

FINAL REPORT

Twinning light project No 5821901 0201 0014
Document Final Report
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**“Strengthening the Rapid Alert System
network for food safety in the Slovak
Republic”**

1. Executive summary

The Twinning light project has been implemented with the intention to face, after accession, the improving of the efficiency and capacities of the two branches of the NCP, the MoA and MoH staff in the food safety sector, in order to complete the protection of consumers from exposure to health risk food products placed on the market.

In accordance with the ToR requirements, project activities have been planned and implemented in order to reach the general and the specific objectives of the project and have been agreed by the project leader with the local beneficiaries.

The project has been implemented by a first phase of Intensive training of professional staff of RASFF units, divided in different training session. The first training session was based on EU regulations development and implementation at national level; mapping of the controlling authorities for the food safety and connecting system; the RASFF system and its application.

The second training session was focused on HACCP methodology in line with Codex Alimentarius, in order to analyse the practical application of the HACCP system in case studies and examples from the guidelines of the Italian Ministry of Health. Practical applications from Emilia-Romagna Region that could be transferred in the Slovak Republic have been also individuated.

These first two training sessions have been performed on the basis of knowledge on SK food control organization and the arrangement with beneficiaries' countries representatives.

The third training session was focused on evaluation of the general principles of risk assessment and communication and then the Italian experts showed and analyzed with the beneficiaries' staff case studies and the project work presentation, foreseen for the last part of the project.

All these contents have been delivered in four training sessions, two of which have been held in Bratislava the other two in Kosice.

After that, in the month of April, has been organised a brainstorming meeting for the transfer of know-how and presentation of the Italian system and methodologies applied by the ARPA partner. Thanks to this phase it has been reached the result of development of a preliminary proposal of general methodical procedure of risk assessment. It is an high-quality evidence-based proposal on general methodical procedure of risk assessment in the field of chemical and microbiological contaminants. This material shall include instructions for evaluation of risk rising from microbiological and chemical contamination. The results of this brainstorming have been presented during the Final press conference and it has been enhanced the capacity of the beneficiary to respect EC regulations and upgraded the Slovak *acquis communautaire* implementation and strengthened the contacts with other National and European institutions.

During a second meeting the general methodical procedure of risk assessment has been presented and the final proposal on risk assessment and control system together with experts from SR has been elaborated.

In May have been implemented the Final high professional seminar by working groups and plenary session, by the exchange of information (discussion, presentations) and experiences on functioning of different national RASFF systems (differences, their comparison, potential and real problems of RASFF functioning and how to solve them in practice) between the professional RASFF unit staff of institutions and experts from ARPA (plenary session).

The project has been concluded with a Final high professional seminar addressed to all 160 Slovak officials involved in the training activities. During this official meeting project results have been disseminated and spread out and it has been defined a follow up plan of action, as to ensure sustainability to the project as well as the final version of the Guidelines has been presented.

Further more, the partners have agreed to organise, in addition to the activities indicated in the ToR, a Final press conference, as stated in the Mission Report of the 15 of May, with local representatives of the MoA and the MoH and Italian representatives of ARPA the Emilia-Romagna Region institutions involved in the projects (Local Health Authorities of Modena, Modena Formazione) and the Major of Castelvetro on behalf of Emilia-Romagna Region.

The Final press conference have been the following objectives:

- To disseminate project results
- To offer Italian stakeholders the opportunity for economical investments in SR in the field of food production and distribution
- To introduce the organisation and the economical setting of the Italian food valley (Emilia-Romagna Region)
- To give some examples of effective collaboration between Italian and Slovak control institutions, with the aim of creating the best opportunities in the area of food production and distribution
- To involve private stakeholders in the sectors of food production and distribution
- To define the needs for future collaboration between Italy and Slovak Republic
- To describe best practices and exchange experiences with the Italian experts on different national RASFF systems.
- To adopt a general methodological procedure for RA in food control.
- Presentation of the agreement between Italy and SR on safe food production and distribution in the field of global competitive market

During the Final press conference a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), an initiative of the Emilia Romagna Region, ARPA Emilia Romagna and the Office for Public Health of the Republic of Slovakia has been signed between the Emilia-Romagna Region, ARPA Emilia Romagna and the State Health Authority of Slovak Republic.

The aims of this MoU was to support initiatives either in terms of specific projects or systematic/organic proposals to promote further development of collaboration among the signing parties of MoU

According to the above described activities, the following results have been reached:

- Strengthened capacity (structure, organisation, competencies) within MoA and MoH staff as branches of the NCP to implement the RASFF measures and risk management in an efficient and effective manner.
- General systems and procedures needed to ensure effective managing and implementation of risk management and RASFF measures.
- Relevant MoA and MoH staff trained on key subject indicated in the ToR
- Implementation of General methodical procedure of risk assessment
- Respect of the EC regulations and upgrading of Slovak *acquis communautaire* implementation and strengthened contacts with other National and European Institutions.

2. Background

After becoming new EU member state, relevant Slovak institutions must upgrade its internal system in order to respect the European standards and the application of the Regulation 178/2002 has been improved but need increasingly the contribution and the assistance from old member states.

In particular, in Slovakia the organisational structure, the content and the scope of the work, which is covered by the RASFF, has been defined by the Slovak Act No. 152/1995 Coll. on Foodstuffs as amended by Act No. 23/2002 Coll.

According to EU legislation, a National Contact Point has been established and it is in contact with all the other NCPs in European Union and with the European Food Safety Authority. The NCP is established at the State Veterinary and Food Administration. On the national level the RASFF consists of two basic parts – one under the competence of the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the second one under the competence of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).

These two components of the Slovakian RASFF will be the main beneficiary of the present project proposal and related activities and in particular the final beneficiaries will be the staff of both the subjects.

The general objective of the training activities are:

- to intervene on the food safety in Slovak Republic in order to improve the efficiency and competencies of the two branches of the NCP
- to strengthen and update knowledge on Rapid Alert System and on risk assessment issue

According to the above described activities, the following results have been reached:

- Strengthened capacity within MoA and MoH staff as branches of the NCP to implement the RASFF measures and risk management in an efficient and effective manner;
- Relevant MoA and MoH staff trained on key subject indicated in the ToR;
- Implementation of General methodical procedure of risk assessment;
- Respect of the EC regulations and upgrading of Slovak *acquis communautaire* implementation and strengthened contacts with other National and European Institutions.

3. Summary of the activities

The following activities have been implemented during the overall project duration, from December 2004 to May 2005.

➤ Intensive training of professional staff of RASFF units

ACTIVITIES
<p>1ST TRAINING SESSION: EU REGULATIONS DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL; MAPPING OF THE CONTROLLING AUTHORITIES FOR THE FOOD SAFETY AND CONNECTING SYSTEM; THE RASFF SYSTEM AND ITS APPLICATION; (4 SESSIONS).</p> <p>The subjects developed during the intensive training were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- EU regulations and requirements- Mapping and linking system- Rapid alert- General remarks: the changes after the accession to EU in SR, general perspectives, expectations from the TL project- Basic definitions, risk assessment, risk management, risk communication, hazard identification, hazard characterisation, exposure assessment, risk characterisation- Brief presentation of National Contact Points on alert reports in 2004
<p>2ND TRAINING SESSION: HACCP METHODOLOGY IN LINE WITH CODEX <i>ALIMENTARIUS</i> (4 SESSIONS)</p> <p>The second training session was focused on different subjects according to the ToR and after the analysis and discussion of the technical aspects has been analysed Italian examples of best practices in the specific field.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Industrial self-control and application method- HACCP risk assessment- Discussion and analysis of technical aspects- Case studies- HCCP applied to the catering industry and foodstuff transport (examples form the guidelines of the Italian Ministry of Health, effects and practical applications in Emilia-Romagna Region)
<p>3RD TRAINING SESSION: (4 SESSIONS)</p> <p>The focus of this session has been on the evaluation of the general principles of risk assessment and its communication and after that cases studies in different situations have been analysed. The last phase has been concentrated in the project work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- EVALUATION OF THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF RISK ASSESSMENT.- RISK MANAGEMENT AND RISK COMMUNICATION;- ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES: experiences of intervention in situations with staphilococcus aureus, lysteria monocytogenes, salmonella, vibrio cholerae, etc. hg, pb, cd, mycotoxines,as, pau- PROJECT WORK PRESENTATION: general definition of specialisation area for the working group implementation and final meeting realisation.

➤ **Development of high – quality evidence – based proposal on general methodological procedure of risk assessment**

ACTIVITIES

1. 5 DAYS BRAINSTORMING MEETING

- **ANALYSIS OF THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE PROCESSES**
- **TRANSFER OF KNOW-HOW AND PRESENTATION OF THE ITALIAN SYSTEM AND METHODOLOGIES APPLIED BY THE ARPA PARTNER**

2. 2 DAYS BRAINSTORMING MEETING

- **DEVELOPMENT OF A PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL OF GENERAL METHODICAL PROCEDURE OF RISK ASSESSMENT IN ORDER TO PRESENT IT DURING THE FINAL HIGH PROFESSIONAL SEMINAR - this preliminary proposal has been prepared for the 2-days meeting of IT experts with experts from PHA SR and SVFA SR. It has been defined an high-quality evidence-based proposal on General methodical procedure of risk assessment in the field of chemical and microbiological contaminants. This material include instructions for evaluation of risk rising from microbiological and chemical contamination with particular emphasis on that part of contaminants, additives, risk rising from microbiological contamination (particularly Staphylococcus aureus, Listeria monocytogenes, Campylobacter, Vibrio cholerae, Salmonella), where is not adopted EU legislation in the area of EU limits, particularly Hg, Pb, Cd, mycotoxines, As, PAU, pathogenic microorganisms (particularly Staphylococcus aureus, Listeria monocytogenes, Campylobacter, Vibrio cholerae, Salmonella etc) and other ones (particularly HACCP in public catering premises-it is necessary to clarify), shall reflect WHO/FAO and possibly EU requirements for evaluation of this risk.**

3. PRESENTATION OF A GENERAL METHODICAL PROCEDURE OF RISK ASSESSMENT

- **ELABORATION OF THE FINAL PROPOSAL ON RISK ASSESSMENT AND CONTROL SYSTEM TOGETHER WITH EXPERTS FROM SR**
- **DEFINITION OF THE FIELDS FOR FUTURE COLLABORATION ACTIVITIES BETWEEN ARPA AND SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

RESULTS

- Final Proposal
- Safe Foodstuff Guidelines

ACTIVITIES

1. ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF CASE STUDY, INDIVIDUATION OF THE BEST PRACTICES AND EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES WITH THE ITALIAN EXPERTS.

During this phase, according to the ToR, 2 days of training course has been carried out, with a first day for the exchange of best practices and analysis of case studies on RASFF and evaluation with the experts of strength and weakness points as well as different solutions. During the second day the beneficiaries in strict collaboration with the experts evaluated methods for risk assessment evaluation.

The phases of this activity where:

- **Exchange of information** (discussion, presentations) **and experiences on functioning of different national RASFF systems** (differences, their comparison, potential and real problems of RASFF functioning and how to solve them in practice) between the professional RASFF unit staff of institutions and experts from Member States (plenary session).
- **Analysis of Case studies** (working groups in small groups – 20 persons each group)
- **Discussion** about the results of the previous activities and presentation of the General methodical procedure of risk assessment.

3.1 Comments

The Comments are based on an evaluation activity made by the Italian experts at the end of the project and based on interviews to the project beneficiaries. The interviews and the analysis of the results will be attached to the report as annex.

The general comments on this activity has been positive and the beneficiaries agreed all the training aspects: contents, organisation of the materials, location, etc.

In particular the Italian experts asked to the beneficiaries to evaluate the project training/technical assistance activities in relation to the following aspects:

- preparation of the intervention
- realisation of the educational procedures
- production of usable materials as action guidelines

In particular it has been verified the level of coherence between the programmed action and its realization, the ability to adaptation/flexibility regarding changes/unexpected interventions , also in coherence with the initially previewed purposes, the perceived output quality.

In this framework, the survey methodology is based in the following instruments of analysis:

- participation to working meetings also to technical meeting in order to connect the requests and the suggestions to a coherent didactical methodology
- materials preparation for the methodological definition of the activities
- personnel interview in order to verify on the field *in itinere* and for the final evaluation
- definition of questionnaires for the evaluation of the training activities from the participants.

The fundamental criteria of appraisal used can be conducted to the following verification areas:

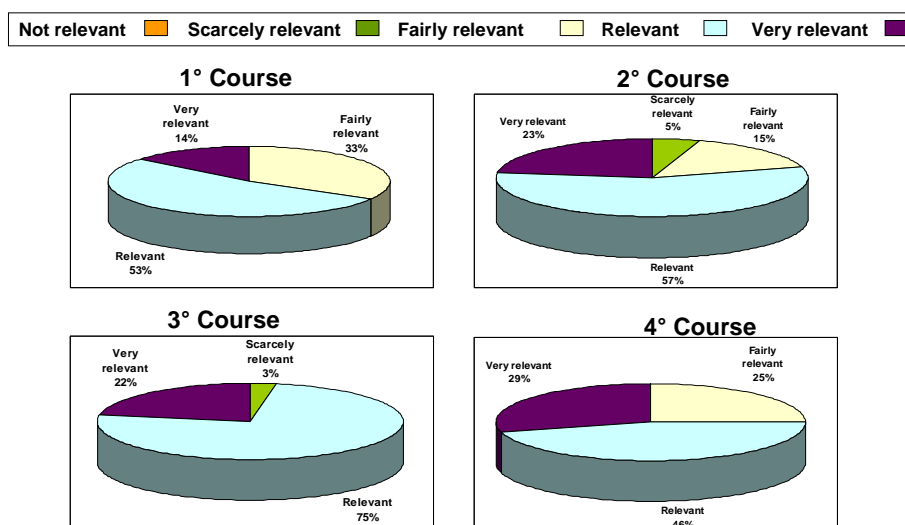
- Coherent proceeding and development of the actions, with a methodology addressed to overcome difficulties and hinders of the various phases.
- Attainment of the defined objectives, coherence with the declared purposes/objectives.
- Changes that took part, realignments, adjustments realised *in itinere*.
- Technique/scientific value of the produced results and factors/conditions that have contributed to produce them;
- Innovation e quality of the produced methodological and organisational proposal, contents and the modalities of job as well as its transferability and sustainability.
- Total budget of the action, satisfactory aspects, unsatisfactory aspects, missed results.

The **results** of the evaluation activity have been the followings:

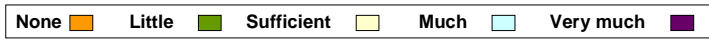
- a) Effectiveness and function of the group containing the project partners, real consistence, quantity of relations, possibility of prosecution, continuity and quality of the participation and presence.
- b) Effectiveness of the system previewed for the project government and management
- c) Value of the results and innovation produced regarding the declared elements of innovation, conditions that facilitate and hinder the experimentation.
- d) Coherence with the general declared purposes and with the expected (qualitative and quantitative) results.

In the following pie table are showed the evaluation session results.

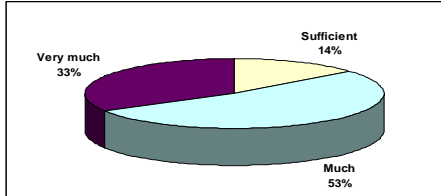
Topic relevance



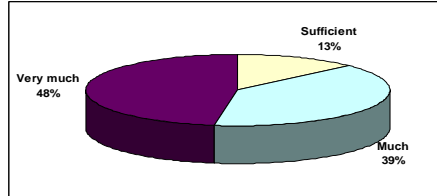
Topic clearness



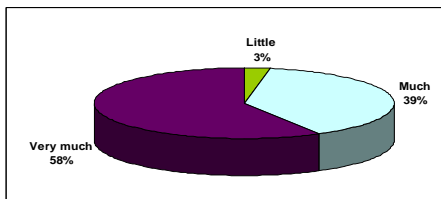
1° Course



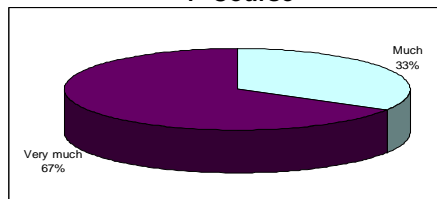
2° Course



3° Course



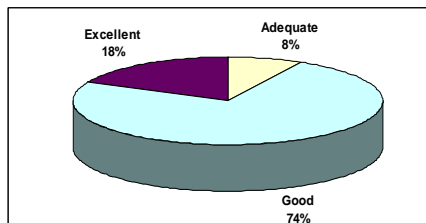
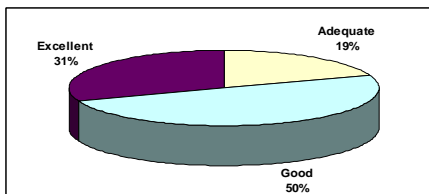
4° Course



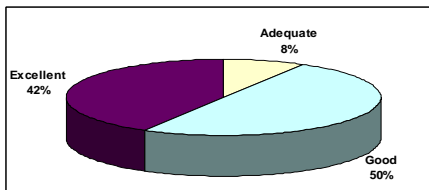
Teaching materials



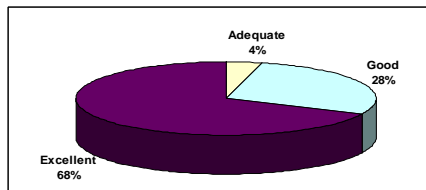
1° Course



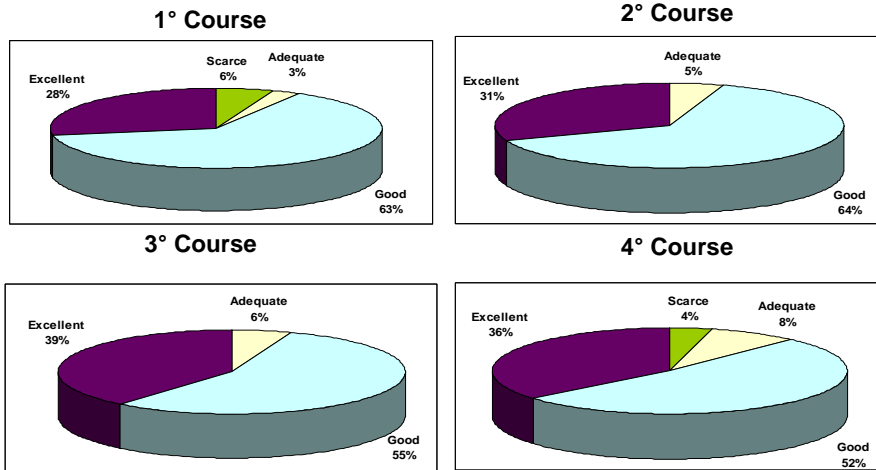
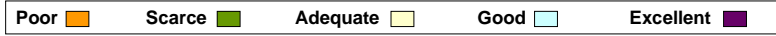
3° Course



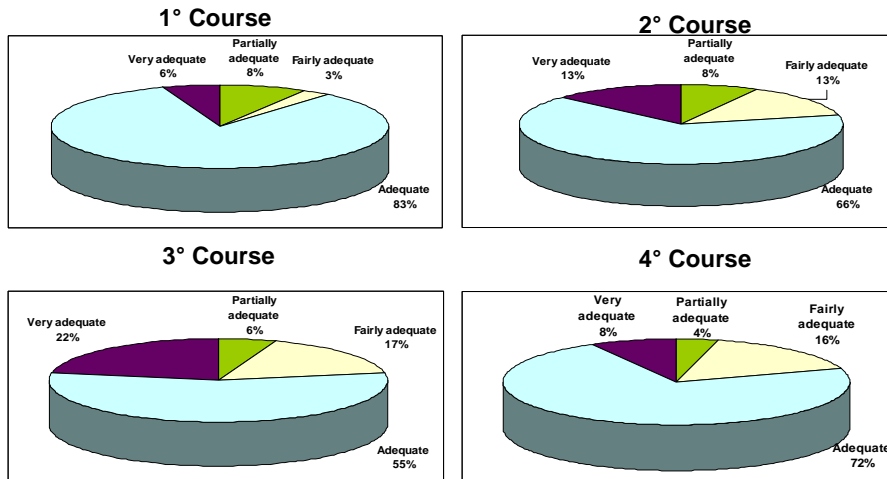
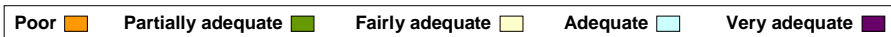
4° Course



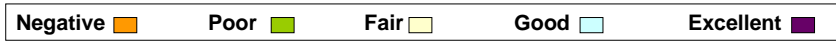
Teaching quality



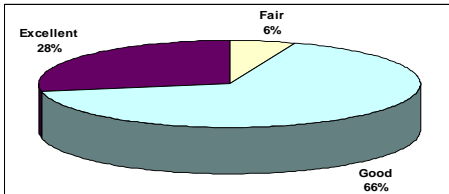
Course efficiency for continuing education



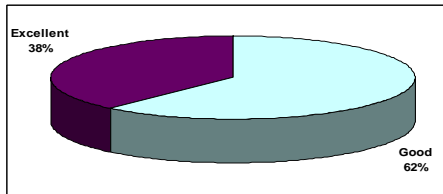
Whole satisfaction degree



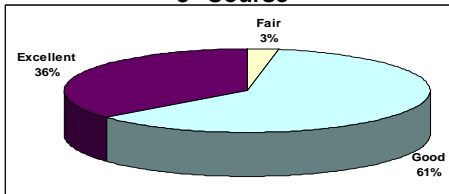
1° Course



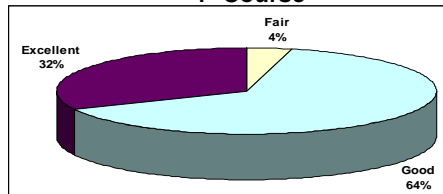
2° Course



3° Course



4° Course



Time plan of the activities

Months/Activity		A. Training 1° course Bratislava	A. Training 2° course Bratislava	A: Training 3° course Kosice	A: Training 4° course Kosice	C. 1 Internal Brain storming	C. 2 Italian- Slovakian meeting	B. Final meeting	Final report
Dec ember									
January	28								
February		28							
March		1, 2	1, 2, 3	15, 16, 17	16, 17, 18				
April						29/3-30-31- 1/4, 2	11-12		
May								12-13	
June									
July									

4. Evaluation of the Twinning light project

The project started with a little delay respecting to the signature of the contract (30 November 2004) due to the impediments of the partners in the month of February.

After the final definition of the work plan, made during the first project meeting on 28th of January in Bratislava, the training has been planned and the first training course started at the end of March.

During the months from March to May all the planned activities have been implemented, respecting the timetable and with and high degree of satisfaction from the beneficiaries, as stated in the evaluation score sheets.

Moreover, all the training materials have been translated from Italian or English to Slovak, in order to facilitate the learning activity of the Slovak trainees. It will become useful material also after the project end and will guarantee the improving of practical capacities of the beneficiaries.

Due to the necessity to overcome the language obstacle, a translation service has been granted during the training sessions, the brainstorming meetings and the conferences as to ensure the communication among the parties.

Regarding the budget, there have been changes in some budget category, according to incurring needs during the project implementation and following the Beneficiary indications and its official approval.

During the **evaluation phase**, thanks to a wider survey conducted by the Italian experts on the beneficiaries, it has been recognised that the problems could be linked to two main reasons:

- The language problem, which has obliged to use the interpreter in a lot of situation and to decrease the time for the interviews and the investigations
- The time table of the project activities: the strict time defined for the evaluation and the impossibility to verify deeply the opinions and suggestions of the final beneficiaries has limited the possibility to exchange at the best opinions and suggestions with the beneficiary. In particular, it has been difficult to evaluate the efficacy of the operative Guidelines settled up during the project implementation, but we will be in contact with the beneficiary in order to evaluate also after the project's end the sustainability of the intervention.

The training sessions and the supporting materials produced can be synthetically judged as very positive. The evaluation results obtained both with informal tools and especially with the informal one, clearly underline the global quality of the supplied service and the trainers preparation and their educational skills, the methodology correctness and the usefulness of the contents and documents utilised.

Especially the evaluation of the trainers has been always completely positive both in the outcomes of the questionnaires proposed in the four training sessions and in the questionnaire proposed in the conference final session.

However, the beneficiary organisation is actively interested in adopting the changes for innovation and the effective adoption of new rules will be done as soon as possible.

In the following table are exposed the considerations resulted from the evaluation on each single issue utilised in the survey with the beneficiaries of the training programme.

	ISSUE	CHECK RESULTS
1	Information on the training course	The information assured to the participants was mostly correct and in accordance with what defined during the planning phase. The expectations related to the course were basically respected.
2	Participants individuation	The participants selection presented some difficulties, in particular the involvement of the subjects operating within the food control sector. The Italian experts tried to focus on the selection of the participants according to the beneficiaries training needs.
3	Supply of information to the participants	Appropriate and clear tools were utilised to inform the participants on the training course aims, contents and organisational aspects.
4	Selection trainers/experts	The trainers were judged absolutely competent and with relevant educational skills. Even the experts involved for what is not strictly connected to the in class training had a positive evaluation both by the TWL BC project leader the Public Health Authority of the SR and, indirectly, by the participants which have positively evaluated the documents supplied with their contribution.
5	Predisposition of the physical structures	The places utilised for the carrying out of the courses were adequate so as the meeting room supplied for the conference session. It was sufficiently capacious and lightened as to favour the participants' attention and collaboration.
6	Predisposition of the training material	The prepared training material (fascicles, slides, practice documents, guidelines) was evaluated as sufficient, very useful and adequate. The equipments (computer, video, software,...) have been supplied according to the training needs.
7	Courses development	The fixed training plans were correctly implemented. It was established to avoid conspicuous adjustment interventions to give homogeneity to the training sessions. The course development have been implemented by a continuous exchange of information between the Italian trainers and the Slovakian beneficiaries as well as thanks to the requests for explanations (always numerous) during the training sessions.
8	Realisation of the tests of the acquired competencies	In order to verify acquisition of the competencies, the <i>self-evaluation</i> method was utilised (given the conspicuous number of the participants. approximately 140) and it was judged valid and effective by the participants themselves.
9	Monitoring and audit process	The results of the monitoring and audit activities were utilised mainly for the setting up of the training and verify methodologies. The presence of the Italian project leader was very useful in order to guarantee the correct implementation of the project and to individuate, when necessary, the preliminary and enhancement activities which had to be introduced.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The objectives of definition of a precise workplan and coordination among the partners for the technical and financial aspects has been reached.

The initial problems were the risks of delay of the activities implementation during the first 2 months that will have been overtaken in the following months.

It could be summarised that the overall implementation of the project have been a positive effect on the beneficiaries and that the project objectives have been reached.

The positive effect of the new instruments provided, the follow up and the sustainability of the project were the focus point of the Final press conference.

At the end of the project (13 May 2005) it has been realised a Final high professional seminar for the final exchange of information and opinions between the project leaders from the Italian and from the Slovakian side and it has been very interesting and useful for the definition of a follow up phase to the project.

Beside the Final high professional seminar, has been implemented a Final press conference not foreseen in the ToR but as agreed between the Member state and the beneficiary country. During the Final press conference it has been signed a *Memorandum of understanding* in order to define the intentions of the signing subjects of the MoU to enhance the collaboration in this specific field.

The idea from the Italian side is to develop in the future other projects (financed by the Transition facility instrument or financed by other EU programmes) in order to enhance the collaboration and improve the level of competencies in the RASFF and related sector of the interested bodies.