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Europe and bird flu – preventive measures in the health field

Recommendation 1725 (2005)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers

adopted at the 961st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (5 April 2006)

1. The Committee of Ministers has studied with interest and shared concern Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1725 (2005) on Europe and bird flu – Preventive measures in the health field. This concern has, of course, increased since the adoption of the recommendation, as the spread of avian influenza to new countries, including several Council of Europe member states, has further raised awareness of the gravity of a potential pandemic. The Committee of Ministers has already provided several elements of response to the Parliamentary Assembly on this subject, in its reply to Written Question No. 479 by Mr Hagberg on national action plans to deal with and prevent a possible epidemic of bird flu in Europe.¹ It transmitted the recommendation to the European Health Committee (CDSP) and to the Public Health Committee (CD-P-SP); their comments appear in the Appendix.

2. The Committee of Ministers has continued to encourage member states to continue action to prevent the animal disease from spreading, and to prepare for a possible pandemic, in co-operation between themselves and under the aegis of the relevant international organisations. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) expertise and global recommendations constitute the most competent response to the threat to humans that arises from the spread of avian influenza throughout the world. The Committee of Ministers also strongly supports the initiatives undertaken by the European Union and other international institutions, such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the United Nations Co-ordinator and the World Bank within their respective fields of competence.

3. Even at this more advanced stage of the progress of avian influenza in Europe and its neighbouring countries, the Committee of Ministers considers that it should not go beyond the strong support and encouragement it is currently giving to member states, in order to avoid duplication of activities with the organisations working to combat the disease and who have developed action plans, such as the WHO's draft protocol for rapid response and containment of pandemic influenza. It fully endorses the recommendations made directly to member and observer states by the Parliamentary Assembly, concerning support for the implementation of WHO, FAO and OIE programmes, financing of prevention campaigns and the dissemination of information to the public and to professionals in the sectors affected. It considers that these organisations are the most competent in this field of action, and should be given full support and encouragement in their co-operation with the national authorities of the countries concerned.

¹ See document CM/AS(2006)Quest479 final.

Appendix to the reply

Joint comments of the European Health Committee (CDSP) and the Public Health Committee (CD-P-SP) on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1725 (2005) – Europe and bird flu – Preventive measures in the health field

The CDSP and the CD-P-SP welcomed the timely contribution of the Parliamentary Assembly to the potential problems of bird flu in Europe. They noted that this issue was actively under consideration at member states, European Union and global level, with the rise of potential risks. They further noted that since the recommendation was adopted there have been further developments, especially at the United Nations level.

Both committees recognised the need for a co-ordinated, strategic approach to the problem of bird flu by the number of regional and global bodies working on this issue at present. They agreed that the Council of Europe should support such activities, whilst avoiding duplication of efforts. They recalled that 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.

Both committees welcomed the Parliamentary Assembly's interest in and contribution to this issue. The CDSP and the CD-P-SP could not identify any activity of its own which would fulfil the Committee of Ministers' criteria, but will continue to follow the matter closely. They will pay special attention to potential infringements of human and patients' rights and promote the principle of equal access to vaccination and appropriate medication, in particular for vulnerable groups of the population.