

# HEALTH AND CONSUMER VOICE

## RAPEX - Ten years of improving safety in Europe



Neven Mimica  
EU Commissioner for Consumer Policy

EU Rapid Information system (RAPEX) is a ten-year old success story exemplifying the added value Europe brings. It is a story of countries working together for the safety of EU consumers, a collective effort of the national authorities and EU institutions serving European citizens. The 10th anniversary of RAPEX is testimony to the ever increasing importance

that enforcement authorities give to co-operation in ensuring a safer Single Market.

RAPEX is the EU rapid alert system between Member States and the European Commission on non-food products. Its role is to disseminate information on potentially dangerous products as soon as possible. This results in the earlier identification and earlier removal from EU markets of products which pose a danger to consumers.

The RAPEX report for 2013 was published in March. A total of 2 364 measures against dangerous non-food products were taken by EU Member States and reported in RAPEX in 2013. This figure indicates a 3.8% rise in alerts compared to 2012, and continues to confirm a trend of growth which has been apparent since the establishment of the

system in 2003. From around 200 notifications in 2003, RAPEX now receives and distributes more than 2 000 notifications on a yearly basis.

In 2013, "clothing, textiles and fashion items" and "toys" were the two main product categories for which corrective measures had to be taken. Among the most frequently notified risks caused by these products were chemical risks, risk of strangulation, risk of injury and choking.

Chemical risks are present both in clothing and toys. Clothes, the most commonly notified category, pose risks of strangulation or injuries because of the presence of drawstrings and cords. Businesses should ensure that well-known risks are already taken into account before production and if mistakes happen, it is important that they withdraw or recall the products.

### TOP TWEETS



**EU Consumer Affairs** ✓  
@EU\_Consumer

Faulty goods? **#Consumers** have right to repair or replacement for 2 years after purchase [bit.ly/1cOULdG](http://bit.ly/1cOULdG) **#EU4Consumers** **#EU4Citizens**

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11:00 AM - 18 Mar 2014



**EU Health** ✓  
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**#EU4Health** How to reduce the burden of **#chronicdiseases** & what is **#EU** action? 1st **#EU** summit on the topic 3-4/04/14 [europa.eu/!Rc76pv](http://europa.eu/!Rc76pv)

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9:20 AM - 31 Mar 2014



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## INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

### Clinical trials – vote in plenary on 3 April 2014

Results: 594 in favour, 17 against and 13 abstentions

Following the positive vote in Parliament, the Regulation now has to be formally adopted by Council and published in the Official Journal. Its application is linked to the full functionality of the EU portal and database under development by the European Medicines Agency. It is expected to come into effect in mid-2016 at the earliest.

### Council adoption of the new Health Programme

On 22 March 2014, the Third Health Programme for the Union's action in the field of health (2014-2020) entered into force.

The call for proposals will be launched by SANCO's executive agency CHAFEA, immediately after the publication of the annual work programme 2014. Publication is expected in April/early May 2014, pending the adoption of the Health Programme Regulation in Council and the positive opinion of the newly established Programme Committee.

### Medical devices – vote in plenary on 3 April 2014

On 2 April 2014, the European Parliament adopted, by large majority, two resolutions on the proposals for a regulation on medical devices and a regulation on in vitro diagnostic medical devices respectively. The files will be taken over by the next European Parliament.

The two proposed regulations are under discussion in Council, and the Greek Presidency aims at making substantial progress before the June 2014 EPSCO Council meeting.

## High-level conference discusses latest insight into honeybee health in Europe



Tonio Borg  
EU Commissioner for Health

Since 2007, there have been warnings from European and global publications about alarmingly high mortalities in bees in the EU and beyond. This prompted the Commission and Member States to step up their monitoring surveys and take actions including the ban of specific pesticides (i.e. neonicotinoids). The findings of a landmark surveillance

study, "Epilobee", were discussed on 7 April 2014 by experts gathering in Brussels. The study was carried out using, for the first time, a harmonised methodology to ensure that the data gathered would be comparable. Covering almost 32 000 beehives, the study has enabled us to obtain the most comprehensive picture so far on honeybee colony mortality across the participating countries.

The survey yielded results that were better than expected. Winter colony mortality rates ranged from 3.5% to 33.6% with a North/South geographical pattern. In several major beekeeping countries, such as Greece, Hungary or Italy the winter mortality was below 10%. However, in Member States with relatively small bee populations, such as Belgium or Sweden, mortality in the bee population rose as high as 30%. Further collection of data will continue in 2014.

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/live\\_animals/bees/docs/bee-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/live_animals/bees/docs/bee-report_en.pdf)

## Bracing Ourselves Against Future Pandemics



Most of us still remember H1N1, the 'swine flu' pandemic. Back in 2009 it spread across the globe and affected over 15 000 people in the EU. The outbreak highlighted weaknesses in the mechanisms in place in EU countries for procuring vaccines and medicines needed during a health crisis.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, Member States asked the Commission to introduce a common procedure for the joint procurement of medical countermeasures, and in particular

of pandemic vaccines. This procedure would allow EU countries to purchase these medical countermeasures as a group, thus ensuring that they are available in sufficient quantities and at a correct price should another serious cross border health crisis emerge.

On 10 April, the Commission adopted a Joint Procurement agreement for vaccines and other medical countermeasures that will allow Member States, on a voluntary basis, to join forces in procuring these products.

The aim is to enhance solidarity between participating Member States by guaranteeing their access to influenza vaccines, as well as improving the purchasing power of those countries participating in the mechanism. The ultimate goal is that Member States can provide their citizens with the right medicines at the right time to protect them against a pandemic.

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/preparedness\\_response/joint\\_procurement/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/preparedness_response/joint_procurement/index_en.htm)

# Consumer Summit 2014 - Overcoming the hurdles to an inclusive and safe EU digital

The urgent need for an integrated single digital and telecoms market, equally benefitting all consumers and protecting their rights was addressed in April, at the Consumer Summit 2014.

The digital economy has an enormous potential for further development of the internal market. E-consumers may benefit from it through wider choice of goods and services, more competitive offers, more attractive prices and more flexible contractual terms and conditions.

There are, however, some business practices that discriminate against the consumers using the digital market. These include simple refusal to sell to consumers from some Member States, their automatic re-routing to national websites, and unjustified diversifying of sale conditions. These



practices have spawned frustration and distrust on the part of consumers, who feel that they are being excluded from the internal market.

The Summit produced a set of recommendations ranging from the importance of open internet, the need for more transparency on the use of consumer data, connectivity without borders and access to the same content throughout the single market.

[http://www.european-consumer-summit.eu/index\\_en.html](http://www.european-consumer-summit.eu/index_en.html)

## Human story wins EU Health Prize



Henk Blanken is a narrative journalist. He tells stories and likes happy endings. The story that won him the 1st prize in the EU Health Prize for Journalists on 8 April 2014 is about Carel Dolman, a gym teacher with a young family, who is diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease at 38. Carel Dolman agrees to go through pioneering surgery, "deep brain stimulation", to recover full control over his body. He is awake during most of the intervention and

guides the neurosurgeon's hands inside his brain. The story is emotional and gripping, but it ends well for Carel.

As he stood on stage to receive his award, Henk Blanken told us briefly about his own story. Four years ago, at age 50, he was also diagnosed with Parkinson's. He finds it more and more difficult to stand for long periods of time and knows that in 15 to 20 years from now, he will be bound to a wheelchair. "This is a life-changing event but it does not stop you from living" he says, full of determination. "I want to let others know about the disease, what it does to you and how you can learn to cope with it. This is why I am currently writing a book about my story."

We wish Henk success in his new venture.

We also congratulate the 2nd place winners Christiane Hawranek and Marco Maurer (DE), and the 3rd place winner Mette Dahlgard (DK).

[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-14-411\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-411_en.htm)

## IN BRIEF

### Food chain: EP agrees on financial framework

Parliament endorsed, on 2 April, the Commission's common financial framework covering the whole food chain. This framework with a budget of almost €1.9 billion will underpin the animal, plant and control package of reforms adopted by the Commission in May 2013. The reforms will simplify the regulatory environment and reduce the administrative burden on food business operators. The budget is expected to be available in the coming weeks.

### GM cultivation – next step

After two years of delay, discussions have resumed in Council on the Commission's legislative proposal giving more freedom to Member States to restrict or ban cultivation of GMOs on their territories. The Greek Presidency hopes to reach a political agreement in June, paving the way for second reading discussions between the European Parliament and the Council to start in the autumn.

### European Action Plan to reduce alcohol-related harm

The objectives of the EU Alcohol strategy are still valid, and even though much has been achieved, alcohol related harm in Europe remains high. To further support the work done under the Strategy, SANCO is working together with the Member States through the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action (CNAPA) on an Action Plan on youth and on binge drinking. CNAPA will agree on the Action Plan in their next meeting on the 17-18 June, and launch it at the High Level CNAPA meeting on 6 October.

## EU challenges Russia in the WTO over ban on EU pig imports



Russia closed its market to EU pig imports at the end of January 2014. The decision was based on four isolated cases of

African swine fever (ASF) detected in wild boar at EU borders with Belarus. Despite the EU putting in place a series of control measures to contain the ASF virus, which most likely originates from Russia itself, Russia continues to apply the ban.

Going against WTO rules, this disproportionate trade ban has cut off almost 25% of all EU pig exports, a massive loss for our pig producers. Bilateral discussions with Russia have not been fruitful. Therefore, the EU has

decided to resort to the WTO's dispute settlement procedures by requesting formal consultations with Russia.

Consultations give the EU and Russia the opportunity to find a satisfactory solution without resorting to litigation. If such a solution is not reached within 60 days, the EU may request the WTO to set up a panel to rule on the legality of Russia's measures.

## Ask the Director General European Patients' Rights Day focuses in 2014 on the empowerment of patients with chronic diseases.

### Mrs. Testori, what are your views on patient empowerment?

I truly believe that improving the lives of patients goes hand-in-hand with efficient healthcare systems. Empowering patients means ensuring they are fully informed and in control of their own health care. I consider this approach particularly suited to patients with chronic diseases that require long-term treatment, such as diabetes. Diabetes patients can learn to conduct check-ups from home and recognise early warning signs. Relying on their own expertise can help them feel confident and secure.

Patient empowerment and involvement can also be a contributing factor to the sustainability of healthcare systems. With an ageing population and a rise in chronic diseases, healthcare resources



*Paola Testori Coggi  
Director General  
for Health and Consumers*

are being stretched. Greater patient involvement could ease the pressure on healthcare systems and hospitals. But this can only work if patients and doctors are connected at all times. The Commission encourages EU countries to make full use of technology, such as mHealth and eHealth, that can provide

### COMING UP

**12-14 May**  
eHealth Forum in Athens

**18 May**  
8th European Patients' Rights Day

**22-25 May**  
European elections

**June**  
RASSF 35th anniversary

**June**  
Publication of Staff Working Doc on on-going medical devices enforcement (PIPS action plan)

**June**  
Adoption of GMO package for food and feed

a two-fold benefit: empowering patients and easing the burden on health systems, and is paving the way for innovation in this field.



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[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_consumer/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm)

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