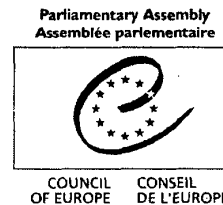


## Parliamentary Assembly **Assemblée parlementaire**



**Doc. 10707**  
4 October 2005

### **Europe and bird flu - preventive measures in the health field**

Report  
Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee  
Rapporteur: Mr Denis Jacquat, France, Group of the European People's Party

#### *Summary*

The Parliamentary Assembly supports the appeal from the World Health Organisation (WHO) for international mobilisation against bird flu and asks its member states to take all the necessary measures to fight against this virus, namely by providing backing for WHO activities in this field and by foreseeing the establishment of a medical surveillance system.

It also asks states to show solidarity by taking the necessary steps in particular to increase the production of anti-viral vaccines and medicines and to make them accessible to developing countries.

**1. Draft recommendation**

§ 1. The Parliamentary Assembly supports the appeal by the United Nations Summit in New York on 16 September 2005 for international mobilisation against bird flu, and the recommendations made by experts at the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Conference on Influenza held in Malta from 10 to 14 September 2005.

§ 2. The Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the decision taken by the United Nations to appoint a coordinator of the United Nations for the bird flu.

§ 3. It is also concerned by the threat of a bird flu pandemic and by the fact that most countries are unprepared to deal with this threat.

§ 4. The pandemic could also have serious consequences for the economy and health systems of member states.

§ 5. Experts have observed an increase in the number of cases of bird flu on poultry farms and note that certain epizootic diseases can lead to sometimes fatal human contamination. Possible mutations of the bird flu virus could also result in direct human to human transmission, whereas the human immune system is not equipped to resist this virus.

§ 6. The Parliamentary Assembly therefore fully endorses the recommendations by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) concerning the steps to be taken if their poultry flocks are infected.

§ 7. Only a small number of member states have set up an early warning system and taken preventive measures against the new virus.

§ 8. The Parliamentary Assembly deplores the flagrant lack of medicines, both vaccines and anti-viral medicines, which are one of the most effective ways of countering this pandemic.

§ 9. It regrets that the countries at risk are having to face the pandemic alone without the necessary financial resources to buy anti-viral vaccines and medicines to build up adequate stocks.

§ 10. The European Commission's proposal to set up an emergency solidarity fund to reimburse some of the costs of using vaccines and anti-viral medicines to developing countries, if a bird flu pandemic were to break out, deserves the Assembly's full support.

§ 11. The Action Plan adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Warsaw on 16 and 17 May 2005 underlined the fact that protection of health as a social human right is an essential condition for social cohesion and economic stability.

§ 12. Consequently, the Parliamentary Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to:

§ 12.1. establish co-operation programmes with the WHO and step up the Council of Europe's health protection activities;

§ 12.2. ask the relevant committee of experts to take the necessary steps to harmonise the authorisation procedure for vaccines and facilitate international access to them by making them available more rapidly to countries that do not manufacture them;

§ 12.3. recommend the governments of Member States and countries with observer status to:

§ 12.3.1. provide backing for WHO activities aimed at preventing and combating the risks of a pandemic;

§ 12.3.2. ensure that the recommendations of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) concerning in particular the quarantining of contaminated poultry and the destruction of infected birds are strictly applied;

§ 12.3.3. provide substantial compensation for poultry farmers whose flocks are infected by the virus;

§ 12.3.4. improve their health and hygiene services;

§ 12.3.5. provide a sufficient stock of masks as preliminary prevention, namely for poultry farmers living in countries at risk;

§ 12.3.6. support the establishment of a regional medical surveillance system;

§ 12.3.7. take the necessary steps to increase capacity to produce anti-viral vaccines and medicines and make them accessible to developing countries;

§ 12.3.8. take steps to set up a solidarity fund to reimburse some of the costs involved in using vaccines and anti-viral medicines to developing countries.

## II. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Denis Jacquat

1. At the second European Conference on Influenza, held in Malta from 10 to 14 September 2005, experts from the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned governments of the imminent arrival of an influenza pandemic and the lack of preparedness of many countries.
2. According to WHO, bird flu could lead to millions of deaths. Experts have also pointed out that last century's influenza epidemics took the world by surprise and left health services little time to prepare. The result was massive social and economic disruption and enormous loss of human lives.
3. This appeal was reiterated at the UN summit in New York on 16 September. Government representatives used the opportunity to call for international mobilisation against bird flu, which could pose a serious threat to human health.
4. Experts have observed an increasing number of cases of bird flu in poultry farms and note that certain animal diseases are linked to sometimes fatal human contamination. Experts fear that mutation of the virus will lead to direct human to human transmission. The fact that human immune defence systems are not adapted to resist this new virus would make such a transmission process even more fatal.
5. The virus was discovered in South Korea on 12 December 2003 and has been reported throughout the region. The virus apparently comes from poultry farms in southern China and localities in Siberia and the Urals and is carried by numerous migratory bird species, including ducks, peregrine falcons, common herons and storks. The infection may affect nearly all domestic and wild bird species and can be very contagious, particularly among chickens and turkeys. Other animal species, such as pigs and other mammals, may also be infected by the virus.
6. One hundred percent of infected animal may be dead within 24 to 48 hours. Unfortunately, all the countries affected by the virus have been very slow to react, leaving it time to spread. Nor have these countries imposed the necessary veterinary measures.
7. In response to a suspected outbreak of bird flu near the Caspian Sea, the Netherlands decided to take preventive measures, based on advice from experts that migratory birds could spread the virus during their autumnal migration to the country. As a result, on 22 August 2005 all poultry intended for sale was isolated.
8. Experts have observed worrying developments this year. The virus now affects humans and has extended to new countries. It continues to evolve, and is taking an increasingly virulent form. 50 % of persons infected die, compared with 20 % for the Spanish flu virus.
9. Unfortunately scientists are unable to predict when the next pandemic will break out.
10. They therefore see an urgent need for an early warning system, particularly in countries at risk or with seriously underdeveloped health and veterinary facilities, where shortage of financial resources make it difficult to set up such a warning system.
11. A further problem is that in these countries, where agriculture is a corner stone of the economy, farmers are unwilling to report the presence of the virus, particularly as they receive very little compensation for slaughtered poultry.
12. The result is that while the Asian chicken flu virus continues to spread, only a handful of rich countries have the capacity to produce and distribute the necessary antivirals, whose quantities are still limited. It is estimated that currently only 2% of the world's population could be treated.

13. Antiviral medicines are one of the best ways of combating the threat, so long as they are used sufficiently early. The truth is, however, that countries have mainly concentrated on developing intervention plans and have failed to take the necessary steps to produce and assemble adequate stocks of antiviral vaccines and medicines. This is mainly the result of the very high cost of producing drugs and the often excessively long time taken to obtain approval for such medicines and bring them into circulation.

14. Governments must therefore do all that is necessary to fight this new threat, while also taking account of the increased risk arising from migration and the development of tourism.

15. They must apply the appropriate health measures recommended by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) namely the recommendation concerning the quarantining of contaminated poultry and the destruction of infected birds and draw up plans to combat the flu epidemic.

16. The rapporteur asks the Parliamentary Assembly to encourage governments to instruct the ministers concerned to take the necessary measures to ensure that as many persons as possible are vaccinated against the flu and the bird flu and step up programmes of technology exchanges.

17. Governments should also take the necessary steps to harmonise the authorisation procedure for antiviral vaccines and medicines and facilitate international access to them by making them available more rapidly to countries that do not manufacture them, in order to achieve a fair distribution of the number of such vaccines and medicines between countries.

18. The rapporteur proposes that the Parliamentary Assembly takes stock of the situation within the next months.

Reporting committee : Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

Referred for urgent debate to the committee, Reference No 3137 of 3 October 2005

Draft recommendation adopted on 4 Octobre 2005

Members of the Committee: Mr Marcel **Glesener** (Chair), Mrs Christine **McCafferty** (1st Vice-Chair), Mrs Patrizia Paoletti Tangheroni (2nd Vice-Chair), Mrs Helena Bargholtz (3rd Vice-Chair), Mrs Birgitta Ahlqvist, MM. Vincenz **Allay-Ferrer**, Giuseppe Arzilli, Miroslav Beneš, Andris **Berzinš**, Jaime Blanco, Bozidar **Bojović**, Mrs Marida Bolognesi, MM. Dumitru Braghis, Saulius **Bucevičius**, Igor **Chernyshenko**, Doros Christodoulides, Dessislav **Chukolov**, Mrs Minodora Cliveti, MM. Telmo Correia, Luis Eduardo Cortès, András Csáky, Imre Czinege, Mrs Helen **D'Amato**, MM. Dirk Dees, Karl **Donabauer**, Mehdi Eker (alternate: Mehmet **Çerçi**), Søren Espersen, Claude Evin, Paul **Flynn**, Mrs Doris **Frommelt**, MM. Jean-Marie Geveaux (alternate : Jean-Marie **Bockel**), Stepan Glävan, Igor Glukhovskiy, Mrs Claude Greff, MM. Ali Riza Gülçiçek, Mykhailo Hladiy, Bent Høie, Mme Sinikka **Hurskainen**, Mrs Halide Incekara, MM. **Denis Jacquat**, Zbigniew Jacyna-Onyszkiewicz, Orest Klympush, Shavarsh **Kocharyan**, Mrs Kateřina **Konečná**, Mrs Marie-José Laloy, MM. Slaven **Letica**, Gadzhzy Makhachev, Tomasz Markowski, Bernard **Marquet**, Paddy **McHugh**, Mrs Ljiljana **Milićević**, M. Philippe Monfils, Mrs Nino Nakashidzé, Mr Nikolaos Nikolopoulos, Mrs Vera **Oskina**, MM. Marek Pol, Cezar Florin Preda, Fiorello Provera, Anatoliy Pysarenko, Mrs Adoración Quesada, Mrs Valentina Radulović-Šćepanović, MM. Helmut Rauber (alternate : Wolfgang **Wodarg**), Walter **Riester**, Enrico Rizzi (alternate : Andrea **Rigoni**), Mrs Maria de Belém Roseira, **Mrs Marlene Rupprecht**, MM. Walter **Schmied**, Samad Seyidov, Mrs Naira Shakhtakhtinskaya, Mr Óssur Skarphéðinsson, Mrs Darinka **Stantcheva**, Mrs Rita **Streb-Hesse**, Mr Konstantinos Tassoulas, Mrs Jozephina Topalli, M. Milan **Urbáni**, Mrs Ruth-Gaby **Vermot-Mangold**, Mrs Angela **Watkinson** M. Bart **Van Winsen**, Mrs Gisela **Wurm**, Mr Andrej Zernovski, Mrs Barbara Žgajner-Tavš, N. ... (alternate : Mrs Betty **Williams**), N. ...

NB: The names of those members present at the meeting are printed in bold

Head of the Secretariat: Mr Géza Mezei

Secretary: Mrs Agnès Nollinger

Co-Secretary : Mrs Christine Meunier