any individual shall not exceed 30 working days per calendar year and a proof of the additional work performed will be required.
- Agreed that ECDC would write a letter to each member of the Board with a request to designate the Competent Bodies thru their official channels, in compliance with the formal procedures as stated in the Founding Regulation;
- Agreed to authorize the Director to approve decisions on implementing rules regarding staff regulations but postponed to its next meeting its decision to delegate to the Director the authority to adopt amendments to the financial rules, pending further clarification from DG Budget;

The Management Board also:

- Took note of the Director's briefing on progress made in the Centre's work and welcome all the work accomplished;
- Requested to be updated at its next meeting on progress made with Sweden with regards to the seat agreement;
- Took note of the progress made in developing a strategic multiannual programme for ECDC and looked forward to see a finalized version taking account of the comments made for approval at its 10th meeting;
- Took note of the draft budget and establishment plan for 2008 that will be put forward the Commission;

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- Took note of the draft financial accounts 2006 and looked forward to the final accounts to be submitted at its 10th meeting in June together the observations of the Court of Auditors;
- Commended ECDC for the work done with the production of the first annual epidemiological report and took note that it would be launched early June 2007 under the German's Presidency;
- Welcomed Commissioner Markos Kyprianou's address to the Board and noted his support to the work of ECDC;
- Took note of the draft Memorandum of Understanding between ECDC and the Public Health Agency of Canada and on the cooperation activities with the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Opening and welcome by the Chair

1. The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all participants to the first meeting to be held in the ECDC building. A particular welcome was extended to new colleagues, notably Dr Dorel Radu, newly appointed member for Romania, Ms Liz Woodeson, newly appointed member for the United Kingdom, and Dr Pawel Gorynski, newly appointed member for Poland.
2. Apologies were noted from Mr Octavio Quintana-Trias and his alternate Dr Anna Lönnroth, from the European Commission and from Dr Snejana Altankova, the appointed new member for Bulgaria and Professor Mira Kojouharova, Bulgaria's appointed alternate.
3. The chair outlined the programme for the day's events regarding the visit from Commissioner Kyprianou and the Swedish Ministers for Public Health and European Affairs.

Adoption of the Agenda *(document MB9/2)*

4. The agenda was adopted with no changes. However, the Director explained that there needed to be a slight change to the running order to accommodate the press conference for Commissioner Kyprianou at which both the Chair and Director needed to be present. It was suggested that the vice-Chair continue the meeting in their absence. The Head of Unit for Administrative Services would present item 6 on ECDC's internal rules, breaking for Commissioner Kyprianou's address as necessary.
5. No declarations of interest were stated, there were no proxy statements to note, and no additional items were added to the agenda.

Adoption of the draft minutes of the 8th meeting of the Management Board in Stockholm, 12–13 December 2006 *(document MB9/4)*

6. The minutes, having been circulated by written procedure, were adopted without change.

Director's briefing on ECDC's work progress

7. The Director first briefed the Board on the issues that had been discussed at the ninth meeting of the Advisory Forum in February 2007.
8. An outline followed of the recent and planned visits to Member States. The Director thanked the members for their cooperation in facilitating these visits.
9. Visits to the Commission and with WHO/EURO have also gone ahead to promote partnership and discuss issues of collaboration.

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10. The Director touched on the work of the Management Board Steering Committee preparing the Terms of Reference for the external evaluation of the Centre, but noted that the meeting would be returning to this issue in the next agenda item.

11. Activities surrounding the publication of the interim report on influenza pandemic preparedness were outlined. The Director noted the interesting discussions that were held with the ENVI Committee of the European Parliament that had highlighted the need for increased communication between ECDC and the ENVI Committee; to ensure they are fully informed on ECDC's work. It was stressed that the work on pandemic preparedness is ongoing and has been undertaken at the request of the Commission. Further, that despite reports in the press that may indicate otherwise, preparedness is progressing well in the EU and with an investment of another 2-3 years on-going work can be completed thus making the EU the best prepared region in the world. She also highlighted the fact that reports on missions to the countries are only released with the permission of both sides.

12. The successful conference on HIV/AIDS under the German Presidency was highlighted with a high-level leadership on the German side.

13. Details were given of the completed and ongoing projects within each of the Units of ECDC.

14. The Management Board responded positively to the level of work that had been achieved since the last meeting, and thanked the Director for her update and for the Report.

15. The Chair asked what progress had been made towards finalizing the seat agreement with the Swedish authorities regarding staff working conditions. The Director assured the Board that it remained on the agenda and negotiations were ongoing. Sweden has asked for more time to put an agreement together but the hope is that it will ultimately be a better package if not being rushed. The member for Sweden added that in order to get as good a deal as possible, the authorities were asking for more time and she appealed for patience. The Chair requested that this matter be put on the agenda for the next meeting in June.

16. Regarding communication with EU citizens the Director stressed that the Annual Report was an accountability report for stakeholders and that a shorter and more accessible version would be prepared for the general public.

17. One member explained that the ENVI Committee plans to appoint a contact point to facilitate the links. The Director confirmed that there was already substantial interaction which would be further strengthened. The 7-year strategy would also be discussed with them and they have already been included in the steering group on surveillance networks.

18. ECDC's role in vaccination policy across the EU was raised. This is a very sensitive issue within Member States and has economic and political implications. These issues have come to the fore recently and will no doubt arise again with the forthcoming Opinion on HPV vaccine and other issues where ECDC is working on. Therefore, caution around the communication is important.

19. In response, the Director clarified the position, acknowledging that it is a sensitive issue. It is ECDC's role to produce scientific evidence and advice with policy options for

policy decision and public health actions, or to make recommendations. ECDC provides policy options for the European Commission and Member States to consider in formulating policy.

20. The issue had been discussed in the Advisory Forum and there is a mandate in ECDC's Founding Regulation for it to be involved in vaccination policies. There is currently a working group set up with EMEA to clarify responsibilities in this area.

21. Responding to comments regarding working groups, the Director explained that beyond the ad hoc scientific panels there is a need for expert committees in some areas. Accepting that ECDC needs to have a clearer idea of what is required the issue will be brought to the next meeting of the Management Board for discussion.

22. The Director assured members that all those serving on panels or working groups are obliged to submit conflict of interest declarations in line with the guidelines previously adopted by the MB.

ECDC external evaluation (*document MB9/8*)

23. The chairman of the Management Board's Steering Committee (MBSC) presented an overview of the proposed terms of reference including the framework for evaluation with suggested questions, the rationale behind the proposal and outlined the timetable for the evaluation.

24. The chair of the MBSC then went on to report on feedback received prior to the meeting of the Management Board. Comments referred to the large number of questions, the appropriateness of the questions given the short time span since ECDC was established, and the fact that there were some overlapping questions.

25. Comments from the floor reflected these initial concerns. Opinion was divided over a number of questions. Some members felt that given the short amount of time since ECDC had been operational an in-depth evaluation was inappropriate and therefore there did not need to be so much detail in the questions and indicators. Others, however, expressed the view that the questions served as an essential tool to guide the contractor and keep control over the project.

26. Several members stressed that ECDC is obliged under the Founding Regulation to go through the evaluation exercise at this point, and therefore a discussion as to whether it was the right time, or what level of evaluation was appropriate were in fact irrelevant. The important thing was to select the best possible contractor and then have a discussion on the results of the evaluation, rather than on the questions.

27. Some confusion was expressed over the period to be evaluated. The Director clarified that the evaluation would be of the Centre's activities up to the time of the start of the evaluation.

28. The proposed Question 18 concerning the expansion of the Centre's remit raised much debate. The general feeling was that it was too early in the Centre's life to be considering this

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matter. However, Article 31 of the Founding Regulation specifies this and so it has to be included. Given that any extension of scope also depends on political considerations, it was suggested that the evaluation be restricted to ECDC's capacity to accommodate an extension. This point was answered by the member from the European Commission: although a contractor will not take a decision whether to extend the scope, it would be useful to have suggested scenarios which would facilitate the decision making process.

29. A suggestion was made to give the contractor a list of suggested stakeholders to consult. This was generally agreed to be a good idea.

30. Following the discussion, the MBSC reconvened at the end of the day to address the issues discussed and the following day presented the Board with proposed changes to the document. These involved the deletion of **four** questions to reduce the number and eliminate any overlap. In this regard, the Board agreed to delete question 2 but to move its suggested indicators under question 11; question 3; question 6 and instead to reword its text into 2 suggested indicators that should go under question 7; and question 16. Also paragraph 44 was reworded to allow the contractor to change the questions and indicators but with the SC retaining final approval.

31. After one suggestion to tighten the wording of the amended para 44, the Management Board approved the Terms of reference as so amended.

ECDC strategic multiannual programme (*document MB9/10*)

32. The Director presented the Centre's strategic multiannual programme for discussion and guidance by the MB. The background of this programme was explained, as it is based on the decisions taken during the 7th MB meeting and the input received after a written consultation. The structure of the current document was then explained, highlighting the main priorities which are divided into two periods: 2007-2009 and 2010-2013, the grouping of the 7 outcome oriented targets and the strategies to achieve them.

33. The MB was asked to give input on the logic, structure and terminology of the document. It was also requested to examine if the priority areas reflect ECDC's main tasks as stated in the Founding Regulation, and if the target setting was appropriate. It was clarified that the targets referred to areas in which ECDC had full responsibility for the outcome, therefore excluding areas of joint work with other organizations.

34. The final approval of this programme should take place in the MB meeting in June.

35. During the discussion round, the document was regarded by several participants as comprehensive, clear and well structured. It was also regarded as an excellent document for discussion. Furthermore, one member of the Board highlighted the importance of the annex and suggested that it be published on ECDC's website.

36. The need for more specific targets and expected outcomes was highlighted, as this will allow for better accountability. It was even suggested to have specific outcomes for each year. More emphasis should be done on timetables and how the programme will be evaluated.

These suggestions were acknowledged by the Director, but clarifying that the indicators rather than the targets would allow for more specifications.

37. Some members of the Board addressed the need to incorporate the issue of immigration and its effect on the reappearance of diseases that were already eradicated in Europe. Regarding this point, the representative of Greece stated that this country has developed a network of health observatories to deal with this issue and offered to share this experience and knowledge with other interested countries. These comments were acknowledged by the Director, adding that the 2007 Work Plan contemplates starting to work on the aforementioned issue but pointing out that the Centre needs to concentrate on its core functions.

38. One member of the Board presented various suggestions that were acknowledged by the Director:

- The document needs to stress more the supplementary role of ECDC to the Member States' work, as it intervenes only when EU wide coordination is requested.
- The section on strengthening the public health functions has a mix-up of interventions and targets.
- The section of enhancing preparedness and response could be more specific on what the current gaps are.
- The section on management and organization needs more attention to the strategy to support and encourage the Centre's staff.
- The annex should provide more emphasis on the top priority diseases at European level, namely TB, STIs, Hepatitis, emerging diseases and zoonoses.

39. Some members of the Board requested clarification on how the outcomes of the Centre's external evaluation will be integrated into this document. The Director felt that when the final outcome of the external evaluation is known, then one would consider whether the strategy document needs any update. It was also highlighted that this document is a point of departure for each annual planning.

40. Comments were stated by the representative of the European Parliament on several issues:

- a. Requested clarification on the role of the AF is in this programme, as this body is related to the Centre's target of improving scientific knowledge.
- b. The soundness of defining the targets only regarding activities where ECDC has full control was challenged, because in future years the joint work of the Centre with other international institutions will increase
- c. More emphasis will be needed as regards the issue of genetic dispositions in relation to the target No. 1 and strategy No. 1 of the document.

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41. The Director acknowledged these comments and informed that the document will also be discussed with the AF.

42. The document was regarded during the discussion round at the MB as very ambitious. This in turn raises the question of the possibility to accomplish all the targets. Strategy No. 1 was considered as an example of this, as it states that ECDC will enhance the knowledge of the health, economic and social impact of CD's in the EU region, a task that was regarded by one of the members of the MB as difficult to achieve even by individual countries, and possibly out of ECDC's remit. Another example of the ambitiousness is found in the training plans, which will require commitment and collaboration from the Member States. The Director acknowledged these comments and stated that the document would be reviewed in light of the input received, adding that the socio-economic determinants were incorporated at the request of the MB but would also be reviewed.

43. It was then discussed that the ambitiousness of this document calls for the setting of priorities. One of the priority areas mentioned was surveillance, which should be more elaborated in this document, in order to achieve better quality and comparability of the surveillance data, not only at EU level but also in the international context. Focus on certain communicable diseases is also needed. The Director offered reassurance that the document would be reviewed in order to focus on the priorities, namely surveillance and being a center of scientific excellence, as well as priority diseases, a matter for review once the Annual Epidemiological Report is finished.

44. Clarification was requested from the floor regarding the relationship with the laboratories and modalities. The Director informed that a laboratory strategy is being developed and will be discussed with the AF in the corresponding May meeting. It will be then presented at the MB meeting in June for further discussion.

45. It was requested by the floor to clarify what is meant in Target No. 3 / Strategy No. 3.2., point 2 "undertake research" as well as Strategy No. 3.3., point 1 "developing public health guidelines and operational policy", where care has to be taken regarding the wording, as ECDC can only issue guidelines but cannot provide policy. This was acknowledged by the Director, stressing that public health guidance is meant and it must be clear that the Center's role is not to issue policy.

46. It was requested that the specialists in infectious diseases, which are the first persons that have contact with the patients, be incorporated in targets No. 4 and 5. They should be included in training initiatives and receive guidelines as they are opinion leaders and subject to the influence of the pharmaceutical industry. The Director accepted that the programme focused on the work with microbiologists and epidemiologists, and promised to discuss this issue with the staff in order to assess how the suggestion can be incorporated into the document.

47. The need for flexibility in this multiannual programme was highlighted by one of the members of the Board, as the expected scientific progress and the development of each country's health care systems in the next years will have an impact on ECDC's task. Therefore, it was suggested to perform a mid-term assessment of the programmer's progress in order to incorporate changes or redefinitions of goals if needed. The suggestion was backed by other members of the Board. The Director affirmed that this document was not "cast in

stone”, therefore it had the flexibility to incorporate changing situations, for example in the public health sector. But she also stressed that this was a vital document for the Centre’s annual planning and a basis for the Work Plans. The Director agreed to the suggestion of performing a mid-term assessment.

48. One representative of the European Commission stated that the relationship between this institution, the ECDC and the Member States needs to be more clearly defined in the document, to highlight ECDC’s added value. Additionally, other issues to be further developed are: Clarification of the Centre’s roles in activities like preparedness and response, tools available for increasing the quality of the relationship with laboratories, resources available for training, approaches to the relationship with neighboring countries and accession candidates.

49. As the issue of communication with the general public was also raised during the discussion, the Director indicated that this important area, which is included in the Centre’s founding Regulation, needs further discussion in a future MB meeting.

50. After the round of discussion, the Director informed that the suggestions presented will be taken into account for the revision of the document. In the June meeting, the MB will be presented with the revised version for other inputs and approval. The Chair suggested that in the documentation to the next Board meeting in June, it be made clear how the comments of the Board have been taken into account. He also stressed the importance of finalizing the discussion of this document at the June meeting. It was so agreed.

Provisional financial accounts 2006 (*document MB9/12*)

51. Jef Maes, Head of the Administrative Services Unit, presented the provisional annual accounts to the MB for information. An outline of their content was presented and the procedures to be followed were briefly explained.

52. It was clarified that the accounts have been sent to the Commission’s accounting officer on 1 March 2007, and they constitute the basis for the second round of audit by the Court of Auditors to take place during March 2007.

53. The MB was informed that the final accounts will be presented at the June meeting of this body.

Expert’s indemnities (*document MB9/9*)

54. A draft decision on expert indemnities for the Centre was presented by Jef Maes, Head of the Administrative Services Unit to the MB for decision. The proposal and rules are based on a previous discussion held by the MB regarding the possibility of paying indemnities to experts for their active work in panels, working groups or committees. The need for such a payment has also been stated by experts chairing ECDC scientific panels and who devote considerable time and input to such groups. During the presentation, it was clarified that the indemnities are not to be paid to participants acting as country representatives (for example

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members of the MB and AF), employees of an EU institution or body, or experts under specific contracts with ECDC for related activities.

55. The Centre proposed that, when the Director establishes through a formal decision a panel, working group or committee, the decision shall include the functions that can be considered for payment of an expert indemnity. The proposed amounts to be paid are set at 300 Euro per day. This amount can be paid for each full day of meeting attendance, and with a possible extension in specific cases for supplementary work, with the maximum number of days equaling the number of meeting days. The total number of expert indemnities received by an individual shall not exceed a maximum of 30 working days per calendar year, and up to 60 days in case of supplementary work. A proof of the active work performed would be required.

56. In answer to a request for clarification from the floor regarding the scope of the indemnity, it was clarified that the proposed 300 Euros are to be understood as compensation for active work. The expert will additionally to this amount receive compensations for other expenses like flights and hotel, as well as the applicable per diem. Also, in principle the indemnities is to be paid for work performed during meetings held in Stockholm, but it could also be paid for meetings held elsewhere, as long as these are being coordinated by ECDC.

57. An extended discussion followed regarding the definition of “active work”, which would entitle an expert to receive an indemnity. Additionally, it was requested to clarify the criteria by which the groups/experts would be subject to the expert’s indemnities.

58. It was explained that the proposal made by ECDC offers a general framework and that later on it will be assessed how the rules apply to each panel, working group or committee through discussions with the Heads of Unit and decision by the Director. It was acknowledged that the definition of “active” needed to be refined, but basically it meant performing activities that gave active input, e.g. chairmanship/moderation, preparing presentations, writing the minutes, etc.. It was also expressed that the experience with this proposed way or working will show if it is being effective, and the MB will be kept informed on progresses in order to give guidance on improvements.

59. As no decision had been reached at this point and Commissioner Kyprianou was about to start his address to the MB, it was proposed to postpone the discussions of this item for the next day.

60. The following day, the Director offered further clarifications regarding the term “active”, considered as the person (e.g. chairman or rapporteur) who produces a tangible piece of work/document subject for deliberation, follow up, preparation. Examples mentioned included the submission of a proposal, production of a draft report, preparation of a written document at the request of a panel. The Director added that flexibility will be needed in order to accommodate other possibilities, but the intention is to reach an agreement in principle with this proposal.

61. Caution was requested by the floor regarding the use of classifications like “passive” expert. To avoid negative connotations in the distinctions, the wording “expert with additional tasks” was proposed, to which the Director agreed.

62. In answer to a question raised from the floor regarding how other agencies have dealt with this issue, the Director explained that other institutions use a similar approach (the Commission has a system of “double per diem” also used by some agencies, others like EFSA have an indemnity system). She then added that the Centre will try to avoid these payments as much as possible and limit them to the bare essentials – and which could mean to drop the provisions for the supplementary work.

63. Members of the Board expressed satisfaction with these clarifications. In order to facilitate the decision taking process, instead of a written procedure it was proposed that the discussions and suggestions be reflected in detail in the minutes that will be circulated as usual to all members of the MB for adoption, and the draft decision will be adapted accordingly. It was so agreed.

Address to the MB by Commissioner Markos Kyprianou

64. The European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Affairs, Markos Kyprianou, was saluted by the Chair and briefed on the recent discussions that had been taking place during this MB meeting. On behalf of the MB, the Chair expressed gratitude for the support that the Commissioner has given to the Centre’s activities. He also expressed the interest of the Board in further discussions with the Commissioner on the issue of ECDC’s remit. An invitation was extended to the Commissioner to visit again the Centre in one year’s time, in order to discuss the progresses achieved by ECDC.

65. The Commissioner thanked for this invitation and highlighted the fast growth of the Centre during its two years of establishment. He stated that after all the work that has been done by the Centre regarding avian flu and a possible pandemic, it is now time to focus on other communicable diseases. As priority areas in this regard he mentioned HIV/AIDS, TB, AMR and vaccine preventable diseases.

66. He expressed his satisfaction with ECDC’s multiannual programme, but called attention to the need of flexibility, in order to be able to adapt to changes in priorities as new diseases appear.

67. He acknowledged the Centre’s good cooperation with other bodies and the fact that it has established itself within the Member States at the political and scientific level, adding that the Centre’s activities will in turn lead to more acknowledgment by the European public.

68. He cautioned about the issue of the Centre’s competences, stressing the need to avoid overlapping with other bodies’ responsibilities. This can be solved via cooperation and remembering that ECDC does not replace but add value and assist Member States when measures or actions are needed at European level.

69. He also reflected on the importance of cooperation with Member States, with ECDC playing a leading role in gaining more visibility as a European Health Agency that offers unbiased scientific information that is the base for decisions. The importance of cooperation with EU institutions, neighboring countries, other organizations like the African Union and

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with organizations that have similar goals as ECDC, like the US CDC in Atlanta, was also highlighted.

70. The importance of the communication to the public was another topic highlighted by the Commissioner. Transparency is needed to give reassurance to the public, offering information but avoiding panic. In the communication strategy, the coordination of actions with the European Commission and the national health authorities or institutes in the member States is vital.

71. Credibility is a key word in the Centre's activities, stated the Commissioner. Because other institutions rely on ECDC's objective advice, procedures like the selection of experts or scientific panels need to be well scrutinized.

72. Given the amount of responsibility that has been trusted upon the Centre, this organization cannot mature gradually, said the Commissioner. The health threats are there and call for fast and effective action.

73. To conclude his address, the Commissioner thanked ECDC for its good work.

74. A discussion round then took place, with members of the Board expressing their gratitude for the Commissioners support and raising some comments and questions. The importance of the risk communication was discussed, taking into account the necessary distinction from risk management, the latter not being under ECDC's remit. In crisis situations it is important to offer scientific assessment and information quickly. The Commissioner stated that, as the Centre is growing and moving into other diseases other than influenza, it has the challenge of assessing how to allocate the resources effectively while being able to deal with the unpredictable.

75. The Director added further information on ECDC's activities. Regarding cooperation, it was informed that the Center is concentrating in the EU region, but also shares with other organizations and regions at the level of information exchange. Regarding communication issues, she acknowledged that this constitutes a main challenge, where transparency is vital but the correct interpretation by the media of ECDC's information needs also to be assured. On this same issue, she expressed that a constant exchange takes place with the European Commission to agree on key messages and timelines. The Centre will continue to develop its activities in this field, increasingly reaching a larger audience, a task in which the development of the multilingual website will play a key role. She acknowledged that the Centre is ambitious in its planning, and reported on the progress done in areas like surveillance, scientific advice and the forthcoming publication of the first Annual Epidemiological Report.

Designation of competent bodies (*document MB9/7*)

76. The Director presented for approval by the MB an update on the situation of the designation of competent bodies (CB), following previous discussions by the MB. An overview of the Centre's bodies and their role was given, as well as a large definition of CB, their role and functions and possible institutions that could qualify as CB. It was explained that the Member States have the task to officially appoint the CB, while the MB is responsible

for compiling and publishing the list of CB, an activity to be completed at the June MB meeting. It was mentioned that the Working Group that has dealt with this issue has recommended that each country should in principle try and appoint no more than 4 CB, to cover the issues of scientific advice, preparedness and response, as well as communication and surveillance.

77. Some clarification was requested from the floor regarding the designation process of a CB by the Member States, especially when several institutions would qualify, particularly in the area of scientific advice. The Director acknowledged that depending on country specificities the situation may vary. It was discussed that a consistent approach is needed and that the focus should be on institutions with a coordinating role at the national level.

78. A discussion on the best and most practical approach to request the official designation by the Member States followed. It was agreed that ECDC would write a letter to each member of the Board with a request to designate the CB through official channels, compliance with the formal procedures stated in ECDC's Founding Regulation had to be ensured, therefore, the letter had to include clear feedback mechanisms. The Chair reinforced that an official acknowledgment of the Member States of the appointment needs to be sent back to the Centre, signed by the corresponding authority. In those cases where the member of the Board is in the national Ministry of Health, a reply from this person on behalf of the competent authority would be valid). If the member of the Board is in another health institution, the formal procedure coming from the Ministry of Health is needed.

ECDC Internal rules (*document MB9/6*)

79. Jef Maes, Head of the Administrative Services Unit, explained during his presentation that the Centre's internal processes are reaching a level of stability which calls for a systematic and harmonized formalization in a set of internal procedures. As some decisions on administrative procedures could be delegated to the Director, in order to concentrate the work of the MB on strategic issues, approval was requested from the MB in three areas: the definition of the Centre's internal rules, authorization for the Director to approve decisions on implementing rules related to staff regulations, and delegation to the Director to adopt amendments to the Centre's financial rules and related implementing rules.

80. Clarification was requested from the floor regarding the legitimacy of this delegation of responsibilities. One representative of the European Commission replied that this institution has requested clarification from legal advisors on the delegation of responsibility regarding the financial rules and staff regulations, so this matter has not been completely clarified yet. The Centre's Director assured that the issue had been discussed with DG Admin and among agencies, but since there was no time pressure to decide on this, it was suitable to wait for the Commissions clarification and then proceed with the approval, either by written procedure or during the MB meeting in June.

Director's Annual Report of the Centre 2006 (*document MB9/5*)

81. The Director presented for adoption by the Board the final draft of the Annual Report, in which the comments and suggestions made at the 8th meeting of the MB and subsequent comments have been incorporated. The ECDC Regulation calls for this document to be approved by 30 March. An overview of the content was provided. Attention was called to an error in one of the headings: "Annex 6 – ECDC Budget Summary 2005" on page 58 (67) should read 2006 instead. It was added that a leaflet for information to reach the general public would be produced, and also a short version of this annual Report.

82. One of the representatives of the European Commission informed of some minor editorial comments to add, not to be discussed at this meeting, and requested input on how to incorporate them.

83. Several members of the Board expressed their congratulations for this report and raised some questions. Among the topics discussed was the issue of how to use this document to communicate the Centre's achievements to the general public, and the vice-Chair proposed to hold a press conference or issue a press release in all Member States, in conjunction with the launch of the Annual Epidemiological Report. Another member of the Board stated that the document should serve, in a shorter version, to communicate with the scientific community and the institutions that have provided the Centre with data.

84. Some clarification regarding the communication strategy for this document was requested. Clarification was also asked regarding the language policy for the planned shorter versions.

85. The Director took note of the suggestions and clarified the targets and language policy for the two shorter versions: One short version was for the professional community and Competent Bodies, in English, and would offer feedback on how the Centre has worked with the data provided and ensure accountability. Another version would target the general public; therefore it would be published in all official languages. For the launch of this document in each country, the help of the MB and AF would be needed, also by involving the corresponding EU Delegation in their countries.

86. Some members of the Board raised their concern that the content of the Director's Annual Report per se was not of sufficient interest for the general public, therefore information about this should be given in conjunction with other announcements. Therefore, a better approach would be to link the information with the launch of outputs that show the added value of the Centre's activities for the European Union, like the Annual Epidemiological Report. It was so agreed.

Preliminary draft budget and establishment plan 2008 (*document MB9/11*)

87. An estimate of revenue and expenditure for next year including a draft establishment plan discussed with the European Commission was presented by Jef Maes, Head of the Administrative Services Unit, to the MB for decision and subsequent forwarding to the Commission, in compliance with the Centre's Founding Regulations.

88. Requests were raised from the floor regarding the interest in receiving more details about the allocation of the budget and human resources, including distribution of the staff in the different Units, the priorities of actions and planned activities. The Director replied that this will be done, and Jef Maes clarified that via an internal process this document will be further refined. He added that the priorities are reflected in the Work Plans, as well as the allocation of budget, and explained further steps of approval of this budget by the European Parliament.

89. The Director explained that the approval of the Work Plans will take place at an earlier stage this year, in order to facilitate contracting activities. Priorities for 2008 will be discussed in the MB meeting in June, and in the MB meeting in December all the details regarding allocation of budget and resources will be available. She then highlighted the importance of having the multiannual strategic planning approved in the June meeting.

90. A representative of the European Commission requested that for the discussion of the Work Plans in June the allocation of resources, including number of staff to work on the different tasks, be included.

91. The Director then requested to reach a gentleman's agreement to put forward to the European Parliament this budget. As doubts were raised concerning the need to vote on this issue, the Director clarified that the MB only needs to approve the ceiling established in this draft budget in agreement with the European Commission.

92. The vice-Chair consequently suggested that it had to be clarified that this item was for information purposes only.

Annual Epidemiological Report (*document MB9/13*)

93. Andrea Ammon, Head of the Surveillance and Communication Unit presented the status of the report, of which the members of the Board received a draft print for information. It was stressed that comments are welcome. It was also explained that previous comments from AF and MB have been added, data has been updated with the feedback given by Member States, graphs have been simplified and chapters 4, 9 and 11 have been added.

94. The time frame was then presented: An official country consultation will be performed for final accuracy check, with comments expected by the 16th of April. Those countries that want to update data need to contact Andrew Amato, Deputy Head of the aforementioned Unit. The aim is to launch the report tentatively on the 4th of June, together with the European Commission and the German Minister of Health. Additionally, a separate executive summary and a short leaflet will be produced.

95. During the discussion, some concerns were raised from the floor regarding problems with the data of some countries, with figures missing, incomplete or inconsistent. Furthermore, clarification on data sources was requested. Therefore each country needs to check the accuracy of the data with their state authorities.

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96. One member of the Board recommended that the input given from the AF while discussing this document be informed to the MB, in order to avoid redundancies.

97. Concerns were raised regarding the possibility that, if media starts to compare the figures among countries without taking into account differences in data collection, diagnosis or case reporting, possible misleading and negative information on the situation in individual countries may be released. Therefore, the figures presented need to clearly address these differences. But it needs also to be considered that for the general public a plethora of explanations won't be of interest, therefore the way of presenting the results to the larger audience needs to be well analyzed. Hence the importance of the short version of this report.

98. Some members of the Board considered that the differences in data in turn can be regarded as a reflection of the added value of this report, as it serves to highlight to the Member States the importance of the harmonization of data and the integration of the epidemiological surveillance. This publication will give an incentive to progress further in this area.

99. In response to the different comments, Andrea Ammon explained that some concerns raised during the discussion are addressed in the document. As much as possible the incidence was taken into account while preparing the tables and descriptions of the surveillance system of countries are available. Therefore, the reader will be informed that the data doesn't come from comparable systems. Each Member State needs to confirm if the information provided is correct. Regarding sources, it was explained that the data was collected from the Chief Medical Officers and if other data is available this should be notified in due time. It was acknowledged that this report serves to highlight the need for more data comparability and more information on how the diagnostics are done in each country.

100. The Director gave further details on the process of data collection. This was done a year ago through a formal letter. During the meeting of the MB last year, in Greece, it was agreed that the MB would perform now a last review of this report. Regarding the chapters that are not yet ready, it was informed that for 9.1 and 9.3 the AF is giving input, and work is still ongoing on chapter 11.

101. Regarding the comments made by the floor on communication issues, Andrea Ammon acknowledged that care has to be taken so as not to affect through this report those countries that have better surveillance systems. The information to the public should focus in a positive way on the need to achieve comparability of data. The Director added that the report itself is not intended for the general public, as the leaflet will serve for this purpose, and the communication strategy will be well planned.

102. One member of the MB stated that transparency will be vital when launching the report. As it will be the first report of this kind, the health authorities of the countries need to be prepared for questioning by the media. It was suggested that journalists specialized in health issues from the different countries be invited by ECDC to a briefing for a thorough presentation of the report.

103. The document was regarded by members of the Board as an excellent source of information and great effort has been put into its preparation. It reflects clearly ECDC's duty.

The representative of the European Parliament recommended that the preface be used to address the different comments raised during this discussion.

104. At the closing of the discussion round, the Chair encouraged the members of the Board to inform their national authorities the issues raised here.

Other matters

105. The Director presented a draft memorandum of understanding between ECDC and the Public Health Agency of Canada. If no objections were raised this would be signed in April when they meet in China.

106. The Director also gave feedback on the cooperation with the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/EURO), and explained that good collaboration was already in place at a political and strategic level, but that closer links now need to be forged at the operational level.

107. Members of the Board fully supported this collaboration, but they felt that they would need to have a more active consideration of the strategic dimensions. The Director agreed with the comments and suggested that this relationship with WHO be part of the external relations strategy that was promised in the last meeting.

108. The Director informed the Board that an application for funds had been made to DG Enlargement. Responding to comments from the floor, she apologized that the Board had not been consulted in advance as would normally be the case, but that the Centre had only one day to submit the application and it was felt that it was important not to miss this opportunity.

109. The representative of Austria informed that preparations are underway for the next MB meeting to take place in Vienna, 14-15 June 2007.

On behalf of the Management Board

Marc Sprenger
Chairman of ECDC Management Board