



Good afternoon everybody!

Two years after the official launch of the EU project “PATIENTS’ VOICE”, we are all together again for the closing event of this relevant initiative in the field of civic activism in health in the northern part of Cyprus.

A warm greetings from Rome, Italy, to the representatives of local and National Authorities, European Commission, leaders of patient’s organizations – some of them known during their study visit in my country - stakeholder, media, citizens and patients.

It’s really a pleasure and a honor for me, as Director of Active Citizenship Network, to participate today even if only by skype.

The closing event is the occasion to account and remember the main outputs and outcomes of each initiative, in particular if the initiative has been supported by public funds.

Please let me congratulate with the project staff, starting from the President of the Universal Patient Rights Association Emete Imge and the project Manager İzlem Sönmez.

For my organization it was really a pleasure to cooperate with the Universal Patient Rights Association in this challenging but also successful multi annual initiative.

Our role was not only to support but also to provide suggestions, tools, experiences and occasion to be in contact with experts, and I was glad to host a leader of a Turkish Cypriot advocacy group during the last celebration of the European Patients’ Rights Day in Brussels.

But more than to talk about what we have done, now I am much more interested to briefly show you something about the possible next step of this initiative and possible new field of action.

First of all, I totally agree about the statement underlined in the save the date/invitation for this event, the project ends but struggle continuous, as well as the partnership continuous, I am happy to add. In fact, I confirm the intention of Active Citizenship Network to continue to work together with the Universal Patient Rights Association, both at National and European level.

For this reason I’d like to show you some concrete new field of action, both linked with patients’ rights in cross-border healthcare.

The first one can be defined with the title *“Cross-border healthcare and centers of excellence to enhance patients’ rights: access, information and innovation”*.



As you are aware, the Health Ministers of EU Member States have recognised that European Reference Networks (ERNs), when fully developed, present an opportunity for building capacity throughout Europe in the provision of specialised health services, in particular in the field of rare diseases, so as to ensure quality of care, and dissemination of knowledge and innovative practices.

Thus, the Council has invited the Member States and the Commission to encourage the European Reference Networks to attain their intended objectives of providing better access for patients requiring highly specialised healthcare.

We strongly believe that these goals could be reached also thanks a more active role of the broader constituency of advocacy groups and patients associations: in terms of raise awareness European citizens about it, facilitating dialogue and exchange of experiences, collection of data & good practices, removing barriers & obstacles.

In line with our multi annual commitment to implement the patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, next 27 of February at the EU Parliament in Brussels we'll present our proposal in which we'd like to involve, from Cyprus, the Universal Patient Rights Association.

The second field of action for a common initiative can be introduced with the title "*The challenges of life-course vaccination to enhance public health protection in Europe: a multi-stakeholder approach*".

This concrete proposal concerns a more active role in vaccine coverage across Europe.

Vaccination is one of the most important public health tools of the 20th century that led to several crucial goals. Indeed, it has led to eradication of small pox, elimination of poliomyelitis from Europe and dramatic decrease of mortality and morbidity of communicable diseases preventable by vaccination. It is estimated that worldwide vaccination prevents 2.7 million cases of measles, 2 million cases of neonatal tetanus, and 1 million cases of pertussis each year. In Europe, seasonal influenza vaccination prevents around 2 million cases each year.

However, vaccination programs are facing considerable challenges, such as a decline in vaccination coverage in some countries, the increasing cost of new vaccines and shortages in supply. In addition, misconceptions about vaccination can further shift the public focus from the individual and collective benefits of vaccination to increased distrust and fear of possible side effects.

One of the main factors contributing to a critical view to vaccination seems to be its success in reducing the burden of many vaccine preventable diseases in Europe. Indeed, as the incidence of the disease decreases, people's perception of the risk associated with these diseases may also decrease, affecting in turn the perception of the perceived value of vaccines. Furthermore, misconceptions about side effects of vaccines are leading to distrust and fear about their safety.

In this challenging and complex environment, there is a clear added value in involving all the stakeholders within the EU and in working with global partners to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of vaccination programs. In particular, next 28 of February at the EU Parliament we'll present our multi annual commitment on the topic, and also for this activity we strongly invite the Universal Patient Rights Association to join us and to play an active role in Cyprus.

Well, I hope both initiatives don't represent only a suggestion for a possible follow up of the project but concrete field of action.

For sure, they testify not only how difficult and challenging is the role of civic & patients associations dealing to advocate for patients' rights, but also how much it is important to strengthen alliances, partnership. This is a clear message also for the public and private bodies present in the Northern Cyprus, please continue to support the association active within the Turkish Cypriot health care provision system.

