

14<sup>th</sup> March 2008

JOINT EPTA PROJECT  
"GENETICALLY MODIFIED PLANTS AND FOODS"

---

INTERIM STATUS REPORT II

– FINAL –

The work progress of the joint EPTA project "Genetically modified plants and foods" from May 2007 until March 2008 is described in this second interim status report.

---

PARTICIPANTS

Eight EPTA members and associates participate in the joint EPTA project "Genetically modified plants and foods":

- > Centre for Technology Assessment (TA-SWISS – Switzerland),
- > Danish Board of Technology (DBT – Denmark),
- > Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment (viWTA – Flanders),
- > Institute for Technology Assessment (ITA – Austria),
- > Norwegian Board of Technology (NBT – Norway),
- > Office of Technology Assessment at the German Parliament (TAB – Germany)
- > Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST – United Kingdom),
- > Scientific Technology Options Assessment (STOA – European Parliament).

The joint EPTA project was approved by the EPTA Council on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

---

WORK PROGRESS

Work meetings of the Project Manager Group took place on 10th and 11th May 2007 in Brussels (Belgium), 4th October 2007 in Brussels (Belgium), and 17th and 18th January 2008 in Berlin (Germany).

EVALUATION OF REVIEWS

The aim of the review exercise was to identify future challenges. In total, 28 reviews were drafted by all participating institutions and by the Finnish Committee for the Future (see first interim status report).

In the evaluation of the reviews, 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.

## DRAFTING OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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

The “translation” of the clusters of challenges to questions for the questionnaire was intensely discussed by Project Manager Group. The result was a first structure and list of questions. In home work, 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 May 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. 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 produced a pre-final questionnaire until end of June 2007.

In July, a pre-test of the questionnaire took place. In the pre-test, the pre-final questionnaire was filled out by two to three experts per participating member. Based on the pre-test, feedback was given to the drafting group which finalised the questionnaire until end of September. One result of the pre-test was to reduce the number of questions. A final discussion and the approval of the questionnaire took place in the Project Manager Group meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2007 in Brussels.

The final questionnaire consists of 15 closed questions (with a possibility to give explanations on selected answers) and one open question on areas for further investigation. The sections of the questionnaire are:

- I. Factors influencing the future of GM plants in Europe
  - I.1 General assessment
  - I.2 New GM plants, new applications
  - I.3 Public attitude and acceptance
- II. Challenges for European policy
  - II.1 Challenges linked to freedom of choice, labelling and co-existence
  - II.2 Challenges linked to new generation of GM crops
  - II.3 Global aspects of GM regulation
- III. Challenges for research policy
- IV. Areas of action

Further, an introductory text explains the context of the survey, naming the objectives of the joined project and the questionnaire.

## SURVEY

A web-based questionnaire was used for the survey. In total, 183 experts were invited to fill out the online questionnaire. The questionnaire was online from mid November to end of December 2007.

The online questionnaire was opened and seen by 101 experts. Of these, 30 experts decided not to fill in the questionnaire (mostly they left after reading the introduction page), and a full set of answers was received from 71 respondents. This gives an answering rate of 38,8 % which is a good one. The distribution of respondents by country gives the following table.

TAB. 1: FILLED OUT QUESTIONNAIRES BY COUNTRY

Country	Number of participating experts
Austria	17
Belgium	6
Denmark	7
Finland	3
Germany	21
Norway	8
Switzerland	5
United Kingdom	1
Not assignable	3

## EVALUATION OF THE SURVEY

The survey could be executed only the countries of the institution participating in the joint project, except United Kingdom. In result, only experts of a selected number of European countries have participated in the questionnaire. The consequence is that we have valid answers for the participating selection of experts, but the survey is not representative for the opinion of European GMO experts overall. Nonetheless, the survey gives a good insight in the expert assessment of new challenges on the European level.

Different categories of experts were invited to take part in the survey. Experts from science (university, research institutes), industry, governmental agencies and non-

governmental organisations (as agricultural, consumer and environmental organisations) were included. In a self categorisation which was part of the questionnaire, nearly 50 % of the experts put themselves in the category "university/research institute". Therefore, it seems on first view that there is an overbalance of scientists. But this has to be relativised because the group "science" is not differentiated and includes very different types of scientists as developers, scientists from ecological assessment and TA experts. Experts invited as representatives of NGOs have at least partly classified themselves as scientist. Overall, the answering experts are well balanced and not biased.

In the Berlin meeting of the Project Manager Group (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> January 2008), the results of the questionnaire and the distribution of answers on every question were discussed and evaluated. With this intense and productive discussion, a structuring of the collected information was achieved and first visions of findings and conclusions worked out.

#### EPTA CONFERENCE 2007

The joint EPTA project "Genetically modified plants and foods" was presented in the EPTA Conference on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007 in Athens. The following presentations were made:

- > New challenges in the area of gm plants and foods - The background for the Joint EPTA Project
- > Overview Joint EPTA Project "Genetically modified plants and foods" - Objectives, approach and state of work

Following the presentations, keynote interventions were given by Mrs. Ulla Burchard (German Parliament - her prepared statement was read out because she was not present in the conference due to illness) and Mr. Paul Rubig (European Parliament). Afterwards, an engaged plenary discussion took place.

---

#### NEXT STEPS

The next step is to transfer the results from the questionnaire (and from the reviews and other resources) in a final report. The Project Manager Group has agreed on the structure of this report which will be oriented on the structure of the questionnaire.

First drafts for the chapters will be produced in a "tandem approach": Each member of the Project Manager Group writes a first draft of a specific chapter which will be reviewed by a second reader. In the next Project Manager Group meeting on 16/17 April 2008, the draft chapters will be discussed and the over all findings and conclusions worked out.

The final report is planned for autumn 2008.