COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 16 May 2007

9537/07

SAN 96

NOTE

from: Permanent Representatives Committee
to: Council

No. prev. doc.: 9354/07 SAN 86

Subject: EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS COUNCIL MEETING ON 30 AND 31 MAY 2007

Combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the neighbouring countries
- Adoption of Council conclusions / Policy debate
  (Public debate, pursuant to Article 8(3) CRP [proposed by the Presidency])

1. At its meeting on 16 May 2007, the Permanent Representatives Committee examined the above-mentioned text proposed by the Presidency and agreed to transmit the draft conclusions as set out in the Annex to the Council.

2. The Council is invited to adopt the proposed draft conclusions.
COMBATING HIV/AIDS WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND IN THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES
- DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS -

The Council of the European Union

1. UNDERLINES the global challenge HIV/AIDS continue to pose and REFERS in this context, to the “Council conclusions on recently emerging issues regarding HIV/AIDS”, adopted in Luxembourg on 23 April 2007;

2. RECALLS the goals and objectives set out in the 2000 UN Millennium Declaration, the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS agreed at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) in 2001, the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS agreed at UNGASS+5 in 2006, the European Programme for Action to Confront HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis through External Action (2007-2011) and the ICPD Cairo Agenda and emphasizes the importance of their implementation;

3. WELCOMES the “Bremen Declaration” as the central political message of the Ministerial Conference "Responsibility and Partnership - Together Against HIV/AIDS" (Bremen, 13 March 2007);

4. UNDERLINES that HIV/AIDS, more than a quarter of a century into the pandemic, and in spite of manifold efforts at the local, regional, national, and international level, is still outpacing our efforts, putting a particular burden upon women, who are increasingly affected in many regions of the world, but also showing a high incidence rate among men;
5. RECOGNISES that HIV/AIDS is a matter of serious concern also in the European Union and in the neighbouring countries. Particular attention must be paid to EU neighbouring countries, where the proportion of women among newly detected HIV-infections is increasing, and to the most vulnerable groups: injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, migrants, prisoners and sex workers;

6. STRESSES that the response to HIV/AIDS is a complex issue which requires above all the political will to take action including
   – strengthening of the health systems and prevention in a multisectoral approach,
   – training of health care personnel,
   – awareness raising in all groups of society,
   – tackling the cost of treatment,
   – full respect to human rights;

7. UNDERLINES the importance of close collaboration between local, regional, national and European levels, as well as between the private and public sectors;

8. TAKES NOTE that barriers to access to antiretroviral treatment vary from country to country and that the high prices of antiretroviral drugs create obstacles to universal access to treatment in some parts of Europe;

9. WELCOMES the readiness of the representatives from the pharmaceutical industry, as expressed at the Bremen Conference, to contribute their share to the availability of affordable antiretroviral drugs taking account of the specific needs of each country;

10. RECOGNIZES that effective strategies for fighting the pandemic have been developed and that it is now time to implement them widely in order to alleviate, as a matter of fundamental human rights, human suffering and to reduce the socio-economic burden in countries and populations affected by the pandemic;
11. UNDERLINES the need for an integrated and coordinated focus on HIV/AIDS prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and support, based on the promotion of human rights both of people with HIV and vulnerable groups of the population;

12. RECOGNISES that prevention efforts must be regularly adapted to the changing patterns of the pandemic;

13. RECOGNISES that at the same time the search for better tools for health promotion, prevention, access to testing, diagnosis and treatment (in particular concerning paediatric drugs, treatment for co-infections such as hepatitis C and multidrug resistant tuberculosis) must be sustained. More research is also urgently needed into microbicides, vaccines and pre-exposure prophylaxis, as well as into the most effective ways to achieve behavioural change;

14. Strongly REAFFIRMS the linkage between HIV/AIDS policies and programmes and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) policies and services as set out in the texts recalled in paragraph 2 of these conclusions;

15. WELCOMES the strategy and the action plan laid down in the European Commission’s Communication on Combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the Neighbouring Countries 2006-2009, and the meaningful involvement of civil society, including people with HIV, who must play a central role in shaping policies and developing services that meet their needs.

16. INVITES the Member States to:

- Provide the political leadership on a national, European and international level to fight this pandemic, and align themselves in particular on the Dublin, Vilnius and Bremen Declarations in a transparent and accountable manner;
Take further action to promote and guarantee human rights, including by fighting discrimination and stigmatisation, especially of people with HIV and those affected most by the epidemic in Europe and neighbouring countries: injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, migrants, prisoners and sex workers;

Promote universal access to evidence-based prevention and comprehensive harm reduction, including needle exchange, as the central part of a successful response to alleviating the impact of HIV/AIDS;

Safeguard the safety of blood and blood products;

Exchange best practices on the prevention of HIV/AIDS;

Promote appropriate screening and treatment methods to reduce as far as possible mother-to-child transmission of HIV;

Promote comprehensive sexuality education, information, counselling and services on safer sex and condom use, in particular for young people;

Take appropriate action to involve relevant partners in the entire process, in particular health professionals, organisations of people with HIV, other civil society organisations, vulnerable groups, the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNAIDS, the European Centre for Disease Prevention und Control (ECDC), the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) as well as the private sector;

Devote attention to the response to HIV/AIDS in their national research programmes;

Cooperate to ensure access to affordable medicines and care;
17. INVITES the Commission to:

- Implement its action plan as laid down in its Communication on Combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the Neighbouring Countries 2006-2009;

- Promote HIV/AIDS prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and support through Community action programmes and through health in all policies;

- Give special attention to public health issues regarding HIV/AIDS prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and support as well as the evaluation and research of health education and prevention measures, in the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013);

- Promote the exchange of best prevention practices, e.g. by supporting a mechanism for the collection of examples of good prevention measures;

- Involve representatives of civil society in twinning projects in order to transfer experience and enhance cooperation;

- Contribute through appropriate proposals and measures to access to affordable medicines, e.g. by initiating a review of Council Regulation (EC) No 953/2003 with regard to neighbouring countries in need of reduced-price drugs for people with HIV;

18. INVITES

- Representatives of civil society, including organisations of people with HIV and vulnerable groups, to engage in trusting co-operation with the governments on the basis of their specific know-how;

- The private sector to contribute to raising awareness of the risks of HIV/AIDS and to show solidarity with people with HIV in particular;
– The media to include accurate information and education about effective HIV/AIDS responses in their work;

– Employers and trade unions to ensure non-discriminatory policies for people with HIV and vulnerable groups in the workplace and to reduce fears of infection, stigma and discrimination among staff by providing objective, evidence-based information, and access to prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and support in accordance with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work;

– The pharmaceutical industry, and each company individually

  o to facilitate access to affordable medicines;

  o to work together with all stakeholders and establish country-specific action plans;

  o to enter into partnerships between the public and the private sector to support R&D and technology transfer;

  o and to cooperate in securing distribution channels for drugs against HIV/AIDS in cooperation with governmental institutions and NGOs.