



EHFG 2012: Estonia's President Ilves and WHO Regional Director Jakab open European Health Forum Gastein focusing on "Crisis and opportunity: Health in age of austerity"

At today's opening of the 15th European Health Forum Gastein Estonia's President Thomas Hendrik Ilves plead for a European healthcare system that is affordable, not overly burdensome to economies and maintains pace with the latest advances in medicine. „Health 2020” is a response to the significant challenges to health and wellbeing across the European Region, said Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

Bad Hofgastein, 3 October 2012 - “Both in times of austerity and prosperity we face numerous challenges to ensure European healthcare is affordable, not overly burdensome to our economies and maintains pace with the latest advances in medicine“, said Thomas Hendrik Ilves, President of the Republic of Estonia. A further challenge is, according to President Ilves, how in a Europe of increasing mobility, it can be ensured that patients receive the highest quality of healthcare everywhere in the Union, at a reasonable cost to our healthcare systems.

“Crisis and Opportunity: Health in Age of Austerity” is the motto of this year's EHFG. More than 600 health policy decision-makers, research, science, industry and patients organizations from 45 countries are currently meeting at the European Union's most important health policy conference in Bad Hofgastein to discuss key issues for the future of European health systems. “One of the solutions is to ensure that we fundamentally re-organize healthcare to make use of already existing information technologies”, said President Ilves. “These solutions are often not medical at all, but rather deal with how in the future we will need to treat data, privacy and research as well as the physician-patient relationship.”

WHO Regional Director Jakab: Financial and economic crisis is threatening the gains made across Europe – Health 2020

“Financial and economic crisis is threatening the gains made across Europe in recent decades, and exacerbating the longer term challenges facing our life system”, said WHO Regional Director for Europe Zsuzsanna Jakab. “Health 2020” is a response for the significant challenges to health and wellbeing across the European Region. There have been real improvements, but the financial and economic crisis facing many countries is threatening to reverse these gains, said Regional Director Jakab.

There are also many positive trends, she considered: “We know much more about the range of determination of disease, particularly the social determinants, and we have more evidence based information about what works and what does not. Also the technologies available to us have greatly improved, with the promise of much more of them.”

“We need collectively coherence in our policies and programs for improvement in health and wellbeing. It is this coherence that Health 2020 provides, Regional Director Jakab said. The goal of Health 2020 is “to improve health and well-being of populations, to reduce health inequalities and to ensure sustainable people-centered health systems with further strengthening public health capacities”. The two main strategic objectives are working to improve health for all and reducing the health divide, and improving partnership, and participatory governance for health.



Dr Ruocco (IT): Trust the fundamentals of our system, trying to reduce its inefficiencies and weaknesses

“Even in a very difficult moment of crisis, we can and must trust the fundamentals of our system, trying to reduce its inefficiencies and weaknesses”, said Dr Giuseppe Ruocco, Director General of the Directorate General for Prevention – Italian Ministry of Health in Bad Hofgastein. “Today, the true challenge is to reconcile the public health service with dwindling resources and the protection of rights.”

Not long ago, the right to health was deemed to be compatible with public expenditure. Today this does no longer seem the case, he argued: its costs must be reduced as much as possible and they may even be adjusted to the individual income level. Dr Ruocco: “We do not want to give up this universal service, the protection of this right and the reduction of inequality. It is absolutely necessary to avoid the slow erosion of welfare, because the weakest segments of the population would be crushed.”

The EHFG is the most important conference on health care policy in the European Union. In this its 15th year, the EHFG attracts more than 600 decision-makers from 45 countries to discuss major topics on the future of the European health care system from 3 to 6 October 2012.

Please find photos of the European Health Forum Gastein using this link: <http://www.ehfg.org/940.html>.

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