

Good morning,

on behalf of Active Citizenship Network welcome to this European meeting on chronic pain in which, I hope, professionals, leaders of civic and patient organizations, Institutions, European networks, companies, stakeholders coming from at least 17 Countries can share experiences and debate in a positive way on the issue of chronic pain that, as you know, this year for the first time it was included on the agenda by the European institutions during the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

A crucial achievement is mainly due to the active role of many civic and patient associations, most of them present here today who have been active for years in the field of the struggle against chronic pain in Europe.

Before starting, I have to thank the Economic and Social Committee for its hospitality, and – of course - the Institutions joining us today.

And thanks in advance, and best wishes for her role, to Beverly Collett, from UK, for accepting to moderate this meeting. She has a great experience on the topic as chair of the Chronic Pain Policy Coalition, as Consultant in Pain Management & Anaesthesia, and as treasurer of the International Association for the Study of Pain.

Well, my role now is just to introduce some elements to contextualize this meeting.

1. The first key-point is the **political framework**: as you know, the informal meeting of the European Health Ministers, held on September 22th and 23rd in Milan, Italy, addressed – among other issues - palliative care and pain therapy. Ministers from the 28 European Member States reached a common position on the need to create a European network ensuring training of professionals in the sector and on exchange of information on the effectiveness of therapies for the weakest population groups.

Therefore, at European level this event is the first occasion for European and National Institutions to present to the community involved in the topic what was discussed and the decisions taken on palliative care and pain management. I am also sure that today the Italian Ministry of Italy can give us more information about it.

At same time, for the Institutions today represents an occasion to know what this community can offer in terms of good practice and experiences useful to contribute to raise awareness about the phenomenon, enhance the body of knowledge of positive cases and success, and strengthen the commitment to this topic. Besides, I would like to think that under the decision taken by the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the Italian Ministry of Health to provide their official patronage for this event, there is their appreciation for our effort in this direction. We are honored for their consideration.

2. The second element I would like to highlight is related to the **collection of good practices** in European countries in terms of struggling against pain carried out by Active Citizenship Network with the invaluable support of many patients associations that I thank a lot. Over the last months, without considering the apps, we have collected 46 good practice coming from 11 countries: Belgium (1 good practice), Bulgaria (2), France (5), Germany (1), Greece (1),

Kosovo (2), Italy (15), Malta (2), Portugal (2), Spain (4), United Kingdom (11). Among them, we can find:

- A first group of good practices is related to specific diseases, for example to patients suffering from fibromyalgia, low back pain, localized neuropathic pain, rheumatoid arthritis and so on.
- A second more substantial group concerns to good practices on chronic pain, without entering into details: in some cases because they involve communication campaigns aiming at increasing public awareness about the phenomenon, and provide reference points and useful information to patients suffering from chronic pain. In other cases, because they are addressed to more than a specific pathology, including those mentioned above.
- In both cases, the promoters are patients' and civic associations, professional teams and networks, institutions, research and pain centers, universities, in most of the cases all these subjects are working together. Probably the secret of their success lies on the ability to build networks developing partnerships and cooperation among both public and private stakeholders.

3. The third element is related to the **message** that comes out from this meeting. I think the message should not be that there is a Country more involved than another or that there is a good practice better than another one (for this reason we prefer to talk about good rather than best practice). As you know, the event won't be a new award, but the recognition of ongoing excellences. My suggestion is that the power and the add value of this event born in the title first: **making the invisible visible**. All effort, every kind of commitment, led by innovation, ethic or cultural issue, are welcome in this meeting if provided to give more relevance to the phenomenon that affects around 20% of the adult population in Europe. For this reason a different kind of experiences will be presented and I really hope this meeting can be relevant in this sense.

Thanks a lot for your attention and have a nice meeting.