



31.1.2018

## NOTICE TO MEMBERS

**Subject: Petition No 0488/2017 by C. F. (Italian) on healthcare for patients suffering from multiple chemical sensitivity and electromagnetic sensitivity**

### 1. Summary of petition

The petitioner suffers from MCS (multiple chemical sensitivity) and EHS (electromagnetic hypersensitivity syndrome). She complains that people suffering from these disabling syndromes in Italy are very much left to fend for themselves. The medical profession has not been trained to treat these illnesses, and in any case sufferers cannot enter medical facilities because of the presence of chemicals and electromagnetic forces that affect, sometimes with fatal results, patients suffering from these ailments. The petitioner considers that the complete lack of care within the current public healthcare system in Italy contrasts strongly with the situation in the USA where MCS and EHS are recognised as disabling illnesses. She says that MCS and EHS have also been recognised by European countries such as Spain, Sweden, Germany and Austria, all of which provide specialised healthcare. The petitioner invokes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and calls for action by the EU institutions, citing among other instances, Parliament's resolution of 2 April 2009 which called on Member States to follow the example set by Sweden, which, having recognised people suffering from electromagnetic sensitivity as being disabled, grants them proper protection and equal opportunities.

### 2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 14 September 2017. Information requested from Commission under Rule 216(6).

### 3. Commission reply, received on 31 January 2018

The Treaty provides that the Union action shall respect the responsibilities of Member States for the definition of their health policy and for the organisation and delivery of health services and medical care (Article 168).

With regard to electromagnetic fields, Council Recommendation 1999/519/EC sets exposure guidelines to ensure a high level of protection of the public. According to the information in possession of the Commission, Italy applies exposure limits which are stricter than to those suggested by the Council Recommendation.

A substantial amount of research has been carried out to assess whether exposure to electromagnetic fields can cause short-term symptoms such as headaches, fatigue and dizziness which is known as Electromagnetic hypersensitivity (EHS) . Overall, the scientific evidence weighs against an association at the frequency range below the guidance values as foreseen by Council Recommendation 1999/519/EC.

New scientific evidence concerning the potential health effects from exposure to electromagnetic fields is periodically reviewed by the independent Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER). In its opinion of 2015 the Committee noted that "the symptoms that are attributed by people to Radio Frequency (RF) EMF exposure can sometimes cause serious impairments to a person's wellbeing. However, research conducted since the previous Opinion adds weight to the conclusion that RF EMF exposure is not the cause of these symptoms".

Electromagnetic hypersensitivity resembles multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS), another disorder associated with low-level environmental exposures to chemicals. Both EHS and MCS are characterized by a range of non-specific symptoms that lack apparent toxicological or physiological basis or independent verification. A more general term for both disorders used by the world Health Organisation is Idiopathic Environmental Intolerance (IEI).

The Commission is not responsible for the recognition of diseases at European level, nor for granting protection to patients. These areas are fully under the competence of each Member State.

### Conclusion

The Commission is of the opinion that respecting exposure limits/values in line with or stricter than those indicated in Council Recommendation 1999/519/EC ensures a high level of protection of the general public.

As regards protecting the general public, Member States are responsible for the definition of their health policies, which include the recognition of specific diseases or syndromes.