

# **Final Press Conference of the 4th European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) 2001**



*28th of September, 2001*

**Leiner:** Gastein should become the competence centre for health and enlargement

**Waneck:** One million Euro for medicine in Eastern Europe saves a billion of investment in Western Europe

**Byrne:** European Food Agency will not be located in Brussels

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## **The EHFG as a meeting point of East and West**

“Due to the horrible events in the United States the politic climate become tougher again”, EHFG-President Günther Leiner said at the final press conference of the 4<sup>th</sup> European Health Forum Gastein on September 28<sup>th</sup> 2001 in Bad Gastein – Salzburg – Austria. “The more positive the European Health Forum stands out from this background – as a place for meeting and exchange, with only one target: the improvement of all European’s quality of life.

“Around 450 Persons from 33 countries have discussed with us. I am very happy that many participants from Central and Eastern European countries are among them. For Austria it is of significant importance to host a congress of this calibre”, says Leiner. With the EU-enlargement the Alpine Republic, that had been attached to the Iron Curtain for decades, suddenly moves to the centre of Europe. If representatives from Eastern, Western and Central Europe countries wanted to meet, Austria would be the ideal meeting point in the centre. For next year the EHFG is planned to be held from September 25<sup>th</sup> to September 28<sup>th</sup> 2002. “We are convinced of Austria’s bridge function: The one bridge end should lead to the EU-applicants, the other one to Brussels. Enlargement must not lead to centralisation, neither geographically, nor politically. With the planned East-Forum the CEE-countries should be lead towards EU health policy. Gastein is supposed to be the competence centre therefore.”

## **Access to Health for All**

At the past three EHFGs it already was defined as a clearly European target for Health Policy to find consensual solutions across all sectors of politics. Health care services have to be accessible for all citizens. The poor pay with their health, they have to reckon with their own death a few years before those better off have to, and they have considerable chances to fall ill earlier. The gap is especially large between Eastern and Western Europe, but there are also clear differences between the poor and the rich within the EU-countries.

“Europe needs a lot of health, it has not done much on the issue so far”, the Austrian state secretary for health Reinhart Waneck stated. For the future challenges Europe is not sufficiently prepared, the sectors health, security and education are on top of the list for the European population as these sectors are a precondition for a safe life, all opinion polls from the past prove that. “In Austria we have acted in the past for the last years, that is, we were not able to adapt the medical progress developed for the well-being of the population to the existing performance structures successfully.”

“For the maintenance and improvement of health care not only the quality of health systems has to be kept in mind, but also the preservation of life circumstances and important factors for a high quality health care are important: high hygienic standards, high quality food and little environmental pollution. It is not enough, to raise the expenses for health care to reverse the trend”, says EU-Commissioner David Byrne. Being questioned on the location of the new EU- independent European Food agency yet to be found the answer was unspecific, it should be easily accessible and centrally located, maybe it will be in Gent, but not in Brussels.

### **Each million invested in the health system of the CEE states now will save the EU states billions of follow-up costs**

The situation of the health systems in the CEE states was a special issue of this year’s EHFG considering the Enlargement coming soon. With the entry of the applicant states the number of EU member states will almost double. The European health organisations will have to be aware, that the health status of the population in the applicant countries is by far worse than in the EU”, Waneck added. In some of the states a basic health care system adequate to our time is just being established. We are obliged to intensify the co-operation on all levels massively and to find common, cross-border solutions. Diseases do not recognise national borders,” Waneck appealed and he outlined the politico-economically gain of socio-economic

investments on the example of the fight against infectious diseases as AIDS or tuberculosis as follows: For every million Euro the EU now invests in the improvement of medical structures of these countries, the European Union will be able to save billions of investments on the long run.”

For David Byrne one of the most important tasks is to gather information on the CEE states, to be able to picture the situation there and to be able to determine and evaluate, which measures have to be implemented to improve. In this respect he underlines the successful collaboration with the WHO having a lot of data at its disposal.

The terror attacks threw a shadow on the Forum this year. Amongst others, the question was raised, if health policy has to stand back, because of the understandable demands for more safety in Europe. Experts have stated, that health politicians even in more quiet times are at the bottom of the pecking order. I have experienced that for myself in my work for the Austrian parliament. It is easier for a minister of Defence or Internal Affairs to win over a minister of health than vice versa. The more this is true for times of crises. Where will the governments take the means to extend Defence and the fight against terror? In which sectors money will be reduced, if, due to cyclical or political reasons the pace of economics slows down? All of those who are responsible in health care will face demanding times. “It will not be enough to raise the position of health care in the political discourse. We will have to take care not to diminish its role furthermore. More than it has been done so far, the ones affected, the citizens have to be involved,” Leiner explained conclusively.