Combating major communicable diseases: accelerated action within the context of poverty reduction

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The committee adopted the report by Bashir KHANBHAI (EPP-ED, UK) on the Commission communication. It called for funding to be increased and priority to be given to reinforcing healthcare services and structures in developing countries. The EU should devote 10% of its development aid spending to policies aimed at combating the main communicable diseases and supporting health systems and population programmes. Such action should combine prevention (e.g. through information and immunisation programmes), treatment (including access to drugs and health structures) and research into vaccines and drugs suited to the population in developing countries. The committee felt that the Commission should devote particular attention to preventing HIV infection in the 15-24 age group, where half of all new HIV infections were occurring, and also to the situation of women and young girls. The report focused on the need to make essential medicines available at reasonable prices in the developing countries, and on the related issues of patents, generic medicines and the TRIPS agreement. It called for the Commission to be granted a mandate to propose ways and means of reviewing the relevant articles of the agreement and to launch a debate within the WTO on reconciling the TRIPS agreement with the public health interests of the developing countries. It also proposed that the 6th Framework Programme should devote considerable funding to the often-neglected area of research into diseases of the poor. Other measures suggested included the establishment of a global fund for infectious diseases (FFID), with support from the EU, G8, the World Bank, IMF and public and private contributions. Allocations to such a fund should be in addition to existing aid efforts. Lastly, the committee proposed that a research agency be set up for distributing new vaccines and treatments.