

Public health: network for epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases in the European Community EWRS

1996/0052(COD) - 22/07/1997 - Council position

The common position of the Council creating a network for epidemiological surveillance in the Community departed significantly from the Commission proposal. Although the Council supported the general idea of creating such a network, it believed that its establishment would mean certain obligations for the Member States which went beyond the scope of Article 129 of the Treaty, on which the proposal was based. Accordingly, the Council drew a distinction between: - 'surveillance': for which Member States were subject to specific obligations regarding the provision of information, and - 'control': for which the Council laid down a more general framework for information, consultation and coordination in respect of national measures for prevention and control. In addition, the common position defined more clearly the role and responsibilities assigned to the Commission and the Member States. More specifically, the Council amended the following main points: - Decision objective: the network had two main tasks: (1) epidemiological surveillance, (2) the establishment of a response system for the prevention and control of communicable diseases; - definitions: the Council introduced the concept of the 'Community network'; - running of the network, epidemiological surveillance section: the network would be adopted in accordance with a type IIIa Committee procedure (regulation). Moreover, the selection of diseases to be covered would be made gradually on the basis of certain criteria defined in the Decision; - response system for the prevention and control of communicable diseases: the Council introduced this new article to organize and implement the response system. It was limited to information, consultation and coordination involving the measures planned or taken by the Member States in this field. Procedures would be carried out within the framework of the regulatory Committee (measures for controlling and preventing diseases were the responsibility of each Member State); - subsidiarity: it was stated that Member States would be totally responsible for their own systems of control and surveillance of communicable diseases: the Decision did not, therefore, aim to harmonize national conventions in this respect; - financial considerations: at Community level, the network would be financed by existing funds and, in particular, through relevant Community programmes and initiatives; - evaluation: regular reports on the implementation of this Decision were provided for; - annex on the categories of communicable diseases covered: the Council stated that this annex was 'indicative'. Only the Committee (acting in accordance with procedure IIIa) could determine diseases to be included in the annex (taking into account, of course, the interests of the Community and the Member States in the surveillance of such diseases at Community level). The Council adopted nine of the twelve amendments taken over by the Commission in its amended proposal. The three rejected amendments involved the comparison and compatibility of information exchanged through the network between the Member States, the definition of agents carrying diseases and the implementation of protection at the external frontiers of the Community. It did include, however, an amendment which the Commission had rejected in its amended proposal, concerning cooperation with the World Health Organization.