## EU HEALTH COMMISSIONER TONIO BORG AT THE EUROPEAN HEALTH FORUM GASTEIN

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EU Health Commissioner Tonio Borg, speaking at the European Health Forum Gastein, began by highlighting the advancement of a selection of health initiatives since he took up office nearly one year ago. “On the tobacco products proposal, I am very much committed to doing everything in my power so that an agreement is reached during the current Parliament”, he said. “I want tobacco products to look and taste like tobacco products, and my aim with the revised Directive is to reduce the number of smokers in the EU by 2 % over the next five years.”

Commissioner Borg also highlighted the upcoming transposition date of the Cross-border Healthcare Directive by 25 October. “This Directive will make it far easier for patients to seek treatment in another EU country and be reimbursed for it, by enshrining such rights in European law. It is not a free-for-all nor a blank cheque, the Directive will, however, significantly improve information available to citizens and empower them so that they can make full use of their rights in their everyday lives.”

The Commissioner also pointed at the Clinical Trials Directive on which he is confident there will be an agreement between the Parliament and the Council before next year's European elections. Finally, the Commissioner announced the new Decision on Serious Cross-border Health Threats, and explained that, amongst other benefits, “this Decision will allow Member States, big or small, to procure pandemic vaccines or other medicines, jointly in the case of an outbreak, on a voluntary basis.”

Speaking about the main theme of the EHFG 2013, resilience and innovation for health systems, the Commissioner highlighted several areas where the Commission can support Member States and offer them practical assistance. For example, the recently created expert panel which can provide voluntary, non-binding advice to Member States, upon request, on issues related to improving the sustainability of their health systems. Another example he gave are the country specific recommendations given to 11 Member States in the context of the European Semester, on adjustments they can make to increase the sustainability of their health systems. Mr Borg said: “The Commission is committed to continuing the discussion on the sustainability of Europe's health systems and how this can be achieved by spending smarter, for example on eHealth, where investments made now can save costs in the future.”

The Commissioner also stressed his commitment to fighting discrimination in health in all its forms and to address the stigma and discrimination suffered by vulnerable groups who sometimes “slip through the net”. For example, Roma people, people living with HIV/AIDS, transgender people, migrants and people suffering with mental health disorders. In this regard he mentioned that the debate would continue during a conference on Fairness in Healthcare, organised by the Commission in Brussels in March 2014.

“Resilient and Innovative Health Systems for Europe” was the slogan for this year's EHFG. More than 550 participants from some 45 countries attended Europe's most important health policy conference in Bad Hofgastein to exchange views on key issues affecting European health systems.

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