## 17th European Health Forum Gastein: “Electing Health – The Europe We Want”

Bad Hofgastein, Salzburg, October 1 to 3, 2014

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“Electing Health – The Europe We Want” is the timely theme of the upcoming European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) from October 1 – 3. Held in Austria's Bad Hofgastein, the 17th edition of the high-level Congress will bring together more than 500 key stakeholders and health experts from all over the world.

“The elections to the European Parliament, the appointment of a new President of the Commission and the new College of Commissioners including new Commissioners with health responsibilities – all of this marks an important point in time for European politics in general and for health policy in Europe in particular”, says Prof Helmut Brand, Maastricht University health expert and EHFG President. “This year we will debate, at the EHFG, not less and not more than what should be on the agenda of the European Parliament and the European Commission for the next five years – and beyond.”

Prof Brand says there had clearly been missed opportunities during the 20 years since the EU obtained a health mandate: “Obvious examples include the failure to create a real link with social policy, persistently weak policies on food and on alcohol, the continuing absence of a health information system, and the reluctance to use internal market rules as a base for legislation.” The Commission’s Health Strategy was “largely a compilation of issues to be addressed”, he said, “rather than a policy document that sets priorities, assigns responsibilities and outlines methods of implementation and assessment. But it can still be developed into a real strategy.”

Over the last two years, the EHFG has monitored the effects on health of the financial crises. Prof Brand: “We explored whether the crisis makes people ill, and how health systems can become resilient while remaining open to innovation. Our conclusion was that the need is for sustainable and patient-centred policies, a renewed commitment to health for all. Policies, governance structures that are tailor-made and that follow the principles of transparency and accountability.”

As always, the EHFG 2014 Congress has a crowded agenda.  In addition to the fundamental debate on the future shape of European health policy and its impact on the health of EU-citizens, the strengthening of primary health care, the performance and efficiency of European health systems as well as the trend toward personalised medicine will be among this year’s topics in the plenary debates and parallel fora. Other fora are dedicated to topics such as public health leadership, the increasing importance of eHealth as well as to successful projects for promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Among other topics, workshops this year will focus on areas ranging from preventable blindness and deafness, the perennial themes of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), the future development of European social health insurance systems, active aging strategies or health literacy in a mobile Europe. They will likewise cover the new EU Health Programme 2014 – 2020, partnerships for health, or the increasingly importance of health workforce migration. Another discussion bound to attract public attention is the implications of not treating undocumented migrants at a time of deep cuts in public spending and hostile attitudes to immigration.

This year’s Forum once again expects to host officials from the very top echelons of governments as well as European Commission representatives. High-level speakers will include EU Commissioner-designate for Health and Food Safety Dr Vytenis Andriukaitis, Dr Sabine Oberhauser, Minister of Health, Austria, as well as government ministers from a number of other countries; Zsuzsanna Jakab, Regional Director, WHO Europe; several Members of the European Parliament and Greek former Prime Minister Giorgos Andrea Papandreou.

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