



EU expertise on health policy of interest to countries in Balkans and CIS – Special discussion forums in Gastein

Bad Hofgastein, 24 September 2010 – Expert knowledge in health policy from the EU is in demand outside the Union. The European Health Forum Gastein is a vital hub for the future development of European health policy. This year's Forum will be the thirteenth so far and will be held from October 6 to 9 in Bad Hofgastein, Austria. For the first time, high-ranking health policy-makers from the Balkan countries and CIS countries will be meeting there to discuss health care systems, policy and reforms.

“We have a tradition of looking beyond the borders of the EU at the European Health Forum Gastein,” says Professor Dr. Günther Leiner, President of the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). The Forum has a long-standing collaboration with Taiwan, for instance.

Balkan countries to discuss health care structures in Gastein

This year's EHFG will feature a health policy forum for the Balkan countries for the first time. Leiner: “The Balkan countries in particular face big problems in providing health care. Hospital stays are longer and more numerous than average. Government financing is poorly developed, and people have big deductibles to pay.” In addition, average life expectancy is lower in the Balkan countries than in the EU. For all these reasons there is substantial interest in sharing expertise at the EHFG. Leiner adds: “There are a number of intriguing approaches for projects and cooperation arrangements in this region.”

The debates are also intended to give insights into future cooperation with the participating countries. After all, at least a few of them could become EU members in the foreseeable future. Leiner notes that the EHFG has a tradition of doing that: “Before Slovenia, Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria acceded to the EU, we had them involved in the EHFG. Now we can find out how EU accession has changed the health care systems in those countries.”

The Balkan information meeting at the EHFG will explore the following questions: How do health care systems have to be designed so they can continue to be financed in the long term? Is it sensible to have a decentralized health care system? Should health insurance be legally mandatory? What social steps can be taken to shorten longer than average hospital stays?

Ministers of the CIS countries to be guests at Gastein

A high-ranking delegation of health ministers and top officials from the CIS countries will also be in Gastein to discuss these and similar issues. This gathering is at the initiation of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation. Russia is the largest country in the world in land area and has a population of 142 million people. It is a gigantic effort for Russia to provide health care to its people based on equal access and also in remote and sparsely populated areas. Other CIS countries face similar problems supplying health care services. Leiner: “Russia and other countries in the region are keenly interested in European expertise and are looking for ways to cooperate.”



About the EHFG

The European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) has been an important forum for EU health policy since being established in 1998. Every year, representatives from politics, government administration, science, business and patient organizations from more than 40 countries gather in Gastein to discuss European health policy. The following individuals have already committed to speak at this year's event: Austrian Health Minister Alois Stöger; EU Commissioner for Health John Dalli, WHO Europe Regional Director Zsuzsanna Jakab and Directors-General of the EU Commission Paola Testori-Coggi and Robert Madelin.

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