Major and neglected diseases in developing countries

2005/2047(INI) - 08/09/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by John BOWIS (EPP-ED, UK)by 76 votes in favour to 8 against with 2 abstentions, on major and neglected diseases in developing countries. Parliament welcomed the Commission's Communications (please see COM(2005) 0179, and COM(2004)0726), but called for its approach to be broadened to include other neglected diseases, and highlighted the fact that the Commission's actions can all be applied to other diseases beyond HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB. It cited diseases such as schistosomiasis, severe visceral leishmaniasis, Chagas' disease and dengue. Parliament stressed the critical importance of securing increased financial resources from Member States and in the funding of the EU's External Actions and development aid, given that the resource gap for HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB alone is projected to reach EUR 11 500 million by 2007. It called on the Commission to address HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria and other diseases as cross-cutting issues in the external assistance instruments of the next financial perspectives.

Health services in the ACP countries suffered greatly in the 1990s, particularly as a result of the emphasis placed on macro-economic reforms, which led to drastic budget cuts in social sectors such as health. Parliament referred to the fact that repayment and servicing of the debt accounts for almost 40% of GDP per annum in the least developed countries, while education and health budgets are still derisory. It urged ACP countries to meet Parliament's target of allocating 20% to health. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers must ensure that the poverty analysis that informs them influence the focus of work in the health sector and provide the opportunity to reorientate health plans and strategies to those health actions most likely to impact on poverty.

The policy document on human resources provided for in the Commission's Programme for Action should also include proposals for urgent action to reverse the loss of health workers from developing countries, such as better training, career opportunities, remuneration, retention incentives, safe working conditions, cooperation with disease-specific initiatives, twinning arrangements, voluntary support and the spread of best practice and technical support.

Parliament went on to state that only one pharmaceutical company has registered medicines available at reduced prices under Council Regulation 953/2003/EC to avoid trade diversion into the EU of certain key medicines. New medicines necessary today, but available only at high prices, are not included in this list. Parliament called on the Commission to assess the real impact of the measures implemented under Regulation 953/2003/EC and on the pharmaceutical industry to make products available to the people of developing countries at tiered prices for improving access to essential medicines, and to propose complementary measures to enable access specifically to essential medicines if shortages exist.

Parliament welcomed the Commission's support in its Programme for Action for comprehensive and evidence-based prevention programmes, and urged the Commission to support HIV/AIDS prevention programmes which include political leadership, education to support behavioural change, harm reduction programmes, commodity distribution, voluntary counselling and testing, secure blood supply, vulnerability reduction measures for groups at higher risk of infection as well as social and behavioural research.

Parliament also stressed the need for increased investment in R&D into new technologies for HIV prevention such as vaccines and microbicides. It called for the development of adapted and affordable paediatric formulations of ARV for the 2.2 million children living with HIV, alongside diagnostic and

monitoring tools suited to their needs and to developing country settings. It was very concerned at reports that some African governments are charging a sales or import tax on ARV and other drugs, which then make the drugs unaffordable to poor communities. The Commission is urged to investigate this and to encourage governments to abolish such taxes. Parliament regretted the lack of R&D into diseases which almost exclusively affect poor people in developing countries due to a lack of viable markets. It stressed that this must be corrected by international efforts, and also called for the Seventh Framework Programme to include specific reference to and funding for research on illnesses that affect citizens of developing countries.