Pandemic influenza preparedness and response planning in the European Community

2006/2062(INI) - 14/06/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Adamos **ADAMOU** (GUE/NGL, CY) in response to the Commission communication on pandemic influenza preparedness and response planning in the EU. Determined to enhance the EU's readiness to deal with a flu pandemic, Parliament voted by 612 votes to 26 with 7 abstentions. It welcomed the Commission Communications as well as the assessments of national pandemic influenza plans that were currently being undertaken by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the Commission and WHO, European Region. The Commission must play a strong coordinating role between the Member States in all activities relating to pandemic preparedness in the EU and it should strengthen the ECDC's capacity to identify the key public health measures that must be taken in the event of a pandemic.

Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to take account of the relevant reports and on-the-spot investigations of the ECDC and to ensure that those Member States whose planning to combat a pandemic was substandard upgrade their plans, since the nature of the risk was such that all Member States must be fully prepared. In the event of an influenza pandemic in the EU or in neighbouring States, the Commission should within 24 hours be able to adopt crisis measures such as quarantine and disinfection measures at airports in connection with flights from certain regions and travel restrictions.

Significant measures, including a full assessment of hospital bed capacity at Member State level, must be taken to prepare for a possible human pandemic. Parliament acknowledged the need for detailed scenarios for the protection of children and young people against the avian influenza A virus (H5N1) to be drawn up. Particular attention should be paid to developing further the capacity to produce pandemic vaccines and anti-virals in Member States and at European level. In this connection, the EU should provide logistic and financial assistance with the development of vaccines.

Parliament went on to state that pandemic influenza simulation exercises were vital in order to test the effectiveness of each Member State's national pandemic influenza plans, together with a need to strengthen surveillance systems, rapid reporting and alerting systems, data analysis and epidemiology for animal and human diseases. Rapid assessment was also required of the immediate socio-economic impact of avian influenza and of compensation issues and associated incentives. The Commission, the ECDC and the Member States were urged to put in place a system for the continuous exchange of information between them and affected countries and thus to assist in the development of best practices.

In addition, sufficient funds should be made available by the Commission and the Member States in order to provide people with more pertinent, understandable and tangible information and thus raise public awareness. Parliament suggested the creation of a European Influenza Task Force, coordinated by the Commission, on which the European Parliament was represented. This Task Force should work together with representatives of European vaccine and antiviral industries. European research and development programmes on emergent diseases must be launched immediately to develop antivirals, antibiotics and vaccines reliably and more quickly.

Parliament stressed that planning for obtaining pandemic vaccines is in most countries underdeveloped and measures should thus be taken to further develop it in accordance with WHO recommendations by giving the Commission a mandate to order vaccines and establish a Community stockpile. The Commission was asked to liaise with vaccine manufacturers to evaluate progress towards vaccine production capacity increase and equity of supply in pandemic situations. It should also address, together

with the Member States, questions of liability and the establishment of a European mechanism for equitable distribution of pandemic vaccines that does not breach contractual agreements established by Member States. Parliament considered that the Commission should take steps to ensure that sufficient antivirals and vaccines are available for those who are exposed to the virus in the event of an outbreak in one or more Member States, and it emphasised the role of the European Medicines Agency, EMEA, in determining the use and effectiveness of anti-virals and pandemic vaccines.

Parliament called on the European Union to take the necessary measures to obtain adequate stocks of antivirals and to establish a compulsory licensing system with businesses which produce antivirals to guarantee mass production of these antivirals. Countries should provide for potential cover for 25 to 30% of the population with available antivirals.

It pointed out that adequate funding should be provided in the 7th Research Framework Programme in order to support projects addressing various aspects of pandemic influenza and other epidemics including joint research with pharmaceutical companies on cell-based and DNA vaccines.

Finally, Parliament pointed out that the European Union had a legitimate reason to provide technical, scientific and economic assistance to countries already affected and in particular to contribute to raising global awareness.