families and communities to adopt healthy lifestyles across the lifespan.

REFERENCES


Europe in the world and global health

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This is an introduction and sets the scene for a series of articles that will appear over the next 18 months in Eurohealth. They will review global health from a European perspective and its place in foreign policy, development, trade, environment and global governance.

Together the articles will form the consideration that a European Global Health Strategy and a European Partnership for Global Health are imperative as an integral part of a vision of a resilient Europe and its new global diplomacy, reflecting interconnectedness and future global challenges.

Partnerships for health to unlock Europe’s futures

In a globalising world problems and solutions reach across national borders in a growing number of fields, linking economic opportunity and growth, as well as development and human security. Political stability or instability further shape the nature of international alignments while leaving them in an unprecedented state of flux. Traditional models of leadership are no longer as effective, as illustrated by disputes within the World Trade Organisation, disagreements concerning the Kyoto Protocol and the UN discord over Iraq. There is a need for new forms of leadership; governments alone cannot form a sustainable society from their own resources.

It takes partnerships and civic engagement to create a dynamic society. Mr Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and President of the Madariaga Foundation, has stressed the importance of developing partnerships to unlock Europe’s role and voice in the global future, recognising that its history and diversity confer a potential to become a bridge between civilisations and cultures. This will not be realised automatically, it requires organisation and concerted action.

Robert Schumann observed that Europe will not be made all at once. It will be built through concrete achievements which create a de facto solidarity. The development of a coherent and visible European Global Health Strategy would not only be in our own self interest, but also an exemplar of an effective European approach to external relations. It would be a way of promoting shared values, both within and outside our borders, towards sustainable development and a commitment to human rights including health.

Globalisation and health

Lee and Collin1 define global health as an “issue when the determinants circumscribe, undermine or are oblivious to the territorial boundaries of states and thus beyond the capacity of individual countries to address through domestic institutions” and are a reflection of “spatial, temporal and cognitive changes”, in short, “globalisation”. The EU Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner,2 claims that the debate about the EU boils down to one word “globalisation”. Further she goes on to claim that the biggest Member

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Challenges

The global health challenges for both poor and advanced economies are well documented. These include global health inequalities; legal and illegal migration; the poaching of health professionals; traditional infectious and newly emerging diseases that do not recognise borders, such as SARS and avian flu; the spread of chronic diseases previously only found in wealthier societies; and the often neglected area of mental health. While we have been successful in eradicating diseases such as smallpox we have created potentially threatening biological weapons.

Europe is well experienced with conflicts, natural disasters, and diseases transmissible from animals to man – planning for a flu pandemic is increasingly in the news. The enormous increase in trade in food across borders may enable the transmission of intentional or unintentional contamination and lead to serious outbreaks of disease. The increase in travel means that pathogens are transferred with great speed from one location to another locally, regionally or even globally. Food insecurity continues to be a major issue and malnutrition makes worse existing vulnerabilities and acts as a persistent drain on productivity. Conflict and civil unrest increase vulnerability to health risks, while violence adds to preventable morbidity and premature death. The instability associated with poverty and health accelerates both state or institutional failure and the proliferation of violence. Social problems of homelessness, crime and substance abuse also affect health, particularly that of children and young people.

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European responses

One recognition of Europe’s contribution to Global Health was signalled by former European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, David Byrne, in his valedictory address at the European Health Forum in Gastein in October 2004, ‘Global Health: Global Healing’. There is already a European Health Strategy, as well as a European Centre for Disease Control in Stockholm with a global remit of health protection on behalf of all Member States. European health industries are in a powerful position, particularly the pharmaceutical industry in their negotiations on intellectual property and vaccine patents. The public health implications of such negotiations are enormous.

The European health insurance industry, health care services, universities and financial institutions with all their capacity, competence and capabilities are in a position to exert a major influence on global health care. European philanthropy is increasingly working together to promote global health through global giving and promoting policy debate. Furthermore, European Foundations’ convening power and their trans-Atlantic links and networks across civic society in Europe makes them important partners.

Europe’s health care systems are experienced but public health experts can play a more central role in global, European and national debates on policy development. There is also scope for further coordination of the work of multiple actors. This can already be seen in number of countries such as the UK where the Department of Health and the Foreign Office have been exploring health and foreign policy and a UK Partnership for Global Health is in place. Another example is the case of Switzerland where the Federal Government have produced a draft health and foreign policy.

European strategic issues

Health, security and foreign policy

Health has raised its profile in foreign policy, but there continues to be a need for an assessment of current thinking in Europe about new security challenges, such as fragile or failing states, what health can do for foreign policy, and what foreign policy can do for health.

Health interests have already played a key role in conflict prevention and in post conflict situations, but there is more work to be done in promoting peace studies, developing the place of health in security policy, including the role of the military in humanitarian assistance, the role of health in European military doctrine, and rebuilding post conflict societies to ensure the creation of long term stability within countries and regions.

Health and sustainable development

The relationship between health, climate and the environment are under researched given the challenges to society of shifts in demographics, increased urbanisation and the need for safe clean water. There are opportunities for further collaborations between non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental organisations and governments. European foundations could assist,
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playing an important convening role.

These foundations, in partnership with other sectors, have a long tradition of supporting learning by investing in the sciences and humanities. A European innovation which could complement the development of new health interventions, drugs, vaccines and better nutrition would be to use existing knowledge to strengthen the health care systems globally that deliver health interventions and thus reduce the gap between knowing and doing. European foundations might consider establishing national libraries of health as a part of the emerging national academies of science in a number of developing countries.

Health and trade

There is also a need to support efforts to clarify policy options between global health and economic interests. The potential impact of economic policies on the determinants of European health, and Europe on the health of others globally, through trade and intellectual property in particular, are matters for further analysis; recognising that ‘good health is good economics’. The economic consequences of SARS for the global economy have been variously estimated as between €60–100 billion, while avian flu is a prominent reminder of the economic consequences of health emergencies. Many international financiers are now asking what other public health emergencies will have macro economic consequences.

European pharmaceutical companies, universities and research centres are major sources of research and development; yet only 10% of research funds are spent on the 90% of health problems concentrated in the poorer countries of the world. Further efforts to develop health systems in these poor economies are threatened by the flow of qualified personnel to European (and other) countries. This continues to be an area for urgent action by Member States. Again, philanthropic bodies in Europe could play an important part in convening meetings of interested parties, including Member States, the Commission and WHO.

Health and governance

The recent appreciation of the importance of global health by governments and philanthropists has revolutionised the scene with money, tools and creative ideas, but narrowing the gap between aspirations and actions remains a challenge. The revolution has done some good, but according to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the missing piece is the architecture for global health and the proper arrangements for health governance.9

Summary and global challenge

In summary, the challenge for European countries, as well as for the European Union and European Commission, is to make globalisation work and to use health to foster better forms of globalisation. Implicit in the idea of making globalisation work is the contention that it is not working at the moment. Some may argue that this is not the case; global life expectancy continues to rise, the global economy expands, and scientific innovation and discovery proceed at seemingly exponential rates unlocking the keys to increased health, wealth and happiness. However, we are aware, as never before, of the downside of increasing interconnectedness; while large parts of the globe experience the positive story of globalisation, millions are cut off from it. Little research is directed towards the major health problems that affect most of the world’s population.

"Health could be a bridge to peace that has a role in conflict prevention and in rebuilding society in post conflict situations."

These failings must be addressed, not just for reasons of common humanity, but for the fundamental reason that the negative externalities of economic globalisation may, in time, threaten its very foundations. Health therefore has a central role to play in meeting the challenges of making globalisation work. The danger is that we will have health as a private good, health as exclusive and hierarchical, health as only the preserve of the rich and health as a matter only of national or European security.

The challenge is not just about technology, neither is it just about supply and demand or getting markets right, although both will play a role. What is important, as these series of articles will try and demonstrate, is the importance of extending the appreciation of health issues amongst policy makers and bringing diverse members of the policy community, including European foundations, together to discuss global challenges. Through consultation and engagement they can develop a European Global Health Strategy and establish a European Partnership for Global Health that, as weapons were the currency of the cold war, health could be one of the currencies to make globalisation work. Health could be a bridge to peace that has a role in conflict prevention and in rebuilding society in post conflict situations.

This is a matter not just for politicians, although they must play their part. This fundamentally is a challenge to our ability to act together at all levels affected by these issues: the places we live; political communities and nations; across different countries of Europe and in institutions of global governance. By mobilising key actors we can begin to fulfil the promise of the benefits of global health for ‘Prosperity, Security and Solidarity’.

References