

ECHA's chairing role of the EU Agencies Network

57th Meeting of the Management Board 19-20 March 2020

Key messages

The members of the Management Board are invited to note that ECHA took on the chairing role of the EU Agencies Network (EUAN) as of 1 March 2020, until 28 February 2021.

Background

The European Union decentralised Agencies and Joint Undertakings (JUs) established in 2005 a network, called the European Union Agencies Network (EUAN), to provide a forum for coordination, information exchange and agreement on common positions on issues of shared interest. The network promotes good governance, strengthens the voice of EU Agencies notably vis-à-vis the EU institutions and works towards increasing the visibility of agencies towards EU citizens and other key actors at the EU institutional and national level.

The EUAN currently comprises 48 Agencies and JUs and its organisational structure includes (a) the Assembly of the Head of Agencies (HoA); (b) the Assembly of the Head of Resources (HoR); (c) the Chairing/Coordinating Agency; (d) the Troika and (e) the Shared Support Office (SSO).

The Assembly of HoA is the major steering body of the Network, responsible to define its overall direction and priorities and reach internal consensus to take collective decisions. The Assembly of HoR prepares decisions of a technical and legal nature in relation to resources management and related matters.

To ensure multi-annual coordination, the chairing Agency is supported on all matters concerning its role by the Troika, comprised of the previous and the next chairing Agencies. The chairing Agency is responsible for coordinating the network's activities and representing the network in meetings and hearings with third parties, including EU institutions. The chairing Agency also organises and chairs the meetings of the Assembly of HoA and HoR which takes place twice per year, once in Brussels and once at the seat of the Coordinating Agency.

The EUAN SSO operates under the chairing Agency, facilitating coordination among network members and with the EU Institutions, while also ensuring continuity from one chairing Agency to another by supporting them in the implementation of their Work Programme and of the network's multiannual strategy. The SSO liaises with EU institutions, key officials and targeted representatives and it regularly monitors and analyses institutional developments relevant to the Network.

The Assembly of HoA established Sub-networks and Working Groups to foster closer cooperation between members at technical level in specific areas. In addition, Task Forces may be set up to provide deliverables to the HoA within a short time-frame on an ad-hoc basis.

ECHA's chairing role – a lean approach

The EUAN works on the basis of multiannual agendas. The strategy for 2021-2027 is in the process of adoption and will focus on increasing the efficiency of Agencies through sharing services and developing expertise in measuring efficiency gains within the network. The strategy also aims to strengthen the strategic image, reputation and impact of intervention of the network vis-à-vis the EU institutions.

Under its chairing role in 2020-2021, ECHA embraces a lean approach, with the ambition to set a new standard that incentivises other Agencies to take on the role in the future. A key target will be to increase the visibility of all Agencies and strategically demonstrate their commonalities and cooperation. The role of the SSO will be strengthened and optimised, as the coordinating centre, particularly for day-to-day activities that require timely and targeted actions from EUAN members. This will optimise the SSO's potential, ensure that the network can operate in an agile manner and that horizontal topics of common concern stay high on the agenda. The use of thematic clusters of Agencies (e.g. ENVI agencies) will be strengthened, to promote strategic cooperation while increasing the ability to react flexibly and effectively to policy developments.

Cooperation between Subnetworks remains valued in order to capitalise on their expertise. However, ECHA will not chair all the sub-networks and will support other Agencies' coordinating role. Such experimental model matches the fit-for-purpose approach and can help the network to operate more smoothly.

The coordination under ECHA's chairing role will be key for the effective communication of the networks' multi-annual strategy and to the discussion on its future implementation, including benchmarks to measure impact and monitor progress thereof. The engagement of institutional stakeholders in relation to the strategic orientation of the EUAN strategy implementation will also increase the visibility of the EU Agencies.

It is proposed that ECHA's fit-for-purpose approach to the chairing role will translate into a limited resource investment. A small project team is responsible to ensure horizontal coordination, with relevant parts of the Secretariat involved in the Subnetworks. Common principles and meeting arrangements will be put in place, with particular attention to sustainability and common procedural standards will guarantee consistency and predictability of work streams and streamlined internal processes. Overall, this approach allows ECHA to chair the EUAN within the limited resources that it can allocate to this task, and at the same time, benefit from the added value of the chairing role in terms of leverage and visibility.

The HoA and HoR meetings will be held in early October 2020 in Helsinki. ECHA's new premises will provide a fitting background for the high-level meeting, built on a forward-looking agenda and meant to provide a forum for networking and common reflection on where the network aims to position itself in an ever-changing political environment.

The coordinating role is an opportunity for ECHA to shape the Strategy, steer Inter-Agency dialogue and bring value in strategic stakeholder outreach actions to articulate and represent the EUAN members' interests. This becomes more relevant at a juncture where the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) is still under negotiations and the newly-announced political priorities from the Commission realign, to a certain extent, the priority-setting of each Agency and JU.

Attachments:

- Annex 1: ECHA Work Programme for the EUAN chairmanship
- Link to EUAN website <https://euagencies.eu/>

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