



OPENING REMARKS

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Welcome and good morning from me as well.

I don't know about you, but my impression is that, in the pre-election debate, the health conditions of European citizens are not at all at the center of the thoughts of current policy makers nor of those who intend to run as candidates, with exceptions of course. Paradoxically, we could almost say that the end of the health emergency seems to have almost created a damage, in fact it has resulted in the lights being turned off on the unmet medical needs of many European citizens.

With only a few months to go before the European elections, and at a time when European citizens have high expectations of Europe's health systems, the complete absence of new health initiatives in the State of the Union address delivered by the president of the European Commission in September last year was widely commented on.

We strongly believe in the key role of the European institutions for the well-being of all of us, and we thank MEP Beatrice Covassi from the S&D Group - who is also a member of the MEP Interest Group "European Patients' Rights & Cross-Border Healthcare" - not only for hosting us today but, more importantly, for the attention she - once again - has shown to the health of European citizens by listening to the demands of civil society and patient associations.

In this regard, actually recently there have also been very encouraging signs.

In fact, on December 5, 2023, the European Commission adopted the [EU4Health 2024 work program](#) to implement key health policy priorities within the European Health Union. As Stella

Kyriakides, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, said, "Civil society has a crucial role to play in reaching out to our citizens." This declaration is a great achievement to be proud of, because the active role of PAGs and citizens' organizations in advocating for public policies, which have the interests, needs and expectations of European citizens at their core and have health as the main common good to be safeguarded, is not recognized in all sectors and by all stakeholders. However, on the negative side, it must also be said that in the aforementioned EU4Health 2024 work program, vaccination policies are apparently the big missing items, and this also clashes with the Council's conclusions from just a year ago.

It is unfortunate that no representative of the European Commission is present at today's debate, because I am sure they would have reminded us how vaccination policies, while not explicitly mentioned among the main areas of focus in 2024, play a key role in many areas that will be particularly addressed by the 2024 work program, including the:

- Europe's Beating Cancer Plan
- Cross-border health threats
- Health promotion and disease prevention
- Global Health

And, I would add, vaccination policies are also an important area of action-research. For this very reason, we thought to host some relevant initiatives on the topic today, to balance the many recommendations on vaccine policies that have been made to European institutions (some of which will be mentioned in a moment) with the concrete actions taken by key stakeholders. In this way, we hope to avoid the risk of overlooking the considerable work already done and underway. Lastly, a policy proposal will be presented today aimed at fostering, even in the next European Parliament, the debate on vaccination policies with a life course approach.

It is an expression of civic activism that - from our point of view - deserves to be supported, so we guarantee concrete external support as of now and we are glad that it will be presented on this occasion for the first time at the European level.

I won't add more so not to spoil too much.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a fruitful event.