EASO’s Sixth Management Board meeting
Malta, 2 and 3 February 2012
Minutes
1. Adoption of the draft agenda
The Chair welcomed the appointment of new RO representatives to the MB.
The agenda was adopted, after adding the possible invitation of Croatia as an observer under AOB.
ED EASO introduced François Bienfait (Head of the Centre for Training, Quality and Expertise), Iva Solcova (Head of the Unit for General Affairs and Administration) as well as the new EASO staff to the MB.

2. Adoption of the draft minutes of the fifth Management Board meeting
The draft minutes of the 5th MB meeting were adopted, incorporating the changes proposed by AT and EC.

3. Asylum situation inside and outside the European Union and 5. Presentation on an Early Warning System
The MB agreed to discuss jointly agenda items 3 and 5.
-A asylum situation inside the EU. Early Alert System
The Chair welcomed the positive outcome resulting from the factsheets provided by the MS. The need for continuity and improvement of the information gathering was stressed. The Chair suggested including additional information (i.e. backlog, average duration of procedures, total overview of 2011 figures).
ED EASO presented the overall statistics, trends and first conclusions from the factsheets. The information confirmed that Afghanistan and the Western Balkans were a priority. He underlined the importance of the information provided as the basis for a first time EU overview to such an extent in the field of asylum.
Concerning an Early Alert System (EAS), ED EASO highlighted EASO's added value on information gathering and analysing, in order to be prepared and to prevent crises across the EU. Knowing the trends across the EU and analysis the external and the internal situation regarding asylum would enable taking knowledge-led measures at an early stage. ED EASO presented a clock-statistics methodology, analysing overtime and across EU countries information gathered from different sources, including Eurostat sources. He presented a practical case-study of this preliminary mechanism regarding trends of applicants for international protection coming from Western Balkan countries. At this stage, EASO should focus on selected nationalities, such as the Western Balkans, in order to capture key-factors of the trends and formulate reasonable hypothesis for short and long-term scenarios. This method will be further elaborated. ED EASO also mentioned an agreement with Eurostat in order to streamline access to the central database to retrieve relevant data.
EC welcomed the positive results of this collective work as a good starting point. Further steps were needed in order to consolidate the various elements and to be consistent with official data provided by Eurostat.
EC stressed the importance of covering what Eurostat is not already covering, and to quickly have data and constant monitoring in order to take measures when needed. For this purpose, the harmonisation of tools and information was considered essential in order to have the latest factual information (i.e. the EC monitoring mechanism of Western Balkan countries). Consolidation of the methodology was suggested, integrating further information in the analysis, such as backlogs and ethnic and national composition of the flows. Efforts should be linked to the broader discussion carried out under the Dublin Regulation negotiations on the threshold to activate measures and actions. EC identified two roles for EASO: firstly, to analyse the situation outside and inside the EU and, secondly, to be part of the operational toolbox to address problematic situations. The ultimate goal should be to have relevant and reliable information to ensure an early response by the EU, and to work out solutions in partnership.
MS welcomed the approach and activities on information gathering and analysing, as well as on the EAS. They considered that the mechanism could lead to political and operational decisions. They highlighted that the EAS showed real added value of EASO to gather different MS' information. They suggested updating the information systematically and analysis at EU level. They proposed enhancing cooperation with Eurostat
and Frontex and optimising existing information, including the European Migration Network (EMN) and national EAS, thus avoiding duplication.

Concerning the countries or regions to focus on, some MS identified the Western Balkans countries (DE, FR, HU) while other MS suggested Afghanistan (AT, UK, CZ, HU), Pakistan (AT, UK, HU), Africa, especially Somalia and Nigeria (FR, IT, ES, NL) or Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (UK).

MS suggested to gather and analyse additional information on reception conditions (IT, DK), return capacity (IT), subsequent applications (ES, NL, HU), average duration of procedures and backlogs (UK, IE, SE), composition and profile of asylum seekers (BE), recognition rates (DK, IE) and application of recent court decisions (NL, SE). IE also mentioned access to information and the potential use of EASO’s website for this purpose.

Furthermore, DE, FR and CZ warned against the possible negative consequences of visa liberalisation dialogues. DE, AT, IT, FR, NL, DK, PL linked the EASO with the Dublin Regulation negotiations. UK proposed to analyse the relationship between student migration and asylum, while IT focused on the connection with irregular immigration.

UNHCR welcomed the results of the exercise and highlighted the situation of Roma community in Serbia and the situation in Syria.

ED EASO emphasized the need for timely and practical trend analysis, to be able to react quickly. In this regard, the importance of information in order to detect trends, rather than statistically validated data, was stressed. He aimed at elaborating further on an EU overview, but reminding that a balance should be found between accessibility and confidentiality of information. Mixed flows were a relevant element in the analysis. Sharing and exchanging information, as well as fostering cooperation with Frontex in this field was deemed important. Further information, provided by MS (i.e. backlog, duration of procedures) would be integrated. EASO could play a double role following the Dublin Regulation negotiations: to provide analytical information in order to trigger the system and to be an instrument in the toolbox to improve MS' capacity concerning their asylum systems. ED EASO proposed to have a broader overview by next MB meeting including additional data.

The Chair concluded that the analysis and methodology were assessed very positively by the MB. He proposed to consolidate it and to incorporate further information (i.e. backlog, duration of procedures, ethnic and national composition of the flows and total overview of 2011 figures). He welcomed the regional approach, including information on composition and ethnicity of the flows. Clock-statistics were relevant. Complementarity with other sources of information such as Eurostat, Frontex or the EMN should be ensured. The Chair underlined that the analysis could be used to develop practical cooperation internally and externally, including the future forecasts. Finally, he suggested following a step-by-step methodology.

- Request by Luxemburg for support

ED EASO and LU informed on the extraordinary influx faced by LU, which triggered the LU request and the ED EASO decision to deploy an asylum support team, focussed on training. The implementation of the Operating Plan already started. At the request of EASO, LU had agreed on developing continued actions and on participating actively in the EASO training system. LU appreciated EASO's quick response and emergency support and thanked BE and UK for making two trainers available.

- Asylum situation outside EU. Presentation by Frontex on the situation at the external borders of the EU

FRONTEX informed that all relevant indicators concerning irregular immigration had increased in 2011. He confirmed that the Mediterranean and the Western Balkans were the main areas of concern. The Central Mediterranean had reached the highest ever number of irregular crossings in a year (more than 64,000) since the beginning of FRONTEX activities. Preliminary data showed that irregular border crossings in the EU had arrived to 140,000, increasing in 35% compared to 2010. Top 5 nationalities included Tunisia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Algeria. Migration risk had overall increased due to more instability in North Africa and the Middle East, due to elements of radicalism in or close to power and due to negative socio-economic pressures. FRONTEX would continue in 2012 with its operations, but more emphasis will be put on nationality screening and ensuring international protection, while enforcing return capacities.
EC asked to avoid mixing the issue of mixed flows with asylum and international protection, keeping the focus on relevant information and directly related to international protection. Attention should be given to completion of the CEAS, compliance with the Geneva Refugee Convention and fair treatment of those persons in need of international protection.

4. Asylum situation in Greece

ED EASO briefed on the Asylum Support Teams being in EL. Decrease in the backlog and increase of examined cases in 1st and 2nd instance was highlighted. However, ED EASO expressed two concerns: lack of staff on EL side of risk of a new backlog. ED EASO informed on the call for experts and encouraged MS to react by 10th February. Moreover, a mid term evaluation would be prepared for the June MB meeting. An extended factsheet for EASO's activities in EL was presented to the MB.

EC complimented EL on the progress made so far. Nevertheless, questions were raised concerning the criteria determining the decrease of the backlog and the low asylum recognition rate compared to other MS. EC suggested a more focused approach in supporting EL, trying to connect EASO's input with tangible outputs to assess the added value of current actions. Further operational support and technical assistance on the ground was deemed necessary. Simplification of procedures on both sides should be achieved. The EU mission, led by EC, with the participation of EASO, Frontex, UNHCR and IOM would take place in February in order to identify further areas in which support to EL and funds could focus. Staff of the EL asylum service could not be increased dramatically; therefore coherent and coordinated support should focus on helping EL to overcome the obstacles. Procedures, including the EC ones, should be streamlined and simplified whenever necessary and possible. The outcome of the mission would be also useful to design operation solutions by EASO.

UNHCR underlined the good cooperation with the EL authorities and summarized its contributions in 1st and 2nd instance procedures. UNHCR highlighted the need for improving EL reception, registration and integration capacities, asking for a structural intervention. UNHCR was looking forward for coordination of efforts from EC and EL authorities.

EL thanked the continuous support. Attention was drawn to the overall picture of migration, asylum seekers being just a part of the total figures. Number of irregular migrants in EL had led to an overloaded system. EL underlined that more time would be needed to put in place an operational asylum service and stressed the need to find ways for an exemption to recruit sufficient staff for the new asylum service. The building of a reception centre had already started and 5 new appeal committees had been put in place. The recognition rate had been increased since the last MB meeting. Responding to an EC request, backlog decrease was mainly due to withdrawal or abandonment of applications. EL informed that the current needs were often very practical (i.e. renting an office for decision makers). EL highlighted that it is willing to further improve the situation.

UK expressed concern regarding the recognition rate and asked for detailed information. Lack of absorption of EU support was regrettable. UK also pointed out that the timeframe for replying to calls of experts was tight. UK and AT asked themselves whether enough effective action on ground was underway and asked for evaluation of the deployments and EASO's support. AT raised the question of the reception conditions and capacity, asking for more concrete figures. AT called for closer cooperation between EASO and Frontex, understanding that there was a clear link between illegal crossings at the EL-Turkish border and the asylum applications.

ED EASO reminded that UNHCR was tasked to undertake immediate, short term measures while EASO was assigned with structural, long term measures. He also recalled that, in accordance with the EASO Regulation, EASO had a coordinating role. EASO's actions had to be implemented on the basis of an agreed detailed plan and at the request of a Member State. EASO could develop more actions, but this depended by nature on the MS' availability to make experts available for deployment.

EC highlighted that emergency support to EL would be the real test case for EASO. EASO's contribution in this field was essential for the construction of the CEAS. Practical support by all actors was deemed
important. EC also mentioned the possibilities of technical support, and underlined the need of common efforts to improve the absorption capacity.

The Chair concluded that permanent assessment on the improvement of the EL asylum system was needed. Waiting for the mid-term evaluation in June was not enough. The mission in February was a good opportunity to identify actions and evaluate the needs. Precise figures (i.e. backlog, processing times, and reception capacities) and concrete EL commitments were necessary. More effective actions on the ground may be needed and thus EASO could play an active role.

6. Internal Audit Service Charter

Mr Gray, DG of the Internal Audit Service, informed on its tasks and the auditing procedures for EC Services and EU Agencies. ED EASO attached great importance to the internal audit as an instrument for EASO management and the MB. DG IAS, the Chair and ED EASO signed the Internal Audit Service Charter.

7. Going concern EASO Work Programme 2012

7. a. State of Play EASO organisation, recruitment and EASO permanent building at Valletta waterfront

ED EASO and EC informed on the state of play of recruitment. Procedures were long, but EASO was steadily growing. The bureau-de-passage in Brussels is still operational.

EASO would be moving to the new premises at Valletta waterfront in summer.

Regarding financial issues, EASO was still financially dependent on the EC, which is processing the financial transactions of EASO, both for commitments and payments. ED EASO stressed that EASO didn't still have sufficiently solid basis for being financial independent. He thanked the EC for their support and joint work. The transfer of financial responsibilities to EASO could only be achieved when EASO could rely on enough qualified staff.

DE considered that EASO faced operational challenges, as long as the necessary resources regarding personnel, premises and finance were not still available. DE asked whether EASO would be fully operational and financially capable in 2013 or 2014.

ED EASO stressed that 2013 was of essential meaning for the Agency regarding the consolidation of the financial capacities and organisation.

EC underlined that progression on recruitment was in line with other experiences and suffered by normal constraints. EC also welcomed the fact that EASO was expected to enter the final premises on time, as the remaining issues with the MT authorities were being solved. On achieving financial independence, EC underlined the importance of complying with the regulatory framework and respecting the deadlines.

The Chair concluded that the state of play was in line with the decisions taken by the MB. Current situations needed to be addressed with flexibility. Concerning 2012, EASO should perform the planned tasks, achieve financial independence and implement its own budget, in order to ensure that it would be able to convince the budgetary authority not to apply the same cuts as was the case for other agencies.

7. b. State of Play European Asylum Curriculum

ED EASO updated on recent developments in the European Asylum Curriculum (EAC). ED EASO stressed the importance of EASO Training Strategy, which would be included in next MB meeting's agenda. EASO would also develop an EU-wide EAC Training Cockpit. This initiative would help to determine training needs and target groups in each MS and would allow EASO to monitor the progress made by each MS when implementing EAC.

EASO would also further evaluate the participation of MS in train-the-trainer sessions organised by EASO and would decide on how to manage training where the minimum capacity are not fulfilled.
EASO's strategic choice was to consolidate the present 13 existing EAC modules. Therefore, it would completely re-draft the Interviewing module and EU Asylum Law and Policy module, which would include future changes upon completion of the CEAS.

7.c. State of Play EASO activities Unaccompanied Minors

ED EASO briefed on the EASO planned activities regarding EC Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors. EASO would have a thematic focus on age assessment, including information sharing, working party meetings and update of EAC 'Interviewing Children' module. Following the conclusion of working parties, EASO would draft guidelines, focussing on best practice. This work would be carried put in cooperation with the EC, MS, UNHCR and NGOs.

EC informed that a report on the implementation of the Action Plan should be delivered in 2012. The importance of age assessment was stressed. EC suggested that the guidelines and working parties should involve experts working on the ground, as well as NGOs, UNHCR and the Consultative Forum.

AT and UK requested further information on the content, nature and timescale of the guidelines. AT asked on the make-up of participants for the planned meetings and working parties. AT also stressed that family tracing and actions aimed at persons found not to be minors should be developed. ES raised the question of the interdependence of international protection of unaccompanied minors and general policies and obligations on protection of minors.

ED EASO called for the involvement of civil society organisations, confirmed the non-binding nature of the guidelines, insisted on the priority focus on age assessment and concluded that interdependence of policies should be assessed.

8. Framework for EASO List of Interpreters

ED EASO presented a revised proposal for the framework of the EASO list of interpreters. The obligation to set up a list of interpreters is directly provided for by the EASO Regulation. According to the EASO Regulation interpreters could be used in connection with Asylum Support Teams, if the requirement of "particular pressure" was met. However, the EASO list of available languages could also be useful in cases not explicitly covered by the EASO Regulation. ED EASO recommended taking into account the lessons learned from the GDISC Interpreters' Pool project. The project had been successful overall, but had also shown that the method of "double interpretation" was only the second best option. ED EASO underlined that MS remained responsible for translation, while EASO would develop a list of available languages.

IE, FR and NL stated that the revised proposals took into account their remarks and concerns, but raised the question of national and EU procurement rules. In this regard, SE asked to include a clarification on procurement rules. MT stressed that the effective organisation of interpretation capacities was a long-term measure.

ED EASO suggested to amend his proposal by adding an additional paragraph which stated that the decision on EASO's list of available languages does not interfere with EU or national rules on procurement.

The Chair concluded that the MB supported the proposal, provided that the additional paragraph was inserted.

9. Presentation first draft of the Annual Report on the situation of asylum in the EU

The Chair welcomed the information provided by the MS. He reminded the decision to have a joint annual report, covering the annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU and the annual general report on EASO's activities.

EASO presented the first draft of the annual report and the working method. ED EASO stressed that priority should be given to quality and thus more time may be needed to finalise the report. The Annual Report
would only describe the developments in 2011. While the part related to EASO activities in 2011 was nearly finalised, other chapters of the Annual Report had to be completed with new information from various sources. Following the meeting of the Consultative Forum, the aim was to provide balanced information, involving civil society in accordance to the EASO Regulation.

The overall approach to this first draft was generally welcomed. DE stressed the convenience to separate the annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU and the annual activity report. Several MS expressed their concern (DE, FR, HU, PL, AT, BE, ES, NL) concerning the inclusion of NGOs’ critical views in the report. NGO’s views may be regarded as EASO’s official assessment. UK supported the quotes from NGO opinions, as they were clearly attributed and could not be mistaken with EASO’s position. FR pointed out that some MS would seem to be singled out if NGO comments were not equally provided for all MS. Balanced information would require a level of comprehensiveness that couldn’t be achieved by the Annual Report. DE considered that civil society would make their comments known after the Report was published. AT emphasized the importance of wording and stressed that EASO should not be presented as a body monitoring MS. NL understood that NGOs’ opinions may be reported where there was a clear connection with EASO action. UNHCR referred to expectations resulting from the Consultative Forum and underlined the importance of involving civil society, according to the EASO Regulation.

EC highlighted the importance of this first report in order to establish EASO as an independent centre for expertise, referred to the methodology and content of the Annual Report on Immigration and Asylum published by EC, and suggested that EASO should publish a compact, factual and user-friendly report, focusing on practical cooperation and impact measures. Involving civil society was deemed essential. EC confirmed its full availability to support EASO in this regard.

MB agreed that the Annual Report was one of the most important outputs of EASO. This first report would be scrutinised closely and would set a precedent. Hence, as ES and NL highlighted, careful consideration should be given to the message the report was delivering. The report should show that EASO is active and responsive. Priority should be given to quality.

The Chair emphasized the importance of this first annual report. He reminded that the MB was responsible for adopting the Report and, therefore, the MS had to fully commit themselves. He noticed the necessity to adress the question of method as far as NGO’S opinions are concerned: this point is sensitive enough to justify some more time to shape the report in compliance with the requirements of the procedure and in respect with the guidelines exposed to the MB. He pointed out that quality, not speed, was essential. There should be a second round of information provided by MS to EASO. Afterwards, a new draft would be circulated in due course for MS’ comments. Taking into due consideration the concerns expressed by several MS, the chair considers that the report should be adopted during the next session of MB, and not by a written procedure.

10. Country of Origin Information

- State of Play EASO activities on Country of Origin Information

EASO presented the COI governance structure and the EASO COI system. EASO invited MS to register to the COI Portal, which was already operational. The EASO COI system would provide permanent support by fostering expertise and capacity building, as well as specific and emergency support by ad hoc support to MS with needs for COI. Training would mirror the COI system and analytical tools would be included in the system. EASO briefed on the activities of the working parties on COI portal and on the European Country Sponsorship.

- State of Play EASO practical cooperation (EURASIL)

ED EASO highlighted the activities of the working parties and the final EURASIL plenary meeting on 15 and 16 March 2012, which would mark the beginning of the gradual handover of Eurasil activities to EASO.

MS cautioned against interruptions in the activity of the Eurasil network.
EC confirmed its support to EASO in order to ensure a smooth handover of practical cooperation measures still being run by EC.

- Methodology of the EASO COI-reports and state of play of the EASO COI-Report on Afghanistan

EASO proposed a methodology on EASO COI reports. According to the proposal, neutrality, objectivity, usability, validity and transparency should be the standards. The methodology would include a Handbook with guidelines to draft COI reports. The draft would be finalised by March 2012 and circulated to MS for comments.

Concerning the COI report on Afghanistan, EASO aimed at finalising the draft by May 2012 and at distributing it to MS for comments. The report is to be included in the agenda of the June MB meeting. In July 2012 it will be published and evaluated by December 2012.

The MB underlined the importance of EASO COI activities. UK asked whether EASO would produce reports on a regular basis or whether it would concentrate on methodology. NL raised the question of the status of EASO reports with regards to COI reports from MS. BE highlighted the importance of methodology and the already existing expertise and structures. The need to involve experts from different fields was stressed. IE suggested to enhance cooperation with judges within the Eurasil context. AT pointed out that all the Eurasil activities had to be followed-up. EC underlined the importance of the Final Eurasil Conference of March.

ED EASO stated that validated methodology was an important asset for the decision-making process and for the judiciary. The status of EASO reports had to be earned, particularly vis-à-vis the ECJ and ECHR. Developing methodology as well as drafting reports on concrete countries or regions was within EASO’s duties.

11. Report on the first plenary meeting of the Consultative Forum and future EASO consultative activities

ED EASO briefed on the results of the first meeting of the Consultative Forum, which took place on 15 December 2011. The results were assessed as very positive and civil society showed great expectations and their wish to regularly participate in EASO consultation activities.

ED EASO informed on future consultative activities in 2012, highlighting the further development of the Consultative Forum Register, to be published on the EASO website, as well as the setting up of a structured consultation process with civil society organisations, including an e-platform for web consultations. ED EASO mentioned that the operational plan will be presented to the MB in its June meeting.

MB endorsed the proposed activities. Some MS (DE, SI, AT) proposed not to go beyond the strict consultation obligations provided for by the EASO Regulation and to balance NGOs’ high expectations. AT believed an e-platform could be very expensive. SI asked for more involvement of the judiciary. BE and SE stressed the need to involve and build networks with civil society organisations and highlighted the importance of using their expertise in asylum. FR underlined the importance of involving civil society. NL asked for a balanced and practical approach.

EC welcomed the results of the first plenary meeting and asked for permanent two way dialogue, including the proposed e-platform to be established as soon as possible.

UNHCR considered the first meeting was successful. The operational plan should address the form in which civil society is involved and consulted in practice.

ED EASO stressed that EASO would draft an operational plan for the Consultative Forum. ED EASO recalled that the Consultative Forum could give input to EASO, but not address recommendations.

The Chair concluded that EASO fulfilled an important objective by organising the first Consultative Forum +Its contributions, advise and expertise should be taken into account, but shouldn't determine EASO activities.

12. Outline Work Programme 2013 to be sent to the Commission on 10 February
ED EASO presented the outline for the Work Programme 2013, emphasizing its five priorities. ED EASO reminded that the Work Programme would be discussed again before its adoption by the MB by 30 September. The EC would have to give its formal opinion prior to adoption.

MS welcomed the outline of the Work Programme 2013 and agreed on the set priorities thereof. They called for flexibility, in order to be able to adapt to new circumstances, especially as new emergency situations may arise. Some MS referred to reinforcing relocation, resettlement and external dimension.

EC welcomed the outline of the Work Programme, asked for flexibility and dynamism and referred to strengthening the external dimension, as well as relocation and resettlement activities. EC underlined that it would carry out a first evaluation of EASO as foreseen in the EC Communication on Solidarity. The importance of incorporating the emergency dimension of the EASO mandate in the COI and EAC was underlined. The possibility of training border guards under the EAC programme was also mentioned.

ED EASO confirmed that the five proposed priorities were equally relevant and underlined that permanent support had to become the day-to-day EASO’s activity. Flexibility was deemed as a valuable asset as regards the Work Programme 2013, especially in emergency support activities.

The Chair concluded that the MB in general agreed on the outline of the Work Programme 2013. In 2013, EASO had to be actively present in all areas covered by the EASO Regulation, provided that it has the necessary resources available.

13. Draft 2013 Budget to be sent to the Commission on 10 February

EC recalled the budgetary procedure for the EU Budget and presented the provisional draft estimate of EASO’s revenue and expenditure for 2013 which constitutes the basis for DG HOME proposal to the EC’s horizontal services for inclusion in 2013 Budget. The good cooperation between EASO and the EC was stressed. 2013 would be the last year that EASO would still be considered a start-up Agency and thus benefit of a more favourable position regarding the budget and the staff. In DG HOME proposal, EASO’s draft 2013 budget would grow to 15M € and would include a request of 80 posts. Internal process in EC was ongoing, leading to the final 2013 Draft Budget to be adopted by the College of Commissioners and therefore amounts requested for both commitments were not final yet.

MS regretted that the budgetary documents had been sent the day before the meeting. They recalled that documents should be sent two weeks prior the meeting, according to the Rules of Procedure. The Chair underlined that documents should be sent in time and concluded that the MB in general agreed on the draft budget estimates.


The MB decided to make the provisional Rules of Procedure permanent.

The Chair proposed to discuss the amendments to these rules, recalling that EC formal opinion had to be delivered before the decision by the MB.

ED EASO presented the amendments affecting the preamble and Articles 3, 7, 9, 10 and 13.

Some MS asked for clarification concerning the observer and expert status. Concerning proxies, EL proposed to add the possibility of notifying proxies during the meeting if special circumstances prevent a Member from voting.

ED EASO explained that reimbursement of expenses incurred by observers and experts in connection with MB activities may be borne by EASO. It was proposed to change the provision on proxies, according to EL remark.

The Chair concluded that the provisional Rules of Procedure had been adopted as permanent, subject to the EC opinion. The revised Rules would be adopted by written procedure, after receiving the EC opinion and amending Article 7 concerning the timeframe for proxies.
15. Status of associated countries

EC informed that the Council decided on 27 January to authorise the opening of negotiations of the Agreements between EASO and the associated countries. Following this Council Decision, formal negotiations would be launched on the basis of preparatory technical talks which have already been undertaken in the last months. The aim is to be able to conclude agreements under the DK Presidency of the Council.

ED EASO stressed that practical cooperation was already ongoing in several areas.

16. Dates of the next Management Board meetings in 2012

The Chair confirmed that the next MB meeting would take place on 18 and 19 June 2012. The venue of the meeting needed to be changed and thus translation possibilities could be limited. ED EASO announced certain items to be included in the agenda, namely, the COI report on Afghanistan, the EASO training strategy, the EASO Communication strategy, the evaluation of the deployment of ASTs and possibly, the discussion of the Annual report on the situation of asylum.

17. AOB

- Invitation to Croatia to attend EASO meetings as an observer

Following the signature of the Treaty of Accession of Croatia to the EU, the MB decided to invite Croatia as an observer to the MB meetings, starting from the 18 and 19 June meeting. It also decided to invite Croatia as an observer to meetings of other structures created under the EASO Regulation. Following the Rules of Procedure, reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses of observers may be borne by EASO.

- ED EASO Appraisal procedures

The Chair informed that, according to the Staff Regulations and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants, ED EASO had to be subject to appraisal procedures. In this regard, the MB had to adopt a Decision on these procedures. The Chair proposed to adopt the Decision by written procedure, subject to the agreement of the EC. Moreover, he proposed to appoint Mr Dirk Van den Bulck, Member of the MB appointed by BE, and Mr Stefano Manservisi, DG HOME of the EC, as reporting officers regarding the said procedures.