

May 2007

JOINT EPTA PROJECT
"GENETICALLY MODIFIED PLANTS AND FOODS"

INTERIM STATUS REPORT

– FINAL –

The work progress of the joint EPTA project "Genetically modified plants and foods" until May 2007 is described in this interim status report.

PARTICIPANTS

The joint EPTA project "Genetically modified plants and foods" was initiated by the EPTA members Danish Board of Technology (DBT – Denmark), Institute for Technology Assessment (ITA – Austria), Office of Technology Assessment at the German Parliament (TAB – Germany) und Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST – United Kingdom).

After the approval of the joint project by the EPTA Council on 17th October 2006, the project was joined by the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment (viWTA), TA Swiss and the Norwegian Board of Technology (NBT – Norway), with its national partner the Norwegian Biotechnology Advisory Board. In spring 2007, the Scientific Technology Options Assessment (STOA) of the European Parliament made its expression of interest for partnership and has meanwhile joined.

In conclusion, now seven EPTA members participate in this joint project.

PROJECT'S OBJECTIVES

The project's objectives are to provide information on

- > regulatory challenges for the European system in the next years,
- > points of public debate in the future,
- > approaches for TA to handle the future issues.

The Project Manager Group has formulated as a hypothesis for the project: "The European regulation does not fit challenges." This implies that the analytical framework of

the project is focused on the identification of technical, societal, regulatory and political challenges.

Throughout its work, the Project Manager Group has focused the execution of the working steps as best as possible on the project's objectives.

WORK PROGRESS

Work meetings of the Project Manager Group took place on 14th and 15th December 2006 in Bonn (Germany), 22nd and 23rd March 2007 in Zurich (Switzerland) and 10th and 11th May 2007 in Brussels (Belgium).

REVIEWS

The aim of the review exercise was to identify future challenges. The Project Manager Group has developed common criteria for the selection of projects and a checklist for the reviews. Reviews were drafted by all participating institutions and by the Finnish Committee for the Future. In total, 30 reviews were prepared (Tab. 1).

TAB. 1: REVIEWED PROJECTS BY COUNTRY

Country	Number of reviews
Austria	6
Denmark	4
Finland	1
Flanders	3
Germany	6
Norway	3
Switzerland	4
United Kingdom	1

In general, the reviews follow a common scheme: background of the project, basic data about the project, major outcomes of the project, impacts and follow up of the project, and still valid challenges identified in the project. The reviewed projects represent very different types: science oriented project and study, standing expert committee, expert conference, interdisciplinary task force, stakeholder discourse, hearing, consensus conference, citizens' jury, public meeting, and public debate. Projects of the last six were included in the reviews.

In the next step, the identified challenges were grouped to clusters. The main group of clusters are technological challenges, societal challenges, and regulatory challenges, every main group with a number of sub-clusters. The assignments of identified challenges to a cluster was not easy because assignments are not always distinctive and the clusters itself can also be built in different ways.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire is intended as a broader survey on the three key questions of the joint project. The development of the questionnaire is based on the challenges identified within the reviews and on the knowledge of the participating EPTA members. The questionnaire is the core methodical instrument in this project.

The “translation” of the clusters of challenges to questions for the questionnaire was intensely discussed in the Zurich meeting of the Project Manager Group. The result was a first structure and list of questions. Further, it was decided to use mainly closed questions and only a restricted number of open questions. In home work, the closed questions were formulated by the Project Manager Group members, and collected to a first draft of the questionnaire. With the division of work, problems of focusing, itemisation and wording of the questions did appear.

In the Brussels meeting of the Project Manager Group, the structure of the questionnaire, the occurred problems and the design of questions were discussed and an agreement was achieved how to handle these issues. The Project Manager Group decided the questionnaire will be based on a scenario as follows:

In the future, more GM crops will be available for the European market. Political pressure on Europe to accept such products will increase. Due to such external factors, the balance in EU regulations will be challenged.

Further, the following structure of the questionnaire was decided:

- > general trends and driving forces that will influence the future of gm plants and food
- > challenges for policy in the European context
- > challenges for research policy
- > challenges for involvement of stakeholder and lay people
- > areas of action

The questionnaire should be answered by 15 to 25 experts per country. They will be asked for judgements based on their knowledge.

A “drafting group” for the questionnaire (with colleagues from ITA, POST and TAB) was established. With further input from the whole project group, the drafting group will circulate a pre-final questionnaire until end of June 2007. Until end of August, the project partners will send feedbacks to the drafting group, based on pre-tests of the questionnaire and their own observations. Afterwards, the drafting group will include the feedback in the questionnaire and circulate the results. The finalising of the ques-

tionnaire should be achieved until end of September so that the questioning can take place from mid October to mid November.

The Project Manager Group proposes to work with a web-based questionnaire. The funding of this approach has to be organised by the participating institutions.

INFORMATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

As an option, the appointment of a Parliamentary Advisory Group was foreseen in the project proposal. The formal installation of such an accompanying group of national and European parliamentarians was seen as not very feasible. Instead, different actions will be taken to inform parliamentarians as

- > information about the project in the newsletter of the participating institutions,
- > creation of a project web-page,
- > “lunch meeting” etc. for information of parliamentarians on national level,
- > workshop with parliamentarians to present first results.

The Project Manager Group will further discuss the involvement of parliamentarians from the EPTA members.

READJUSTMENT OF THE WORK-PLAN

The first working steps were executed in time. The development of the questionnaire needs however more time than foreseen in the original work-plan. The quality of work should have here clear priority. Consequence is that the questionnaire phase can not be finished until August 2007 and must be prolonged until November 2007. The following working steps (evaluation phase, final report phase and dissemination phase) have to be adjusted. It is expected that the termination of the joined project must be postponed until summer or autumn 2008.