

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2242/03  
by Uma Aaltonen (Verts/ALE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Spread of rabies to countries where the disease is under control

Rabies has been diagnosed in a horse imported into Finland from Estonia in May 2003. The disease was last ascertained in Finland in 1989 and has since been brought under control through vaccination of dogs and cats and of wild animals in south-east Finland, in this case using bait containing the vaccine. According to the WHO classification, Finland is a rabies-free country. Rabies is prevalent throughout Eastern Europe as well as in parts of the Baltic region and Russia close to Finland. In Estonia 422 cases in all were recorded in 2002, namely 355 in wild animals and 67 in domestic animals. Although the eradication of rabies intrinsically lies within the province of national legislation, the situation will become significantly more difficult once the new Member States have joined the EU. Because it will be easier for animals to be transported and moved from one Member State to another and quarantine is to be abolished (the incubation period for rabies can be as long as six months), rabies prevention will pose a much greater challenge at national level.

1. Once quarantine for animals has been abolished, what permanent measures will the Commission take to assist European efforts to combat rabies?
2. Is the Commission providing any form of support for action by future Member States to reduce the incidence of rabies, for instance by taking the initiative of laying bait dosed with vaccine in areas at risk, so as to make it possible to prevent the spread of rabies?