



NATIONAL CONGRESS 2003
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(www.integration-projects.org)

Short report in English:

European and African participants to AIDES' 15th national assembly expect the enlarged European Union to play a greater role against the global AIDS epidemic.

(PDF format: click on title to reach the article)

REDUCING HARM

French Health Minister says harm reduction for drug users proved a great success.

Breaking the Curve

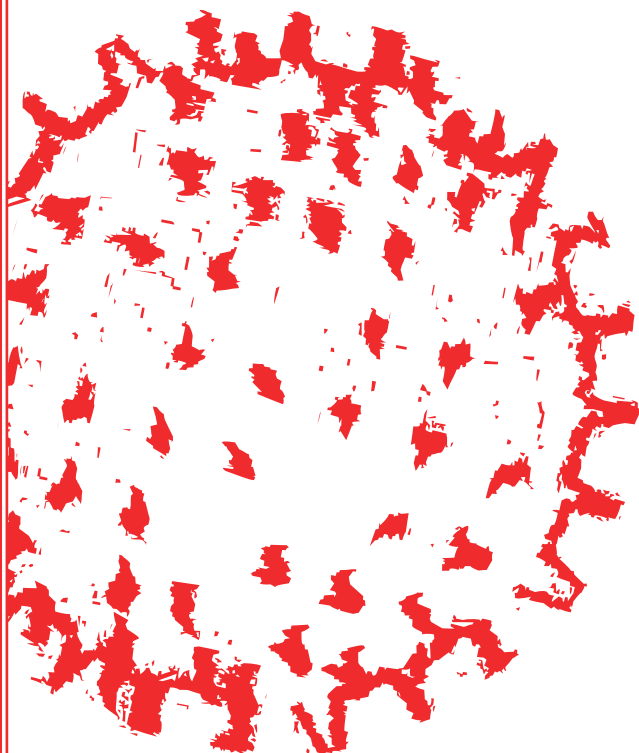
A plenary session on key European issues regarding HIV/AIDS

AIDES' Perspectives

Promoting a community-based approach against AIDS both in France and internationally

FUND the FUND

Donor countries should keep their promise.



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Introduction:



The opening of the 15th assembly of AIDES, France's largest NGO against AIDS, which took place on June 20th, 2003, in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, stressed the need for greater pan-European solidarity and commitment in the fight against HIV/AIDS, both within Europe and internationally.

The 320 participants included guest HIV/AIDS activists from Mali, Morocco, Poland, Togo, Romania and Russia, as well as Dr. Michel de GROULARD representing UNAIDS, Dr. Jean-François MATTEI, French Minister of Health, Didier Claude ROD, Member of the European Parliament, and Dr. Hélène ROSSERT, AIDES General Director and member of the Board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS Tuberculosis and Malaria.

French Health Minister says harm reduction for drug users proved a great success.

In his opening speech, Christian SAOUT, President of AIDES, encouraged Jean-François MATTEI, French Minister of Health, to promote greater co-ordination at the pan-European level in the fight against AIDS: “Especially now that the EU is enlarging, the lessons learned and the best strategies to fight AIDS implemented in the EU need to be synthesised at the European level to enable each member country to set up the best possible plan against AIDS.”

Citing the example of Finland, which was able to keep its HIV epidemic among drug users at a low level thanks to the rapid implementation of harm-reduction strategies, Christian SAOUT invited Minister MATTEI to include the need to develop pan-European standards to fight AIDS in the agenda of the “Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs European Council,” especially concerning drug users. AIDES, with its partners from the Coalition of HIV/AIDS NGOs in Europe, produced a consensus statement in 1999 entitled “DRUG USE and HIV: Building a European Policy for Harm Reduction,” which, according to SAOUT, could form the basis for such pan-European standards.

In his speech, Minister MATTEI affirmed that harm reduction strategies and substitution treatments for drug users have been successful in France and should therefore be maintained in the long term.



MATTEI affirmed that we should make sure we do not forget “the lessons learned” in the fight against AIDS: “we ought to share these experiences” with “other generations, and other countries.” MATTEI said he wants to see more developed countries participate in the ESTHER programme (inter-hospital partnerships against AIDS between the South and the North). Further, MATTEI is looking forward to the “Donors' Conference” he is co-chairing with Thommy THOMPSON, US Secretary of Health. This conference, which will take place in Paris on July 16th, 2003, is “designed to strengthen the resources of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.”

"BREAKING the CURVE"



A plenary session on key Central and Eastern European issues regarding HIV/AIDS



D. Rod, A. W. Simon, and F. Hamers



Sacha TSEKHANOVICH

The participation of Wojciech TOMCZYNSKI and Monica DAN was made possible through the Integration Project, co-financed by the European Commission

& the French Embassy in Warsaw

Arnaud WASSON-SIMON, co-ordinator of European Partnerships and Advocacy for AIDES, presented a short preview of the documentary "BREAKING the CURVE: Fighting AIDS in Estonia and Russia," to be released in September 2003, and which is part of an inter-NGO campaign calling for greater EU involvement against the exploding HIV/AIDS epidemic in Eastern Europe (this preview can be downloaded from www.integration-project.org). This documentary presents the work of grassroots HIV/AIDS NGOs with drug users in Estonia and Russia, two countries which over the past four years have been effected by the "fastest growing HIV epidemic in the world" (UNAIDS, 2002).

Dr. Françoise HAMERS, Director of the EuroHIV Centre also intervened at the AIDES assembly: she assesses that "during the past 5 years, most countries of the former Soviet Union have been severely affected by HIV epidemics that continue to spread as a result of injecting drug use. With an estimated 1 million individuals already infected, mostly injecting drug users, and high rates of syphilis, the region may soon also face a large-scale epidemic of sexually-transmitted HIV infection" (quoted from article published by Dr. HAMERS in *The LANCET* on March 22, 2003).

Wojciech TOMCZYNSKI from the NGO "BADZ Z NAMI" (Poland), and Monica DAN from "ARAS" (Romania) presented their involvement in the Integration Project, a series of inter-NGO initiatives against AIDS bringing together NGOs from the EU Applicant Countries with NGOs from the EU. The Integration Project receives funding from the European Commission (www.integration-project.org).

In Poland, the activities of "BADZ Z NAMI" have been greatly influenced by AIDES: "BADZ Z NAMI" was

indeed founded by Wojciech following his participation in an internship at AIDES, almost ten years ago. In Romania, ARAS, which focuses upon improving prevention and health services for the most vulnerable communities with regards to HIV/AIDS, advocates for greater participation of civil society in the definition of governmental strategies on health: citing best European practices is always a key strategy to foster improvement of health care in Romania.

Sacha TSEKHANOVICH from the NGO Humanitarian Action in St. Petersburg, Russia, presented his harm-reduction projects which were initiated by Médecin du Monde. When they started HIV testing and needle exchange services in 1999, drug users in St. Petersburg were still very little affected by HIV. Unfortunately, since then, the HIV epidemic has literally exploded around them. The Russian health authorities nevertheless, still remain very reluctant to develop and streamline harm reduction strategies for drug users: they still prohibit the use of substitution treatment such as Methadone very actively.

Didier Claude ROD, member of the European Parliament from the Green Party, presented some of the key issues he has faced so far as a parliamentarian committed to the fight against AIDS. Notably, ROD supported amendments which led for HIV/AIDS to be explicitly cited as a priority of the new EU Public Health Programme for 2003 to 2008. ROD also systematically supported the right for developing countries to produce or to import generic copies of medicines, including anti-AIDS treatments. His activism proved successful through the adoption in March 2001 of an emergency resolution by the European Parliament asking the pharmaceutical industry to drop its lawsuit against the Government of South Africa.

AIDES perspectives for 2003-2004: promoting a community-based approach against AIDS both in France and internationally.



In its strategic perspectives for 2003-2004, AIDES reaffirms its identity as a community-based association against HIV/AIDS: prevention or support projects are defined in full partnership with the communities that are targeted and should be based upon a detailed assessment of their needs.

With the new conservative government of France threatening to undermine some of the key initiatives developed against HIV/AIDS, AIDES reaffirms its full commitment to defending the right for all immigrants in France to have full access to prevention and treatments, independently of their individual residency status. Also, harm reduction outreach for gay men, for intravenous drug users, or for drug users in rave parties, needs to be maintained and developed.

Development of AIDES African Programmes:

AIDES will pursue its involvement in the Réseau Afrique 2000 (a

network of 16 Sub-Saharan grassroots HIV/AIDS NGOs and AIDES): notably to support the development of income generating activities which are accessible to People Living with HIV/AIDS in Africa.

In 2004, the DONYA Training Center will open in Bamako, MALI. This Training Center is a project developed by ARCAD-SIDA (MALI) and AIDES in partnership with the Réseau Afrique 2000.

Development of the Integration Project - strengthening the fight against AIDS in an enlarged Europe.

The Integration Project, which aims to strengthen the community-based fight against HIV/AIDS NGOs in future member-countries of the European Union through the integration of best

European practices, now includes a section specifically dedicated to developing harm reduction for drug users in Estonia and Romania

(“Integration SAFER-IDUS,” funded by DG Enlargement).

Further, HIV/AIDS NGOs from all applicant countries (i.e. - all 13 applicant countries... except Malta) along with EPHA, EATG and 4 EU HIV/AIDS NGOs, expressed their support for the project presented by AIDES to DG SANCO of the European Commission in May 2003: if accepted, the partners of the INTEGRATION PROJECT will be able to maintain and develop their joint work against HIV/AIDS for 3 years. (EC answer is expected before October 2003).

AIDES intends to develop its advocacy work in favour of a greater co-ordinated EU response against the exploding HIV/AIDS epidemic in Eastern Europe notably in link with EuroCASO (now being re-organized) and through the release of the documentary “Breaking the Curve: fighting AIDS in Estonia and in Russia.” For more information: www.integration-project.org



FUND the FUND: donor countries should keep their promise.

Following the international meeting AIDES hosted in Paris on March 28 and 29, 2003 (co-organised with Act-Up Paris and HealthGap, USA), the international advocacy campaign Fund the Fund was initiated. “Fund the Fund” at this point, has received the full support of 125 NGOs worldwide. Its main aim is to promote urgent increased investment in the Global Fund to

Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria as it is desperately needed for 2003 and future years. The Global Fund requires \$1.4 billion in new donations in 2003 in order to decently fund the programmes presented for Round 3.

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