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(Third part)

REPORT

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TOP 2. The handling of the H1N1 pandemic: more transparency needed

THE PRESIDENT – Our next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled “The handling of the H1N1 pandemic: more transparency needed” presented by Mr Paul Flynn on behalf of the Committee on Social, Health and Family Affairs, Document 12283.

We will aim to finish this item by 5 p.m., which means that we shall interrupt the speakers list at about 4.50 p.m. to allow time for replies and votes.

I first call Mr Flynn, rapporteur. You have 13 minutes in total, which you may divide between presentation of the report and reply to the debate.

Mr FLYNN (*United Kingdom*) – Exactly a year ago, a very bad decision was taken by the World Health Organization that now seems unscientific and irrational. The result of that decision was that the whole world became scared that a major plague was on the way – a new pandemic that would have been as bad, according to reports, as the flu pandemic of 1918. There seems to have been no scientific basis for that decision. It rested on the change in the definition of a pandemic that took place last year.

Hitherto, the definition of a flu pandemic was one in which thousands of deaths occurred. That definition was changed to include conditions that could be either “severe” or “mild”. According to the epidemiology, this swine flu was likely to be mild. As a result of that decision, the countries of the world wasted billions of pounds on medicines that were never used and that will never be used. They suffered fear and anxiety. They suffered the disruption of their health services, whose priorities were distorted to concentrate on swine flu rather than on other issues, and the world was exposed to taking in a vaccine that had not been properly trialled.

We are now looking into the results of all that, and many countries are undertaking their own investigations. Preliminary results show that there is no correlation between the amounts spent on taking precautions and the results. The country that spent the least was Poland, which rejected the idea that this disease was dangerous and which had suspicions about the safety of the vaccine. Other countries – including France, the Netherlands and my own country, the United Kingdom – spent very large sums of money. Britain spent £570 million on medicines that will never be used. The outcome, however, was that the number of deaths per million from swine flu in Britain was about twice the number in Poland.

There is a great deal of evidence that the decisions were taken on an unscientific basis. We are not making accusations, but we are entitled to transparency. There is no transparency. Our committee has held three hearings and we have invited the WHO to come along. I have also visited Geneva, but we still do not know the answers to the questions. Who took that decision? Who were the members of the emergency committee? If we can find out who they are, we should also like to know what their interests are. The only ones to benefit from the decision were the pharmaceutical companies and the vaccine manufacturers. They made billions of euros.

Without transparency, suspicion remains. We are not accusing anyone of any wrongdoing, but we are entitled to know what went on. We have cried wolf four times in recent years – on sudden acute respiratory syndrome, on Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, on avian flu and now on swine flu – and the world has been greatly alarmed, yet in all four cases, there were very few deaths around the world. In the United Kingdom, we were told that swine flu would cause about 65 000 deaths. The truth is that fewer than 500 people died with the disease, and probably fewer than 100 died of the disease.

That is all very tragic, but in a normal year between 2 000 and 3 000 die of seasonal flu, so the effect was much milder than that. There was no reason for the alarm. In the past few days, the WHO has held a rather remarkable event. We want to thank it for holding its own investigation into this matter, although we were not pleased when we heard that six members of the review body that was looking into the emergency committee’s decision were themselves members of the emergency

committee. On Tuesday, two of them quite rightly resigned, but I think that the other four should resign as well. They cannot pass judgment on their own decisions. We call on the WHO to ensure that the investigation is a thorough one.

National governments are also holding their own investigations – my country will announce its investigation next week – but we know what is likely to happen. Nations will defend their own conduct. I am sure Egypt will say that it did not suffer from swine flu because it killed all the pigs in the country. I am sure that Britain will say that it did not have many cases because it spent £1 billion, and that Poland will say that it spent very little and had none.

So nation states will defend themselves, as will the WHO and the pharmaceutical companies, but who will speak for the 800 million people who suffered badly as a result of this decision? And, given that we have cried wolf four times, who will suffer in the future if a very nasty disease comes along but no one believes the WHO because they no longer trust it? The United Kingdom is the second biggest payer to the WHO and we greatly admire its work in eliminating smallpox, and now polio, from the world. We need a World Health Organization in which we can have absolute confidence, but without transparency, that is not possible.

This report speaks on behalf of the people we represent, and I urge you to support it. THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Flynn. You have five and a half minutes remaining.

In the debate I call Mr Huss, who will speak on behalf of the Socialist Group.

Mr HUSS (*Luxembourg*) congratulated Mr Flynn on his critical, yet constructive report. He did not want to criticise the World Health Organization in itself, but it had to be accepted that its management of the pandemic had been poor.

Democracy meant dialogue, the provision of information and transparency. The WHO committee of experts was not transparent and had provided no explanation for its decisions or of the criteria for what constituted a pandemic. It was worrying that this secret committee had the power to instigate wide-ranging and powerful public health campaigns. The WHO handling of the pandemic could affect its response to the many other pandemics developing throughout the world, pandemics such as diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, depression and obesity. The kitty was empty, there was no money left, vaccinations were very expensive, and the pharmaceutical companies had filled their pockets.

The criteria for a pandemic had to be redefined, and membership of the WHO expert committees to be clarified. Monitoring processes could be more democratic, and the Council of Europe could enter into dialogue with it to encourage a change of approach. To make the WHO less dependent on the pharmaceutical companies, alternative funding arrangements could be found. The crisis would have provided at least one benefit if it brought these changes to the WHO.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. I call Mr Marquet on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Mr MARQUET (*Monaco*) was glad that the H1N1 pandemic had been debated because, although he had great respect for the work of the World Health Organization, there had been serious problems with the management of the pandemic. Those problems required caution and measured discussion, not a witch hunt. Mr Flynn was to be congratulated on his work on a real governance issue within the WHO.

States had signed extensive secret contracts with laboratories. Too much secrecy had surrounded the declaration of the pandemic in June 2009, and the WHO needed to modify its guidance. There was still insufficient information about the expert panel who had determined the definition of the pandemic.

The lack of transparency raised wider issues, such as the increasingly technical nature of issues on which politicians were required to make decisions. Experts should help decision makers, but not replace them. There was a need for the ethical questions to be considered and probably for a code of conduct.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. I call next Mr Parfenov on behalf of the European Democrat Group.

Mr PARFENOV (*Russian Federation*) thanked the rapporteur for his work and for his determination in insisting that the issue be raised on Thursday and not at the end of the part-session on Friday. As the disease had spread, many in the world had waited to see whether it would reach the level of pandemic. Then, after the declaration in June 2009, doubts began to arise. The report did not answer all the questions that had been asked, probably rightly, but the amounts of money earned by the pharmaceutical industry and spent by countries were known. Answers were needed, both about the interests of the pharmaceutical industry in having a pandemic declared, and about how such problems could be avoided in future.

The WHO was an excellent organisation but it was notable that its long-term work was very good while its efforts to deal with emergencies were poor. It was a very closed organisation and there was not sufficient information about it. It was known that state contributions to the WHO accounted for only around 20% to 30% of its costs, and that had to be addressed. Transparency was the best way forward.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Parfenov. The next speaker is Mr Hunko, who will speak on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Mr HUNKO (*Germany*) thanked Mr Wodarg for the original initiative and Mr Flynn for his work on the report. The H1N1 virus had turned out to be very mild. In Germany between April 2009 and April 2010, there were only 200 cases, a small number in comparison with the number of deaths from normal influenza.

Predictions of the seriousness of the outbreak and its designation as a Phase 6 pandemic were based on a limited range of scientific opinion. Billions of dollars had been spent on the vaccine and it was necessary to clarify what had happened to avoid future repetition of the problems. The WHO had changed the criteria for a Phase 6 pandemic, basing it on this outbreak. There had been no clear answer from the WHO as to why that had happened. He had received a secret report, placed on the internet by a whistleblower, concerning what had transpired between the German state and the pharmaceutical industry.

Some very deft marketing by the pharmaceutical industry had resulted in huge costs for states. The German people had lost trust in the WHO as a result. The WHO was under pressure from private interests, and steps had to be taken to ensure its independence as there were many other diseases which could lead to similar problems.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Hunko. The next speaker is Mrs Circene, who will speak on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Mrs CIRCENE (*Latvia*) – On behalf of my political group, I thank Mr Flynn for his report, which is very relevant. The H1N1 pandemic raised many unanswered questions and involved global organisations such as the World Health Organization. I want to stress the fact that, because this is not the first such case, it is particularly important to discuss the matter publicly on the international level. Several years ago, there was avian flu. Although it did not infect humans, billions of dollars of medicines were sold. Those medicines were not clinically tested in relation to humans and avian flu.

In June 2009, the WHO declared a level 6 pandemic and vaccines were purchased in massive quantities. Without sufficient justification, 100 000 children were vaccinated. The way the pandemic has been handled – not only by the WHO, but by the competent health authorities at European Union level – gives cause for alarm. As early as 2009, doubts were expressed about the need for such vaccinations, the lack of transparency and the possible influence of the pharmaceutical industry. Given the inadequate transparency of the process, such influence could have been exerted.

The Parliamentary Assembly was unable to obtain the names of people in charge and their possible conflicts of interest. That is why we need specific guidelines to prevent experts from becoming associated with the industry's private sector. All information, without exception, should be made public. That is the key factor, because the pandemic vaccines have a distinctive feature – their development and production can take place only on the basis of a special order being made. Governments place orders only after an announcement has been made by the WHO.

Furthermore, the information available on this pandemic was ambiguous for several reasons: a virus similar to H1N1 has been known for nearly 100 years, because in 1918 a similar virus caused the Spanish flu, and in the 1960s US soldiers brought back a similar legionnaire's disease from Vietnam.

It was already known that the mortality rate from that virus was not very high.

Therefore, in co-ordination with international organisations, the strategy used by the WHO in declaring a level 6 pandemic and in naming a responsible person should be revised because each declaration of a pandemic incurs enormous costs.

Every day, tens of thousands of children die from hunger. The mortality rate from non-infectious diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, oncological diseases, HIV/AIDS, high blood pressure and so on is even higher. Therefore, it is important to hold regular discussions on drafting international and national guidelines in the sphere of health care, as well as good governance in the public health sector and independent research.

I am grateful for the report, which raises awareness of this serious problem.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mrs Circene.

I understand that the rapporteur, Mr Flynn, does not wish to respond at this stage, but will reply at the end of the debate.

Our next speaker is Mrs Caparin.

Mrs CAPARIN (*Croatia*) – It is a well-known fact that the possibility of pandemic spread of the flu virus exists, so it is necessary to have a completely prepared epidemiologic service which is well organised and capable of counteracting an epidemic on a daily basis. It must be ready for a new virus appearing and quickly spreading the world over, bearing in mind that most – perhaps all – of the citizens of the planet would have no immunity.

The H1N1 virus quickly showed all of its pandemic characteristics. No classification as a pandemic by WHO is needed for the epidemiologists to know how to act when a pandemic virus appears. Epidemiologic services monitored the spreading of the virus in the world and noted the moment that it reached Croatia. The services daily informed the commission set up by the Ministry of Health and Social Care to monitor pandemic flu, which was the co-ordinating body for all involved in the fight against the pandemic and was headed by the minister himself.

Information on the problem was made available transparently every morning without giving rise to worry or panic, and that is how epidemiologic services must function. The virus appeared in the middle of the tourist season in Croatia, but there was no panic. The characteristics of the pandemic that were registered in Croatia were the appearance of the virus during the summer, not the usual flu season; the epidemic peaked in the autumn, with a rise in the number of patients with common flu much earlier in the season than usual, and the number fell quickly after the peak; the number of hospitalised patients was much greater than usual among those with common flu, with more than 2 500 from the appearance of the new virus until the end of the epidemic wave, whereas the number for common flu is usually only 300; the dominant complication of the pandemic H1N1 flu was the primary viral inflammation of the lungs, which is rare in common flu; 86 people were treated in intensive care, because of complications; the number of registered deaths from pandemic flu was higher than the average yearly deaths from common flu; and the pandemic virus has expelled from circulation the common seasonal flu virus.

In Croatia, all the anti-epidemic measures that were undertaken, including vaccination, took place without even a wink from WHO or its proclamation of a pandemic, because the epidemiologic services co-operate with similar services in Europe and the European Centre for Disease Control, and their monitoring spotted all the characteristics of the pandemic. It was their duty to protect citizens, together with the Croatian crisis headquarters for the health ministry. The degrees of pandemics announced by WHO are based on the international agreement of experts and are there to ease the organisation of scientifically based anti-epidemic measures in such a situation.

Taking information from some non-expert sources, parts of the media wrote about the H1N1 problem without transparency, inconsistently and vaguely, alternately exaggerating or diminishing the pandemic, questioning anti-epidemic measures and compromising the vaccine – all of which was totally unjustified. Bearing that in mind, we need to evaluate communication with the media, the role of the internet and new technologies, and how users can be encouraged to recognise proper sources of information.

Finally, the question remains of whether the H1N1 virus has appeared as a natural mutation or emerged from some other source.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mrs Caparin, but we have to move on. I now call Mr Kucheida of France, but I cannot see him, so the next speaker is Mr Ünal.

Mr ÜNAL (*Turkey*) was glad to have an opportunity to discuss a report on an issue that had long dominated the health care agenda. He thanked Mr Flynn and Mr Wodarg for their work in putting the issue on the agenda.

Potential pandemics such as swine flu demonstrated the importance of having a body such as the World Health Organization, able to respond to major health threats. It was important that countries were prepared for pandemics and primed to act should there be an outbreak. It was important that countries should take preventive measures but it was wrong to force people to take such measures under the pretence of a pandemic. Countries had borne a high cost in preparing for the pandemic, and the decision-making process that led to their purchasing vaccines could have been more transparent. That fact that it had not been had caused questions to form in people's minds. The dangers of the pandemic had been exaggerated by the authorities, and public health had been endangered by the actions of pharmaceutical companies. That was a global scandal.

While the WHO was an effective organisation, there had been too much doubt and insufficient information about the dangers posed by H1N1. He wanted to know whether such mistakes could be prevented when dealing in future with pandemics, such as bird flu.

Some countries had bought large quantities of vaccines in anticipation of the pandemic, and no one would compensate them for these unnecessary costs. The WHO was the international organisation best placed to give guidance on health but recent events had raised questions about its processes. To answer such questions would strengthen, not weaken, the institution's credibility.

More ethical regulation was required of the relationship between pharmaceutical companies and the WHO. National health care organisations also needed to learn lessons from how they had responded to the pandemic.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. The next speaker is Mr Hancock.

Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*) – I congratulate the rapporteur on the excellent work that he has done, and thank the staff of the Secretariat for the work that they have done on this issue. Our colleague from Germany, Mr Wodarg, is no longer a member of the Assembly, but I thank him for the efforts that he put in to raising this issue in the first place. It was well worth the effort, and the two hearings that have been held have demonstrated, for the first time in a long time, that the Council of Europe can come up with a real response to a public concern. If it had not been for us, that would have gone relatively unnoticed and that would have been a tragedy. If it had not been for this Assembly, the issue would have been easily and simply swept under the carpet. Little or nothing would have come out of it. To use the parlance of football – as the World Cup is with us every day – the World Health Organization would have been shown a red card and it would have been seriously suggested that it might have taken a bung from the drug companies to manipulate the system in such a malicious and possibly even illegal way. It changed its criteria – when you consider it in the cold light of day and in the context of all the facts that have come out, you have to ask what the reason behind the change in the definition might have been. You cannot find anything on its website to suggest why that might have happened, who wanted it changed and on what the criteria to which it was being changed were based. There is no evidence to support that. That alone would make even the most supportive person begin to smell a rat, as they would realise that there was something seriously wrong with why such a change was being made.

We have the so-called "advisers", who offer advice to the WHO. Nearly every one of the people concerned either was or had been in the pay of one or another of the drug companies. In what other business or institution would it be possible for somebody in the pay of a body that would be the significant beneficiary of any change be able to give such unfettered advice? When the WHO received the advice, it did not even bother to challenge it. Once again, there was nothing in the evidence submitted to the two Council of Europe meetings to suggest that the WHO was critical of what it was being told. Surely any organisation that exists to promote good health and good governance and to ensure that the right thing is being done not just to one patient but to millions around the world has an obligation to go beyond what is reasonable and not to assume that what it is being told is correct. On that, the WHO failed miserably.

The Council of Europe and its members are to be congratulated on having the tenacity to keep going at this, particularly Mr Flynn. He is a bit like a Welsh terrier that, once it gets hold of your trouser leg, will not easily let go. He has dragged the WHO screaming and, sadly, not bawling, to this Assembly. It is an indictment of the WHO that it has not been prepared to come here and defend its position for the rostrum. I am sure that the Assembly would have welcomed such an opportunity, because the WHO would have to have performed a *tour de force* to convince us that it did this for the right reasons. There is a nasty smell about this, and as Paul Flynn said just before he concluded, it will make it difficult for people to trust the WHO in the future and so a lot of people's health will suffer.

(*Mr Mignon, Vice-President of the Assembly, took the chair in place of Mr Cebeci.*)

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. I want to reassure Mr Flynn that apparently everything is in order. Apparently, Sir, you are similar to a Welsh fox terrier – I do not see the resemblance. I call Mr Rouquet.

Mr ROUQUET (*France*) said H1N1 was a complex problem. The Assembly had had an important earlier debate on democracy, and this discussion on H1N1 and the question of how organisations had managed it related to issues raised in that debate. One such was how to have democratically accountable decisions when it was necessary to rely on expert technical advice in making them. That problem arose in many areas of democratic life, but it was particularly difficult when taking public health decisions because it was necessary to take into account much technical and medical information. Information was necessary to enable decision makers to make the right decisions, but there were questions of democratic accountability.

In the case of H1N1, the relevant figures were not available for consultation which meant that it was not possible to come to a balanced conclusion based on the evidence. The low level of transparency in the WHO had led to questions being asked about the role of pharmaceutical companies in the decision-making process. It was the role of politicians to hold their governments to account and to raise issues of transparency, especially when expert opinion was needed to enlighten decision making.

It could be true that wanting to know everything before acting meant not acting at all. It was not right to condemn the WHO, which had had to rely on expert opinions. Perhaps the French Government could be criticised for buying vaccines on the advice of experts. On the other hand, the criticisms that would have been made of the government had the worst predictions been realised had to be taken into account. A French inquiry on the matter would soon report its findings, and it was to be hoped that this would provide more information on exactly what had happened.

There was a need to re-examine the relationship between experts and the rest of the body politic in complex democratic societies. A paper had been written on that very topic, which had explored whether it was possible for citizens and experts to enter into discussion, and under what conditions that process could be successful. Conclusions needed to be drawn from that work for individual countries

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. I call Mr Agramunt Font de Mora. Mr AGRAMUNT FONT DE MORA (*Spain*) reminded delegates that it was difficult for politicians to find the courage to resist fear and say, "No, we are not afraid." He congratulated Mr Flynn on his brave report, particularly as it was hard to criticise other international organisations. He was obviously pleased that there were few victims of H1N1, but bemoaned the enormous amount of money spent on large quantities of vaccines and regretted the loss of confidence in all public authorities that would stem from the incident. He emphasised and supported the report's conclusion of the vital need for transparency.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Agramunt Font de Mora. I call Mr Díaz Tejera. Mr DÍAZ TEJERA (*Spain*) said that, despite their political differences, he agreed wholeheartedly with Mr Agramunt Font de Mora. Everyone had been a victim of a chain of massive deceptions. He, too, was glad that nothing serious had happened, but governments and citizens had been deceived and much money had been invested as a result of the deception. It was impossible truly to measure the harm done but the money could have been better used to fight diseases in poor countries.

He was saddened that the civil service of the World Health Organization had not co-operated with the Council of Europe and he reminded the WHO that it was in the service of the general interest. The WHO's management processes and protocols had to change to prevent such an occurrence from happening again, as the credibility of the WHO and national governments had been damaged. It was clear that the drug companies had failed in respect of their social responsibilities and had put private interests above the general interest. It was equally clear that the response of public authorities had been inadequate.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you, Mr Díaz Tejera. It was an absolute pleasure to hear from you. I am from neither the right nor the left, because I am the President, but I wish to say what an excellent debate we are having – that applies to all the statements I have heard since it began. I am entirely neutral, although of course my heart tends toward one direction.

I call Mr Ivanji.

Mr IVANJI (*Serbia*) – Who truly holds fate in their own hands? Is it me or is it you? Does anyone? I certainly hold my fate in my own hands, and it was up to me to decide whether or not to receive the vaccine. My wife and I have not received it, and neither has my child, who, like all children around the world, hates vaccinations. When people are scared, they try to find comfort in their faith in God, their faith in themselves or, if they are suffering from an illness, faith in a doctor. One's faith in a doctor or a health minister is supported by faith in the World Health Organization. However, one cannot put one's faith in every minister and every doctor. My doctor said that I should make my own decision, and I believed in him as much as I believe in myself – all the same, I said a prayer.

The Polish Minister of Health had faith in herself and, unlike some other ministers and governments in the world, she was fully aware that her position as minister obliged her to take full responsibility for her actions. Brave decisions call for brave individuals. Is it not the brave ones who make history and thus become a part of it? Mrs Eva Kopac says, "When prescribing a medicine, first ask yourselves: would you give that medicine to your own child or to your own mother?" That approach obliges people to take

responsibility and, as much as I hate to admit it, that quality is not something with which most doctors are endowed.

Swine flu revealed all the deficits of the world in which we live; a lack of transparency in decision making, a lack of responsibility and good governance means that we, the citizens, can be easily misled by important organisations, in which doctors obediently trust. The epidemic resulted in more than 18 000 victims, each one of whom is equally important. However, we need to discuss the fact that governments throughout the world were also the victims of the WHO and that each taxpayer suffered a loss because the WHO was advised by those who had a conflict of interest. As a result, 88 million vaccines lie stored in warehouses while the profits of pharmaceutical companies grow. If I were a malicious person, I would say that many profited from this illness and the trust that has been betrayed.

On this occasion, the world reacted in the same way as it always does when a pandemic is declared. Any person who dared to sneeze was, all of a sudden, a suspect while many people stayed locked in their homes because of a simple cold. The world was divided into the cautious and the incautious – those who wore masks and those who did not. People refused to send their children to kindergartens if one child there had a temperature, and people who were infected hid their illness because they did not want to risk being proscribed and ignored by their friends for months after they got well.

All that happened, while others were making good money, because we were not informed, we panicked and we believed our doctors, ministers and governments – we believed the World Health Organization. I agree that we still have to believe them, but we must believe that the WHO will find the strength to face its own deficiencies. That is why we are sending this resolution out to the world; we do so in good faith and as an appeal. We have to face and handle all future epidemics responsibly; we must gather and act on transparent information and facts that are available to all in order to accept and estimate the degree of danger to ourselves. We should not allow ourselves to be treated as guinea pigs by anyone ever again. That is the reason why I am a proud Member of our Parliamentary Assembly today, because it has shown courage and responsibility towards European citizens. I congratulate us all on that, and I thank Mr Flynn for his brave report.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. The next speaker is Mrs Vėsaitė.

Mrs VĖSAITĖ (*Lithuania*) – Dear colleagues, I read this report as though it were a detective story. If the facts indicated in it are correct, a criminal offence has been committed against the taxpayer. Only 10% of the vaccines were used; the rest will never be used. At the moment we have more questions than answers. Who will trust the World Health Organization next time? If we tell people that there is a fire when there is no fire they will not trust us again.

I believe that the pharmaceutical corporations should take some responsibility, but they take none. Why do the 800 million citizens of the Council of Europe states not have the right to know who the decision makers in the expert group were? Those people influenced the national decision makers into taking the wrong steps. That is really scandalous. I support the report, and I support the idea that the investigations should continue. Those who made the wrong decisions should be punished. Thank you, Mr Flynn. I also send my thanks to Mr Wodarg, who initiated the report.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. I now call Mrs Andersen.

Mrs ANDERSEN (*Norway*) – The handling of the swine flu outbreak has harmed our trust in the World Health Organization, as many of my colleagues have said. It scared our populations, resulting in a risk that, the next time we tell them to take a vaccine, they will say no. That could be dangerous. We have allocated a lot of money to a minor problem, leaving help for those hit by the big killers in the world unfinanced. In Norway, people were almost fighting each other in the queues for the vaccine, and accusing us politicians – almost to the point of threatening to kill us – because there was not enough to go round.

Everyone is still confused about what happened. I was confident that the decisions had been taken on a solid basis until I attended the hearing here in Strasbourg in January. However, we are still not hearing good answers to our questions about the change of the definition of a pandemic, and about whether there were secure rules on the connections between the pharmaceutical industry and the WHO to ensure that no biased advice was given during the process. That is all mentioned in the report, and I was really disturbed to read it. The months have passed since January, and there has been enough time to clarify those important issues. That has not happened, however. That is why I am quite convinced that we have to take this action, and why I strongly support the report and the resolution.

There are big killers in the world: AIDS, malaria, malnutrition, famine and diarrhoea are just some of them. They affect poor people and poor countries, and perhaps that is why they are not so interesting to the pharmaceutical industry. They ought to be our concern, however. We ought to be spending more money on them, as well as on the other health problems affecting our populations. As many of my colleagues have said, however, there are many problems involved. No government, or individual politician can say that it will not take the advice of the WHO if it says that a pandemic is likely to occur. That is why it is crucial that we clarify the definition of a pandemic, to determine whether it will be dangerous. We must also have transparency over the connections between the WHO and the pharmaceutical industry, to ensure that we can trust the advice that we receive. This is a signal that we need financing for the important health matters throughout the world.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. I call Mrs Frahm.

Mrs FRAHM (*Denmark*) – I am last but, I hope, not least. First, I want to congratulate the reporter on his splendid report. He has done a splendid job. Perhaps we should also celebrate the fact that the pandemic was not so bad, and that relatively few people were hit by the flu or died from it. Exactly a year ago, newspapers and other media in Europe had one big item on the agenda: the flu. People all over Europe were afraid to travel. People here in this building stopped giving each other friendly kisses, and small bottles of sterilising gel were sold and used everywhere. These were all good examples of how people took responsibility for not spreading the H1N1 virus.

Now, a year later, we can see that the threat from the virus was exaggerated, and the rapporteur, Mr Flynn, has made it clear that we have some cleaning up to do after the experience of the so-called H1N1 pandemic. It seems that the exaggeration of the pandemic was perhaps neither a mistake nor a coincidence. The pharmaceutical industries that earned a fortune from the pandemic had their people in the WHO, which had the power to declare the pandemic and thereby oblige a number of countries to buy large supplies of products from those industries.

The WHO and health authorities at European and national level broke with the principles in the European code of conduct in their handling of the situation. They thereby forced countries to spend billions on unnecessary supplies of medicine, as well as scaring the public all over Europe and the rest of the world. After a year, they are now willing to evaluate the process, but we need them to do more if we are to prevent health authorities from repeating the mistakes.

Organisations such as the WHO and the European health authorities need to be transparent and to publish information on the connections and economic interests of people in committees or other bodies who have an influence on decision making in these matters. The Assembly must support the line in the recommendation and call on the Committee of Ministers to instruct the European Health Committee and related bodies to promote good governance and to live up to the standards in the European code of conduct on lobbying.

Also, the Committee of Ministers must urge member states to put pressure on the WHO in order to secure an open and thorough evaluation of the process followed by a change towards good governance and a clear policy on lobbying. If it does not, the loss of faith in these institutions may be disastrous if – or when – a real pandemic threatens the lives of people in Europe and all over the world.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. By the way, I have a frog in my throat; I do not have the flu myself.

That concludes the list of speakers.

I call Mr Flynn, rapporteur, to reply. You have five and a half minutes.

Mr FLYNN (*United Kingdom*) – My great thanks to the team that created this report: Mrs Maury Pasquier, who showed admirable fairness as a citizen of Geneva in leading the report and chairing our committee in a thorough way, as the health professional that she is. The team realised that this was not like any other report; it was much more important. They were speaking for the people of Europe – not for private interests, not for privilege or wealth, but for the interests and health of the 800 people who we represent.

The two heroes of this debate, and I am grateful for all the kind things that have been said, are Wolfgang Wodarg – it was not a Welsh terrier but a German dachshund that kept biting at the heels of the World Health Organization – and Mrs Ewa Kopacz, the great, courageous woman, another health professional, who said to the pharmaceutical companies, “I don’t believe that there is a danger. I won’t accept from you that I should buy a drug whose safety you won’t guarantee.” Those companies had told the Polish Government that it would have to pay for any adverse side effects, and she very bravely made a statement in November and faced them down.

We have had a magnificent debate. How often is it that we hear voices in here from all parts of the political spectrum and from every corner of Europe singing a Hallelujah Chorus in harmony, saying the same thing? Our message is a powerful, thunderous and intelligent one of anger against a foolish act by the World Health Organization. We are the first body in the world to look at this problem and to denounce what happened. This is not going to go away.

We need to take a lesson from this. We need a firewall between the pharmaceutical industry, commercial industry, science and public health. At the moment, that firewall is porous. We must see decisions made about our health in future for the best possible scientific reasons – they must not be contaminated by the need for profit. I urge you to reinforce that message with a vote now in favour of this report.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. Does Chair of the Committee on Social, Health and Family Affairs wish to speak?

Mrs MAURY PASQUIER (*Switzerland*) thanked the rapporteur for what he had done in producing a balanced report that had attempted to find answers to legitimate questions surrounding H1N1 and the links between the WHO and the pharmaceutical industry. Representatives from the WHO had been invited to attend but had declined to do so. The WHO was conducting its own investigation.

It should be clear that the Assembly was being hardest on those it most loved. The objectives of the WHO were the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health and the development of informed public opinion on health matters. What had happened in the summer of 2009 went against those objectives. Transparency was needed to restore trust, but the Assembly should also appeal to governments to ensure independent funding and expertise for the WHO

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. You were able to express that on our behalf, and we thank you for that. You mentioned Mr Wodarg and other ex-colleagues, and I congratulate them on this important work.

The debate is closed. I thought for one delightful moment that you were applauding me, but, alas, my joy was short lived.

The Committee on Social, Health and Family Affairs has presented a draft resolution and a draft recommendation to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will now proceed to vote on the whole of the draft resolution contained in Document 12283.

The vote is open.

The draft resolution in Document 12283 is adopted, with 60 votes for, 1 against and 1 abstention.

We will now proceed to vote on the whole of the draft recommendation contained in Document 12283.

The vote is open.

The draft recommendation in Document 12283 is adopted, with 62 votes for, 1 against and 1 abstention.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Congratulations to the chairperson. Congratulations, too, to the Chair I am temporarily standing in for.