

*Dear organizers,
Dear participants to the Symposium,*

I am deeply sorry that I could not participate today in this quite timing debate on the future of health policy in the European Union, considering also the dire circumstances that we have been living for several months now due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.

The challenges we have before us are unprecedented. The EU, since the onset of the crisis, has had hard times in coordinating a united and coherent response, whereas Member States often reacted differently depending on their national urgencies and priorities. This has caused a harsh political debate on how the EU can be an added value in designing and supporting health policies across the EU, especially during public emergencies.

We have learned that EU action can be crucial in ensuring the supply of medicines where needed, supporting R&I in safe and quality vaccines, as well as coordinating a purchase plan on behalf of Member States. What is needed now is a well-functioning single space for health data sharing across different level of administrations, a renewed strategy on diseases prevention, in particular for cancer, a structured e-Health policy to reduce inequalities and more affordable and patient-centred medical services.

That is why we welcomed the proposal for a new stand-alone health programme, EU4Health, that Ms Von Der Leyen released last May, along with the new budget package and Next Generation EU. Despite the frankly incomprehensible cut operated by the European Council in July (from 9 billion to less more than 1 billion approx.), the European Parliament proved to be brave and ambitious enough during budget talks, managing to ensure fresh money to top-up strategic EU sectoral programmes. The largest share was indeed secured for EU4Health, which now is projected to have almost 5 billion. We will surely support this budget allocation during trilogues with the Council, which have been scheduled after the last Plenary voted for the start of the inter-institutional negotiations.

To conclude, I want to thank I-Com for its continuous work and attention to health policy, but mostly for its policy insights and studies that help understand the major issues at stake.

MEP Patrizia Toia
Vice-Chair ITRE Committee