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From:	Presidency
To:	Working Party on Public Health (High Level)
Subject:	The Role of EU in Global health - <i>Exchange of views</i>

Delegations will find in the Annex a note prepared by the Presidency on the subject above, which will be the basis for an exchange of views at the meeting of the Working Party on Public Health (High Level) on 9 December 2021.

The Role of EU in Global health

Background

The Communication from the Commission on the EU Role in Global Health in 2010 established the strong legitimacy of the EU to act on global health due to its leading role in international trade, global environmental governance and in development aid, as well as its values, such as solidarity and experience of universal and equitable quality healthcare.

The informal expert group on the EU's role in global health (Working group on global health, WGGH) was set up in 2019 by the Finnish presidency. It initially included Member States holding EU presidency from 2019 to 2022. The group works on recommendations and ideas of how the EU and its Member States could position themselves more strategically in the global health arena, also bearing in mind the region's substantial financial contribution to WHO and other major actors in global health.

Since the first WGGH meeting in October 2019, the policy environment has changed significantly. During the Covid-19 pandemic global health has become a priority at the highest political levels of the EU and its Member States. The pandemic is a challenge as well as an opportunity for the EU's approach to global health. The Commission and the Member States have shown significant leadership when supporting WHO, ACT-A, and COVAX. Consequently, multilateralism and global cooperation have gained importance in our discussions.

During its Presidency, Slovenia has put global health high on its agenda with special focus on strengthening health resilience globally.

The Slovenian presidency conference on ‘The Role of the European Union in Strengthening Health Systems Resilience Globally’

The Conference was held on 20 October 2021 and it outlined the opportunities and the need to increase EU strategic investments in health systems globally. COVID-19 has unequivocally demonstrated the importance of global solidarity in the response to common health threats. Dealing with this unprecedented global crisis, we can see that no country is safe until everyone is safe. While strengthening pandemic preparedness we should also focus on other global challenges, such as rising NCDs. This calls for a holistic, inclusive, and coordinated approach to health systems strengthening within Europe and beyond its borders.

Working group on global health

The fifth session of the Working group on global health (WGGH) took place on 22 October 2021. Experts from 10 Member States, from DG SANTE, and from the European External Action Service took part in the meeting hosted by the Slovenian EU Presidency. The WGGH addressed questions on EU global health strategy, EU leadership in global health, solidarity, strengthening health systems globally and improving platforms for collaboration among EU and its Member States.

The WGGH experts agreed that a clear strategy, improved working arrangements and reliable mechanisms as well as better communication are needed. The coordination of EU actions and developing EU's positions in a dynamic setting are ongoing challenges therefore these processes should become more agile and quicker.

Council conclusions of the Slovenian Presidency

The Council conclusions on strengthening the European Health Union were adopted on 7 December 2021. The Council invites Member States and the Commission to further explore how the EU could have a more strategic approach in global health, including through a possible new Joint Action on global health. The Council encourages the use of existing EU mechanisms and instruments such as EU4Health, to strengthen the role of the EU in Global Health. It also invites Member States and the Commission to explore how to further improve their coordination in establishing EU positions on health issues in a timely and efficient manner.

The Conclusions outline the need for educational opportunities in the field of global health and global health diplomacy. Relevant stakeholders, including civil society and non-governmental organisations should be actively involved and unnecessary duplication and overlap with the work of other international actors should be avoided. The aim is to ensure coherence and complementarity with existing initiatives.

The Council suggests a review of mechanisms and instruments should be prepared through which the EU, its Member States and non-state actors support the strengthening of health systems globally. This will help to identify gaps and enhance the role of the EU in global health and health security. At the same time, partnerships and networks that provide support in strengthening health systems globally in terms of preparedness, capacity building, health promotion, health research and development, and digital health should be encouraged.

Way forward

The COVID-19 pandemic has put global health at the top of the European political agenda, and we can be proud of the leadership that Europe has taken over recent months. Striving towards stronger coherence and trying to build a common narrative for the European Health Union should go beyond a narrow focus on health security. In future, Member States can together build a more concrete and operational roadmap in many areas of global health. By working together in future Joint Action on global health, funded under the EU4Health programme, we could ensure an appropriate framework to design a potential roadmap and define priorities of the EU in global health.

Guiding questions for discussion

What might the next political steps be for Member States and European Commission to strengthen the role of EU in global health?

If there are some, could you share an example of your country using an EU mechanism to support health system strengthening outside EU?
