



3A's CLOSING SESSION SPEECH

SECRETÁRIO DE ESTADO DA SAÚDE, DIOGO SERRAS LOPES

30th of April 2021

Good afternoon,

I.

I would like to address you on behalf of Portugal, the country that currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Although it was not possible for all of us to meet here in person (a sign of the times I'm afraid), I am sure that the work that has been done here will contribute to learn how to manage better and prevent future situations like this pandemic. A future where meetings like this are only held virtually by choice, and not as the only option.

II.

This past year highlighted the importance of Health, Medicines and Medical Devices in the day-to-day lives of European citizens.

These difficult months have shown us that health challenges aren't constrained by borders, creeds or flag colors. That is why we need greater knowledge, cooperation and solidarity.

It is now clear and assumed by the entire Society that we need to strengthen our collaboration in the Health area. Health needs to be a priority not only on paper or on



our daily speeches, but also in practice. Not only to give our citizens a better quality of life, but also to prepare Europe for future threats that are sure to arise.

III.

Allow me to thank you all for attending this “3A Conference”. It was both an honor and a privilege for Portugal to welcome you all during these two days to discuss the challenges that Europe faces regarding the Autonomy, Accessibility and Sustainability of Medicines and Medical Devices.

During these two days, this Conference was an inclusive platform, engaged in a wide reflection and debate, capable of bringing together diverse voices and informed opinions, about the challenges that the Health sector faces and its long-term future.

I dare to say that what we saw here was a “true European Health Union”, in what regards the information shared by the participants. What now needs to be done, as the Director-General of WHO said in the opening session, is to intervene in “specific areas where action is needed”.

And the fact that MEP Dolors Montserrat identified the “prevention of scarcity” of medicines and the “boosting of production” in the European Union as the areas in which the European Parliament is working only shows the harmony between the European institutions.

During these two days, we addressed the threat of scarcity and how different countries, agencies and hospitals faced that risk. We have set the stage for innovative initiatives in order to seek answers to rare diseases and unmet needs. We discussed how new technological tools can support us in providing better care for our citizens.



We tried to find new ways to make our laws and regulations more flexible without jeopardizing their safety and effectiveness.

We listened to different stakeholders about new solutions capable of guaranteeing the sustainability of our health systems and investment in health.

IV.

But of course, this is a debate that does not end here. When talking about health, availability, accessibility, and affordability are central to everything. As such, many more questions remain to be answered.

Now, as every economist, I do suffer from the both curse and blessing of always look at the opportunity cost in every decision.

We do need to improve strategic regulatory and scientific aspects in the area of medical devices, which will allow us to increase access in a safe and effective way throughout the European area.

And all of this without forgetting that we need to consider costs and prices, not only for Medicines, but also for medical devices.

All countries are facing very high expenditures with health technologies. Medicines that are used for chronic diseases, “niche-buster” technologies with high prices, orphan drugs... all of these are straining health systems’ budgets. And we do know that this current rise in expenditure is not sustainable in the long run.

So, we need to consider this in a very serious way. While never losing our focus - which is the health and the quality of life of our citizens – we must find answers to other questions: How can we better serve our society? Is there a greater good in treating one



person, that couldn't be treated any other way, or potentially saving many others? There are no easy answers, I'm afraid. As we're talking about a health system that is meant to be universal and to serve all, but at the same time is intended to treat as many people as possible in the best possible way.

Finally, more transparency – a lot more transparency – is needed in the negotiation of prices for medicines and medical devices. And this, we firmly believe, can come from further integration of our health systems and health agencies, giving the European Union the power of our 500 million citizens for the rise in efficiency and sustainability of our universal health care systems.

V.

It is now up to the governments of the Member States and the European Commission to fulfill the mission in the motto of the Presidency of the EU Council. "It is now the time to act". Thinking globally and acting globally makes us stronger. International cooperation and worldwide collaboration make us more agile.

To close, I would like to extend a very special thank you to Informed, and all those who allowed for this Conference to take place, for their effort, availability and commitment towards this initiative.

Thank you all!