Open Health Forum: more room for civil society?

The Open Health Forum took place on July 29 to 30 in <?xml:namespace prefix = st1 ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:smarttags" />Brussels. Hosted by DG SANCO, the gathering aimed to convene the larger constituency of health actors to discuss European Health Policy.<?xml:namespace prefix = o ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

In a different format than in previous years, the meeting kicked off with Commissioner John Dalli calling for an ideal future, where we would not face illness or problems in access to care in our everyday life, but live in a Europe where medical treatment would not be a priority because citizens would enjoy good health. In a world of increasing medicalisation, it was inspiring to hear his ideas.

But meanwhile, we are faced with the harsh reality of increasing health inequalities, great disparities between the EU-15 and the EU-27 countries, a lingering economic crisis, and a lack of political will and support for the introduction of health as a pivotal axis in overall policies. Rather than being considered as a limiting factor, or the big 'black hole' in national budgets, health should be seen as the key element to strive for to achieve sustainability. **What would happen if economic, social, trade, work, transport and all policies would be shaped by or compliant with the interests of health?** Undoubtedly, we would be better off.

The workshop on **Innovation for Health** had a strong representation

from corporate interests in the panel (IT, Pharma, mining) in comparison with only one civil society delegate. The discussion that ensued revolved largely around how innovation played such an important role in health, but lagged behind in addressing real issues such as defining what innovation means, talking about access and affordability of innovation, or identifying key players in research and development beyond the "usual suspects", i.e industry. HAI Europe intervened, to talk about the need to liaise the discussions on innovation for health with the **council conclusions on the role of EU in global health**.

What were we still missing at the end of the day?

In a nutshell more room to ask the *so what* questions: What is the role to be played by Civil Society in building and implementing future EU health policies and ensure citizens' health and well-being?

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