

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3008/01

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to the Commission

Subject: The plague in Kazakhstan: risk to Europe and the United States

In Roman times the plague was spread throughout Europe and from 1347 to 1348 swept through the whole of the Mediterranean area, including Europe and north Africa via Genovese ships returning from the Black Sea and due to the rapid movements of troops of the Mongol Empire, which spread the plague bacterium, through rat fleas on the horses and backpacks of soldiers coming from areas far away where the plague was endemic.

In the present historical context, where military operations are being carried out on a vast scale in areas posing health risks there may be a re-emergence of plague foci; even though military personnel and staff already employed in health care are protected by appropriate precautions such as vaccination and prophylactics, these do not rule out the presence of virulent strains in laboratories, which are therefore much more contagious than the original strain.

There is also a risk of the plague being spread when those employed in military, technical assistance and health operations return home.

For certain types of plague - bubonic, pneumonic or septicaemic - early diagnosis is the determining factor in ensuring suitable treatment to cure or prevent the illness.

Can the Commission say whether it intends:

1. to set up a committee of inquiry to consider as a matter of urgency any possible risk of epidemics, to identify their hygiene/health or criminal origin (such as germ warfare) and to assess the possibility of providing aid for Kazakhstan and for all those countries working in Central Asia as part of humanitarian aid missions.
2. to set up a monitoring committee responsible for assessing the measures required to tackle any possible contamination?