

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Role of the local and regional authorities in the reform of European public health systems'

(2000/C 226/19)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the decision of the Bureau of 15 September 1999 to draw up, in accordance with the fifth paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, an Opinion on the Role of the local and regional authorities in the reform of European public health systems and to instruct Commission 5 for Social Policy, Public Health, Consumer Protection, Research and Tourism to prepare the Committee's work on the subject;

having regard to the draft opinion (CdR 416/99 rev. 2) adopted by Commission 5 on 6 March 2000 (rapporteur: Mr Tilman Tögel (D/PSE));

adopted the following opinion at its 33rd plenary session held on 12 and 13 April 2000 (meeting of 13 April).

The Committee of the Regions would like to make the following comments about the further development of European public health policy:

1. The health care field includes tasks performed by the local and regional authorities which are important to the public and have a major financial impact in the light of European integration. In view of the strong cultural influences on health care, European involvement must be kept to a bare minimum.

2. Systems (by means of which the spread of infectious diseases can be averted, foodstuff supervision can be made more efficient and environmental effects hazardous to health can be prevented) could be studied and settled at the EU-level. The role of the EU is essential in such duties.

3. Member States carry out their health and medical care according to national organisational and financial solutions. They are the results of a long historical and cultural development. The harmonisation of these solutions would not be reasonable nor justifiable.

4. Discussions on cross-border aspects of health should be encouraged. Discussion matters could for instance focus on financing health-costs relating to cross-border activities.

5. The policy and decision-making powers of the local authorities must not only be taken into consideration but also strengthened in line with needs, and developed.

The Committee of the Regions makes the following recommendations to the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament:

6. As an initial step, the necessary basis for cooperation should be established by means of greater transparency, the targeted development of methods and the exchange of experience.

7. In developing European public health policy as defined in the treaty of Amsterdam, the European Union's bodies, in collaboration with the Member States should:

— provide a further stimulus to solving local and regional problems, especially those arising in border areas, by working together with local and regional authorities via practical initiatives and targeted development projects;

— look at the individual areas and issues, responsibility for which is dispersed across the whole range of European bodies, as a whole and to coordinate this approach via the European Commission;

— encourage regional players to become actively involved, within the range of opportunities offered by both nationally managed health care systems and health systems of the self-managing kind existing in some Member States in the fields of public health. This applies particularly where public health and health care functions are assigned to different bodies and levels. Being close to the 'grass roots' the local authorities have an important role to play. Their social service departments are responsible for identifying problems, taking preventive action and offering assistance, particularly to sections of the population which are at risk or experiencing difficulties;

— extend health monitoring and public health reporting in Europe systematically to all matters relevant to public health so as to establish a reliable data framework in parallel with practical comparative studies of structure.

8. The Committee of the Regions calls for the necessary transparency and debate on health matters. Issues for dis-

ussion include, for example, Community and especially cross-border quality assurance and planning.

9. The COR also believes that, in the future, when decisions are taken affecting the public health and health care responsibilities of local and regional authorities, particular attention should be paid to the views of the COR.

Brussels, 13 April 2000.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Jos CHABERT
