

Council conclusions on ‘Lessons learned for Public Health from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa — Health Security in the European Union’

(2015/C 421/04)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

1. RECALLS that under Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, a high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Union policies and activities; that Union action, which shall complement national policies, shall be directed towards improving public health, preventing physical and mental illness and diseases, and obviating sources of danger to physical and mental health. Such action shall cover the fight against the major health scourges, by promoting research into their causes, their transmission and their prevention, as well as health information and education, and monitoring, early warning of and combating serious cross-border threats to health. Member States shall, in liaison with the Commission, coordinate among themselves their policies and programmes in those areas;
2. NOTES with concern that the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) epidemic in West Africa has proved to be the largest epidemic of the disease on record, with more than 28 000 reported confirmed, probable and suspected cases and over 11 000 reported deaths ⁽¹⁾, including about 500 of healthcare workers, since March 2014 and that, since its outbreak in December 2013, the epidemic has evolved into a public health, humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis with an unprecedented impact on families and communities in affected countries;
3. RECALLS the International Health Regulations (2005) ⁽²⁾ (IHR) adopted by the 58th World Health Assembly on 23 May 2005 which reinforced coordination among States Parties to the IHR as regards preparedness for and the response to a public health emergency of international concern;
4. NOTES the response to the outbreak of EVD by the Member States, the European Commission, the Health Security Committee (HSC), the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO);
5. WELCOMES the extensive response to the outbreak of EVD by the affected countries and the remarkable work by civil society and non-governmental organisations;
6. RECALLS that improving citizens’ health security was a core aim of the second EU Health Programme (2008-2013) ⁽³⁾ and NOTES the overarching objective to ‘protect Union citizens from serious cross-border health threats’ as enshrined in the third EU Health Programme (2014-2020) ⁽⁴⁾;
7. RECALLS that Decision No 1082/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽⁵⁾ lays down rules on epidemiological surveillance, monitoring, early warning of, and combating serious cross-border threats to health, including preparedness and response planning related to those activities, with a view to coordinate and in order to complement national policies and ACKNOWLEDGES that the Decision enabled the Union to address the public health aspects of the Ebola outbreak while also reinforcing the interoperability of its preparedness and response capacities and that it provides a solid framework to tackle future public health crises similar to the Ebola outbreak;
8. WELCOMES that medical evacuation of Ebola patients to Europe was implemented through the collaboration between the WHO, the Commission services, Member States and the HSC;
9. UNDERLINES the importance of coordination of preparedness research at the European and global level and of the efforts made by the respective networks;

⁽¹⁾ <http://apps.who.int/ebola/ebola-situation-reports>

⁽²⁾ http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/43883/1/9789241580410_eng.pdf

⁽³⁾ Decision No 1350/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 establishing a second programme of Community action in the field of health (2008-13) (OJ L 301, 20.11.2007, p. 3).

⁽⁴⁾ Regulation (EU) No 282/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 on the establishment of a third Programme for the Union’s action in the field of health (2014-2020) (OJ L 86, 21.3.2014, p. 1).

⁽⁵⁾ Decision No 1082/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2013 on serious cross-border threats to health and repealing Decision No 2119/98/EC (OJ L 293, 5.11.2013, p. 1).

10. UNDERLINES the important role of the HSC, established by Decision No 1082/2013/EU, in supporting the exchange of information between the Member States and the Commission, as well as in facilitating the coordination of the preparedness and response planning to the outbreak and of risk and crisis communication;
11. WELCOMES that the EU and its Member States have invested EUR 2 billion in addressing the Ebola crisis ⁽¹⁾ and to ensure better preparation to tackle possible future outbreaks;
12. RECALLS that under 'Horizon 2020 — the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020)' ⁽²⁾ the EU has provided EUR 140 million on research on communicable diseases, such as Ebola;
13. RECALLS the Council Conclusions of 30 April 2009 on 'Influenza A/H1N1 infection' ⁽³⁾ as well as the Council Conclusions of 12 October 2009 on 'Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 — a strategic approach' ⁽⁴⁾ and the Council Conclusions of 13 September 2010 on 'Lessons learned from the A/H1N1 pandemic — Health security in the European Union' ⁽⁵⁾, in which the Member States are invited to continue and to extend cooperation on preparation, monitoring, early warning and coordinated responses for all matters relating to public health emergencies;
14. SUPPORTS the ongoing efforts in reforming WHO's preparedness and response capacity as recommended in Resolution EBSS3.R1 on 'Ebola: ending the current outbreak, strengthening global preparedness and ensuring the WHO's capacity to prepare for and respond to future large scale outbreaks and emergencies with public health consequences' adopted on 25 January 2015 ⁽⁶⁾ and as a follow-up to the Final Report of the Ebola Interim Assessment Panel published on 7 July 2015 ⁽⁷⁾;
15. WELCOMES the resolution of the European Parliament of 18 September 2014 on EU response to the Ebola outbreak ⁽⁸⁾ as well as its own-initiative report of 27 October 2015 on 'the Ebola crisis: the long-term lessons and how to strengthen health systems in developing countries to prevent future crises' ⁽⁹⁾;
16. RECALLS the Ebola High Level Coordination meeting held in Brussels on 16 October 2014, co-organised by the Commission and the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, where EU and EEA Ministers of Health reaffirmed joint efforts to reinforce preparedness and response activities to fight Ebola;
17. RECALLS the high level conference 'Ebola: From Emergency to Recovery' held in Brussels on 3 March 2015 ⁽¹⁰⁾ under the organisation of the European Union, which aimed to sustain the international mobilisation and to plan the next steps in the fight both against the current outbreak and the Ebola virus in general;
18. TAKES NOTE of the discussions on lessons learned from the Ebola epidemic that have taken place in various international fora since its outbreak and notably the G7 Health Ministers' Commitment 'Lessons Learned from Ebola' adopted on 8 and 9 October 2015 ⁽¹¹⁾ underlining the need for better global public health crisis management and calling for greater cooperation in view of developing and maintaining core capacities for IHR implementation;
19. WELCOMES the Conference 'Lessons learned for Public Health from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa' co-organised by the Commission and the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 12 and 14 October 2015 in Luxembourg ⁽¹²⁾, which stressed the need for improved cross-sectoral cooperation as well as strengthened health security in the European Union in order to enhance and maintain the response and preparedness capacities of Member States in case of future outbreaks;

⁽¹⁾ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5339_en.htm

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EU) No 1291/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing Horizon 2020 — the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) and repealing Decision No 1982/2006/EC (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 104).

⁽³⁾ 9392/09.

⁽⁴⁾ 13635/09.

⁽⁵⁾ 12665/10.

⁽⁶⁾ http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EBSS3/EBSS3_R1-en.pdf?ua=1&ua=1

⁽⁷⁾ <http://who.int/csr/resources/publications/ebola/report-by-panel.pdf?ua=1>

⁽⁸⁾ 2014/2842(RSP), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P8-TA-2014-0026>

⁽⁹⁾ 2014/2204(INI),

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2015-0281+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=en>

⁽¹⁰⁾ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-4521_en.htm

⁽¹¹⁾ http://www.bmg.bund.de/fileadmin/dateien/Downloads/G/G7-Ges.Minister_2015/G7_Health_Ministers_Declaration_AMR_and_EBOLA.pdf

⁽¹²⁾ Conference report, http://ec.europa.eu/health/preparedness_response/events/ev_20151012_en.htm#

20. RECOGNISES that while preparedness and response planning as well as its implementation remain primarily a matter of national competence to be decided on by Member States, it is necessary to work together with a view to coordinate, where appropriate, national measures at EU level, in coherence with public health crises management at international level, notably within WHO and in line with Decision No 1082/2013/EU on serious cross-border health threats;

INVITES MEMBER STATES TO:

21. MAINTAIN appropriate capacities, during and in between emergencies, in order to strengthen national preparedness and response activities, the international coordination and the implementation of lessons learned from previous incidents;

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO:

22. IDENTIFY, ASSESS and TAKE FORWARD, as appropriate and while fully respecting Member States' competences, discussions of the following issues at EU level, notably within the HSC on the basis of the relevant provisions of Decision No 1082/2013/EU and while taking into account relevant work at international level:

- (a) improvement of cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration in facing public health emergencies of international concern within the EU;
- (b) strengthening of risk-assessment and risk-management of serious cross-border threats to health;
- (c) exchange of good practices in the field of prevention and treatment, including protection and training of health care workers;
- (d) fostering of stronger involvement of relevant work and experiences of other stakeholders such as civil society and non-governmental organisations;
- (e) defining EU medical evacuation capacities in preparation for possible future emergencies;
- (f) strengthening of preparedness research, notably with regard to diagnostic methods, vaccines and therapeutic products development and improvement of coordination between the European and global research community;
- (g) the means and tools to deliver medical and public health assistance (emergency medical teams and experts) as part of the European Emergency Response Capacity under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism in collaboration with WHO and the Global Health Emergency Workforce, in accordance with Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism ⁽¹⁾;
- (h) strengthening of public health and health service expertise as regards the prevention of the spread, as well as control, management of serious cross-border health threats and treatment of related diseases, e.g. by expert networks on screening and clinical case management as well as Europe-wide simulation exercises to test cross-sectoral coordination;
- (i) improving coherence of Member States risk and crises communication by consulting each other, with a view to coordinate, through the HSC and its communicators' network;
- (j) coherent implementation of core capacities in the EU and at global level, according to the IHR requirements, under WHO leadership, notably to build and strengthen resilient health systems, to promote the need for high quality surveillance and infrastructure and sharing of information;
- (k) strengthening of EU preparedness and response planning as part of enhanced global health security;

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

23. IDENTIFY opportunities to improve coordination mechanisms for future incidents that extend across different policy areas.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 924.