

Address to the 2nd EU HCV Summit “Securing sustainable funding for Hepatitis C Virus elimination plans” by *George Papandreou, President of Socialist International and former prime minister of Greece.*

I am honored to address the EU HCV Policy Summits organized by the Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association, for a second time.

I understand that both hepatitis C virus infection and chronic hepatitis C are a public health hazard. Morbidity and mortality are significant in Europe and globally.

Yet new safe and effective treatments can cure chronic hepatitis C. This indeed is a remarkable achievement. It represents an historical opportunity, not only to cure those infected but also to eliminate this disease globally.

The World Health Organization has affirmed this possibility by adopting the Global Health Sector Strategy to eliminate HCV by 2030. So, we face both a challenge and a huge responsibility.

To succeed, we need both good diagnostic practices and delivery of treatment for those who are infected.

I am thrilled to hear that there has been great progress on both fronts, complemented by price reductions in treatment and affordable diagnostics.

Still, the total cost of surveillance, awareness campaigns, screening, prevention and treatment remains too costly for many around the world. Not surprisingly, the economical burden is especially high for the EU countries.

Investing for the improvement of health is however not only a morally correct thing to do but it yields social and economic benefits.

What is however a crucial fact this Summit has highlighted -a fact that policy and decision makers need to seriously consider- is that the cost of elimination is lower than the cost of treating the long-term consequences of HCV, such as chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis and liver cancer.

So, investment towards HCV elimination not only provides cure from suffering but is also the best value for money.

We know of course that the up front investment will be high.

Experts, patients and stakeholders need to campaign and inform the European Parliament, the EU Commission as well as national governments.

The message is that HCV elimination programs are highly cost-effective, cost-saving and life saving.

I had the opportunity in the previous Summit, to outline how European Financing Institutions could be induced to prepare financing tools and support national HCV elimination programs for the European countries. I am glad to see that a major part of the analytical work has been finalized and the conclusions are presented here during today's Summit. Some European countries, have important experience in creating social bonds and similar financing tools. Others may prefer to explore opportunities through cooperation with the European Financial Institutions such as the European Investments Bank.

So I would suggest that the next crucial step now, is for the EU Commission to prepare the legislative actions, to convincingly motivate the European Investment Bank and other European Financial Institutions to take this ambitious yet totally realistic project on board. At a time of euroscepticism, a time where the value of our Union is put into question both by internal political forces and external players, a project such as this one highlights the added value of a European Union. A Union with the political will and the capacity to change the lives for the better of so many of our citizens.

I can only conclude by congratulating you all, in this 2nd EU HCV Policy Summit on "Securing sustainable funding for Hepatitis C Virus elimination plans".

I offer my wishes, and all my support for the best of success

6th June 2018