On 8 December 2011, the European Commission adopted a proposal that seeks to strengthen the existing means of the European Union (EU) to address cross-border health threats other than communicable diseases and to strengthen the preparedness for crises in the EU [1,2].

The draft proposal will now be transmitted to the Council and the European Parliament for amendment and would replace Decision No 2119/98/EC [3], which is one of the legal bases of the founding Regulation of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) [4]. ECDC currently identifies, assesses and communicates current and emerging threats to human health from communicable diseases in the EU and will continue to do so. The ECDC shall also act on its own initiative in the case of other outbreaks of illness of unknown origin which may spread within or to the Community, until the source of the outbreak is known. Other cross-border threats to health emerging from biological, chemical and environmental events are so far not being addressed in the same way.

The proposal would enable Member States and the Commission to set up additional ad hoc monitoring networks. This involves:

- coordinating actions between national planning and important economic sectors such as transport, energy and civil protection and supporting Member States in setting up a joint procurement mechanism for medical countermeasures;
- setting up an ad hoc network in situations where a Member State has raised an alert on a serious threat other than a communicable disease;
- expanding the remit of the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) – which currently covers only communicable diseases – to cover all serious threats to health;
- coordinating development of national or European public health risk assessments for threats of biological, chemical or environmental origin in a crisis situation.

References