



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 17 June 2013**

**10332/13**

**SAN 188  
PHARM 25  
PROCIV 70  
CODEC 1285**

**NOTE**

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from: General Secretariat of the Council  
to: Council

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Subject: **Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs** Council meeting on  
20 and 21 June 2013

Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on serious  
cross-border threats to health (First Reading)  
*- Information from the Presidency*  
(Any Other Business item)

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Delegations will find in the Annex an information note on the abovementioned subject.

Recent experiences of threats to public health underlined the need to improve the health security framework at EU level. The H1N1 pandemic in 2009, volcanic ash cloud in 2010 and E.coli outbreak in 2011 and the more recent outbreaks of the novel coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and avian influenza A(H7N9) virus have served to remind Member States of the European Union of the importance of pandemic preparedness.

In these circumstances the agreement reached (on 6 May 2013) between the Council and the European Parliament on the Commission's proposal for a Decision on Serious Cross Border Threats to Health represents a major step forward in the fight to protect European citizens from these cross-border health threats.

This agreement on the Decision will help Member States prepare for and protect citizens against possible future pandemics and environmental disasters. It strengthens risk preparedness and response planning, improves access to vaccines for Member States, and will result in clearer risk and crisis communication to the public and healthcare professionals.

A crucial aspect of the agreement is the establishment of a legal basis for the coordination of vaccine procurement across the EU. This will provide more equitable access to vaccines at fairer prices - a development particularly welcome for smaller Member States who simply could not afford the prices charged during recent pandemics. The EU will also now be able to trigger pandemic vaccine production itself, ultimately leading to faster vaccination in an emergency.

The **Decision on Serious Cross Border Threats to Health** provides for:

- **Strengthened risk preparedness and response planning**

Member States will consult with a view to coordinating their efforts to develop, strengthen and maintain their preparedness and response planning;

- **Greater access to vaccines**

Following the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, the Council of the EU invited the Commission to develop a mechanism for joint procurement of vaccines and antiviral medication to address issues with liability, availability and price of medicinal products and confidentiality. Previous experiences saw some Member States left with unused stockpiles, whereas other smaller Member States had been priced out of the market. The declaration of an emergency at EU level will now be able to trigger a switch from seasonal to pandemic vaccine production, ultimately leading to faster vaccination in an emergency;

- **Enhanced risk monitoring and assessment**

The existing Early Warning and Response System for communicable diseases will be extended to all serious public health threats. Risk assessments will be carried out as appropriate;

- **Improved risk management**

The Health Security Committee was set up by the EU Health Ministers in 2001 following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and release of anthrax in the United States. This Decision formally establishes the HSC on a legal footing and will facilitate coordination of planning and response;

- **Clearer risk and crisis communication**

Inconsistent or confusing communication with the public and healthcare professionals needs to be avoided. It is important that information is accurate and is communicated quickly. The HSC will help Member States to coordinate messages as appropriate. Communication may also need to be adapted to national needs and circumstances.

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