

STRENGTHENING HEALTH IN THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD

Remarks by

ROBERT MADELIN

Director General

for

Health and Consumer Protection

European Commission

Seminar on health in all policies and ENP countries

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to make some concluding remarks on what has been a most stimulating seminar.

This event stems directly from the fifth Senior Officials' meeting between the European Commission and the WHO, held in Brussels last autumn.

At that meeting we recognized the clear shared interest of both organizations in promoting health in the countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy, and of promoting the "Health in All Policies" approach.

This seminar has underlined that it is over simplistic to look at individual policy areas in isolation.

Actions in one area can and often do have an impact on other policy areas.

This seminar has focussed on a number of pressing issues – including social inequalities, nutrition and agriculture, employment policies, transport and environment.

These challenges extend beyond the limits of traditional health policy.

The Commission has a long history of integrating health into other policies.

We are keen to share this experience with ENP partners to contribute to better health of all citizens, both within the EU and within its neighbourhood.

ENP and health

ENP Action Plans are agreed bilaterally between the EU and each partner country.

All the Action Plans currently in place include a health component.

In addition, joint work in other sectors – such as environment, socio-economic development and poverty reduction – also contributes towards better health.

Active discussions on the implementation of action plans have started between the Commission and the ENP partners in the relevant joint institutions, such as the various sub-committees.

We are also increasingly opening our internal expert groups and networks to ENP participation.

For example, in January this year, ENP partners were invited for the first time to the meeting of the Network of Competent Authorities on Health information.

The next meeting of this network will take place in July and similar invitations will be made in the future.

This is of great importance. Adequate and systematic information on health is essential for sound policy-making and for mainstreaming health into other policy sectors.

The main Community instrument to provide an integrated approach towards protecting and improving health is the Public Health Programme, in place since 2003.¹

The new Community Health Programme for the years 2008-2013 is currently being discussed in the Parliament and the Council.²

For the first time, the draft programme envisages the possibility of third country participation, particularly for neighbourhood countries.

Even though the programme is still under negotiation, I would already invite you to reflect on whether you would be interested in joining.

We would be happy to provide you with further information. You can also freely enrol for the next Health Programme information day, which will be announced on our web-site.

Cooperating with international actors

In strengthening our health dialogue with the European neighbourhood, we clearly recognise the need to work closely with other international organisations such as the WHO, the Council of Europe, the OECD, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation.

The Commission and the WHO have already developed co-operation on EU/ENP issues. For instance, this year we are co-financing work by WHO-Europe on health security and preparedness planning. We will develop an assessment tool to evaluate priority health risks in EU neighbourhood countries.

Projects with other Commission departments – from trade and external relations to aid and development – can also have an impact on health in the EU Neighbourhood. At any one time, there are over 100 projects underway between the WHO and 11 different Directorates General of the Commission.

We also co-operate at country level. For example we are working together on HIV/AIDS in the Ukraine and on developing a strategy for health information in Syria. Recently, there was a joint Commission-WHO technical health mission to Moldova. Co-operation in other ENP countries is increasing.

I am very much heartened by this co-operation. Building on this, we will continue to seek opportunities to work hand in hand both at headquarters and, more importantly, at country level.

This seminar has brought together for the first time the authorities from ENP countries, the Commission delegations and the WHO offices from the EU Neighbourhood. I truly hope that this will further enhance mutual understanding and cooperation on the ground.

Let us not forget the third organiser of this event – the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies.³

The Observatory is a partnership between the WHO Regional Office for Europe, six EU Member States and several other organisations, including the World Bank. It is an invaluable source of health policy expertise in Europe and beyond.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_programme/programme_en.htm

² http://ec.europa.eu/prelex/detail_dossier_real.cfm?CL=en&DosId=192715

³ www.euro.who.int/observatory

Challenges ahead

Turning to future priorities, implementation of existing international health law will be a common challenge for ENP partners and the EU alike.

We live in an era where the concept of global health threats is a stark reality.

Whether in relation to bioterrorism, malaria, influenza pandemics, or the impact of HIV/AIDS, there is a clear need for global health security responses.

We have worked with the WHO and its Member States on the revision of the International Health Regulations⁴, to put in place a modern global framework to control the spread of communicable diseases. The revised IHR entered into force 10 days ago.

The challenge now both within the EU and in its neighbourhood is the full and timely implementation of this important international legal framework.

The borders of the EU must not be seen as a new "*cordon sanitaire*". We are already putting in place joint initiatives with our neighbours on surveillance and control of communicable diseases.

Take the example of HIV/AIDS. Back in 2005, the Commission adopted a communication on combating HIV/AIDS in the EU and neighbouring countries. We also opened our HIV/AIDS Think Tank to Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus – the countries most affected by the epidemic.

Southern ENP partners have recently been invited to the newly-created EpiSouth network on communicable diseases, which brings together the countries of the Mediterranean and the Balkans.

In the longer term, co-operation could be enhanced through our newly-established agency – the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, based in Stockholm.

Tobacco – a global epidemic

Non-communicable diseases are of course equally important. Tobacco consumption, obesity and alcoholism are spreading at an alarming rate world-wide.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control⁵ – the first ever international treaty on health – entered into force in February 2005. It commits countries world-wide to taking action on tobacco taxation, smoking prevention and treatment, illicit trade, advertising and promotion, and product regulation.

147 Parties have so far ratified the Treaty, including the European Community and 25 of its Member States.

I am very pleased to note that all but two of the ENP countries have ratified the convention. I particularly welcome the recent ratification of the Treaty by Moldova (just last month) and would urge those who have not yet done so to join the club as soon as possible. The second Conference of the Parties to the Treaty will start in four days time in Bangkok. This will be a good opportunity to discuss illicit trade in tobacco products and other pressing

⁴ http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA58/WHA58_3-en.pdf

⁵ http://www.who.int/tobacco/framework/WHO_FCTC_english.pdf

issues. I invite you to join forces with the EU to reduce the toll of death and disease caused by smoking world-wide.

Some of you have already included the implementation of IHR and FCTC in your country programmes. I would urge all of you to make use of our financial instruments to implement the commitments set out in international health agreements.

Prioritising health

During the course of this seminar, we have heard that the EU - through TACIS and MEDA - has financed several health projects in ENP countries. Under the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, there are further opportunities for health-related support.

As is the case with the EU structural funds, the challenge will be to prioritise health in national programmes and to make sure that projects in other sectors contribute towards better health.

In planning such health programmes, account should be taken of work by other donors.

Regional cooperation

Strengthening the regional dimension will be another important challenge.

This is central to the very essence and nature of the European Union. We discovered a long time ago that many challenges – from economic reconstruction to increasing scientific research – cannot be properly addressed by individual countries acting alone.

Likewise, health threats, such as HIV/AIDS and avian influenza – and also many other health problems – can be effectively addressed only by embracing a trans-border approach.

That is why the EU has been a strong supporter of regional collaboration both within, outside and across EU-borders.

The European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument confirms the possibility for such co-operation. The regional programme for the East of the ENP region envisages co-operation on communicable diseases and health as part of "people to people" co-operation.

Likewise, the programme for the Euro-Med Region lists among its confidence building measures collaboration on the prevention and management of health risks, such as epidemics.

It is most encouraging to see these developments, and I would strongly encourage you to make best use of the opportunity to work together and pool resources.

Finally let me express my hope that this seminar will not just be a one-off event but will be followed by further health-related events, also in the partner countries.

I would strongly encourage you to make use of the possibilities offered by instruments such as TAIEX or twinning, which could be used to share knowledge and best practice.

The initiative is yours to seize.

Thank you.

