

8954/03 (Presse 122)

Extraordinary Council meeting

- **EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND
CONSUMER AFFAIRS -**

Brussels, 6 May 2003

President : **Mr Kostas STEFANIS**
Minister for Health and Social Welfare of the
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- *Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.*
- *The documents whose references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site <http://ue.eu.int>.*
- *Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the above mentioned Council Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.*

PARTICIPANTS

The Governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

Belgium :

Mr Jef TAVERNIER

Minister for Consumer Protection, Public Health and the Environment

Denmark :

Mr Claus GRUBE

Deputy Permanent Representative

Germany :

Mr Klaus Theo SCHRÖDER

State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Health and Social Security

Greece :

Mr Kostas STEFANIS

Minister for Health and Social Welfare

Spain :

Ms Ana María PASTOR JULIÁN

Minister for Health and Consumer Affairs

France :

Mr Jean-François MATTEI

Minister for Health, the Family and Disabled Persons

Ireland :

Mr Micheál MARTIN

Minister for Health and Children

Italy :

Mr Girolamo SIRCHIA

Minister for Health

Luxembourg :

Mr Carlo WAGNER

Minister for Health and Social Security

Netherlands :

Ms Clemence I.J.M. ROSS VAN DORP

State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport

Austria :

Mr Reinhart WANECK

State Secretary, Federal Ministry for Health and Women

Portugal :

Mr Luís Filipe PEREIRA

Minister for Health

Finland :

Ms Liisa HYSSÄLÄ

Minister of Health and Social Services

Sweden :

Mr Morgan JOHANSSON

Minister for Health and Social Affairs

United Kingdom :

Mr David LAMMY

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health

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Commission :

Mr David BYRNE

Member

* * *

Other participant:

Ms Gro Harlem BRUNDTLAND

General Director, World Health Organisation

The Governments of the Accessing States were represented as follows:

Czech Republic :

Mr Michael VÍT Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Estonia :

Ms Maarja MÄNDMAA Secretary General, Ministry for Social Affairs

Cyprus :

Ms Constandia AKKELIDOU Minister for Health

Latvia :

Ms Ingrid CIRCENE Minister for Health

Lithuania :

Mr Juozas OLEKAS Minister for Healthcare

Hungary :

Mr Mihály KÓKÉNY Secretary of State

Malta:

Mr Ray BUSUTTIL Chief Sanitary Inspector

Poland :

Mr Andrzej TRYBUSZ Chief Sanitary Inspector

Slovakia :

Mr Juraj MIGAŠ Ambassador, Head of Mission

Slovenia :

Mr Dusan KEBER Minister for Health

ITEMS DEBATED

SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS) – COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

At its extraordinary meeting on 6 May on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. “The Council examined carefully the situation regarding severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), both within the European Union and world-wide, and the different measures taken to address it. It confirmed the importance of a quick assessment of the situation and review of future action.

The SARS situation

2. Intense international scientific cooperation has shown that a previously unrecognised coronavirus is the cause of SARS. The SARS virus is mainly spread by close person-to-person contact. There is so far no evidence that goods arriving from SARS-affected areas pose a risk to public health.
3. The Council recalled the global alert given by the WHO on 12 March 2003 and noted the rapid global spread of SARS, and the significant increase of reported cases, in particular in China ².
4. The Council noted that the number of confirmed or suspected cases in the EU remains limited ³, and that such cases have been effectively isolated and treated, thus so far avoiding any secondary spread of infection.
5. The Council had a thorough and constructive exchange of views with Dr Brundtland, WHO Director General, and congratulated the WHO for its work to address SARS. It noted that the World Health Assembly in May will provide an excellent opportunity to review and update the global response to SARS. The Council welcomed the good co-operation, and exchange of information and experience between the WHO, the Commission and the Member States.

² www.who.int/csr/sars

³ www.europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_threats/com/sars/sars_en.htm

6. The Council expressed its sympathy to those countries and areas most affected by SARS, and the European Union's determination to contribute effectively to the containment and, hopefully, to the eventual elimination of this threat to human health. In particular, the Council took note of the letter by President Prodi to President Hu offering Commission assistance to China in combating SARS.

EU response to SARS so far

7. The Council considers that the network for the epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases in the Community ⁴ has provided a very effective basis for the rapid exchange of information within the EU and for a coordinated response, in which the acceding countries have fully participated.
8. The Council recalled that the application of health protection measures falls to the authorities of the Member States, and confirmed the benefits of effective co-ordination of such measures through the Network Committee.
9. The Council endorses the orientations for immediate and future actions ⁵ agreed on 10 April 2003 by the Network Committee. They are summarised as follows:
- i. rapid detection of all suspect cases of SARS through good surveillance;
 - ii. protection of those at risk of infection from the cases through effective isolation of SARS patients in hospitals, including measures to protect carers;
 - iii. particular attention to be paid to air travel, which has been an important factor in the spread of SARS, notably through standardised screening of passengers leaving affected areas, onboard advice to passengers and effective information at ports of entry from affected areas; and

⁴ Decision 2119/98/EC, OJ L 268 of 3.10.1998, p.1

⁵ http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_threats/com/sars/sars_actions_en.pdf on immediate actions and http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_threats/com/sars/sars_future_actions_en.pdf on future actions

iv. the importance of raising awareness among professionals and the public and the timely and accurate reporting and sharing of information with other countries, in particular EEA/EFTA countries, acceding and candidate countries and with the WHO. Cooperation should also be developed with other partners, such as airline companies.

The way ahead: future action on SARS

10. The Council considers that Community action should continue to focus on strengthening the EU preparedness and efforts within the communicable disease network and the Community action programme on public health.
11. The Council underlines the need for continued cooperation between the Member States, the Commission and the WHO in containing and eventually stopping the spread of SARS. Such cooperation is especially valuable in assisting the affected areas, in the development of a validated diagnostic test and in the promotion of research on vaccines, anti-viral agents and their availability. In this context, the Council supports the efforts of the WHO to accelerate the revision of international health regulations.
12. Within the framework of that cooperation, the Member States should in particular ensure:
 - prompt and effective identification of all suspect and probable SARS cases, and their appropriate isolation in hospitals;
 - appropriate protection of hospital personnel treating the patients;
 - provision of guidance and information to health care workers and the public;
 - measures, consistent throughout the European Union, to provide and acquire information and traceability of international travellers arriving or in transit from affected areas;
 - provision of travel advice including appropriate recommendations to postpone travel to specified areas;

- guidance on collection, storage, and shipment of clinical specimens; and
- timely and accurate reporting and sharing information with the Commission, WHO, other countries and other partners (e.g. airline companies).

13. The Council urges the Member States and acceding countries to

- implement effectively the orientations for immediate and future actions by the Network Committee;
- contribute actively to setting up a specific expert group on SARS under the Network Committee to develop common modalities and advice on health measures across Europe; and
- provide by 15 May all relevant information to the Commission on measures taken to address SARS and their implementation.

14. The Council encourages the Commission to

- continue coordinating EU action on SARS;
- keep the orientations for immediate and future actions under regular review, notably in the light of advice from the WHO;
- report to the Council in June on measures taken by the Member States;
- consider developing a general preparedness plan on communicable diseases and health threats;
- coordinate and network national laboratory expertise; and
- financially support research and development of validated diagnostic tests, therapeutic interventions, and vaccines.

15. The Council takes note of the Commission's intention to submit a proposal to create a European Centre for disease prevention and control.

16. The Council will review the situation and developments at its meeting on 2 June 2003."

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a virus that has been described on patients in Asia, North America and Europe, and which presents the characteristics of a respiratory illness. The first cases of atypical pneumonia, now recognised as SARS, were detected in China in November 2002. International transmission of SARS for cases was first reported in March 2003.

A Global warning was given by the World Health Organisation on 12 March 2003. On 5 May 2003 there was 6583 cumulative number of cases ⁶.

OTHER BUSINESS

– FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON TOBACCO CONTROL

The Council agreed to forward to the Permanent Representative Committee a draft document to be used as a working basis regarding an EC common position on the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. This common position should be agreed by the Community and its Member States in regard to the adoption of the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, and will enable all Member States to vote in favour of this adoption.

The Framework Convention is due to be adopted by the World Health Assembly during its 19-28 May 2003 session. The draft text of the Convention was agreed at the sixth session (17 February – 1 March 2003) of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body for the Framework Convention ⁷.

This Convention was created by a resolution voted by the 191 Member States of the WHO on 24 May 1999.

⁶ See http://www.who.int/csr/sarscountry/2003_05_05/en/

⁷ See <http://www.who.int/gb/fctc/PDF/inb6/einb65.pdf>