Combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the neighbouring countries, 2006-2009

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Georgs ANDREJEVS (ALDE, LV) in response to the Commission communication on combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the neighbouring countries, 2006-2009. MEPs in the committee supported the actions and initiatives set out by the Commission, but called for better identification of the most vulnerable groups in society, more help for neighbouring countries for the fight against HIV, a new communication campaign to inform people on how to prevent and combat HIV/AIDS as well as more support for the research and development of new drugs against this disease.

The committee urged the Commission to analyse the latest available data on new HIV infections to identify countries and population groups most affected and to establish a comprehensive list of the most vulnerable groups in each society so that the Commission and Member States can address and reach them efficiently and provide them with information on how to protect themselves and their partners. The Commission was also asked to consider appropriate measures to reach migrant and immigrant populations within the EU, especially when they come from countries with high prevalence rates, "in order to slow down the alarming trend of new HIV infections among these groups".

With a view to supporting neighbouring countries in the fight against HIV/AIDS, MEPs called on the Commission to use all available instruments, such as the Neighbourhood Policy and the Northern Dimension, and to offer political and technical assistance to neighbouring countries which wish to take advantage of the flexibilities of the TRIPS Agreements when faced with a public-health problem.

Amongst its other recommendations, the report urged the Commission and the Member States to promote communication campaigns to provide the population (especially adolescents and young people) with clear information on HIV infection, ways of preventing it, unsafe practices and practices which help to prevent infection with HIV. To counter the increasing spread of AIDS among the female population, the Commission was urged to pay particular attention to the promotion of sexual and reproductive health programmes for women and, together with the Member States, to subsidise research and development of microbicides and female condoms which provide protection against HIV/AIDS. MEPs also called for the development of information and awareness campaigns aimed at combating homophobia, the stigma that attaches all people living with HIV and discrimination against vulnerable groups and those infected with HIV. And the Commission was urged to promote the implementation of prevention and harm-reduction measures, including the use of condoms, drug substitution treatment, access to voluntary testing, clean needle and syringe exchanges.

As far as research and funding are concerned, the report asked the Commission "to use all the possibilities available within the Seventh Framework Programme on Research and Development to continue to fund and identify further promising projects" concerning HIV research and the development of new innovative antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, vaccines and microbicides. MEPs also urged the Commission to continue the financial assistance and overall support for the efforts of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

Lastly, MEPs suggested establishing a "clearinghouse" at EU level in order to collect and analyse best practices from all institutions and organisations active in the fight against HIV/AIDS, in order to help identify shortcomings in existing actions and formulate new strategies.