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EU-LAC Health Conference – Proceeding to the next step of health research cooperation between the European Union, Latin American and Caribbean countries

Brussels, Belgium, 2 June 2015

The Minister of Science, Technology and Telecommunications of Costa Rica, the Vice-Minister of International Affairs of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic, and the Director of the National Institute of Health Carlos III, Spain, opened EU-LAC Health Conference

The [EU-LAC Health](#) project invited high-level policy-makers, ministry and funding agency representatives, expert scientists, as well as members of the project's Advisory Board to a conference at the Bibliothèque Solvay in Brussels. The one-day event had the purpose to present, discuss and disseminate the main output of the EU-funded project – namely, the EU-LAC Health Roadmap. This consensus roadmap provides concrete thematic health research areas with a mutual benefit for both regions and a proposition on how to effectively coordinate such bi-regional health research and innovation cooperation - the Joint Initiative on Health Research and Innovation (*JIRI-Health*). Discussing the outcomes with a larger audience, getting input from related relevant initiatives on potential models of governance or practical working modalities as well as engaging with the interested public into a discussion on next steps, concerns and potential impacts of the JIRI-Health were the aims of the well-visited event.

The opening was held by three distinctive EU and CELAC speakers: **Marcelo Jenkins Coronas**, Minister of Science, Technology and Telecommunications of Costa Rica, **Jesús Fernandez Crespo**, Director of the Spanish National Institute of Health Carlos III, and **Rafael Sánchez Cárdenas**, Vice Minister of International Affairs of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic. They jointly and commonly stressed the high importance of the large bi-regional health research initiative which has already managed to create and engage a large network of interested stakeholders across the Atlantic acknowledging the need to collaborate on not only bi-regional but global challenges. **Maria Cristina Russo**, Director of International Cooperation at the Directorate General of Research and Innovation of the European Commission, provided insights into EC strategies underlining the fact that it is essential to promote cooperation between the CELAC and the EU in order to develop a research (and knowledge) area. It was stressed that EU-CELAC cooperation will be strengthened in the coming years, which will be reflected in Horizon 2020. **Hector Sámano Rocha**, Counsellor for International Cooperation at the National Council for Science and Technology, Mexico, explained the EU-CELAC policy dialogue implemented in the form of the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM). Health research was selected as a key area and it has been acknowledged the great support from the EU-LAC Health project by providing thematic input to the SOM working group on Health.

The chair of the International Rare Disease Research Consortium (IRDiRC), **Paul Lasko**, was invited with the aim to present IRDiRC as a transnational model of coordination of health research

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cooperation that the JIRI-Health could potentially learn from. Creating a non-bureaucratic and flexible coordinating structure that focusses on common bi-regional challenges but keeps the principle of national authorities funding their own researchers was stressed to be a key principle for governance. **Philippe Cupers**, Head of Unit of Strategy in the Directorate Health of Directorate General of Research and Innovation (EC), declared to further use and explore well-working and existing EU Initiatives too such as Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI), European Infrastructures (ESFRI) or ERA-nets for greater participation of CELAC countries. EU-LAC Health can also serve as a bridge for connecting ongoing initiatives.

The EU-LAC Health roadmap, presented by the members of the Advisory Board of the project **Maria del Rocío Sáenz Madrigal**, Executive President of the Costa Rican Social Security Fund, and **Eero Vuorio**, Professor emeritus of the University of Turku, Finland, defines six priority areas in health research for EU-CELAC collaboration: **Chronic Diseases, Infection, Cancer, Neurological Disease & Stroke, Prevention of Disease and Promotion of Well-being and Health and Social Care Service Research**. In total, 22 national agencies and 3 regional/multilateral organizations and the bi-regional Advisory Board of EU-LAC Health participated in the identification process of these priority areas. Six working groups, formed by expert scientists from both regions helped the consortium to further narrow down those topics as recommendations for potential activities between the two regions. All topics were validated and endorsed by the EU-CELAC SOM as cooperation in these areas bears added values like e.g. differences in cultural context, genetic background, population and type of health care system, a larger critical mass to address grand societal challenges, the sharing of data, knowledge, expertise and technology, export and import of best practices for prevention and treatment of diseases as well as capacity building in both regions.



From left to right: Rafael de Andres Medina, Paul Lasko, Ernesto Gozzer, Philippe Cupers, Alfredo Cesario (moderator), Ximena Luengo (moderator)





The roundtable discussion with previous speakers, as well as **Ernesto Gozzer**, director of the National Institute of Health, Peru, revealed some aspects to be taken into account when thinking towards a JIRI-Health. The fact that the initiative is thematically rather broad potentially means a larger integration of topics. However, it could also bear the risk of less efficiency. A clear definition of the scientific research purpose will be essential in order to convince even more EU and CELAC funders of the necessity of the initiative.

Following the morning part, a closed session with representatives of ministries and funding agencies was held in order to have an open discussion on the JIRI-Health and understand the needs, demands and interests of funding agencies. An encouraging number of countries expressed strong interest in the initiative, among them Spain, Portugal, France, Israel, Finland, Romania, Costa Rica, Peru, Dominican Republic, Panama, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Discussions will take place within the group of interested parties on the next steps for the coordination of cooperation, the definition of its term and further commitment of the agencies.

More information can be found at the [Project-Homepage: www.eulachealth.eu](http://www.eulachealth.eu)

Project-Partners: ISCIII (Spain)-coordinator, MSCR-RIMAI (Costa Rica), INNOVATEC (Spain), DLR (Germany), COHRED (Switzerland), FIOCRUZ (Brazil), MINCYT (Argentina), APRE (Italy), INSERM-AVIESAN (France), INNCOMNSZ (Mexico).

Advisory Board members country: Belgium, Chile, Finland, Costa Rica, Germany, Ecuador, Italy, Trinidad & Tobago, United Kingdom, PAHO/WHO

