

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0225/03
by Guido Podestà (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: AIDS in eastern Europe

At the end of 2001 one million adults and children in Eastern Europe had been diagnosed with AIDS. This area, along with Central Asia, has the highest growth rate in the world. In one year alone, the rate of infection in the region rose by 42% and shows no sign of slowing down. A number of factors are contributing to this scenario: a growing but unstable economy, with a high rate of unemployment, the liberalisation of social and cultural norms and inadequate public health services. These factors are creating a series of problems which are playing a major role in the growth of the epidemic:

- The number of young people leaving school is very high. The lack of jobs is increasing the risk of young people joining vulnerable groups, such as drug addicts, or turning to prostitution.
- Trafficking in human beings and the sex trade have increased since the fall of the Berlin Wall, as has drug use among young people.
- Lack of information about sexuality and reproductive health is leading to a total unawareness of the risk of infection: sex education programmes are required to inform the public about sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. In addition, the political authorities should be urged to take steps to remove discrimination against people infected with the virus, by incorporating AIDS prevention programmes into their sexuality and reproductive health programmes.

The national governments of this region often lack the financial resources and expertise required to introduce prevention programmes. A great deal of assistance is required in this context.

How does the Commission intend to develop specific policies to give greater importance to AIDS prevention in the countries of Eastern Europe?

What measures does the Commission intend to adopt to help national governments in this region to launch programmes to prevent and fight AIDS?