

**Arto Koho, R.P. of Finland to the EU, 21/06/06  
European Policy Centre, Policy Dialogue,  
"Health is wealth"**

**Concluding speech, The forthcoming Finnish  
Presidency and some views on health policy  
priorities**

# Background ideas: enhanced health promotion and health information

- Today we have a better understanding of the diseases and of the etiology of the diseases. Yet very much is linked with behavioral models and living habits. When improving prevention, behavioral and social sciences are needed to complement traditional information. Conventional information model is: a physician gives the patient necessary information, advice in medication and other treatment advices.
- I may quote professor Pekka Puska here, quite freely. Correct information is a necessary starting point, a premise. A good doctor-patient relation, when based on trust, is already a step further. However, influencing health behavior is often much more profound and complex problem. The patient or any citizen should act according to the information and good advices. The patient should understand the information. Social support becomes important as well, referring e.g. to the family, colleagues and friends. The 'physical' support, support by the environment is also needed. It may mean e.g. access to low-salt foods and non-smoking environments etc. Puska reminds us of the Ottawa conference charter in 1986: "the core objective is to make the healthy choice the easy one". (Pekka Puska: Treatment Compliance as a health policy challenge", *Lääkkeet ja terveys*, Pharmaceutical information Centre, 2006).
- With Puska's ideas we come to a very broad concept. Societal decision-making and organizational challenges at national or local level are to be considered. Information challenges grow in the same manner. Good environment, physical activity and other healthy lifestyle demands, good nutrition information and good drug information come close together into a broad scheme. In good health promotion policy they belong together and complement each other.

## General objectives

- FI is willing to prefer during the Presidency some broad horizontal themes. We may see this approach, to be simple, as a contrast to e.g. a disease specific orientation.
- We see health as one of the major contributors to growth or, if you like, as one motor of the economy. We therefore believe e.g. that themes of maintaining working ability on one hand, and increasing attractiveness of working life on the other very relevant both at the national and the EU level. However, the Finnish Presidency would like to emphasize and enhance activities on main area of EU's health policy, namely on health promotion. We try do this by pointing out the relevance of the principle of taking into account health questions in all other policy areas and of impact assessments.
- Horizontal and strategic approach are key words, Health in All Policies heart and soul and key element.

## The inherited agenda

- The Council's current health agenda is a starting point, a premise. We will build up on the work of our Austrian colleagues and on any new proposals from the Commission.
- A high priority is the Public Health Programme.
- Work will continue on dossiers such as the revision of the directive on medical devices and the regulation on advanced therapies.
- We will carry on the work on a number of Commission communications such as the ones on alcohol strategy, mental health and nutrition and physical activity. Quite obviously pandemic preparedness will stay on the agenda.
- We are also going to advance the WHO activities relating to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the new International Health Regulations, Children's Environmental Health and the European Strategy on Non-Communicable Diseases.
- We will also take note of the regulation on health statistics.

## Three main events

- There are three major meetings organised in the field of health during the Finnish Presidency. Those are the Informal Meeting of Ministers of Employment, Social Policy and Health in July, the High Level Conference on Health in All Policies in September and the Finnish EU Presidency Conference on Drugs “Moving Forward Together”, also in September.
- In the informal Council meeting we try to touch upon the challenges brought about in working life by globalisation and demographic change. There are three separate workshops: (I) Higher productivity by developing the quality of working life, (II) How can working careers be prolonged during the lifecycle by social policy? and (III) How to promote health in the world of work?
- The Drug Conference concentrates on cooperation between social, health and police sectors in the field of drug prevention and treatment and the prevention of drug related infectious diseases. There we will call attention to the prevention of HIV/AIDS as well. Our Eastern neighbours, Russia, Ukraine and Moldova, will be invited to this event.

# Health in All Policies, the main theme

- The main event during the Finnish Presidency is a high level conference focusing on the principle of health in all policies. Here we would like to highlight the three most important arguments supporting the consideration of health arguments in all policies. First, health is mainly determined outside the actual health care services. This view is strongly supported by research. Secondly, the determinants of health are - accordingly - modified by decisions taken in other sectors. And thirdly, the EU has a mandate to take health into account in all its policies, whereas this issue is far more complicated at the national level.
- The conference will largely be on integration of the outcomes of the relevant EU and WHO projects that have been completed or are under way, and on presentations by the leading experts in the field.
- The wish of the Presidency is that the process will be able to place due emphasis on themes that are of greatest interest to Member States. The Finnish authorities have therefore created a network consisting of the representatives of the Commission and of the relevant civil servants and advisers from Member States that will be consulted in the preparations.
- The conference will consist of plenary sessions and themed workshops. The plenary sessions will be used to present the key issues in their wider contexts and summarise the results, while the workshops will engage with specific topics, such as distribution of health impacts among population groups (health inequalities), Heart health, nutrition and physical activity, Alcohol, children's health and Transport policy and health.
- The priority of HiAP is closely linked with the aims of better regulation and improvement of Council's working methods e.g. by emphasising better use of impact assessment.