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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	Negotiations for an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, as well as complementary amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) <i>- Information from the Presidency and the Commission</i>

Delegations will find in Annex an information note from the Presidency and the Commission on the above mentioned subject to be raised under “Any other business” at the meeting of the EPSCO Council (Health) on 21 June 2024.

Information from the Presidency and the Commission on the negotiations for an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, as well as complementary amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005)

Background

The EU and its Member States have been active promoters of the negotiation of an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response (hereafter “the Pandemic Agreement”), which was initiated at the special session of the World Health Assembly (WHA) held between 29 November and 1 December 2021, and the negotiation of complementary amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) (hereafter the “IHR”).

Bearing in mind the importance of the topic and the prominent role of the European Union in global health, the Council authorized on 3 March 2022 the Commission to negotiate on behalf of the EU, for matters falling within Union competence, the Pandemic Agreement, as well as complementary amendments to the IHR (2005). In accordance with the Council Decision, the Commission and the Member States are cooperating closely during the negotiation process.

The Working Party on Public Health was designated as the Special Committee in accordance with Article 218(4) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and practical arrangements have been agreed.

At its 77th meeting held between 27 May 2024 and 1 June 2024, the WHA took a decisive step towards strengthening global security by adopting by consensus a package of amendments to the IHR and by taking a renewed commitment to complete the negotiations of the pandemic agreement within a year, at the latest.

Negotiations for an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) met in the first semester 2024 from 19 February to 1 March 2024 for its eight meeting, from 18 to 28 March for its ninth meeting and across two additional extraordinary sessions held from 29 April to 10 May, and from 20 to 24 May for its resumed ninth meeting. Important and meaningful progress was achieved during these meetings and the INB has reached initial agreement on many provisions of the proposed WHO Pandemic

Agreement. However, at the end of the resumed ninth meeting of the INB, WHO Member States acknowledged that more time is needed to finalise the negotiations, given their scope and complexity.

In a decision taken on 1 June 2024, at the 77th session of the WHA, WHO Member States agreed to continue the negotiations on the Pandemic Agreement and extended the mandate of the INB, with the goal of reaching consensus by the 78th session of the WHA (May 2025) or earlier, during 2024 if possible, in which case a special session of the WHA would be convened.

Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005)

With regard to the amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005), the Working Group on IHR amendments (WGIHR) met in the first semester 2024 from 5 to 9 February for its seventh meeting, from 22 to 26 April for its eighth meeting and from 16 to 18 May for a resumed session of the eighth meeting.

Recognizing the major progress achieved in the course of the discussions and acknowledging that an agreement on a package of amendments to the IHR was within reach, WHO Member States decided to prolong the negotiations during the 77th session of the WHA and reached an agreement on an ambitious package of amendments on 1 June 2024.

The package of amendments to the Regulations, adopted on 1 June 2024, aims at strengthening global preparedness, surveillance and responses to public health emergencies, including pandemics. The amendments are focussed on improving international cooperation and collaboration in response to health threats. They also provide a framework for enhanced support to ensure more effective implementation of the Regulations.

Special Committee meetings under the Belgian Presidency

Until the seventy-seventh World Health Assembly, the Belgian Presidency has hosted five meetings of the Working Party on Public Health in its capacity as Special Committee within the meaning of Article 218(4) TFEU.

The meetings were held on 24 January, 13 March, 25 April, 23 May 2024 and 12 June. On 24 January 2024 the Special Committee took place in person in Brussels.

All the meetings focused on strategic discussion on the EU's goals and priorities and on the role of the EU in the negotiations. The need to stay united, to focus on a successful outcome and to cooperate in order to do the outreach and explain the EU's position was emphasized repeatedly.
