

Tonio Borg

Member of the European Commission, responsible for Health

Commissioner Borg addresses a Conference on Health in the Mediterranean

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Tonio Borg, European Commissioner for Health, attends a Ministerial Conference organised by the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Rome, Italy, 28 October 2014

**COMMISSIONER TONIO BORG'S PARTICIPATION AT THE
"HEALTH IN THE MEDITERRANEAN" MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
MINISTRY OF HEALTH CONFERENCE CENTRE
ROME, 28 OCTOBER 2014**

WELCOME SPEECH

Minister Lorenzin,

Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since this Conference is all about co-operation in the Mediterranean let me start my address by speaking my native language Maltese, a semitic language with a strong Italian influence - a reflection of Malta`s mixed history at the centre of the Mediterranean:

"Merħba lill-Ministri kollha iżda l-aktar dawk tal-Mediterran. Din

Welcome to all Ministers but particularly the Mediterranean ones. This is

mhux Konferenza ta` aħna u huma: hija laqgħa ta`imseħbin, ta`

not a Conference of us and them: it is a meeting of partners, of

ħbieb, illi jaqsmu baħar wieħed. Kull ma jġri fuq naħa jolqot in-

friends sharing a common sea; whatever happens on one side affects the

naħa l-oħra. Fil-qasam tas-saħħa, aħna irridu nagħrfu illi ma

other. In matters relating to health we have to realize that there are

hemmx fruntieri, u għalhekk iridu ngħinu lil xulxin għall-ġid

no frontiers and therefore we have to assist each other for our

tagħna lkoll."

common good

Indirizzo a lei Signora Ministro. Sono lieto di essere qui a Roma perche` lei ha capito subito l'importanza di una Presidenza Europea e anche Mediterranea. La sua visione e` veramente lungimirante. L'Italia e` sempre stata in prima linea in materie Mediterranee. Un paese fondatore dell'Unione Europea, guidata da uomini e donne di visione, che non hanno mai abbandonato alla loro sorte le fortune dell` altre sponde e che ha sempre visto il Mediterraneo non come un mare che blocca ma un ponte che unisce. L` assistenza implica un grande sacrificio che il vostro paese fa nel salvare migliaia di persone che naufragano nel centro del Mediterraneo. Questo e` un esempio a noi tutti sulla significato vero della solidarieta` in Europa.

Let me also say that I am particularly pleased to see so many Ministers here from both sides of our Mediterranean sea.

This shows that our close historic and cultural bonds translate into a shared commitment to working together for better health in the Mediterranean.

The countries of the Mediterranean have co-operated, traded and held cultural, linguistic and economic exchanges for centuries. We have more in common than our borders with the Mediterranean sea!

In these times of globalisation, I believe Mediterranean co-operation on health, in particular when it comes to protecting our citizens against health threats, is needed more than ever.

Our agenda will focus in particular on global health threats & the International Health Regulations, antimicrobial resistance, lifestyles as well as health and migration.

Starting with the first issue – health threats – these threats do not stop at national or European Union borders.

As such, one country's health security is everybody's health security. This is something that we have learned with a number of recent epidemics, including avian flu, not to mention the Ebola crisis that we are facing at the moment.

In this context, the International Health Regulations – which we must all apply - constitute a major achievement; and a key driver in taking forward our fight against serious cross-border threats to health.

In the European Union, we have a Decision on serious cross-border health threats, in force since last year, which provides a solid framework to address preparedness, notification of alerts, surveillance, risk assessment, risk management and risk communication for all health threats.

The Decision also stipulates that EU Member States consult each other within the Health Security Committee to support the implementation of surveillance and response under the International Health Regulations.

It is also important that we work closely together to improve our collective preparedness to monitor and contain infectious diseases.

In this regard, I am persuaded that projects financed by the European Union, such as Episouthplus and MediPIET can make a difference.

Moving on, today we will also discuss Antimicrobial resistance, another major challenge that concerns us all.

The discovery of antibiotics in the 20th century was a milestone – leading to a revolution in the fight against previously fatal diseases.

Today, the emergence and spread of microbes resistant to medicines is jeopardizing our ability to treat people with infections – and putting people's lives at risk.

As part of its commitment to fighting Antimicrobial Resistance, the Commission launched in 2011 a 5 year Action Plan.

Today's event fully reflects the fact that AMR is a global problem which calls for a global response, encompassing solutions adapted to national, regional and local needs and practices.

Later this morning, we will also speak about lifestyles and their impact on Health.

Our countries face common challenges in this regard.

Unhealthy lifestyles – namely inadequate diet, lack of physical activity and alcohol abuse – affect people's quality of life and life expectancy, impact on health systems and budgets and on society as a whole.

This is why I believe we all need to boost our efforts to promote healthy living.

And this is particularly important now, when many countries on both sides of the Mediterranean sea are going through in-depth reforms of their health systems.

We need to promote adequate nutrition, encourage people to exercise, raise awareness on the harm caused by alcohol – as an investment in people's health and in the future of our citizens and of our health systems.

Finally, Migration also plays an important role in the life and economies of our countries.

Some of our countries face particular challenges related to coping with large unexpected inflows of migrants.

Let me stress that the EU is committed to addressing the health needs of migrants, whatever their legal status.

The EU is willing to work together with neighbouring countries to address the issue of migrants' health in the context of the overall framework of collaboration on migration.

To conclude,

Let me assure you that the European Commission is committed to support Mediterranean countries in their joint efforts to improve health.

Let's address them by working together within the various co-operation frameworks that bring us together – the European Neighbourhood policy, which seeks to support health system reforms; the Union for the Mediterranean, and our joint co-operation projects – to improve health for all.

The projects funded by the EU have been varied and numerous.

In Egypt we have funded the health sector policy support programme II which started in 2010. In Jordan we provided humanitarian assistance to meet the refugees health needs and sanitation in communities hosting Syrian refugees; in Lebanon the Instrument for Stability Programme will disburse 20 million euros to support public health services; in Libya the Libya Health Systems Strengthening Programme has aimed at reinforcing strategic planning, financing and management of health service delivery; in Morocco, the EU support programme to healthcare coverage runs into millions of euros; in Palestine policy makers have participated in EU funded training sessions and in Tunisia EU funds have been directed towards the setting up of the National Agency for the certification of health services.

Israel and the EU signed a co-operation agreement last March on drug addiction and health issues.

Ministers,

This is my last address as European Commissioner since my term comes to an end on the last day of this month; and I do not want to sound as if I am singing my swan song before I leave office.

But my vision is not of a Fortress Europe. We have had too many fortresses, battles and wars in the past. We need to build a future for future generations. This can be achieved if we move ahead, even if in small steps, but always ahead. And moving ahead in health is an ideal way of launching confidence building measures. Not in any paternalistic or condescending way but as equal partners. Health is part of foreign policy as much as security, and it is an excellent form of solidarity, dialogue and co-operation.

Let this Mediterranean conference be a milestone of our strengthened cooperation on health.

I am looking forward to our fruitful discussions today.

Thank you.