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TECHNICAL REPORT

Identifying DG SANCO's Future Challenges 2009-2014

Final Report

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Protection Directorate-General

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Executive summary

DG SANCO's 'Future Challenges 2009–2014' project

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection (DG SANCO) aims to "ensure food and consumer goods sold in the EU are safe, that the EU's internal market works for the benefit of consumers and that Europe helps protect and improve its citizens' health".³ In 2006, DG SANCO embarked on a series of activities to consider the challenges it will face in the period 2009 to 2014. RAND Europe was asked to support this future challenges project by developing and testing three scenarios for Europe in the near future. Scenario thinking aims to identify new options which might otherwise have been missed; previously unnoticed risks to be managed; and foster insight into which organizations and processes need to be influenced. Scenarios are not intended to *predict* the future, but rather to provide a set of plausible yet intellectually challenging "futures" that can aid strategic thinking and creative discussions within and between organizations.

The process of creating the scenarios for DG SANCO involved gathering data on major trends and key uncertainties around four areas identified by DG SANCO: governance, confidence, changing society and globalization. This information informed an internal DG SANCO workshop that identified eight key uncertainties that could affect DG SANCO in 2009-2014. Following this meeting, RAND Europe developed three scenarios: Galapagos, Coral Reef and Wave. These scenarios were then tested and fine-tuned in four case study workshops, each of which focused on a particular element that could affect the future environment in which DG SANCO operates: nanotechnology; consumer behaviour; ethical food consumption; and health equity. The scenario development process is outlined in detail in Chapters Two to Six. The remainder of this Executive Summary focuses on the questions, challenges and recommendations that emerged from the process.

Knowledge, skills, influence and risk: areas for further consideration

DG SANCO was closely involved in every stage of the scenario development and testing process, and in October 2007 produced its DG SANCO *Future Challenges Paper: 2009–2014*.⁴ This paper has been widely circulated, both inside and outside the Commission,

³ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/weare_en.htm (accessed 12th March 2008).

⁴ Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/events/future_challenges_en.htm (accessed 12th March 2008).

with the aim that it will enrich, validate and improve DG SANCO's vision. Below we present issues which emerged from the case study workshops that DG SANCO will need to consider as it continues to further develop the Future Challenges project. The issues are structured around four key questions:

1. What will DG SANCO need to know?
2. What skills will DG SANCO need to develop?
3. Who will DG SANCO need to influence?
4. What risks will DG SANCO need to manage?

For the sake of clarity the issues are phrased as actions that DG SANCO *will* need to undertake. Although scenarios do provide indications of robust conclusions and insight into the development of policy options, they are not predictions of the future. Therefore, these statements should be read as reflecting the opinions of informed participants, rather than representing predictions made by RAND Europe.

What will DG SANCO need to know?

- In the futures discussed, a better understanding of consumers' preferences, attitudes and behaviour will be crucial to the success of DG SANCO's policies.
- DG SANCO will need a comprehensive set of international comparable data on key areas relating to its competencies.
- DG SANCO may need effective monitoring of what is happening 'on the ground' with regards to compliance with regulations, rather than using instrument-based reporting on regulation.
- DG SANCO will require solid in-house scientific expertise (or at least ready access to such expertise) to adequately address the problems in policy fields where new technologies will play a major role in the coming years, such as the regulation of nanotechnology or pushing health technology to improve equity.
- Future environments will be increasingly complex in important areas of DG SANCO's action, requiring a better understanding of cause–effect relationships in important policy fields, for example in the field of health equity or on-line consumer behaviours. It is important to note that complexity confuses causal links and increases the risks incurred when taking action.
- Intensifying international trade will have increasing implications for how DG SANCO delivers its aims; and therefore access to expertise in this area will be needed. It will be particularly important to understand how China, India and Russia will deploy their increasing influence in the arena of global regulations and standards.

What skills will DG SANCO need to develop?

- DG SANCO has to become better at prioritizing its work: each scenario (in different ways) would require a clear focus on the unique contribution DG SANCO could make.
- DG SANCO will need to develop its communication skills further. The scenario work suggested that social change, and the development of new communications media, will require a rapidly evolving communications strategy. In these futures, DG SANCO should especially learn how to use new communication channels effectively.
- DG SANCO needs to think how it “sells” its policies because in the emerging environment successful organizations will require a “license to operate” beyond their formal or legal powers. This will require strategic skills to understand the attitude of actors, coupled with the ability to select exactly the right communication method.
- Analytical skills will become increasingly important for DG SANCO’s work, in order to locate, filter and analyse large amounts of information into knowledge that is useful to the organization.
- To promote rapid learning and feedback, it will be necessary to evaluate policies and projects; the necessary skills must be developed within DG SANCO so its staff can either conduct evaluations themselves or become knowledgeable commissioners of external evaluations.
- Understanding the complexities of some regulatory fields (including the possibilities and varieties of soft and hard regulation) will require further analysis.
- To be successful in the European multi-actor governance system, DG SANCO will need networking skills and strong cooperation and consensus-building skills.

Who will DG SANCO need to influence?

- The most important actors to be influenced will be the Member States, their governments and particular authorities within them.
- Cooperation with international organizations such as World Health Organization and World Trade Organization will be of increased importance to DG SANCO, who should attempt to influence the agendas (and decisions) of these organizations more strongly.
- Politicians will remain in charge of DG SANCO and therefore it will be important to provide them with the evidence and arguments they can best use. Given that there may be a considerable period between initiating and realizing actions, politicians need to prioritize and maintain their support for an issue.
- Other Directorates-General (and the wider institutions of the EU) will continue to be closely linked to DG SANCO’s activities and thus remain important actors to

influence. It is vital that DG SANCO is recognized as a “credible operator” within the European Commission.

- DG SANCO should focus more on the local (sub-Member State) level. By aligning itself with trusted local authorities and actors, DG SANCO may increase its credibility and trustworthiness. Engaging with local grassroots organizations and citizens might also be a way to improve the delivery of DG SANCO's aims.
- Every four years, DG SANCO should take an action, such as tackling mobile phone roaming tariffs, which is widely popular and is publicized as a European Union intervention.
- Although the group of relevant institutional actors to influence will remain rather stable over time, DG SANCO should become more strategic in developing:
 - key targeted stakeholders, rather than addressing all – providing that this targeting is made clear and linked to DG SANCO's remit
 - strong alliances for specific policy issues.

What risks will DG SANCO need to manage?

- External shocks, originating from the global economy, other global actors or global disasters and disease outbreaks, may have to be managed by DG SANCO at some point. While local or regional threats might be dealt with at a lower level, DG SANCO will need to be prepared to address global, external shocks.
- DG SANCO needs to ensure that it has high quality information on the issues it is addressing, and will need to back up its decisions with a more exacting burden of proof, fit its activities to the information it has available, or adopt more adaptive recommendations.
- The future development of the EU institutions, whether in the direction of more or less integration, constitutes a major risk to be managed by DG SANCO.
- DG SANCO will need to guard against the danger of overreaching its capacity to deliver. DG SANCO will come under pressure to deliver across a range of areas but adopting too many goals, or setting these goals too high, might lead to failure and public frustration.
- DG SANCO has to manage the risk of being held responsible for problems which lie outside its competencies, but which may be attributed to DG SANCO.
- Across all the scenarios there was a perceived risk that DG SANCO may become crisis-driven rather than strategic in its behaviour.

Complex strategic problems for DG SANCO to address

Using the material generated by workshop participants, RAND Europe has identified six complex strategic problems that DG SANCO will need to address. These are issues where DG SANCO must select from a wide variety of mutually exclusive decisions; prioritize and make trade-offs between its various responsibilities; or develop a sophisticated response to multi-faceted and mercurial problems.

- DG SANCO could find itself gradually doing more and increasingly diverse things. Should it aim to excel in diverse fields or deliver benefits where it has a unique advantage? Is it possible to develop a coherent policy portfolio that balances growth and maintaining delivery for existing areas?
- DG SANCO is likely to occupy a more complex regulatory environment. Should it aim to set the standards to be met by self- and external regulation or should it take action to regulate?
- It is very likely that the quantity and complexity of information generated inside and outside DG SANCO will increase. This increase will present challenges of communication and coordination for DG SANCO both inside and outside the organization. How will DG SANCO establish efficient coordination and communications practices?
- Consumers' needs and desires are both rapidly changing and becoming more heterogeneous, which implies that a light-footed and responsive process is needed. How will this be squared with the Commission-wide requirements of probity, fairness and so forth?
- Is DG SANCO prepared for a further globalization of activities that may produce more change in the next ten years than in the past thirty?
- The possible changes identified through the Future Challenges workshops might overwhelm any organization's capacity to change whilst maintaining delivery of core services. How could this be avoided?

Recommendations on taking the Future Challenges project further

RAND Europe has provided recommendations on how DG SANCO can further develop the knowledge and awareness generated by the Future Challenges 2009–2014 project. These recommendations are focused around: how to use scenarios in organizations; the use of workshops; new ways of thinking about Impact Assessments.

Using scenarios

Scenarios can help to communicate the uncertainty that organizations face, provide a shared reference point for assessing an organization's options, and support risk assessments and policy options. Given this range of applications, it is important for the organization to be clear about the effects it intends to induce. Possibilities include:

- informing specific decisions
- providing input to decision-making frameworks
- supporting indirect decision-making, such as clarifying an issue's importance or framing a decision agenda
- engendering cultural change, for example by shaking up habitual thinking and stimulating creativity
- creating a 'safer space' in which to engage stakeholders in a strategic debate.

Nevertheless, significant gaps exist between much current scenario practice and the potential contributions of scenarios. Public sector organizations also face particular constraints relating to accountability arrangements and political responsibilities (Ling, 2002). Their successful use therefore requires clarity of purpose, effective facilitation, and sensitivity to the wider architecture of accountability and political responsibility. More specifically, DG SANCO should be aware of the following challenges.

- Participants in a scenario exercise may not always agree on the interpretation of their scenarios.
- Scenarios must be presented in a way that engages with the particular needs of specific decision-makers and makes clear their relation to the world of practical action.
- It may be difficult to establish what future decisions will be within and what ones beyond the control of DG SANCO.
- The most important uncertainties affecting a decision have to do with the effects (both foreseen and unforeseen) of various proposed policy actions, which is itself uncertain.
- After an interesting "strategic conversation", members of an organization may return to "business as usual".

The use of workshops

Holding further creative scenario workshops would help to embed strategic thinking deeper into DG SANCO's processes. They could help to develop an understanding that strategic thinking is an iterative process in which the needs and priorities of stakeholders, the vision and goals of the organization, and the implications of external changes are held in balance to inform decisions. Workshops could also allow participants to take a fresh look at DG SANCO's vision and the expectations of its stakeholders.

Workshops can explore vertical strategy (for example, policy areas); horizontal strategy (for example, cross-cutting issues like communications); generate new policy ideas; or test existing strategies. Section 7.7.2 provides more details on how the workshops could be structured according to their purposes.

Impact Assessments

The current Commission-wide approach to Impact Assessments focuses on examining a variety of options in a single (hypothetical) future. In this approach, consideration of uncertainty focuses on the policy options rather than on the future. An *ex ante* evaluation informed by futures methodology would tend to reverse this and examine the impact of a single option in a range of plausible futures. By introducing futures thinking in this way to *ex ante* evaluation, it would be possible to institutionalize scenarios within a Directorate-General as part of the Impact Assessment process. Naturally, any such scenarios would need to consider elements that reflect the entire range of a Directorate-General's activities.