

INTRODUCTION TALKS OF THE ONE HEALTH EJP (EUROPEAN JOINT PROGRAMME) FINAL MEETING SEPTEMBER 11, 2023 PARIS

CONFÉRENCE INTRODUCTIVE A LA RÉUNION DE CLÔTURE DU PROGRAMME CONJOINT EUROPÉEN ONE HEALTH (EJP ONE HEALTH) A PARIS, MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DE LA PRÉVENTION LE 11 SEPTEMBRE 2023.

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INTRODUCTION

The guest speakers first of all thanked the organisers for their invitation and expressed their gratitude to be here today in the presence of Madame La Ministre, Mrs Firmin Le Bodo. They equally thanked the General Director of Anses Monsieur Benoit Vallet, for his warm welcome.

THE SUCCESS STORY OF MEDVETNET

After the BSE crisis in 1999, the first suggestion of the public research institutes working on animal health and food safety was to set up a network of research institutes gathering several member states, i.e. "Food Vet Net". This initiative was promoted by ClubV (Covetlab, 2023), a small consortium of five scientific veterinary institutes. Unfortunately, the European Commission was not supporting this "Food Vet" ap-

proach, but instead was claiming a network of institutes active in the domain of foodborne zoonoses, consisting of Medical institutes and Veterinary institutes working together. That network was for the first time a European consortium following the One Health approach. A Network of Excellence was funded in the Framework Programme N°6. A grant of 14 M€ was allocated to this research project on foodborne zoonoses. A total of 14 Medical and Veterinary public institutes with expertises in research and reference on foodborne zoonoses were committed for 5 years (2004-2009) (MedVetNet, 2023).

Despite the success of this project, the European Commission did not plan the continuation of the Network of Excellence. The consortium members discussed the best way to maintain their collaboration without a grant from the European Commission and decided to turn the EC-funded network into a self-sustained association of public research institutes, i.e. the

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MedVetNet Association. In 2009, this legal association under French law was funded by own contributions of its members, thus maintaining the structure and allowing to prepare a possible future EC-funded project. In this way, a period of seven years was bridged, from 2010 to 2017.

The members of the MedVetNet Association (MedVetNet, 2023) looked for an option to obtain EC funding. The idea of an article 185 European project, a long term, ambitious public-public partnerships set up on a voluntary basis by EU Member States and established through a specific and severe legislative procedure, was suggested by officers from the EC. The European project IMERA (2023) was identified as an example of Art 185 project (Doctrine, 2023) that was working well. It was focused on metrology, combining research and reference activities, and the Ministries of authority were committed as co-funders, therefore complying with the expectations of the MedVetNet Association members. A first Article 185 proposal was drafted entitled "Foodborne zoonoses –Emerging threats". Unfortunately, the General Director of Directorate Research of the European Commission at that time, invited the consortium in October 2014 to postpone this Article 185 project proposal, but suggested to work on the preparation of a Co-fund ERA-Net instead, i.e. a public-public partnership under Horizon 2020 aiming at designing and implementing trans-national calls for research proposals.

The members of the MedVetNet Association were not totally disappointed and started discussions with the scientific officers of the European Commission. In 2015, representatives of the Directorates Research, Health and Agriculture presented and proposed the European Joint Programme as a new co-funding instrument under Horizon 2020. The Association was subsequently invited to prepare a « Pilot » EJP co-managed by DG Agriculture and DG Research (EJP, 2023).

The overarching goal of the EJP was on "Zoonoses- Emerging threats" and was called One Health EJP. The proposal was to address the challenges faced in the field of zoonoses derived from food-producing animals and transmitted directly, or by food to human. It is interesting to remind that the consortium had immediately noted that difficulties existed to take on board the environmental challenges claimed by the European Commission.

In February 2017, the managers of the MedVetNet Association finalised a 5-year research programme, and submitted it to the European Commission. The consortium was expecting a European co-funding of 50% of the total cost of the research programme. In return, the EC expected an in-kind contribution from the consortium members. It was suggested by the ministries that the national funding agencies should be included in the 'additional funding calls' for external calls. In the end, this option was not taken up.

Although the EJP was co-managed by DG Agriculture and DG Research, the subsidy was the subject of heated debate. In the end, DG Agriculture financed €40 million, DG Research €5 million and the Member States €45 million. The

volume of resources became significant. In 2018 the One Health EJP was born.

Different entities are involved at different levels, illustrating the "One Health" approach.

At Community level, the agriculture and research directorates are working together. At national level, the Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Research are working together. Their respective public institutes working on human health, animal health and food safety also collaborate. In scientific communities: scientists from public medical and veterinary institutes are working together. In conclusion, the One Health EJP (2023) was a genuine One Health programme, and all the players had a clear role to play, which was promising. In conclusion, this success was a long-term process, taking twenty years to build mutual trust and enable the consortium to become a solid partner to work with the European Commission in agreement with the Member States.

IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING WITHIN THE ONE HEALTH EJP

One of the major keys of success of the One health EJP was bringing together scientists, facilitating networking and capacity building. Obviously, networking fuels innovation and progress in the scientific world.

The One Health EJP stimulated the exchange of knowledge and expertise among researchers from diverse backgrounds within human, animal and environmental health, including microbiologists, epidemiologists, veterinarians, bio-informaticians and environmental scientists. This interdisciplinary approach allowed a more holistic understanding of complex One Health issues. Through networking and working together within the projects, scientists were able to pool their resources, share data, and leverage each other's strengths to tackle cross border challenges in One Health.

By bringing together experts from these different fields, the One Health EJP has made significant strides in understanding the transmission of zoonotic and foodborne diseases. This collaboration has not only led to the identification of emerging threats but has also resulted in more effective prevention and control strategies.

The partnership has enabled for example the tools for a coordinated surveillance system for antimicrobial resistance. This system has provided valuable data that informs policies and interventions at the national and international levels, contributing to combat the rising threat of antibiotic-resistant infections. The One Health EJP initiative has not only brought together scientists from various disciplines but has also fostered collaborations between research institutions. The Scientific Steering Board played a vital role in shaping the direction and priorities of OH EJP. The intensive interaction amongst its members contributed to the harmonious alignment of goals and strategies. Also, the informal interactions during the on-site meetings of the SSB were important to build trust and strengthen relationships.

THE LEGACY OF THE ONE HEALTH EJP IS ITS EUROPEAN NETWORK, A UNIQUE EUROPEAN ONE HEALTH CONSORTIUM

The most valuable achievement of the One Health EJP is the creation of its network:

- A unique European network of public health / animal health / food safety public organizations, dealing with foodborne zoonoses, antimicrobial resistance and emerging threats.
- Results of this collaboration and their outcomes have a significant cross-sector value aiming to increase the 'OneHealthness' of its partners.
- Alignment with national and international stakeholders was built in in the governance and organization of the EJP.
- The EJP was oriented towards uptake & impact; collaborators have frequently been informed about the important effect their work may have for society and policy.

The Med-Vet basis of One Health EJP is not completely One Health, as a specific environment partner is missing. However, many projects include the environment dimension in their work and show consciousness of the environment as part of the One Health plan. In addition, the European Agency EEA was part of the EJP stakeholders.

The many projects and activities of the One Health EJP follow the guidance: 'prevention-detection-response', the so-called Integrative Strategy Matrix developed at the launch of the EJP. It emphasises the interdisciplinary collaboration of public health, animal health and food safety actors, from surveillance systems over laboratory activities, collection of epidemiological

data and joint risk assessment, and risk management is an excellent basis for a real One Health network that fully includes the environmental dimension.

The interest that the One Health EJP has raised with some European agencies (ECDC, EFSA, EEA, EMA) and international organizations (FAO, WOA, WHO) shows that the work it has achieved is valuable. Although there will not immediately be budget to extend all activities of the One Health EJP, the MedVetNet Association will act as a forum to keep the European organizations together and inform its members on all developments regarding One Health. The SRIA that the EJP developed may serve as a basis for future One Health networks in Europe.

The uptake of the results and outcomes of the One Health EJP continues to be a challenge. Communication and dissemination efforts are crucial to help stakeholders understand what tools have been developed and may be useful for them to uptake. That work should certainly continue after the end of the EJP, for instance by the MedVetNet Association.

CONCLUSION

The success story of MedVetNet is a long-lasting process, twenty years were needed to create the mutual trust and allow the consortium to become a strong partner to work with the European Commission in agreement with the member states. The speakers wished the best for the future. This project was supported by funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under grant agreement No 773830: One Health European Joint Programme.

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