To:
José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

Cc:
Tonio Borg, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy
Andris Piebalgs, Commissioner for Development

European Commission
200, Rue de la Loi
B-1049 Brussels, Belgium

Brussels, 18th November 2013

Subject: Health experts call on the European Commission to address the TB and HIV funding crisis in the European region

Dear President Barroso,

Leading health organisations recently released a report titled “Bridging the Gap: How the European Union can address the funding crisis for TB and HIV programmes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia” which calls on the European Commission to step up its political response to the escalating TB and HIV epidemics in the European region.

TB and HIV continue to present significant threats to public health in the region. The European region accounts for nearly a quarter of all drug-resistant TB cases globally and has the world’s fastest growing HIV epidemic, with significant increases in mortality from AIDS. These diseases urgently require sustained political and financial support from both domestic and international sources, including regional level support from the European Union.

The Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, historically the largest donor for TB and HIV programmes in the European region, has developed a New Funding Model that will significantly reduce the amount of funding available for TB and HIV programmes in middle-income countries. These new criteria are expected to cut funding to the region by 50 percent. The argument that wealthier countries should pay for their own health programmes makes theoretical sense, but in practice the political will to deliver services to vulnerable populations is often absent. Such an abrupt end to funding in the absence of new donors or dramatically increased domestic resources will effectively mean abandoning tens of thousands of people.
Given the Eastern European and Central Asian region’s very high rates of drug-resistant TB, increasing HIV prevalence and difficult human rights environment, the region needs a significantly greater share of the available funding to ensure that even the basic needs of people affected by TB and HIV are addressed. European Union institutions cannot turn a blind eye to these cross-border health threats occurring both on their doorsteps in countries like Azerbaijan and Moldova but also within the European Union itself in countries like Romania and Lithuania.

Underfunding HIV and TB programmes in the European region will inevitably contribute to a further rise in rates of disease and drug-resistance. In addition, it will also cause an enormous burden on the European region’s economy for years to come. Current conservative estimates put the overall cost of TB in the EU at an astonishing €5.9 billion per year. The only way to reduce these costs now and in the future is to ensure TB and HIV programmes in the region receive adequate funding, including from the European Commission and the Global Fund, and reaches people in need.

The EU has two options: to generate adequate regional political will to the fight against TB and HIV or to ignore these diseases at its own peril and risk a greater public health emergency. We therefore call on the EU to provide the economic and political assistance needed to support the transition process towards ownership of national health responses. This can be done through existing cooperation agreements and financial instruments and must include capacity strengthening of local civil society who plays an important role in shaping the national and regional health agendas.

We recognise that health is a national matter, but the issues we have outlined require a regional response and cannot be left to countries to deal with independently. We call on the European Commission to demonstrate greater regional political leadership to the fight against TB and HIV in the European region.

We would be grateful if you could find the time to meet with us at your earliest convenience to discuss those issues more in detail.

Yours Sincerely,

Patrick Bertrand
Executive Director
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On behalf of 51 European organisations: