

Active Citizens in Europe advocate for vaccination TRAINING SEMINAR

6th November 2018

15:30 - 18:30

Thon Hotel EU

Rue de la Loi 75, Brussels

Meeting room: The Netherlands I & II - conference area (1st floor).

Mariano Votta's speech

Good afternoon and welcome to everyone. I am extremely proud and happy about this initiative.

Recently we have felt the need to combine a public activity, in which we take into consideration the perspective of citizens in the process of policy making at the EU level, with a more reserved but necessary meeting to explore issues that are particularly significant to us, such as vaccines.

Actually, the request of this kind of meeting came directly from our constituency, which requested us to satisfy the need to be more up-to-date and prepared in the front of the decrease in vaccination coverage, that has returned to topical relevance; and also to better identify, recognize and fight the increased external factors that can negatively influence the vaccine policy in EU.

We can do it today, and for this I would like to thank MSD very much for its support, not only for this seminar but more in general for our policy, which we have called "Action Plan to improve the awareness on vaccine benefits across Europe". I will give you more details afterwards but first let me briefly introduce my association.

As you probably know, Active Citizenship Network (ACN) is one of the most widespread and flexible European network, with more than 100 civil, patients and users organizations as partners across Europe. It was established in 2001 and it is coordinated by [Cittadinanzattiva](#), an Italian non-profit organization founded in 1978, which is independent from any political affiliation, trade unions, private companies and public institutions.

The main objectives of ACN are the promotion of civic activism and participation in the political arena, as well as the protection of citizens' rights, which are both the strength and the uniqueness of ACN.

In particular, we focus on the following two objectives:

1. One is to promote abroad all the successful experiences achieved by Cittadinanzattiva in Italy.
2. The second and most important is to encourage the active participation of citizens in the European policy-making in order to promote the construction of an "European active citizenship", through the citizens' powers and responsibilities in public policies. These include:

- recognizing the primary role of citizens and civil organizations in the care of the common good;
- supporting citizen's participation in policy making at the local, national and EU level;
- involving them in the defense of their fundamental rights as citizens, patients, consumers, users, etc.

At the European level, ACN's action develops according to four well-defined strategic pillars: the protection of citizens' rights; cross-border issues; empowerment; and sustainability.

I apologize for the long institutional presentation of my association, but I felt the need to do so to point out how the object of today's training seminars, focused on vaccines, is extremely coherent both with our mission and with each of the four pillars that characterize our action at the European level. Indeed, the topic of vaccines is certainly a global and cross-border phenomenon, not circumscribed to an isolated context. The topic of vaccines affects the sustainability of healthcare systems, as the lack of vaccination and the degree of vaccination coverage have a strong impact on public health expenditures. The protection of citizens' rights, not only patients, cannot be guaranteed without proper information, especially on the subject of vaccines where it is essential to distinguish reliable sources of information from fake news. We believe that a well-informed citizen who is aware of his rights is a resource for the society. For this reason we are happy to invest in the empowerment of citizens.

At the national level we do this by inviting citizens to participate to our activities, such as the 2018 vaccine tour that took place in many Italian cities, while at the European level we offer the opportunities for training and empowerment to leaders of associations operating in different countries but supporting our own policy: to be "Active Citizens in Europe (that) advocate for vaccination". This is the title of this two-days event that begins today and will end tomorrow with an appointment at the European Parliament.

Today's training and tomorrow's meeting are part of the same multi-year activity, our "Action plan to improve the awareness on vaccine benefit across Europe", which involves us at the European level in line with what we have been doing in Italy for a long time. Our commitment has been appreciated by the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the Agency of the European Union aimed at strengthening Europe's defense against infectious diseases that, 2 years ago, has decided to officially include my citizens' organization in the ECDC Technical Advisory Group dealing with vaccine coverage. And as members of this Advisory Group we feel a great responsibility in continuing to commit ourselves to this issue: we believe that a widespread vaccination culture is necessary, particularly to overcome the idea that we only get vaccinated when we are young and, instead, to shift to (a common

knowledge linked to) a life-course vaccination approach which prevents a series of diseases even during adulthood.

For this reason, in the past months we have provided our point of view to the European Institutions in order to respond to the Public Consultation on: “Strengthened cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases” launched by the DG Santé.

With the meeting that was held last February at the European Parliament “The challenges of life-course vaccination to enhance public health protection in Europe: a multi-stakeholder approach” we wanted to emphasize the decisive role of the civil society, of the citizens organizations and the advocacy groups in this challenging and complex environment. We strongly believe that there is a clear added-value to strengthen cooperation among all relevant actors at the EU level, including health authorities, the vaccine industry, research and innovation, the healthcare sector and others. However, we first need to guarantee the involvement of the civil society.

Last April we supported the European Immunization week, while last May, during the XII (12th) European Patients’ Rights Day, we highlighted the importance of proper therapeutic adherence to vaccination plans.

In this two days we would like to reinforce the message that ACN is a network of civil society that works to enhance associations’ participation on the theme of vaccination and that now we are moving to concrete actions at the EU level. In fact, as you can imagine, our idea is to promote common activities for the next year, and during the second part of this meeting we will talk about them.

Well, it's time to start. One last piece of information, for our expert speakers: in line with our approach on the topic, vaccination is intended as a citizen right for the whole population, so for this training seminar we have invited not only patients’ associations but civil associations too, also coming from Extra EU Countries.

Thanks again for accepting our invitation, thanks to Suzanne that will moderate this seminar, and a special thanks for all the experts for their invaluable know-how, we appreciate a lot your availability to be here today!

Thanks again for the attention. I wish you a fruitful seminar.

Mariano Votta
Director Active Citizenship Network

