



“Iron Curtain” Separates a Sick and Health Europe

- **Dramatic differences in healthcare within the EU**
- **Infant mortality in Romania six times as high as in Sweden**
- **EU Commission anticipates long-term catch-up process in the new EU states**

With respect to healthcare a united Europe even within the European Union can hardly be spoken of. The differences in the quality of healthcare systems and the health of the population between the old and new member states are enormous.

“Is there an Iron Curtain between a sick and healthy Europe today?” asks Alojz Peterle, member of the “MEPs Against Cancer” initiative and speaker on the subject of “Health and Justice” at the European Health Forum Gastein taking place from 1 to 4 October in Bad Hofgastein. The former Slovenian minister president addresses one of the most urgent issues in EU health policy at the leading health policy event in the EU.

The example of infant mortality makes particularly clear how dramatic the differences in the status of healthcare are. The likelihood that a child in Romania will die in its first year of life is six times as high as it is in Sweden,” says Peterle, quoting an especially shocking statistic. “And in terms of the mortality rates for cancer patients the differences are so great that in terms of healthcare we can virtually talk of an Iron Curtain through Europe.”

“The EU Commission must treat problem of inequality between the various member states on par with the differences between social and demographic groups,” Peterle demands.

The EU Commission is thoroughly aware of the problem. “One primary reason for the enormous differences, however, is the variety of economic situations,” says Andrzej Rys, head of the Directorate of Public Health in the Directorate General for Health and Consumer Affairs (DG Sanco). “Measures to reduce economic differences, particularly the use of structural funds, will automatically lead to decisive improvements in the area of healthcare as well. The programmes to reduce health-related differences between social groups will help eliminate the differences between the member states.”

However, Rys warns of expecting that in the area of healthcare the new member states will quickly reach the level of the “old” EU states: “Key indicators such as life expectancy and healthy phases in life are not only influenced by the present, but ultimately reflect the positive and negative influences during the entire lifespan. With targeted measures a few things can be achieved in the short term, but the complete elimination of differences is undoubtedly a long-term project.”

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