



Event	<b>Study Visit of NGOs from new EU Member States</b>
Authors	HB/VP/RR
Date and place	21-23 November 2006, Brussels
Organised by	EPHA

## BACKGROUND

The Study Visit was held in Brussels as part of the European Commission supported project “Building Public Health Community across Europe” and was a follow-up to the capacity building activities which have taken place in the new Member States in 2005 and 2006. The purpose of the visit was to facilitate information exchange and networking among NGOs working on specific health determinants and to offer an opportunity to gain knowledge of Brussels-based health policies.

Representatives of the following organisations participated in the study visit:

1. National Institute for Health Development (Hungary) – a government-based organisation that promotes public policies for health and takes part in the implementation of National Public Health Programme;
2. Slovenian Health Association (Slovenia)– an NGOs platform in the field of public health which aims to strengthen the public co-operation and to influence health policy shaping;
3. Malta Resource Center for Civil Society Non-Governmental Organisations (Malta) – provides capacity building as a means to help NGOs and groups working for social change, development, health, environment, culture and fight against poverty and social exclusion;
4. Foundation for Children of Copper Basin (Poland) – an NGO working on environment in the region of Legnica, Poland;
5. The Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organisations (NENO) (Estonia) – the largest Estonian organization uniting public benefit not-for-profit organizations;
6. Stop Smoking NGO (Slovakia) – the first NGO specialised in tobacco control and active in smoking prevention;

7. Association of non-governmental, non profit organisations active in the areas of social assistance and social health care (SKOK) (Czech Republic)
8. Society Development Centre (Latvia) – aims to strengthen society development for a civic, responsible, healthy, gender equal, integrated society.

## **DAY ONE**

Roxana welcomed the participants and gave a short introduction to the project. The participants introduced themselves, the focus of their work and their aims for the study visit. In terms of expectations, the participants highlighted that they wanted to increase their voice as NGOs, look into potential avenues of funding, improve ways of working with other stakeholders and other sectors, and further their understanding of establishing national public health platforms.

### **Presentation by Anne Hoël – Policy Officer, EPHA**

Anne gave an overview of what it means to advocate for public health at EU level. She introduced the group to the main EU institutions – the European Council, the European Parliament (EP), the European Commission (EC) and explained the role of each. The roles of other actors in the development of policy at European level were also explained – international organisations and institutions, local and regional authorities, social partners, think-tanks, chambers of commerce, trade associations, consultants, lawyers and lobbyists, NGOs and the media.

The presentation focused on the involvement of NGOs and emphasised that networking, and the formation of and participation in alliances is the only way to ensure the voice of NGOs is heard. The different roles of NGOs were described:

- Advocacy: tracking, analysing and acting on policy developments; networking with key actors; raising the profile of the organisation; lobbying in order to get viewpoints across and to provide detailed expertise and bridge the gap between policy-makers and civil society;
- NGOs as watchdogs: they have a role to challenge policy makers and stakeholders to address the concerns of civil society organisations; empower other NGOs to get involved in the policy making process; representing the diverse needs of civil society; maintaining pressure on policy makers.

The topics for the health agenda for 2007 were presented to the group:

- EU Health Strategy
- Mental Health Strategy
- Nutrition Strategy and Nutrition labeling
- Alcohol strategy
- Common Agricultural Policy
- Information to Patients
- Demographic Changes
- Audiovisual policy
- health services Initiative
- Services of general interest
- Smoke Free Europe
- Environment and Health
- Road Safety Action Plan

Finally, information was provided on how to access relevant on-line documents and respond to consultations.

### **Presentation by Tuuli-Maria Mattila – DG Health and Consumer Protection**

#### **The EU Health Policy and the role of Stakeholders**

The Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General (DG SANCO) initiates the Community action programme in the field of public health, which has three main strands: *health information, health determinants and health threats.*

Although health is the responsibility of Member States, the Commission has the power to legislate on blood, organs, tissues, cells and tobacco. In other areas DG SANCO initiates strategies and policy consultations. The major initiatives for 2007 are: the Public Health Programme 2007-2013, the Health Strategy and the Health Services Initiative. The Commission releases a work programme on a yearly basis which highlights its health-related priorities. A call for project proposals is launched every year (usually February).

Stakeholders can get involved in a number of ways, including consultations, participation in high-level groups, responding to calls for proposals and being active in the EU Health Forum, of which there are two aspects:

- 1) *Health Policy Forum* which is a platform for consultation and information exchange and gathers 49 pan-European NGOs; and
- 2) *Open Forum Conferences* which are general events for a larger audience, in order to widely disseminate information and provide a space for networking.

### **Presentation by Ruth Paserman – DG Employment and Social Affairs**

EU Member States co-ordinate their policies for combating poverty and social exclusion on the basis of a process of policy exchanges and mutual learning known as the *Open Method of Coordination* (OMC). One of the three policy areas provided in this framework is : accessible, high quality and sustainable health and long-term care.

Cooperation on this basis has started in the form of an analysis of health care and long-term care in Member States by means of a questionnaire and a joint Commission/Council report. It was explained that the reports from Member States reveal a striking level of health inequalities. Social protection systems and health insurance systems vary across countries and the challenge for EU Member States is to find out what are the best quality standards and peer review mechanisms.

The issue of professional trained volunteers was also highlighted, as well as the need for EU Member States to exchange on how voluntary systems work across Europe.

The Reports of Member States can be downloaded from:

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social\\_protection/health\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_protection/health_en.htm)

## **DAY TWO**

Participants were given a tour of the European Parliament by EPHA staff, which was followed by their attendance at the Foreign Affairs Committee meeting. Before lunch, participants had the opportunity to meet with their respective Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) for a short period. In the afternoon, participants were addressed by **MEP Marios Matsakis**, who briefly introduced himself and the workings of the Parliament.

An insider perspective on the European Parliament was then presented by **Ms Virpi Koykka** from the Secretariat of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety ( ENVI Committee). Ms Koykka gave an outline of the decision-making process, various methods of contacting MEPs, as well as how to determine the interests of various MEPs.

When the Commission adopts a new legislative proposal it is decided which committee will deal with this. A rapporteur is responsible for writing a report on the proposal, however other members can table amendments. The ENVI Committee consists of 63 members and 63 substitute members. The ENVI Secretariat consists of neutral civil servants who work directly with MEPs in order to write their reports and advise them on institutional issues and procedures.

### **Presentation by Oliver Emmes - Green Party, Food Policy**

The Green Party are currently working on 7 food related policy issues. These include:

1) genetically modified food; 2) bio-diversity; 3) prices; 4) nutrition and health; 5) food miles and promoting local food; 6) fair trade; and 7) reduction of subsidies.

Regarding health impact assessments for the above mentioned topics, it was indicated that impact assessments in general lack accuracy and create the need for further, diverse assessments when the value of promoting healthy food would suffice.

In relation to nutrition, health and education, it was suggested that a link should be made between the environmental and health policy objectives and the Television without Frontiers Directive.

## **DAY THREE**

### **Presentation by Silvia Juscenko - Health Attaché, Latvian Permanent Representation to the EU**

Silvia listed the type of activities the Latvian Permanent Representation to the EU is involved in: working groups in the Council, meetings of the Permanent Representatives Committees (COREPER), working groups with the Commission, but also informal meetings with the Commission and the Parliament and meetings with Permanent Representations of other

Member States. She explained that the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council is one of the nine configurations of the Council of the European Union. Regarding the involvement of NGOs and social partners in the EU decision-making process, it was highlighted that cooperation with NGOs is crucial, not only because they ensure legitimacy, quality and easy implementation of EU-decisions, but also because they bring in a knowledge and grass-roots experience that civil servants do not have.

### **Presentation by Richard Polacek - Policy Officer, Social Platform**

The Social Platform is an alliance of representative European federations and networks of NGOs who are active in the social sector. Its aim to strengthen the sector by building the capacity of its members through organising meetings, training and networking visits. They are involved in civil dialogue with EU institutions, campaigning, and raising awareness of Social NGOs. Key campaigns include:

- Lisbon Strategy;
- EU Social Agenda 2005-2010 and Social Inclusion;
- Services Directive and Services of General Interest;
- Future of Anti-discrimination policies;
- Corporate Social Responsibility;
- Participatory Democracy and Civil Dialogue;
- EU Constitutional Treaty.

### **Presentation by Lara Garrido-Herrero – Secretary General, EPHA**

In the afternoon, Lara gave a presentation on representing the interests of NGOs at European level. EPHA's organisational structure was presented as an example of how to set up a national platform. The types of members, rights of members and the benefits members receive, as well as how EPHA consults its members were all explained.

### **Presentation by Nicola Critien – Project manager, Malta Resource Centre**

Nicola presented the Malta Resource Center's experience of setting up a national platform under their SOS Initiative Malta. She spoke about the need for capacity building, research and administrative support. After the success of the Maltese Anti Poverty Network which was set up with the help of the Malta Resource Center, the Center is currently creating a *National Health Network* in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Elderly and Community Care. The new Health Network's main aim will be to influence National Action Plans. The initiative will be divided into two sub-projects: 1) Volservnet - to structure voluntary services; and 2) Malta Health NGOs Network (MHNN) – to facilitate the coordination of NGOs. The Malta Resource Center is hoping to capitalise on the current interest in corporate social responsibility in order to fund the project. Different methods of ensuring that such projects are sustainable were explored. As much NGO work in Malta is reliant on voluntary contributions, the importance of offering training as an incentive was highlighted. It was suggested by another NGO, that a creating a database of volunteers and available volunteer positions,

could be a useful tool for the network.

### **Presentation by Tanja Velkov – Project Manager, Slovenian Health Association**

Tanja gave a short presentation explaining the long and often difficult process of setting up a Health Association in Slovenia. The purpose of such an association is to facilitate NGO coordination and dialogue with various public institutions at different levels. The aim is to improve public health in Slovenia; promote the participation of health care users in the decision-making process; and ensure cooperation between various stakeholders. This will involve monitoring developments in health care policy and encouraging local, as well as state institutions to promote, monitor and evaluate actions that impact on health.

Themes to be discussed by the Association include: mental health, women's health, reproductive health, youth, strategy for development of ageing society and workers health. The Slovenian Health Association's top priority is to encourage national government to create a specific health fund through which health NGOs can access financial resource.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

Participants concluded that the visit was extremely beneficial and welcomed the opportunity to learn about the work and priorities of a variety of actors from the European health policy arena. The discussions were finalised with a debate on what NGOs need for further the development of platforms at national level, on how they can develop a regional public health platform and on how they can cooperate with EPHA to further the work already done. Several suggestions and recommendations were made:

### **For new Member States NGOs:**

- to explore ways in which the experience of working in the network can be useful for their national governments, in relation to EU policies;
- to share information and experiences on how to approach national governments, Ministries and how to communicate effectively with decision-makers and civil servants (the Maltese experience in approaching the Ministry of Health can be an example);
- to set up national contacts on public health in each country;
- to identify the needs for training and capacity building in their countries;
- to explore various funding possibilities: corporate social responsibility, calls for proposals from DG SANCO, DG Employment and DG Education and Culture (the Grundtvig Programme - Adult Long-Life Learning);
- to explore existing national policies regarding sponsorship or donations;
- to develop capacity building and training for media (suggestions: how to approach sensitive health issues, timing of submitting articles);
- to use the experience of other European platforms;
- to approach social corporate responsibility (differences between sponsorship and

donation, tax-laws are unclear in some countries).

**For EPHA:**

- to coordinate the information flow among new EU Member States NGOs through EPHA mailing list, EPHA monthly Newsletter and EPHA website;
- to support NGOS by facilitating contacts with MEPs and Ministries of Health;
- to continue raising awareness and provide NGOs with information on the benefits of working in a platform;
- to alert NGOs on key European health related policies and on funding opportunities;
- to support NGOs in exploring existing EU policies regarding sponsorship or donations;
- to keep NGOs updated on EPHA International Conference on Health and Enlargement, in Bratislava 2007;
- support NGOs in developing their capacity to work with the media.