



SPEAKING NOTES

WELCOME SESSION

Event: 3A's Conference – INFARMED

Topic: Portuguese Presidency priorities on access to medicines and medical devices

Date: Thursday, 29 April 2021, 08:45 (15 minutes)

INTRODUCTION

Dear WHO Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides, Dear Stella,

Dear Representatives from the Commission, the European Parliament and the EMA,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

INTERVENTION

- Good morning. It is my pleasure to address you today, as Portugal holds the rotative Presidency of the Council of the European Union.
- Allow me to welcome you to the "3 A's Conference". It is a honour for Portugal to welcome you all to this event in a moment in which Europe is facing crucial challenges relating to its strategic autonomy concerning the accessibility and sustainability of medicines and medical devices.
- We believe this Conference is an essential moment in the pursuance of the set of priorities defined by the Portuguese Presidency in the field of health. This is truly one of the flagship conferences under the Portuguese Presidency.



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- In that sense, we rely on your expertise and collective knowledge to contribute to the fruitful discussions held throughout this meeting, with view to delivering concrete proposals for the reinforcement of Europe's standing in this crucial domain.
- I am sure this Conference will serve as an inclusive platform for insightful debates, bringing together expert voices from different backgrounds on the challenges the health sector will be facing in the coming years.
- The past year has further underlined the importance of Health, specifically of medicines and medical devices, in the day-to-day lives of European citizens. These difficult months have proven that health threats know no borders. For that precise reason, their handling requires increased cooperation, expertise and solidarity.
- Today, it is a socially-accepted fact that we must increase our cooperation in this field at a European and Global level. Indeed, as we continue to prioritize health, we will steadily but surely ensure better standards of quality of life for our citizens.
- As the European Union continues to focus its efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in the strongest possible way, it is crucial not to let initiatives such as this one be underestimated, as they play an essential role in our collective ambition of Building a European Health Union.
- In fact, despite the significant accomplishments of the past decades in improving the European quality of life and investing in our health systems, this pandemic has made it abundantly clear that although we are on the right path, there is still much work to be done in order to mitigate evident social inequalities in the access to healthcare.



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- Therefore, I am certain this Conference will serve as an important contribute towards that goal. The topics under discussion, the expertise of our speakers and the interest and commitment of everyone who is joining us for these sessions serve as an encouraging signal of Europe's pledge to work together in building a better future.
 - Finally, allow me to express my gratitude to INFARMED and to all who have contributed to the organization of this Conference for their effort, availability and expertise.
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- Earlier this year, when the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union had the opportunity to present its priorities in the field of Health, the issue of equitable access to and availability of medicines and medical devices was placed at the forefront.
 - Through this policy choice, we recognized the need to tackle one of the most urgent challenges facing Europe: inequalities in the access to healthcare. We have elected to do so through a three pronged approach:
 - By reinforcing Europe's strategic autonomy in the manufacturing process of medicines and medical devices – and working to find concrete policy options to address this issue;
 - By assessing the state of our citizens' access to medicines, medical devices and overall treatment options; and
 - By looking at the actual sustainability of our health systems.



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- The past few months have made it clear that it is essential to promote a greater European strategic autonomy regarding ready access to medicines and medical devices, through the reinforcement of Europe's production and supply capacity.
- We may not allow Europe to become increasingly dependent on third countries to satisfy its basic access needs for medicines and medical devices. It is crucial that Member States work together to ensure that Europe resumes its position as a worldwide leader in access to healthcare – not a follower.
- The pandemic has, particularly, underlined the urgency of making sure European citizens have ready access to medicines and medical devices. In that light, broadening cost-effective and equitable access to healthcare, and in particular to innovative health technology, is a key tool in pursuing the ambitious project of creating a true European Health Union.
- Furthermore, it is essential that we engage in these goals whilst ensuring the long-term sustainability of our health systems, which continue to be exemplary models of access to healthcare.
- Moreover, sustainability concerns should not stand in the way of our efforts to improve our health systems by promoting transparency policies throughout the value chain, particularly relating to pricing, regional cooperation and effective efforts to share relevant information.
- The definition of the priorities addressed also resulted from the work developed by our German colleagues during the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union, coupled with the abundant wealth of information the pandemic crisis has revealed in the past year.
- Our collective challenge has been made clear: we must work together to build a stronger European Union and reinforce our citizen's trust in the European social



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model, by promoting a European Union rooted on the principles of solidarity, convergence and cohesion.

- We want a strong and robust Europe, able to act in a coordinated way when responding to future crises akin to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- That context served as our stepping stone in the organization of this Conference, in order to bring forth these crucial issues to the forefront of our response to collective challenges.
- Indeed, this Conference is the appropriate place for a structured debate to occur between all involved parties, through a collaborative approach, and deliver concrete solutions that may up the standards for quality of life of European citizens – which is the ultimate goal behind our common health policies in building a European Health Union.
- The Presidency's work and commitments in the field of health have also been closely linked with the steps recently taken by the European Commission, namely through the adoption of the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe in November of 2020. This document is of the utmost importance, as it integrates regulatory and scientific strategic aspects in the area of medical devices.
- The Portuguese Presidency has also succeeded in obtaining a mandate to negotiate the Health Technology Assessment regulation, which had been deadlocked for the past three years. The next step, negotiating with the European Parliament, is currently underway.
- It is our belief that, when at last approved, this regulation will carry significant advantages to patient care, whilst also bolstering European manufacturers in the field of health technology.



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- Furthermore, throughout the remaining months of the Portuguese Presidency, the expansion of the mandate of the European Medicines Agency will also be top of mind.
- We must not forget what the pandemic has made clear: that we must act together, and not apart, if we are to achieve the best results in the name and in service of European citizens.
- Together, we can contribute to building a fairer, more resilient, equitable and cohesive Europe, and thereby reinforce the trust of our citizens in our institutions, agencies and common guiding principles.
- I wish you all a very fruitful meeting; thank you very much for your time.