



David BYRNE
European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection

Strasbourg, 15th October 2004

Dear Commissioner Byrne,

I hereby take great pleasure in presenting you with the resolution of the Assembly of European Regions (AER) in response to your consultation entitled “Enabling good health for all: a new European Health Strategy”, which you will find attached hereto.

This position was adopted by the Committee on “Social Cohesion, Social Affairs & Public Health” of the AER, at its plenary meeting in Bad Hofgastein on 7th-8th October 2004. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for participating in this meeting and presenting your vision of a future European health strategy to the Regions.

The AER member Regions welcome the initiative you have taken in launching a reflection process on how the European Union can contribute to citizens’ health. As you are well aware, the Regions have a fundamental role to play in formulating health policy and organising, providing, financing and monitoring health systems. We therefore urge the Union to ground any European actions in this sector in the principle of subsidiarity and to support the Regions’ endeavours in promoting good health.

In particular, the Regions welcome your proposal to include health as an objective under the Union financial instruments and we have suggested concrete health problems, which the AER member Regions are working together to redress and where Union support could be directed. I would like to bring to your attention in particular the ongoing effort to restructure health care systems in Central and Eastern Europe. The Regions in these areas must be given the tools, both in terms of know-how and of financial support, to formulate their own response to the particular needs of their citizens and we would therefore encourage the European Union to lend its support to them.

As you correctly acknowledge within your consultation document, there are a number of health issues, which cannot be limited to national boundaries and therefore require a cross-border approach. The AER provides a platform for the creation of regional health networks and indeed the member Regions have been engaged in a series of projects over the years, dealing with issues such as an ageing society, alcohol and drugs prevention and youth and elderly care. We welcome your proposal for the Union to support regional partnerships via the EU financial instruments, as an acknowledgement of the primary role of regions in the area of health.

The Regions further support your proposal to mainstream health into other European policy areas. It is our experience that we often have to deal with a number of separate initiatives, originating from separate Commission Directorate Generals, which all have implications for health policy and it is often difficult to assess each of these individually.

I would like to offer two examples in this respect. With regard to the current debate on services of general interest in Europe, the Regions welcome the initiative to conduct a separate evaluation of health and social services, as this is an acknowledgement of the particularities of these sectors. However, the Regions are concerned by the potential implications of an agreement to liberalise health services under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and feel that a more transparent process is required in this context. Any move towards liberalisation under the GATS would effectively render the current debate on health services meaningless.

I trust you will take the Regions' resolution into consideration and that you will also bring it to the attention of your successor, Mr Marko Kyprianou.

On behalf of the member Regions of the AER, I would like to thank you for your contribution to promoting good health across Europe during your mandate as European Commissioner and I wish you every success for the future.

Sincerely,



Stig-Erik WESTMARK
President,
AER Committee "Social Cohesion, Social Policy & Public Health"
Chairman of the International Committee, Västmanland (S)

**AER Committee “Social Cohesion, Social Policy & Public Health”
RESOLUTION**

**European Commission Consultation on
“Enabling good health for all: a reflection process for a new EU health strategy”**

adopted on 7th –8th October 2004, Bad Hofgastein (Salzburg-A)

The member Regions of the Committee on “Social Cohesion, Social Policy and Public Health” of the Assembly of European Regions (AER), meeting in Bad Hofgastein (Salzburg-A) on 7th-8th October 2004 and having considered the questions raised in European Commissioner Byrne’s consultation on a new European health strategy, have adopted the following position:

- I. The AER member regions welcome the initiative undertaken by European Commissioner David Byrne to launch a reflection process on how the Union can best support the Member States and their regions in providing and maintaining a high level of public health.
- II. The Regions, which in many cases are responsible for the organisation, provision, financing and monitoring of health care systems, share the objective of making these systems efficient and economically sustainable. A balance must be struck however between economic goals and the obligation to provide a public service. Therefore, special provision should be made under the internal market rules and the rules on competition and state aid for the health sector.
- III. The Regions therefore support the mainstreaming of health into other European policy areas, as it is often the case that Union actions in one sector have significant consequences for health, which are not taken into consideration at the early policy formulation stages.
- IV. Prevention must become a central focus of European, national and regional health policy and particular focus should be paid to youth care in this context. Young people should be educated at an early stage about how to make healthy decisions and to take responsibility for their life-style choices;
- V. The Regions support the creation of more sustainable employment in the health sector, which should be distributed equally across the European regions, in order to avoid the problem of ‘brain drain’ and of attracting and retaining health professionals to remote regions.
- VI. The Regions encourage the recognition of health care as a central aspect of regional economic growth and development and therefore call upon the European Union to include health care as a priority under the Union financial instruments, in particular the Structural Funds. Special focus should be granted to continuing the restructuring of health care systems in the new member states.

- VII. The Regions' experience shows that interregional partnerships are an effective tool for developing health policy and addressing the health gap, as they constitute a mechanism for exchanging know-how and experience and for making use of spare capacities. The Regions therefore urge the Union to grant financial support to partnerships in the field of health.
- VIII. However, the health objectives under the EU financial instruments should be determined by way of an inclusive process, allowing consultation with the regions, which are best placed to identify the key problems in need of redress.
- IX. In this respect, the Regions would propose the following issues be included under the health objectives of the European financial instruments:
- i. Alcohol and drugs prevention;
 - ii. Hospital management in Central and Eastern Europe;
 - iii. Youth care;
 - iv. Dealing with an ageing society;
 - v. Preventing the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.
- X. The AER member Regions have already launched partnerships in these areas with the aim of enhancing their understanding of the factors contributing to these problems and of identifying best practice to redress these, and are willing to share their experience in these areas with the European Commission.

The AER member Regions request that this resolution be presented to European Commissioner David Byrne during the proceedings of the European Health Policy Forum on Monday 11th October 2004 in Brussels and be submitted in response to the consultation he launched.

The Regions further request that this resolution be brought to the attention of the new European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Affairs.

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