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[Issue # 13 – 03/04/08](#)

## Hearing of Commissioner Vassiliou at the European Parliament – Directive on Cross-Border Healthcare to be expected in June

In accordance with the requirements of the EU Treaty, European Commissioner responsible for Health **Mrs. Androula Vassiliou** has appeared in front of the European Parliament for a hearing on the 1<sup>st</sup> of this month. Stakeholders, such as FEPI and members of the public were allowed to observe the questioning by the MEP's, who have finally voted to confirm her nomination the 10<sup>th</sup> of April.

**Mrs. Vassiliou** begun her intervention by underlining that she was '*very honored to be nominated as the successor of **Dr. Kyprianou** and that 'before the end of the mandate of the current European Commission', she will do her utmost to 'complete all remaining files and to promote EU commitment with stakeholders'.*

The new Commissioner made it clear that she was '*fully conscious of the fact that the health portfolio touches upon and affects people's everyday life*' and that '*we need to work together to meet the high levels of public health and food safety that European citizens expect and demand*'. She made clear to the European Parliament that she was '*committed to ensuring a firm enforcement of EU law relating to health by all Member States*'.

After her introduction speech, **Mrs. Vassiliou** was asked to take questions from all political group active in the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee of the European Parliament and as it was expected, the proposal issue of the future Directive on 'safe, efficient, and high-quality cross-border health-care' was inevitably raised.

British **MEP John Bowis** (EPP-ED) was the first to bring up the issue, pointing out that: *'we (the MEP's) are all impatient to hear from you what will be the next evolution of this directive's proposal; otherwise decisions will continue to be made by the Court of Justice and not by us. We know that it has been blocked by the European Commission since December!'*

The Commissioner has admitted that a number of her colleagues *'are sceptical'*, but she took a firm stand in favour of the Directive: *'we need to make them understand that it is not about health services but about the rights of the patients'*. **Mrs. Vassiliou** then stated that she was **'already working on the proposal and [is] determined to submit it for adoption by the European Commission in June'**.

Socialist, **MEP Linda MacAvan** (UK) asked **Mrs. Vassiliou** whether it would be possible for *'the current draft be modified until June'* **Mrs. Vassiliou** explained then, that *'the intention is not to damage the existing national health systems, but to improve them. In the new proposal, there will be a 'safety clause' to allow individual Member States to take measures if the 'export of the patients' becomes excessive and damaging the national health systems'*.

*'It is estimated that only 1% of patients leave their country for health care abroad. That is not an amount that will put national health systems in danger,'* the Commissioner argued. In addition, *'the European Court of Justice decision clearly states that for non-hospital care, no prior authorisation is needed'*. As far as hospital care is concerned, *"only if there is evidence that the national systems are going to be over-burdened or will suffer financial loss"* can the country of origin can ask for prior authorisation'.

For further information on **Mrs. Vassiliou** hearing or the future Healthcare Directive Proposal, please contact our Secretariat.

## **Launch of the official website of Mrs. Androula Vassiliou and nomination of her cabinet**

Following the confirmation of her nomination, **Mrs. Androula Vassiliou** website as European Commissioner responsible for health was put on line. The site presents the priorities of **Mrs. Vassiliou** and contains a list of her immediate collaborators (cabinet). As it was expected most of the members of Dr. Kyprianou's team were maintained in their posts. Head of Cabinet **Mr. Philippe Brunet** is thus still active, as well as Deputy Head of Cabinet **Ms. Despina**

**Spanou. Ms. Paula Pinho**, who attended the CEPLIS' Health Working Group in June 2007 is also continuing to work in her position as Member of the Cabinet.

The website also contains speeches and videos, as long as the most recent news regarding European Commission's DG SANCO.

**Mrs. Vassiliou's** website can be consulted at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/vassiliou/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/vassiliou/index_en.htm)

**The European Commission launches a public consultation in relation to its plans for a proposal on patient safety later in 2008**

The European Commission launched on 25 March 2008 an eight week public consultation on patient safety. The results of this will help in the development of the Commission's proposal for on general patient safety issues planned for the end of 2008. That proposal will address the important issue of patient safety throughout the European Union (EU) and will include a detailed first pillar, addressing healthcare-associated infections (HCAI), on which separate public consultations have already been held.

The two primary objectives of the European Commission's general patient safety proposal are:

- i. to support Member States in their efforts to minimise harm to patients from adverse events in their health systems, through appropriate policies and actions to improve safety and, therefore, quality of care.
- ii. to improve EU citizens' confidence that they will receive sufficient and comprehensible information available on levels of safety and available redress in EU health systems, including healthcare providers in their own country and in other Member States.

Patient safety issues can affect all EU citizens. The European Commission would like to have the views of all those involved in this field from the patient and consumer to national competent authorities, from the health professional to the healthcare manager and anyone else who wishes to participate.

Should you want to take part in this public consultation, please register to this website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=patientsafety>