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Analysis by the Director of the Situation of the REITOX Network

Summary

Introduction

At the last meeting (3 March 2000), the Management Board requested the Director, in co-operation with the Member States and the Focal Points, to provide an analysis of the REITOX Network.

To this end, the Centre has, from April to July, developed a global action in order to acquire the fundamental elements for analysis.

The chosen methodology was set up by:

- collecting the contributions from the different involved parties (internal staff, Management Board Working Groups, Focal Points, Scientific Committee, External Evaluators, Court of Auditors)
- establishing four different phases: 1) a basic diagnosis in order to reach the fundamental elements for analysis; 2) a reflection involving the EMCDDA staff as well as the Focal Points; 3) some improvements which have been directly implemented; 4) a final proposal for improving the network's activities.

Methodology

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Conclusions

Following the above mentioned analysis:

- ❖ some improvements regarding the two-way relationship have already been initiated ;
- ❖ the chapter of REITOX in the EMCDDA internal Reform Plan has been compiled and finalised according to this analysis;
- ❖ a series of new concrete actions are foreseen for a better functioning of the REITOX network;
- ❖ a more detailed assessment (external evaluation) of the Focal Points is proposed, in order to estimate the capacity of the REITOX Focal Points, to carry out the tasks related to 2001-2003 Work Program in the framework of the implementation of the Reform Plan (ex-ante evaluation)

1. DIAGNOSTIC ELEMENTS FOR NEEDS ANALYSIS

1.1 Preliminary Analysis of the Needs

In order to identify the needs of the network as well as the means to improve it, 5 key-elements have been utilised:

- ❖ The outcome of external assessment of the EMCDDA (cf. Final Evaluation Report of Deloitte & Touche), which states some conclusions in terms of network improvement and recommendations;
- ❖ The Conclusions of the Management Board working party on medium-term perspectives
- ❖ The opinion of the Scientific Committee on the evaluation report
- ❖ The internal assessment of the REITOX Focal Points
- ❖ The preliminary observations of the Court of Auditors

The principal conclusions for a preliminary needs analysis have been summarised as follow:

- ❖ the relationship within the network has to be improved, both in technical and contractual terms
- ❖ the Focal Points have to be consulted in work plan procedures
- ❖ a revision of the actual co-financing system is needed, regarding the objectives, the role of the Member States and the balance between core tasks
- ❖ the new targets indicated in the EU Action Plan have to be taken into account in the global REITOX improvement and work planning
- ❖ an evaluation of the Focal Points is needed, in order to identify the individual needs in view of the new programming period (2001-2003)

2. REFLECTION FOR THE NETWORK IMPROVEMENT

2.1 Internal Reflection

After the analysis of the needs, the Centre has tried to define some concrete orientations.

Two internal groups were established on a voluntary basis:

- an internal working party, which produced a document on strategic lines for improvement, in view of the establishment of the 'Corporate Plan'.
- an internal reflection group, which produced a document with recommendations for the REITOX improvement, in view of the internal reform plan.

The principal conclusions drawn up by the two groups are the following:

- ❖ The network is a central subject for the work strategy: REITOX as a privileged partner of the EMCDDA
- ❖ The network should be adapted to external changes and new priorities (new trends in the drug field)
- ❖ The communication is the basis for a network improvement (sharing mission, transparency, permanent exchanges, benchmarking activities)
- ❖ The provided information should have a high scientific quality: evaluation criteria, clear guidelines, feedback
- ❖ The individual Focal Point has a substantial relevance at different levels (taking into account the individual differences at different level: responsibility, technical aspects, contractual aspects, etc.)
- ❖ The subsidiarity is a basis principle for the working relationship between the Centre and the National Focal Points

2.2 REITOX Reflection

Another step for reflection on the network improvement was the direct involvement of the REITOX Focal Points, through:

- ❖ an extraordinary REITOX meeting on 30 and 31 May 2000 – with participation of a representative of the Scientific Committee and the evaluators of Deloitte & Touche
- ❖ the establishment of a REITOX working party on 15 June 2000 (set up by 4 Focal Points: Belgium, France, Portugal, United Kingdom)
- ❖ the collection of Focal Point comments on the final document produced by the REITOX working party

The following preliminary conclusions of this exercise could be drawn up:

A) The central position of the network

❖ REITOX network as privileged partner of the EMCDDA

The REITOX network is the network of the Focal Points and their national networks. It is the privileged partner of the EMCDDA. It is through this network that the Centre collects its information.

❖ NFP with a representative role of the EMCDDA

NFPs should adopt a representative role of the EMCDDA in their country, fully ensure the distribution and dissemination of the information produced by the Centre, by adding a European dimension to the strictly national tasks. They should play an active role in the pluri-linguistic dimension of the European Union.

B) The new framework

❖ Priorities in the light of the EU Plan

The *first priority for the NFPs* will be to work with the Centre on the conceptualisation and subsequent implementation of the new targets, which are:

- reduction of negative impacts on health
- youth prevalence
- successful treatments
- availability
- drug related crime [laundering/precursors]
- implementation of policy and of demand reduction.

The *second priority* shall be to report against the annual report requirements of the EMCDDA, taking on board the evolution of the first priority mentioned above.

The *third priority* shall be to carry out networking and animation activities nationally, in order to encourage and facilitate the implementation by the Member State of the existing 5 harmonised epidemiological key-indicators

C) The communication

❖ Mission statement shared by EMCDDA and REITOX Network

The members of the REITOX network share the EMCDDA mission statement and objectives. They contribute in the implementation of the EU strategy.

❖ Association in the programming procedures and objectives fixed by the MB

The Focal Points should be associated with the programming procedures and objectives of the Centre.

❖ Stimulating vertical and horizontal co-operation

As previously mentioned, Focal Points should be involved in all processes which could have an influence on their work and the Centre has to animate, both the vertical and horizontal co-operation

❖ Improving EMCDDA internal co-ordination related to FP activities

The REITOX co-ordination department is responsible for the overall co-ordination of the network. It should have a global view of the activities undertaken and achieved by the Focal Points, monitor the information requests emanating from the Centre and regulate the information flow between the Centre and the Focal Points.

D) High scientific quality of the information

❖ Clear guidelines and permanent feedback

The Focal Points should receive clear and stable guidelines as well as necessary feed-back regarding the information they provided, in order to identify the informational gaps. At their turn, Focal Points should also provide the EMCDDA with necessary feed-back related to the information received from the Centre.

E) The new framework support

❖ Support by the Members States

Within the framework of the global implementation of the EU Action Plan, the NFPs have a clear double role to play:

- To ensure the implementation, within their country, of the 5 harmonised epidemiological key-indicators, their collection and analysis (national report). To this end the Member States has full responsibility at both organisational and financial level, once clear protocols and guidelines have been produced by the EMCDDA
- To participate into the conceptual process of new indicators, corresponding to the priority areas set out in the EU action plan; the responsibility lays within the EMCDDA.

F) The subsidiarity principle

❖ Individual approach

The operational means regarding each programming period should be individually identified in order to reach the periodical objectives, taking into account the specific characteristics of each National Focal Point.

3. CURRENT IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

In the light of indications and observations made by the Management Board and on the basis of the external evaluation recommendations, the Centre has already initiated some concrete activities in order to improve the network.

3.1 Activities for Improvement

The Centre has established:

- ❖ An internal REITOX Task Force (February 2000)
1 permanent correspondent per Department being responsible for the information flow between REITOX Co-ordination and the other EMCDDA Departments, following specific requests emanating from the Focal Points
- ❖ New guidelines for the national reports (finalised in April 2000)
which were unanimously adopted by the Focal Points
- ❖ Homogenous bilateral integrated feedback (May 2000)
regarding the information contained in last year's national reports, which received positive reaction from the Focal Points
- ❖ A new reporting template for the "Early Warning System" (May 2000)
regarding the progress reports such as requested in the core tasks contract
- ❖ New synthetic templates regarding the 5 epidemiological key-indicators"
regarding the updating exercise such as requested in the core tasks contract
- ❖ A new dialog framework with the Focal Points with regular contacts with the FP speaker person, one extraordinary meeting and working group to discuss future perspectives

All the above mentioned actions were positively welcomed by the Focal Points

4. FINAL PROPOSAL

On the basis of the acquired elements, the Centre has been able to draw up a proposal for improvement, set up by a theoretical part with general principles and concrete implications and a series of actions to be undertaken

4.1. Principles and consequent concrete implications

1. Mission statement shared by EMCDDA and REITOX Network

The members of the REITOX network share the EMCDDA mission statement and objectives. They contribute in the implementation of the EU strategy.

Concrete implications

- Involvement of the Focal Points into the global EU strategy
- Common decisions regarding work program
- Adapted formal document on collaboration between the EMCDDA and the network
- Ensuring permanent communication between the EMCDDA and the network
- Dynamic communication between MB, SC, FP and national partners in each MS

2. Support by the Members States

Within the framework of the global implementation of the EU Action Plan, the Focal Points have a clear double role to play :

- To ensure the implementation, within their country, of the 5 harmonised epidemiological key-indicators, their collection and analysis (national report) ;
- To participate into the conceptual process of new indicators, corresponding to the priority areas set out in the EU action plan.

Regarding the first role, the Member State has full responsibility at both organisational and financial level, once clear protocols and guidelines have been produced by the EMCDDA. The Focal Points and the European Commission have an active important role today in this process.

For what regards the second role, the responsibility lays within the EMCDDA.

Concrete implications

- A political decision which commits the Member States, not only on the general principles, but concerning the operational objectives and corresponding necessary means.
- A mandate (and related corresponding means) given by the Member State (competent authority relayed by the MB representative) towards its Focal Point.

- An increased dialogue between the Member States, the Focal Points, the Management board, the EMCDDA and the European Commission for what regards the active implementation of the 5 indicators.
- An evaluation, lead by the EMCDDA, on the state of progress (impact and consequences) of the effective implementation of the five key-indicators. Such an evaluation should be conducted at the end of 2002.

3. Priorities in the light of the EU Plan

- ❖ Taking into account the tasks foreseen in the EMCDDA regulation, the European Union Action Plan and the Joint Action on New Synthetic Drugs, the work of the Focal Points shall fall in three main priority areas:
 - The first priority, in terms of effort, time and use of finances obtained from the contract with the EMCDDA, will be to work with the Centre on the conceptualisation and subsequent implementation of the new targets - reduction of negative impacts on health; youth prevalence; successful treatments; availability; drug related crime; [laundering/precursors] - and to work on the development of indicators for the implementation of policy and of demand reduction.
 - The second priority shall be to report to the EMCDDA, in the framework of its reporting requirements (Annual Report and other), taking into account the evolution of the first priority mentioned above.
 - The third priority shall be to carry out networking and animation activities nationally in order to encourage and facilitate the implementation by the Member State of the existing 5 harmonised epidemiological key-indicators (always remembering that two of these, prevalence and treatment, need to evolve in the light of the Action Plan), and the Joint Action on New Synthetic Drugs.

Concrete implications

- The aim by the end of 2001 is to develop preliminary conception for information/indicators in each of these areas that are rooted in an understanding of national conditions as well as early methodological conceptions.
- By the end of 2002, when there is to be a Progress Report on the EU Action Plan, the Centre should be in a position to report on this conceptual development work, on some early studies of feasibility (where different aspects of the work will be undertaken by different clusters of Focal Points and other partners of the Centre), and to make proposals to the HDG and the Council about implementation in a progressive manner before the end of the Action Plan.

4. REITOX network as privileged partner of the EMCDDA

The REITOX network is the network of the Focal Points and their national networks. It is the privileged partner of the EMCDDA. It is through this network that the Centre collects its information.

Concrete implications

- The National Focal Points organise and co-ordinate their national networks of information providers
- The EMCDDA has a role in helping the NFP developing and stimulating the functionality of their national networks
- The EMCDDA should support and stimulate the exchange between all the involved partners through, amongst others, regular meetings with clear agendas, human exchanges and benchmark activity on network functioning
- An external evaluation of the Focal Points should be made in the light of future information needs in the framework of the EU Action Plan and of the relationship between the Centre and the NFP

5. Association in the programming procedures and objectives fixed by the MB

As privileged partners, the Focal Points should be associated with the programming procedures and objectives of the Centre.

Concrete implications

- Transparency in programming procedures and active involvement of the Focal Points in the preparation of the work programs
- Assess the differences between NFP in the contracts (progress contracts)

6. Individual negotiation

Taking into account the principle of subsidiarity, the Focal Points should individually negotiate with their national authority the operational means regarding each programming period in order to reach the periodical objectives

Concrete implications

- Taking into account country specific problems, particularly in the implementation of key-indicators and other information needs
- Identifying the needs of the Focal Points through evaluation of national structure, expertise, staffing and financing on the basis of previous strictly defined criteria
- Give specific indications to each MS in order to support changes and to reach the defined tasks

- The individual contracts between National Focal Points and the Centre should be based on the outcome of the Focal Points' external evaluation

7. Clear guidelines and permanent feedback

It's fundamental to increase the feedback from the EMCDDA towards its Focal Points and also the feedback from NFP's to their national information providers.

The Focal Points should receive clear and stable guidelines as well as necessary feed-back regarding the information they provided, in order to identify the informational gaps. At their turn, Focal Points should also provide the EMCDDA with necessary feed-back related to the information received from the Centre.

Concrete implications

- Common previously agreed guidelines criteria and standards
- Guidebook on shared criteria for evaluation with indication of mechanisms and procedures for feedback and evaluation
- Timeliness guidelines, shared by the whole network
- Regular feed-back on different core tasks (especially key-indicators)
- Regular feed-back on information provided by the EMCDDA
- Improvement of the quality of the information provided (on the basis of feed-back)

8. Stimulating vertical and horizontal co-operation

As previously mentioned, Focal Points should be involved in all processes which could have an influence on their work.. Therefore, the Centre has to animate both the vertical and horizontal co-operation, the network's spirit, the added European value, the experience sharing, the common information, as well as the optimum use of information and communication technologies.

Concrete implications

- Develop a common structured communication model
- Regular information flow between the Centre and the FP (sharing minutes of MB, SC, REITOX and expert meetings, reports, Calls for Tenders, etc.)
- Develop the private REITOX web site (interactive EMCDDA-FP information exchange) providing access to both the Management Board members and Scientific Committee members
- Creation of REITOX working parties, involving Focal Points on a voluntary basis, to handle specific issues together with the Centre
- increase technical meetings, focusing on scientific aspects
- Develop exchange programmes (exchange of professionals, etc.)
- Develop activity in the field of quality insurance

9. Improving EMCDDA internal co-ordination related to FP activities

The REITOX co-ordination department is responsible for the overall co-ordination of the network. It should have a global view of the activities undertaken and achieved by the Focal Points, monitor the information requests emanating from the Centre and regulate the information flow between the Centre and the Focal Points.

Concrete implications

- Reinforcing currently existing REITOX co-ordination with a more central and important role within the EMCDDA
- Establishment of rules and procedures regarding contacts with the Focal Points

10. NFP with a representative role of the EMCDDA

National Focal Points should adopt a representative role of the EMCDDA in their country, fully ensure the distribution and dissemination of the information produced by the Centre, by adding a European dimension to the strictly national tasks. They should play an active role in the plurilingual dimension of the European Union.

Concrete implications

- Dissemination of the information from NFP to their national partners and experts
- Production of information adaptable to both national and EU level
- Support to the NFP in order to develop a dissemination structure

4.2. Actions

Following this analysis it is already possible to identify concrete actions to improve the efficiency of the Reitox Network :

- some of these actions could be immediately undertaken by the Centre, independently of the internal reform, giving continuity to the current improvement process mentioned in Chapter 3
- other operational issues should be foreseen in the framework of the internal reform and are directly related with the main elements of the Reform Plan.

4.2.1. Actions to be undertaken by the Centre independently of the internal reform :

- to develop the Reitox Web site in a more interactive tool and to give access to it to the members of the Management Board and Scientific Committee,
- to increase the transparency of the management issues by means of the information made available in the Reitox Web site (minutes of meetings, scientific reports, events, call for tenders and other important administrative issues,
- to give regular and time guidelines and feedback on the information provided, on the basis of shared criteria,
- to increase the technical content of the meetings,
- to create working groups on specific issues.

4.2.2. Actions in the framework of the internal Reform Plan :

The issue of REITOX cuts across many of the issues identified in the Reform Plan. In particular the Focal Points need to be involved in:

- Strategic planning – which needs to be a bottom up process. Specifically they can give input on capacity and, in conjunction with their Management Board member, on emerging issues from a Member State perspective.
- The communication strategy – this will rely on the Focal Points to act as the EMCDDA antenna in the Member State and thus they must also buy into the strategy.
- The Quality strategy. The Focal Points are one of the key information sources and thus their commitment to the quality policy is absolutely crucial.

However, the role of the Focal Points needs to be supported by the Member State, to give them the status and resources required to act effectively. This is an action for the Management Board Members.

In the same way as a competence assessment of the staff is required to maximise the potential of the Centre, so **an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the various Focal Points is needed**. This would enable the EMCDDA to provide the most effective support to each Focal point, and also enable the Focal Points to act as a support for each other in terms of organisational and knowledge development. This could also be used to build relationships and expertise with a view to managing enlargement and to improve the current financial system.

Therefore, it is suggested that, in line with the orientation taken by the Bureau, the Management Board decided to launch immediately an external evaluation of the NFP's with the view to identify their existing capacities and potential gaps to be able to implement the reform package.

To this end, the MB should set up a tripartite Steering Committee composed of representatives of the Management Board, the NFP's and the EMCDDA. This Steering Committee should in particular establish the Terms of Reference of the external evaluation immediately after the September meeting of the Management Board, accompany the development of the evaluation and prepare the appropriate decisions to be taken by the MB to improve the functioning of REITOX.

EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON REITOX

***WITH A VIEW TO DRAWING UP A REPORT ON THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
OF THE EUROPEAN MONITORING CENTRE FOR DRUGS AND DRUG ADDICTION***

(EMCDDA - LISBON)

FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 1999

These observations were adopted by the “college” of the Members of the Court of Auditors in Luxembourg at its meeting of 28 and 29 June 2000 in the French language. The official translation was sent by the Court of Auditors to the EMCDDA on 21 July 2000

MANAGEMENT OF THE CONTRACTS WITH THE NATIONAL CENTRES

Financial implementation

1. In order to help achieve the Centre's aims, virtually half of the operational expenditure is devoted to financing national centres (one per Member State). In 1999, the Centre agreed contracts with these centres worth 1,8 million Euro, with 1,5 million Euro going to direct support contracts (100 000 Euro per centre) and 0,3 million Euro to supplementary contracts. The basic contracts were made at the beginning of the year and payments of at least 1,2 million Euro (i.e. 80 %) ought to have been made for them by the end of the year. In practice, only 0,95 million Euro, i.e. 63 %, had been paid out under these contracts by the year-end. Of the other contracts, involving a sum of 0,3 million Euro, 17 % of the total value was paid. Overall, the Centre had to carry over 0,8 million Euro of the 1,8 million Euro committed for the national centres.
2. Under-utilisation of appropriations on this scale points to shortcomings in the Centre's monitoring of its annual work programme. The Centre, in conjunction with the national centres, ought to improve the way it monitors the measures which are financed so as to minimise carry-overs of appropriations and thus ensure stricter adherence to the principle of annuality.

Contractual provisions

3. The contracts agreed by the Centre make no provision for sub-contracting, and yet one of the national centres has used such arrangements. In view of the nature of some of the work, sub-contracting may offer an effective solution, but its use should be subject to the prior authorisation of the Centre.
4. When determining certain costs, it may be useful to apply standard ratios in order to make the cost evaluation easier for the contractors. In such cases, the Centre should ask the contractors for details in order to ascertain whether the rates applied are plausible and should, if need be, set maximum limits.

Nature and checking of the national co-financing

5. The basic contracts and certain supplementary contracts provide for co-financing by the Member State in which the centre is situated. In principle, the national co-financing should at least be equivalent to the financing granted by the EDMC. However, it is not stipulated to what extent the national and Community financing provided for under the contracts should result in an increase in the budget of the centre concerned.
6. In practice, co-financing is certified by declarations issued by the centres themselves. Furthermore, an examination of the financial tables annexed to the contracts has revealed disparities in the implementation of the national and Community funding: in some cases, the national co-financing is applied at a global level, in other cases it takes account of the way in which the Community financing is divided up between the various aims pursued by the contracts.

Activities financed

7. The basic contracts agreed in 1999 make provision for four activities. Disparities are apparent in the way in which the national and Community funding is divided up between the planned tasks (see *Table*).
8. There are also disparities in the manner in which the aid granted by the Centre is used (see *Table*).
9. Whilst disparities in the distribution of the funding can doubtless be partly justified by special circumstances, these disparities do nevertheless seem to be excessive. In particular, it is unusual that one centre takes no action whatsoever with regard to data on reducing the demand for drugs, despite the fact that this is one of the Centre's specific objectives.

Table – European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

Use of financing granted to the centres by task

	Minima	Maxima	Average (15 centres)
Use of financing * by the centres			
Updating national report	2%	73%	24%
Information on reducing demand	0%	28%	11%
New measures synthetic drugs	2%	41%	15%
Epidemiological indicators	12%	93%	50%
Use by the centres of financing granted by the Monitoring Centre			
Updating national report	4%	79%	32%
Information on reducing demand	0%	28%	15%
New measures synthetic drugs	4%	40%	15%
Epidemiological indicators	7%	80%	38%
Source : Table drawn up by the Court of Auditors on the basis of the Monitoring Centre's data			

* Financing granted by the Monitoring Centre and national co-financing

EMCDDA INITIAL COMMENTS

The Court of Auditors' preliminary observations will be discussed with the Auditors in the detail of each point during the phase called "contradictory procedure" for editing the final report. Meanwhile some oral and written discussions had already taken place, in the following terms :

The EMCDDA achieved a good performance and value for money in the utilisation of its budgetary credits and in the execution of its contracts with the Focal Points, considering the concrete conditions on the ground. Nevertheless, the EMCDDA will further work in order to improve that performance and to implement the recommendations of the Court of Auditors which would be considered pertinent on those matters. Every observation of the Court of Auditors shall have an adequate follow-up by the concerned services.

Particularly concerning REITOX, there is by now a financial system established by the Management Board following the conclusions of a "ad hoc working group" (since the regulations have no specific dispositions on those issues).

The Court of Auditors' preliminary observations call for a profound reflection in order to improve the Reitox financing system in the framework of the internal reform.

A recasting seems to constitute the needed remedy to the Court of Auditors' remarks and could have the following consequences on REITOX :

- No EMCDDA financing in principle of Focal Points statutory tasks which anyway should be executed with national financing.
- Establishment and contract of supplementary or new tasks for each Focal Point to be financed by EMCDDA budget
- Exceptional initial temporary financing of weaker Focal Points to allow them responding to the minimum level of outputs on the statutory tasks
- Definition and implementation of the principles of additionality, subsidiarity and complementarity on EMCDDA financing to the Focal Points

Additionality would mean that each Euro paid by EMCDDA to a Focal Point should correspond to a specific task additional to the statutory tasks the Focal Point would do anyway. Subsidiarity would mean that each activity financed would be supposedly best managed by the Focal Point concerned contributing to the general objectives of EMCDDA and Reitox.

Complementarity would mean that each Euro financed to a Focal Point would be complementary to the national financing and each activity would be complementary to the general activities of EMCDDA and Reitox.