Strengthening the European voice in global health

Launch of the Initiative for a European Council on Global Health

Summary
At a meeting in Geneva on 28-29 January 2008 - convened in partnership by the European Foundation Centre (EFC), the Global Forum for Health Research and the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva - some key players interested in global health discussed how to enhance Europe's participation. Participants representing 25 different organisations - including NGOs, academic institutions, foundations, international agencies and government departments - agreed to strengthen the European voice in global health through creating the Initiative for a European Council on Global Health. They identified both the need and the opportunity and outlined first strategic directions and next steps. The goal is that such a European Council be established in the coming year.

Why the Initiative?
The need: The recognition of the need for policy coherence, strategic direction and a value base in relation to global health is only just beginning to emerge in Europe – both within countries and at the level of the European Union (EU). The EFC has been at the forefront of developing a strong European voice in global health and, through the European Partnership on Global Health (EPGH), was one of the first organisations to draw attention to this void. Providing a sound basis for discussion, the EPHG document1 “European perspectives on Global Health - A policy glossary” has already proved a valuable resource for policy setting regarding the global health agenda. It outlines the many dimensions of global health and provides detailed arguments why a distinct European approach should be developed. It identifies the key aims of a European approach to policy, research and action for global health to ensure health at home and abroad through:

- Strengthening global health security
- Promoting global health equity
- Enhancing good governance for global health

The Geneva meeting highlighted the need for a common platform and voice of the many global health actors in Europe in order to promote:

- European health values in the international arena (universality, access to good quality care, equity and solidarity);
- broad policy coherence and synergy of policy domains for health benefits (such as development, trade, environment, and agriculture) particularly in relation to the social and economic determinants of health;
- European responsibility to address the health of the poorest populations.

The opportunity: Increasing the synergy of policy domains is a declared goal of the EU’s new policy both in health and in development. Consequently, the policy base for joint global health action is beginning to emerge within the EU, particularly within two key arenas:

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• A major breakthrough is that one of the four principles on which the new Health Strategy² of the European Commission is based is “Strengthening the EU’s voice in global health”.
• In 2005 the European Commission³ laid out a series of proposals to enhance funding for development aid (including the health goals). The specific aid targets to be reached by 2010 were accepted by the Council on 24 May 2005 and are now official policy.

The response: The Geneva participants agreed that Europe should exercise leadership in global health and mobilize the diversity of European actors to contribute to policy, research and action for global health goals. The meeting constituted itself as the Initiative for a European Council on Global Health with the key aim to strengthen a sustainable European voice and commitment for global health. It outlined a number of key characteristics and goals for the Council, which would work to influence policy and improve practice on research and action for global health through advocacy based on evidence and analysis.

To achieve the goals, the meeting further
• agreed that a European Council on Global Health (ECGH) should be established;
• welcomed the possibility that such a European Council could become part of a larger alliance of similar councils from other regions of the world;
• underlined a commitment that, beginning with the period of constitution of the European Council, dialogue with colleagues from the South would be ensured;
• created the nucleus of a preparatory Task Force to move forward the proposals made in relation to the goals and objectives, governance, structure, membership, beneficiaries, partnerships, location, financing and performance measures of an ECGH. The Task Force will initially work on a statement of purpose, invite new members and prepare the next meeting of the Initiative;
• suggested that the Initiative should aim to get global health included in the agenda of one of the next EU presidencies and also keep abreast of the development of a European foreign policy;
• proposed that a small initial Secretariat be established in order to support the members of the Initiative and the Task Force to move the agenda forward.

Next steps
The meeting proposed that some specific related steps be taken straightaway:
• Rework and update the Policy Glossary¹ to enhance its usefulness as a policy tool;
• Begin a structured dialogue with the European Commission on global health; propose a structured cooperation mechanism for global health matters of the European Health Strategy; and build the relationship with the WHO;
• Engage foundations at the annual meeting of the EFC in June 2008 in Istanbul;
• Continue the transatlantic dialogue with the Global Health Council (USA) and the Canadian Society for International Health, both of whom were represented at the meeting.
• The initial organizers - EFC, Global Forum, Graduate Institute – were asked to assist with identifying initial resources for the work of the Initiative and the Task Force.

A strong plea was made to European Foundations to continue their support for global health matters and support as well as engage in the Initiative.

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³ Accelerating progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals: financing for development and aid effectiveness. COM 133 of 12/04/2005