Resolution on the Zika virus outbreak Zika virus outbreak

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety on the Zika virus outbreak. It noted that this disease, an emerging mosquito-borne virus first identified in Uganda's Zika forest in 1947, has emerged outside its known endemic boundaries for the first time and revealed its potential to cause neurological complications (i.e. Guillain-Barré syndrome and meningoencephalitis). The Zika virus has been largely recorded in Brazil. Members pointed out that as of 9 February 2016, no cases of autochthonous Zika virus transmission have been reported on the European continent but a few cases have been reported in European outermost regions. Imported cases of Zika virus infection have also been reported in several European countries.

This being so, Parliament felt that there is **a real threat of transborder transmission of the Zika virus infection caused by infected travellers and global commerce**. Since **neither treatment nor vaccines are available**, and since the mosquitoes that spread the Zika virus bite both indoors and outdoors, prevention is currently based on personal protection measures.

Research: Parliament welcomed the Commission's decision to mobilise **EUR 10 million for research** into the Zika virus but questioned whether this amount is commensurate with the extensive scientific challenge of helping to understand the Zika virus disease. It pointed out the further funding possibilities available under Horizon 2020 and FP7 for research on vaccine development for malaria and neglected infectious diseases, which include the Zika virus. Research should focus primarily on preventive measures to avoid the spread of the virus, and on treatments and vaccinations. Members added that, if EU public money is spent on research, the **results of that research should be free of intellectual property rights** and **price accessibility** to patients **guaranteed** for the products thereby developed.

Action plan: Parliament called on the Commission to come up with **an action plan to prevent the spread of the virus in Europe** and to assist Member States and third countries fighting this epidemic in the regions where the outbreak is more severe (mostly in the Caribbean and Central and South America). Such a plan should include targeted and sufficient free distribution of mechanical barriers such as nets (to avoid mosquito bites) and condoms (to avoid sexual transmission). The Commission was also asked to develop a **Management Protocol** targeted at citizens who might be at risk of carrying the Zika virus infection owing to their epidemiologic context, with the aim of effectively breaking the chain of sexual and blood transmission by early detection.

Prevention: Parliament asked the Commission and Member States to:

- coordinate a set of prevention guidelines to be put in place this summer by national authorities
- conduct an immediate analysis of insecticides in terms of human health and effectiveness against the mosquito vector of the infection;
- propose specific measures for European regions where the Zika virus has already spread, in order to eradicate all possible vectors of transmission in those regions, to support persons already infected, especially pregnant women, and to avoid a broader transmission in those regions and in the rest of the European continent;

- significantly enhance monitoring of invasive mosquito species and increase control of mosquitoes by eliminating breeding sites (such as pools) and planning for insecticide spraying in case of outbreaks, and to improve disinfection rates of cargo, cargo carriers and cabin and passenger compartments of planes from infected countries;

- increase the awareness of clinicians and travel health clinics about the evolution of the Zika virus epidemic and the vector control envisaged by the authorities in affected areas, so that they can include Zika virus infection in their differential diagnosis for residents and travellers from those areas and prepare for possible quarantine of travellers suspected of having the Zika virus in order to prevent autochthonous transmission;

- organise an information campaign coordinated by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) with the aim of informing and reassuring European citizens and avoiding unnecessary alarm;

- enhance vigilance regarding the early detection of imported cases of Zika virus infection in the EU, including the EU Overseas Countries and Territories and the EU Outermost Regions, in particular where vectors or potential vectors are present, in order to reduce the risk of autochthonous transmission.

Public health: Parliament pointed out the fact that the Zika virus has exposed the weaknesses in both public health systems' responses, especially at the primary care level, and the provision of reproductive health services and rights for women and girls in the countries affected. Government officials in these countries have advised women to delay pregnancy until more is known about the Zika virus.

Access to sexual health rights: lastly, since Zika may be sexually transmitted, Members supports calls made by the United Nations to **repeal laws and policies that restrict access to sexual and reproductive health and rights** in contravention of international standards, and echoed their willingness to ensure that public health responses are pursued in conformity with health and health-related rights. Parliament called on the EU to support the governments of the affected countries in providing a comprehensive sexual and reproductive information and health care package, including family planning possibilities, with an emphasis on access to a range of high-quality contraceptive methods for all women and adolescent girls, and access to safe abortion in order to combat the rise in unsafe abortions since the start of the epidemic. in this context, the Commission should trigger the required dialogue about contraception and women's and girls' rights with partner countries.