



XIII EUROPEAN PATIENTS' RIGHTS DAY 2019

Delivering patient value throughout the healthcare system

“A Debate on citizens' expectations”

April 9th, 2019 (12:30 - 15:00) - EU Parliament, Brussels

Opening Remarks and Keynote Presentations

Mariano Votta

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Good afternoon and welcome to the European celebration of the thirteenth Edition of the European Patients' Rights Day.

As you know, Active Citizenship Network, the European branch of the Italian NGO Cittadinanzattiva, has promoted this multi-stakeholder event since 2007, and as its Director, I am very honored to celebrate this relevant anniversary here at the EU Parliament.

First of all, I would like to thank the European Institutions, and in particular the Italian Members of the European Parliament Brando Benifei and Elena Gentile for accepting to co-host this initiative.

Every year we select a theme that is directly linked to some specific patients' rights stated in the European Charter of Patients' Rights. Instead, this year the upcoming elections have suggested us to turn our attention towards the potential future scenarios, with concerns to health and wellness, that may shape the next European health agenda and so the European patients' rights as a whole.



Therefore, we have decided to double our efforts: today's event will consist of "a debate on citizens' expectations", while tomorrow there will be a separate conference focused on "Digital Health and Personalized Medicine".

These two initiatives are linked together by the same message enclosed in the title of this 13th edition of the European Patients' Rights Day: "Delivering patient value throughout the healthcare system".

There is one specific figure that perfectly introduces today's debate: 70% of Europeans want the EU to do more on health¹.

In this regard, I'd like to make a few considerations based on recent publications that have come to my attention. The first publication, entitled "The benefit of EU action in health policy: The record to date"² and promoted by the European Parliament, underlines that "European health policy measures taken to date are highly beneficial to and relevant for European citizens, economies and the Member States. The EU does acquit its responsibility and utilises its capacity to act on behalf of EU citizens in this policy area. The study concludes that EU health policy clearly achieves added value".

The second one, entitled "Economic and social impacts and benefits of health systems"³ and published by the WHO, "provides evidence to show the health sector is essential to a stable, functioning economy. Health systems have a positive impact on the economic performance of other sectors in the national economy and are a key sector for driving forward the implementation of local and national goals for sustainable development".

¹ Cfr. a recent Eurobarometer survey: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/external/html/eurobarometer-052017/default_en.htm#health

² [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/631729/EPRS_STU\(2019\)631729_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/631729/EPRS_STU(2019)631729_EN.pdf)

³ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/economic-and-social-impacts-and-benefits-of-health-systems-2019>



This being said, I'd like to add another observation of mine. As we all know, the pre-electoral period is characterized by the proliferation of political manifestos. Some of them are written by the candidates and aim to sway the votes, while the others originate from the citizens and serve to let future political decision-makers know what the priorities of the various stakeholders are for the next years.

Well, one thing stands out: the topic of health has not appeared in the pre-electoral debate, despite the civil society, patient advocacy groups, professionals and numerous stakeholders engaged in the field, have long been disseminating a series of manifestos (to which, in some cases, we have even contributed) focused on the future of the European Health Agenda. It is therefore paradoxical that these demands have not received adequate attention from official policy. This is a further reason to encourage opportunities for discussion and dialogue, such as the one of today, between those who care about health as a common good and those who will be called upon, if elected, to take decisions for millions of Europeans.

We are glad to be here today with the MEPs who have accepted our invitation "in their home" to discuss different priority topics linked to healthcare policies at the EU level, including health promotion, disease prevention, and access to innovation.

Obviously, we have invited all the current MEPs, especially those who decided to run again. Moreover, we have tried to extend the invitation across all EU countries also to those candidates that are not yet MEPs. We have done this thanks to the valuable collaboration of the national partner associations of ACN, which I thank for their commitment.



Today there are experts and leaders of civic and patient organizations coming from at least 15 European countries, some even extra EU. My organization is pleased to host each one of you, especially those who have travelled from further away. Your presence is very important for us since, as we always say, patients' rights have no borders.

I hope that today's event can offer a civic perspective, placing and recognizing the citizens at the center of health policies, not only as "users or consumers" of health services or "patients" with a specific disease, but also as active citizens participating in healthcare policymaking as essential stakeholders. This is fundamental to strengthen our 'European citizenship', trying to reduce the gap between the citizens and the institutions, by showing the benefits that the EU can provide to patients.

The aim of this conference is mainly to share and discuss with the candidates the needs of citizens and patients and the ways to strengthen their rights at the European level, contributing to set out the EU health agenda.

Lastly, let me briefly highlight the meaning and value that as a civic organization we recognize to the EU, in front of a growing orientation converging towards illiberal souverainism instead of democratic Europeanism.

Almost 20 years ago, Cittadinanzattiva embraced the European dimension, choosing to establish a network operating at the European level to assert an active European citizenship able to influence the EU political agenda.

In today's climate of nationalist claims, questionable populist solutions and temptations to return to the past, Cittadinanzattiva invites citizens to vote at the next European elections and hopes to build a unified and plural Europe.



For the first time since the post-war period, there is a real risk of democratic regression in the heart of the West. The next European elections will have to demonstrate that we want to remain in the EU. The aim is not to preserve the Union that currently exists, as the world is evolving and so is the EU, but we are called upon to defend the rights and achievements that we have inherited, giving rise to a new Europe capable of facing the challenges of the next decades. To do so, it is necessary that all parties involved reach a balance between a European Union which requires to keep public finances in order through antisocial policies and a society asking that adequate levels of protection of rights are guaranteed together with social justice, development and promotion of an active citizenship.

Well, I have finished my introduction.

Last but not least, let me thank Jacki Davis for having agreed to chair the conference. She is a leading commentator and analyst on European Union affairs, a very experienced journalist, a speaker and moderator of high-level events, and so the right person for the unconfutable role to be the moderator here today.

Thank you all once again, I wish you a useful and interesting conference.