## EHFG 2013: “MORE EUROPE NOT LESS IN HEALTH POLICY”

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 *Health issues needed to be highlighted at EU level , especially in 2014, when elections are being held for the European Parliament and a new European Commission will be selected, Prof Helmut Brand, President of the European Health Forum Gastein, said at the press conference concluding this year's forum. Next year's EHFG Congress will focus on the major health issues facing the new Commission and newly-elected European Parliament.*

**Bad Hofgastein, 4 October 2013** – “Euro-sceptic parties have had considerable success in attracting votes in the recent elections in Germany and Austria, to name only the two most topical examples,” Prof Helmut Brand, President of the European Health Forum Gastein, said today at the press conference concluding this year's EHFG Congress. “Next year will see elections to the European Parliament, and the prognosis is quite clear: voters will give further support to Euro-sceptic parties. One reason for this, which cannot be ignored, is the widespread loss of confidence across the Union following the economic crisis and the drastic austerity measures it brought in its train.”

That was one side of the outlook for 2014, said Prof Brand. “The other is that the European Parliament will acquire more power, and will for the first time select the President of the Commission. That Commission will have new members - including a new Health Commissioner. And there will no doubt be a further reshuffling of the cards on the EU Treaty, to integrate into the existing legal framework measures put in place during the economic crisis.” A lot was possible, he said, ranging from the inclusion of specific new provisions in the Treaty, to bilateral or multilateral agreements, or even to a complete re-negotiation of the Treaty. Whatever happened, a debate about the Treaty would have an impact on the EU's health mandate, Prof Brand said.

“If we look back over the 20 years since the mandate was put in place, there have been important developments in terms of the 'Europeanisation' of the public health issue,” he said. New structures were created such as DG SANCO and the agencies for public health, a health strategy and health programmes were developed. The European Court contributed to important clarifications, for example in the further development of cross-border healthcare. And crises such as BSE, SARS and H1N1 also helped to strengthen cooperation and coordination at European level.

“The possibility of a renegotiation of the Treaty raises the possibility of a wide variety of scenarios for health,” said the EHFG President. “On the one hand, it could lead to significant strengthening of the EU health mandate and consolidation of the positive developments in this field over the past years." On the other hand, he warned, health might return, yet again, to being a pawn in the negotiations, with Member States trying to recover national competencies they had lost in other areas. “We may end up with a weaker health mandate than we have today,” said Prof Brand. “I personally see this as undesirable, because EU-wide action frequently - and demonstrably - improves the chances of protecting the health of more than 500 million citizens, something countries acting on their own and taking action individually, cannot achieve.”

So 2014, the year of European elections, should be used to make health visible in Europe, “just as we are doing it here in Gastein,” said Prof Brand. “That way we can get health onto the table for the time after the elections, and for the period when the new Commission is appointed, when the Treaty is conceivably being renegotiated. This can help to ensure that we end up, not with a broken-backed, but a reinvigorated health mandate for the EU.” The EHFG 2014 Congress, he added, would focus on the major health issues facing the Comission and the European Parliament in their next term of office.

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

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