International health regulations

2007/2079(INI) - 06/09/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 570 votes in favour to 5 against with 4 abstentions, an own-initiative report drawn up by Miroslav **OUZKY** (EPP-ED, CZ) on International Health Regulations (IHR). The recent past had seen the emergence of new disease challenges for national and international public health and better procedures for assistance and information needed to be developed at national and regional level. Parliament acknowledged the significance of a clear and comprehensible international mechanism which aims to prevent, protect against and control the spread of disease, and to provide a public health response proportionate to the risks and accessible to all those who need it. It felt that priority should be given to ensuring maximum protection against the global spread of infectious disease and public health emergencies of international concern, but with minimum interference with world traffic. In accordance with Article 5 of the EC Treaty, the subsidiarity principle needed to be respected as the organisation of health services falls within the competences of individual Member States.

Parliament referred to the World Health Assembly Resolution of 26 May 2006 calling for voluntary early application of certain IHR aspects relating to pandemic influenza, and called on the international community to apply the WHO code of good practice on the rapid sharing of strains, published in January 2007. Parliament stressed the urgent need to implement the International Health Regulations in a coordinated manner across the Community while simultaneously strengthening existing systems and capacities. At the same time, however, on the basis of their powers and of the subsidiarity principle, it was up to the Member States alone to organise their health services, while ensuring a high level of health protection for their citizens.

In order to address better the risk, there was a need to support the development of information systems, both those meant for exchange of information between healthcare providers and those providing information for patients. Parliament emphasised the need to enhance the safety of the information systems. Furthermore, in order to achieve a high level of protection and preparedness in a highly mobile world, it was absolutely necessary to cooperate with neighbouring and third countries. Members underlined the need for close cooperation between national as well as between national and European authorities when exchanging information in the area of public health safety in order to optimise implementation and better protect EU citizens from public health emergencies of international concern (PHEICs). Parliament recalled the role of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), and the EU Early Warning and Response System for public health threats (EWRS) in implementing the IHR and in cases of emergency, and it urged Member States to fulfil their obligations as set out in the IHR. The Commission was asked to:

- prepare guidelines for threat detection and assessment, in cooperation with the competent committee of the European Parliament;
- formalise the ECDC’s role in the implementation of the IHR, particularly regarding the collection of data on issues within its mandate;
- find ways and means of supporting the establishment of adequate systems in neighbouring and third countries through financing and regional development mechanisms;
- define ways and means that will make it possible to support the WHO's policy concerning access to pandemic vaccines for developing countries;
- develop programmes to tackle European and global health threats such as healthcare associated infections and the growing resistance to antibiotic treatments. Parliament pointed out that a pan-European solution is clearly required as such health crises do not respect geographical borders.

Lastly, Parliament emphasised the need for the creation of a central EU stockpile of indisputably effective anti-viral and vaccination products to protect Union citizens against a possible influenza pandemic affecting all Member States, to complement Member State measures. EU-wide measures must be adopted by the Commission to address the possibility of an influenza pandemic such as are able to effectively halt the spread of influenza in Europe within a period of 24 hours.