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Brussels, 13. 11. 2017
Ares (2017) 4459744

Dear Honourable Member,

Thank you and the co-signatories for your message of 12 September 2017 and the attached joint statement on the future engagement of the European Union in healthcare. I very much appreciate your commitment to continued European Union action and support for cooperation between European Union Member States on health.

I fully share your view that European Union added value action on health and cooperation between Member States to address common challenges contributes to the sustainable development of our Union. Our intention with the White Paper on the future of Europe is to encourage debate, including in this area, among stakeholders and citizens.

As you rightly point out, health systems across Europe face similar challenges. In the Commission's Annual Growth Survey for 2017 we highlighted that "to safeguard sustainable health systems and support their positive contribution to population health and economic prosperity, further policy action will be needed enabling the individual to stay healthy for longer, while making health systems more effective, accessible and resilient."

The Commission is promoting country-specific knowledge and knowledge across countries to inform policies at national and European level. The main instrument for this is the State of Health in the European Union cycle and its deliverables.

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The European Pillar of Social Rights also recognises very explicitly the right to "timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality" as one of its 20 principles.

The European Union can clearly help Member States address the challenge of increased calls on health services and more complex technological choices at a time of intense pressure on public finances. At the same time, its action in this respect is framed by a limited Treaty mandate stipulating that national health policy and the management of health services are the responsibility of Member States.

Within these limits, the Commission is currently preparing an initiative on strengthening European Union cooperation on Health Technology Assessment (HTA). HTA helps Member States to allocate national resources to effective health interventions.

As you say, there are several examples of European Union level initiatives with a clear added value such as, increasing cross border cooperation on rare diseases through the European Reference Networks, developing digital health tools across borders, addressing cross-border health threats and antimicrobial resistance collectively as part of the security agenda, supporting national vaccination efforts and promoting global health.

Let me reassure you of my conviction that the European Union can provide high-level added value support in the field of health and thank you for your support and engagement.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a long horizontal stroke with a short diagonal stroke crossing it near the left end.