



EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK

MINUTES OF THE 6TH MEETING OF THE BOARD OF THE EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK, BILBAO, 13-14 FEBRUARY 1997

Introduction and Apologies

1. The Chairman, Mr Weber, welcomed those present and noted apologies from:

- M. Sauber (employers, Luxembourg);
- Mr Zimalis (employers, Greece), for whom Mr Tsamasopoulos was substituting;
- Mme Corman (employers' organisations at European level), for whom M. Richard was substituting;
- Mr Walsh (Government, Ireland) for whom Dr Wood was substituting;
- Dr Kreizberg (Germany, employers), and his alternate;
- Mr Opfermann and Dr Fuhrmann from the German Government, for whom Mrs Rueckert was substituting;
- Mr Larsson and Dr Hunter from the European Commission.

He also welcomed the new representative of the Portuguese Government, Sr. Cabral, who had replaced Sr. Durao. (Attendance List attached at Annex 1.)

Item 1: Adoption of the Draft Agenda (A/97/1A (revised))

2. The Chairman explained that the Agenda was set out in such a way as to facilitate quick agreement on uncontentious matters ('A' points), thus allowing enough time for full discussion of important topics (B points). A revised Agenda had been tabled which moved the 1997 Budget to a 'B' point.

The Board adopted the revised Agenda.

A Points

Item 2: Adoption of the draft Minutes of the last meeting, 6-7 November 1996 (A/97/1M)

3. M. Boisnel (Government representative, France), notified a written amendment of his statement as Chairman of the Board of the Dublin Foundation (point 14.2). Sr. Hortigüela (Government representative, Spain) stated that the technical support that might be provided to the Agency was through the National Institute for Safety and Hygiene at Work and not for the new building (Item 9). Sr. Muñoz (Employers, Spain) said that his remarks about the role of the Basque government in contributing to the rent

of Gran Vía 33 had been inaccurately translated from English to Spanish (a written amendment was submitted - also item 9).

Subject to these amendments, the minutes were adopted.

Item 3: Review of Mandates (A/97/1)

4. The Board agreed that the following mandates had been discharged:

- that of 26 October 1995 to Mr Larsson to carry out financial operations on behalf of the Agency;
- that of the role of the Bureau (working group) had been discharged in all but the first point - to prepare meetings of the Board - which was a continuing responsibility;
- the second mandate of 7 November 1996, for the Bureau to approve the 1996 Annual Report.

The mandate for the infrastructure group remained in force, although the nature of its work would alter now that the question of the Agency's medium term accommodation had been settled.

Item 4: Annual Report 1996 (A/97/2)

5. The Board noted that this had been approved, subject to some minor textual amendments submitted by the European Commission.

Item 5: Draft Statement of Revenue and Expenditure 1998 (A/97/4.1)

6. The Chairman explained that this paper had to be submitted to the European Commission by 31 March each year. He invited Mr Oostens, from the Commission, to explain the background.

7. Mr Oostens said that the Commission had had an initial debate on the priorities for 1998; its overall budget would have to reflect austerity measures. A year-on-year increase of 3% per annum was envisaged, but since this included 7-8% increases for structural funds, it implied an increase of only 0.5% for other budgets, including Category III (Internal lines) which covered safety and health. Within that Title the EC had prioritised TENS, SMEs and research, which further reduced the cash available to safety and health and other internal lines. Any increase for the Agency would be at the expense of other headings under the same Category. However it should be recognised that the Agency was still in its 'building up' phase, which required increased appropriations.

8. The Board agreed the draft Statement of Revenue and Expenditure.

B Points

Item 6: Budget 1997 (A/97/3)

9. Introducing the item, the Director explained that although the Agency's Board, the Commission, ECOSOC, the European Parliament's Social Affairs Committee and the Council had supported a budget of 5 mecu for the Agency for 1997, the European Parliament's Budget Committee had reduced it to 3 mecu with 1 mecu in reserve. This did not reflect hostility towards the Agency, but caution in wanting to ensure that it would work before giving it more money. Parliament Members had suggested to him that it would be reasonable to ask for the release of the extra 1 mecu. The extra mecu would be devoted mainly to financing operations, as the Parliament had stipulated that it should be spent on operations related to the work programme. He explained that it had been possible to relieve pressure on the 1997 Budget by committing some 320,000-340,000 ecu from the 1996 Budget on operations; so nearly 1 mecu would be spent on operations in 1997. The extra 1 mecu, if obtained, would allow him to increase the staffing of the Agency to a total of some 10% less than originally planned; the recruitment of staff would be gradual so that it could be halted if insufficient funds were available. Without the 1 mecu the Agency would be able to work and show some results, but not to implement fully the Work Programme for 1996-97; some activities, for example certain meetings and the production of a periodical, had been cut, and as a general result, the network would be delayed. In order to ask the European Parliament for release of the reserve, the 1997 budget for operations would be committed in the first months of this year. The proposed strategy, though risky, was the only realistic way to proceed. The Parliament had said, in their comment accompanying the Budget, that they might release more money later in the year, and the Bureau should consider if the Agency should ask for more.

10. Mr Oostens, representing the European Commission, confirmed that the strategy reflected his advice; if the money in reserve was released, the Agency would have to ask the EC formally to make a transfer to the Agency's Budget line. In response to a question from Dr Asherson, representing the employers, he explained that the Agency could generate its own revenue by sales, for example, if it wished, although this was not easy.

11. The Board agreed unanimously the strategy recommended by the Director, and agreed a Mandate for the Bureau to oversee the carrying out of the strategy (attached at Annex 2).

Item 7: Draft Four-Year Rolling Programme, 1998-2001: Preliminary Discussion (A/97/5)

12. Introducing the paper, the Director emphasised that it was a first draft of a programme which did not have to be finalised until November, and that it had necessarily had to be written without external input or a 'history' of activity by the Agency. The Programme was divided into three sections:

- development of the network, including the Internet links, the priority task for 1996/97;

- information services, for example a safety and health bulletin, a report on the state of safety in the EU every two years, conferences, exhibitions, etc.;
- information projects under six headings.

The Board were asked to look particularly at the proposed structure of the Programme, at the priorities as between the network, services and projects and at Chapter 4, which went beyond existing activity plans. (A revised version, taking account of comments from the European Commission, had been tabled.) He hoped to have contributions to the planning process from a wide range of other bodies in the forthcoming months - the Bureau had already provided some useful ideas.

13. Mr Haigh, representing the European Commission, said that the Commission appreciated the hard work that had gone into drafting the programme, and that the Director had heeded earlier comments by the Commission. However the rolling programme formed the basis for the Agency's annual work programmes, and should therefore be based on what activities would be practicable within the available budgets. Also, the Commission thought that the programme went beyond the role of the Agency as defined in the Regulation. Information needs could only be defined in dialogue with the political authorities in the Community. Chapter 4 should be completely redrafted, and it was for the Commission to decide how the Commission services should be involved in consultation on the programme, and how the Advisory Committee should be consulted. Nevertheless DG V looked forward to cooperation with the Agency and had already suggested some items of work it could carry out.

14. Dr Asherson (employers) welcomed the Programme as a positive start, although the employers believed that it should be more modest and better focused. However they also wanted the Agency to be innovative and helpful, within the terms of the Regulation. The Agency could help to promote greater consistency between Member States who were at different stages on the health and safety 'learning curve'. It should demonstrate its value for money by providing information in a user-friendly way; the network should be an absolute priority. There was some scepticism about the value of a periodical although the need for short-term visibility was accepted. The employers would submit detailed comments by mid-April.

15. Mr Wilders (workers) said that his group welcomed the draft as stimulating and ambitious. Accepting that plans would have to fit with the available budget, he welcomed the intention to do as much work as possible. If it was thought that the programme was not aligned with the Regulation, some minor redrafting could prevent confusion. A newsletter/periodical could be successful if it addressed itself to individuals' needs to find out where information on specific topics could be found. The workers' group wished to debate the draft programme further and respond in detail before summer.

16. Mr Laterveer (Netherlands), representing the Government group, said that the group was pleased with the draft programme; it was very ambitious, which was not a bad thing at this stage. However they considered that it set out to do too much at once, there was a need to set priorities, and the first priority should be to establish the network to link existing information. The Focal Points were at the heart of the network and should become operational quickly.

17. In conclusion, the Chairman said that the discussion had been helpful and that much thinking about the programme had taken place in the groups. More detailed written comments should be submitted by June so that a redraft of the document could be done. The Board noted, with approval, the Chairman's conclusions.

Item 8: Draft Financial Statement 1998 (A/97/4)

18. Mr Oostens explained that by 31 January each year the Agency was obliged to produce a statement of revenue and expenditure after approval by the Administrative Board - this had been done. The Agency had to present a preliminary budget to the Commission, which would prepare a financial statement for the PDB. This draft would be a useful basis from which the Commission could work, subject to clarification from the Agency about the proposed number of staff.

The Board noted the paper.

Item 9: Report from Focal Points meeting, 14-15 January 1997 (A/97/6)

19. Introducing the paper, the Director emphasised the importance of this first meeting of the Focal Points, at which 13 Member States had been represented (the other two came later to a separate meeting). Future Focal Point meetings would be arranged in sequence with Bureau and Board meetings to create a circle of information and decision-making. The Agency also planned to convene six 'thematic networks' which would each produce information on areas defined in the Rolling Work Programme, based on those set out in the Regulation. Two early projects had been identified for the first of these networks (national priorities and programmes): national safety and health priorities for the next ten years; and safety and health as an economic factor. It was necessary to start the work of the Agency through 'people' networks as it would be some time before the electronic system was operational. Although there had been some criticism that the planned number of thematic network meetings was too many - and the original schedule had been cut back - it was vital that the Agency should start this work now.

20. Dr Asherson (employers) said that it was important that the Board members should know what was happening in Focal Point meetings, although they should not seek to interfere in the business. She suggested that the Board interest groups should have representatives in the meetings to provide a link. The employers gave cautious support to the priorities as outlined for thematic groups; national priorities and programmes followed by research and practical solutions.

21. Mr Wilders (workers) said at this stage they could not say what they thought should be priorities, though they agreed it was essential to set up a group on the Internet, and agreed that national priorities and programmes was important. In this exercise, it should be borne in mind that not only the Governments' views of priorities should be examined, but also the views of social partners at national level. Work on practical measures and solutions was important, and could be linked closely to the development of the Agency's Internet links and Homepage. He wanted the subject of possible interest group representation at thematic groups to be considered at the next Board

meeting. The social partners should also have some input to the document on basic requirements.

22. Mr Laterveer (Governments) said that the thematic group programme should begin more slowly, in view of the pressures on resources of the Member States' safety and health authorities; one group (national Priorities and programmes) could begin now as a pilot.

23. Mr Costa Tavares (workers, Portugal) commented that there would be difficulties in using only English as the working language for Focal Point meetings. Mr Clifton (UK Government) said that the Agency should be flexible in its demands on Focal Points, who were structured differently in various Member States - the 'requirements' should be redrafted more on the lines of guidance. He thought that the group meeting the following week should help to identify themes on which the Agency could help Member States and the Commission. M. Boissel (France, government) and Dr Wood (Ireland, government) supported the view that the Agency should prioritise one thematic group at this stage, and M. Boissel added that the 'Basic Requirements' should reflect the Agency's role as well as the responsibilities of the Focal Points.

24. Mr Haigh (European Commission) said that the proposed thematic groups on Community Strategy and Programmes, and Legislation, posed problems for the Commission and he doubted if they could do useful work in the short term because of other schedules (e.g. of the Advisory Committee).

25. In response, the Director thanked the Board for its constructive comments and guidance, and particularly for its support of the proposed network structure and the clear priorities for the thematic network development. He said that the proposed schedule of meetings was to be revised anyway after the Focal Point meeting, and the six subject areas would be reviewed as part of the work on the four-year rolling work programme. The Agency had already undertaken to provide a revised draft of the 'Basic Requirements' to the next Focal Point meeting. The proposed group on Community policy and strategy would meet only if requested by the Commission. The Focal Points themselves would have to handle more information requests if there were to be fewer thematic groups.

26. In conclusion, the Chairman said that representatives of the social partners, and the Commission, could attend Focal Point meetings as observers, to aid transparency. It was important that the social partners felt involved in the information-gathering process; the proposed user panels in Member States had a key role in this. It was also important to note that countries were saying that they needed more time to contribute, though they were not questioning the aims of the Agency or its means of achieving the aims. He drew attention to the changes the Government group had suggested to the paper on 'basic requirements' for the Focal points. In particular, the point about the use of English as the sole working language should be deleted. The thematic network group on national priorities and programmes should be the first priority, and could meet twice before the summer, and the two second priorities should be research and practical measures. Further groups could meet this year, but their identity could be considered by the Bureau at a later stage. The Board noted, with approval, the Chairman's conclusions.

Item 10: Date of Next Meeting

27. The Chairman explained that the date set for the autumn 1997 meeting of the Administrative Board clashed with that of the Advisory Committee. He therefore proposed that the date for the next meeting should be 18 and 19 November 1997.

This was agreed unanimously by the Board.

Item 11: Any Other Business

28. The Chairman drew attention to the amount of resources involved in the despatch of 96 sets of papers for every Board meeting, and asked members to indicate if in future they would be willing to receive papers by E:mail. Members were asked to complete a pro-forma in response to this.

29. The Chairman informed the Board that Commissioner Flynn was to visit the Agency in Bilbao on 2 May.

30. The Chairman also informed the Board that on 15 or 16 September 1997 it was hoped to organise a 'relaunch' event in Bilbao to mark the Agency's move to new premises; the Luxembourg Prime Minister/Minister of Labour in his Presidency role could attend. This event could be a half day seminar held at the new Guggenheim Museum. The Director said that Board members would be invited although the Agency could not pay their expenses.

31. The Chairman notified the Board that the next Bureau meetings would be 3-4 June and sometime between 15 and 17 September.

32. Mr Haigh, representing the European Commission, informed the Board that there would be a European Week of Safety and Health 20-24 October 1997, and a Film Festival in May 1998.

33. The Director presented a logo designed for the Agency, which was accepted by the Board.

34. The Board was informed about the commitments made by the Agency on the 1996 Budget.

Secretariat
Bilbao 1997

EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK

Bilbao, 14 February 1997

Mandate No.1

To oversee the carrying out of the strategy outlined in A/97/3 for ensuring the release of the 1 mecu in reserve on the Agency's budget for 1997.