

(Revitalized) Task-Force of the OIE regional Commission for Europe for improving regional participation in the OIE standard setting

Second meeting (RCG2) - 18 & 19 April 2017 - Riga / Latvia **Report (Final)**

The second meeting of the Revitalized Task Force took place in Riga / Latvia on 18 and 19 April 2017, at the invitation of the President of the OIE regional Commission for Europe, Dr Maris Balodis. For the records, the first meeting (RTF1) had taken place in Belgrade / Serbia on 20 and 21 December 2016, during which the main mandate and modus operandi of the Task-Force had been presented and discussed. In particular, the first drafts of the Terms of Reference of the Task-Force as well as of a Regional Strategic Framework for Europe had been proposed, and a tentative list of the OIE Code and Manual Chapters that could possibly be discussed and supported on behalf of the 53 Member Countries of Europe had also been agreed. Moreover, a Task-Force teleconference had been organised end of February just prior to the OIE Council Meeting to discuss a few items and notably the new procedure for the selection of candidates for the OIE Specialist commissions, to bring the positions of Europe at the 2017 February Council meeting through Dr Schwabenbauer (Germany).

The objectives of the second meeting were to finalise the drafts of the Task-Force Terms of reference and the regional Work Plan Framework for Europe and to discuss the content of the selected OIE Code and Manual Chapters, with a view to possibly reaching a consensus for their support on behalf of the 53 countries of Europe during the 85th OIE General Session in May 2017. More generally, this meeting was considered as a preparation of the meeting of the OIE regional Commission for Europe to be held in Paris on 22 May.

Summary

All Members attended except Dr Schwabenbauer, Dr Nepoklonov and Dr Plavsic, Delegates of Germany, Russia and Serbia respectively. However, Dr Schwabenbauer could attend partially the meeting by teleconference. The meeting was chaired by Dr Maris Balodis, in his capacity as President of the Bureau of the OIE regional Commission for Europe (and de facto of the Task-Force).

▪ General

It was proposed to rename the Task-Force as **Regional Core Group (RCG)** of the OIE regional Commission for Europe, inspired by a similar initiative in Asia. The first and second meetings of the Revitalised Task Force will therefore be abbreviated as RCG1 and RCG2 respectively.

▪ RCG *modus operandi*

The Draft RCG Terms of Reference (ToRs), initially prepared by Dres M. Balodis and U. Herzog and commented quite extensively during the RCG1 were discussed again, with no significant change. They had been circulated for comments to all 53 Delegates of Europe by email on 7 March 2017, with no feed-back received. The need for more regular exchanges of information between the RCG and the OIE Member Countries of Europe was however re-emphasized. The ToRs will be proposed for adoption during the meeting of the regional Commission for Europe in May 2017.

Proposed Actions:

Action 1 → [RCG Secretariat] To finalise the ToRs on the basis of the RCG2 discussions and present them for adoption during the 85th OIE General Session (May 2017).

▪ **Regional Work Plan Framework for Europe**

A draft Regional Work Plan Framework for Europe for 2017-2020, initially prepared by Dres M. Balodis and U. Herzog and commented also quite comprehensively during the RCG₁ was discussed again. They had been circulated for comments to all 53 Delegates of Europe by email on 7 March 2017, with no feed-back received. Its overall objective is to improve the regional governance of the OIE, encouraging a more active participation of the OIE Member Countries in the definition of regional priorities and thereby, of activities to be carried out. Very few changes were proposed, mainly editorial. The Regional Work Plan Framework for Europe will be proposed for adoption during the meeting of the regional Commission for Europe in May 2017.

Proposed Actions:

Action 2 → [RCG Secretariat] To finalise the Regional Work Plan Framework on the basis of the RCG₂ discussions and present them for adoption during the 85th OIE General Session (May 2017).

▪ **Discussion on selected OIE Code and Manual Chapters of regional importance**

Based on the list of OIE Code and Manual chapters selected during the RCG₁ (14 in total), Dr M. Klemm (EC) presented the main changes proposed for adoption during the 85th OIE General Session in May 2017. The Chapters on African swine fever and Lumpy skin diseases had been translated into Russian thanks to the support from Latvia, and circulated to the Russian speaking countries together with the other chapters in English. The process for improved regional participation in OIE standard setting led by the RCG is described as an Annex of the RCG ToRs.

The main discussion points included:

- The need to prepare Speaking Notes (Secretariat with EC Support) including a strong rationale for support or not of each Chapter on behalf of the 53 countries in Europe;
- The Table below summarises the discussions on each Chapter as well as the proposed regional position:

Items for Member Country comment and proposed for adoption in May 2017	Part A: Annex No.	Decision for regional support (YES / NO)	Rationale for decision (to be included in the Speaking Note)
Draft new chapter on criteria for assessing the safety of commodities (Chapter 2.X.)	Annex 8	Yes	Proposes a general and standardized approach that will serve as a basis for all specific disease chapters across the Codes
Draft new chapter on prevention, detection and control of <i>Salmonella</i> in cattle (Chapter 6.X.)	Annex 10	Yes	Important in terms of veterinary public health in Europe.
Draft new chapter on prevention, detection and control of <i>Salmonella</i> in pigs (Chapter 6.Y.)	Annex 11	Yes	Important in terms of veterinary public health in Europe.
Welfare of working equids (Chapter 7.12.)	Annex 13	Yes	Very few comments compared to 2016 Important in the context of the 2nd Action Plan (2017-2019) of the OIE Platform on animal welfare for Europe (as the welfare of working equids is proposed to be also addressed)
Draft new chapter on infection with <i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i> complex (Chapter 8.X.)	Annex 14	Yes	No significant changes provided, but basically the merging of 2 existing chapters (for bovines and wild cervidae) into one single chapter
Infection with Avian influenza viruses (Article 10.4.25.)	Annex 15	Yes	Small change in article 10.4.25 that supports the use of equivalence of treatments when scientifically demonstrated; important for international trade. Strong need for an in-depth review of the whole chapter in the coming years as the interpretation

			of the current chapter has proven difficult and led to inconsistent implementation by member countries resulting in severe trade restrictions
Infection with Lumpy skin disease (Chapter 11.11.)	Annex 16	No (Pending clarifications)	Fast track procedure recommended during the 27 th Conference of the OIE regional Commission for Europe (Lisbon, September 2016) and the GF-TADs for Europe SGE LSD meetings, in light of the recent epidemiological situation prevailing in south east Europe since 2015 Some questions discussed at the meeting in Riga remained to be clarified, therefore the Task Force could not at that time suggest support of the Region for this chapter [to be discussed again on 22 May in Paris]
Infection with African swine fever virus (Chapter 15.1.)	Annex 18	Yes	The proposed changes should help affected countries of Europe overcome trade restrictions related to this disease
Draft new chapter on infection with porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome virus (Chapter 15.X.)	Annex 19	Yes	The proposed changes should facilitate the international trade of fresh pig meat (not a risk for international spread of the agent).

Proposed Actions:

- Action 3** → To prepare Speaking Notes in support of the 13 Chapters and circulate it to all 53 countries of Europe for comments before the OIE General Session;
- Action 4** → To present those Speaking Notes during the OIE 85th General Session.

Nota bene:

- OIE Report of the Code Commission (February 2017) is available at : <http://www.oie.int/international-standard-setting/specialists-commissions-groups/code-commission-reports/meetings-reports/> ;
- EU comments and position papers on issues discussed in the OIE are available at: http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/international_affairs/standard_setting_bodies/oie/eu-comments_en
- The Russian translations should be provided to OIE Headquarters, to facilitate the translation of the 2017 version of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

▪ **Technical items for the 2019 General Session and the 28th Conference of the Regional Commission for Europe**

A new procedure was recently proposed by OIE Headquarters to ensure a more active participation of OIE Member Countries in the selection of the Technical Items (with questionnaire), both for the OIE General Sessions and the OIE Regional conferences, which could include the following steps:

- Prior to the meetings of the Regional Commissions: the OIE regional and sub-regional Representations contact the representatives of the Council from their respective region as well as the Bureau of the Regional Commission to propose a list of possible topics, to be circulated to the Member Countries of the Regional Commission for possible comments (clarification; additions; etc); a list of 3 topics per event is made final by the Bureau;
- During the meetings of the Regional Commissions: the Members of the Regional Commissions select one topic (out of the three proposals) per event.

The RCG2 was the ideal arena to conduct the first 'step' and the following preliminary list of Technical Items was established (the list of Technical Items selected since 1999 had been provided by the RCG Secretariat to avoid the selection of Technical Items recently addressed):

- For the 87th OIE General Session:
 - Animal Health and Animal Welfare Private standards / OIE standards
 - Novel feed for animal production opportunities
 - Genetic selection for AH and AW purposes - opportunities and potential risks
 - Electronic certification for animal and animal product trade : opportunities and challenges

- For the 28th conference of the Regional Commission for Europe:
 - Use of social media in communicating on animal health and welfare
 - Application of biosecurity in different production systems at individual, country, regional level
 - Vector borne diseases : monitoring, risk assessment and preventive and control options

Proposed Actions:

Action 5 → [RCG Secretariat] To circulate the preliminary lists of Technical Items to the 53 Member Countries of Europe, for comments;

Action 6 → [RCG] Depending on the comments from the Member Countries (see Action 5), to select three Technical Items per event and present those during the meeting of the Regional Commission for Europe (May 2017) for final selection (1 topic per event).

▪ **Agenda for Meeting of the OIE Regional Commission for Europe**

The agenda of the meeting of the Regional Commission for Europe (Paris, 22 May pm) had already been prepared by the OIE and shared with the Bureau of the Regional Commission for Europe for comments. The RCG2 was however a good opportunity to discuss it again and get wider approval.

The main discussion points included:

- There is a need to have two separate blocks of items : those for 'discussion' and those for 'information';
- Discussion time should only be accommodated for Items for discussions.

Proposed Actions:

Action 7 → [RCG Secretariat] To reshape the agenda according to the RCG2 Discussions and submit it to OIE management for approval

Nota bene: in the future, it will be worth better scheduling the preparation of the Regional Commission meeting agendas by the Regional Core Group (id est planning the RCG meeting in a more timely manner).

▪ **OIE Council reports**

Dr Karin Schwabenbauer, member of the OIE Council, presented (via Skype) the main outcomes of the last OIE Council meeting (February 2017). She particularly emphasized the willingness from OIE to improve procedures aiming at a more robust and transparent system, notably regarding:

- The procedures of the OIE official status recognition;
- The selection of candidates for the OIE Specialist Commissions (this had already been discussed in the RCG1 and the RCG Teleconference in February 2017);
- The OIE General Session (SOPs are being developed);
- The OIE human Resource policy;
- The OIE IT policy.

Those 'topics' had been selected following an internal auditing system extended beyond budgetary and financial processes, during which risks were mapped and 'risk owners' identified.

Dr Schwabenbauer also insisted on the budgetary aspects, with the urgent need to find the necessary budget for (i) the renovation of WAHIS (total cost estimated to 11 million euros), and more generally (ii) the sustainability of the OIE 'core functions' which currently rely too heavily on voluntary contributions. The OIE has therefore decided to ask the World Assembly of Delegates to vote in favour of an exceptional increase of the level of statutory contributions by 20% in May 2017 (with effect as of January 2018). While this may be regarded as a significant increase, it actually corresponds to a reasonable increase of 4 K euros/year for countries in category 1 and 34 K euros/year for countries in category 6. Acceptance of this increase by the OIE world Assembly of Delegates is crucial for the future of the OIE.

The main discussion points included:

- The need to use the opportunity of the OIE General Sessions to introduce young/new experts and promote them, in the perspective of their possible future selection in OIE Specialist Commissions or Ad Hoc Groups; in Europe, for intra-regional balance purposes, experts from Eastern Europe are particularly in demand;
- The total cost for WAHIS renovation (corresponding to 1 year regular budget) was deemed prohibitive; OIE Members would like to enquire if a competitive call for tender had been launched.

Proposed Actions:

Action 8 → [OIE RR-Moscow and SRR-Astana] To engage with Delegates from Eastern Europe to identify and promote some new Experts

- **Communication aspects**

Following the RCG₁ discussions, the RCG Secretariat presented a cost estimate for the overhaul of the OIE regional website for Europe. With the idea to re-use the 'skeleton' of the OIE Regional website for the Americas currently under development, the project will amount to approx. 10 to 12 K euros (not including the annual hosting / maintenance amounting to 1000 euros per year).

The Secretariat also informed the RCG Members about the 'vanishing' of the website of the OIE Platform on animal welfare for Europe, due to unfortunate IT manoeuvres. Options are currently explored to possibly retrieve the architecture of the website with the developer.

The main discussion points included:

- Switzerland indicated their interest in funding the overhaul of the OIE regional website ; they will contact the OIE World Animal Health and Welfare Fund to possibly earmark some contributions for this project;
- The annual maintenance / hosting of the OIE regional website should be budgeted on the OIE Regional Offices operational costs;
- For the time being, there is no need for new communication tools such as WhatsApp or a Facebook page (these could be explored in the future). The RCG should make better use of emails to exchange with OIE Member Countries in a more regular manner. To that effect, each RCG Member should be assigned a cluster of countries.

- **Financial resources for the Regional Commission and their activities**

The RCG Secretariat presented a preliminary indicative budget based on the activities proposed in the Regional Work Plan Framework for Europe (see page 2).

The main discussion points included:

- There is a need to have a clear understanding of which activities are already covered under the OIE Regional Roadmap for Europe (programme of activities of the OIE RR and SRR in Europe), and from there, identify the gaps in terms of activities (from the Regional Work Plan Framework for Europe) and subsequent budget. This should be done both for 2017 and 2018.

Proposed Actions:

Action 9 → [RCG Secretariat] To prepare a comprehensive table for 2017 and 2018, enabling a clear understanding of the activities to be covered (or not); this Table will be presented in the next RCG meeting.

Next meeting of the Task-Force

It is proposed to hold the next RCG meeting (RCG₃ – short meeting) on Sunday 21 May, in the margins of the OIE General Session. The objective will be mainly to fine-tune the last details for the meeting of the Regional Commission for Europe to be held on the following day.

For the RCG₄, the RCG Members proposed to hold it in Russia in the second semester 2017.

Action 10 → [RCG Secretariat] To organise the RCG₃ in the margins of the OIE 85th General Session

Action 11 → [RCG Secretariat] To explore with the Russian Delegate the possibility to hold the RCG₄ in Russia

Acknowledgements

The Members and Secretariat of the Task-Force would like to address their deep thanks to the government of Latvia for the excellent organisation of the RCG₂.