

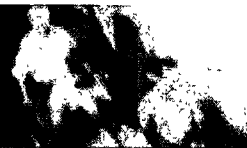
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Brussels, 7 May 2001

European Food Authority: Preparations for setting up the EFA Advisory Forum launched in Brussels

Commissioner David Byrne has today launched the preparations for setting up one of the key bodies of the future European Food Authority. The Commissioner spoke to representatives of national food safety agencies and other competent bodies in the Member States responsible for similar tasks, who are meeting for the first time today in Brussels as the 'Interim Scientific Advisory Forum'. The meeting aims to identify the agencies or other bodies that will be the national counterparts of the EFA and represented on its Advisory Forum, and to begin work on closer scientific co-operation. David Byrne reminded representatives of the key role the EFA will play in ensuring that policy making is based on sound science and that emerging risks in the food chain are identified at an early stage. He underlined the importance of close co-operation between EFA and national food safety agencies in fulfilling EFA's task, and ultimately, in improving consumer confidence in the safety of food.

"The Commission is committed to an early start of the work of the European Food Authority. I have taken the initiative to set up this group as a forerunner of the EFA's Advisory Forum because I want to see EFA operational as soon as possible. It is high time we start pooling scientific and technical resources and set up an integrated scientific network between European and national authorities. We need to get the top national scientists on food issues around the table in EFA's Advisory Forum so that conflict and contradictions in risk assessment methods and outcomes are clarified and if possible avoided. The Executive Director cannot be nominated until the legislation setting up the Authority is adopted, and a new legal entity constituted. But at a scientific and technical level we can already move forward, and we should do so.", David Byrne said.

The European Commission took the initiative to convoke the Interim Scientific Advisory Forum as part of its preparations for a rapid launch of the EFA. The proposal for a Regulation laying down fundamental principles and requirements of food law and establishing a European Food Authority was presented by the European Commission on November 8 last year. It is currently under examination by the European Parliament and the Council of

Ministers. The European Parliament is scheduled to adopt its position at the June 12 Plenary. The Swedish Presidency is working towards the adoption of a Common Position of the Council before July 1.

The regulation defines the Advisory Forum as one of the four key components of the future EFA, the others being the Executive Director and his/her staff, the Management Board and the scientific panels. The Advisory Forum is to fulfil a key role in ensuring smooth scientific and technical co-operation and the early identification of problematic and conflicting scientific opinions. The Forum will be chaired by the Executive Director of the Authority. It will consist of representatives from each Member State and it has the broad mandate to advise the Executive Director in the performance of his duties. Members of the Forum will be required to act independently and in the public interest. They must make a declaration of commitment and a declaration of interests which will be made public.

The Forum will be directly involved in endeavours to solve cases of conflicting scientific opinions between EU and national authorities. It will advise the Executive Director on setting priorities for scientific and technical work, and on avoiding duplication of efforts. In particular in the early stages the Forum will also have an important role in setting up scientific networks and co-operation between technical bodies.

The Interim Scientific Advisory Forum is scheduled to meet several times before the end of the year to discuss a range of issues of scientific and technical co-operation. Many Member States have made changes in the way their food administration services are organised over the past years. Other member states are considering similar steps. It is therefore important to identify the national counterparts of the European Food Authority at this early stage.

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