Public health: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control ECDC

2003/0174(COD) - 27/01/2004

The committee unanimously adopted the report by John BOWIS (EPP-ED, UK) amending the proposal under the 1st reading of the codecision procedure. It proposed inter alia that the European Parliament should be able to appoint two representatives to the Centre's Management Board and that the Board should be expanded so that every Member State can have one representative. Parliament should also play a role in the procedure for appointing the Director, by holding a parliamentary hearing of the selected candidate. MEPs amended the description of the Centre's tasks so that, as well as assessing communicable diseases and other health threats, "in the event of other outbreaks of serious illness, including when biological and non-biological agents are a possible cause, and if there is a possibility of spread within or to the Community, the Centre shall act on its own initiative until the source of the outbreak is known and then, as appropriate, in cooperation with the relevant competent authority or authorities identified as being responsible". The Centre should also, they said, identify the strategic areas and aims of applied research and "contribute to the improvement and strengthening of the prevention and monitoring of human diseases in the EU". When identifying emerging health threats, both physical and mental health threats should be covered. In addition, one of the Centre's key tasks should be to ensure that the dedicated surveillance networks operate efficiently, inter alia by harmonising and rationalising the operating methodologies. The committee pointed out that the benefits of the Centre's technical research capacity should not be restricted solely to the Commission and therefore amended the text to enable Member States, third countries and international organisations (in particular the WHO) to request scientific and technical assistance. It specified that "the Centre shall respond within its financial capacity and mandate". To improve accessibility of information to the public, MEPs said that the Centre should have its own website to communicate information about its work and should publish its opinions. Lastly, they said that, in addition to the external review scheduled to take place three years after the regulation comes into force, there should be provision for further reviews at five-yearly intervals. The evaluation should assess whether or not the scope of the Centre's mission should be extended.