

Brussels November 10th 2016

Dear Dr Andriukaitis,

On May 12, 2016 we sent Mrs Caroline Hager, (Directorate-General for Health and Food safety, Unit B3 Cross border healthcare, eHealth, Health workforce) a request, from FEMS for participation to the WG on European Health Workforce.

We had already participated in two Working Groups of the Joint Action for EU Health Workforce: Wp5 and WP6 and we thought to be qualified to be present in the Working Group.

Yesterday we got the answer: "The Commission's administrative rules have recently changed and we are not in the position to open the participation to new organisations at present.

Therefore we regret to inform you that we will not be able to give you a positive answer to your request."

FEMS is a European Federation of Doctors' Trade Unions and National Medical Association from a large number of EU member States. Therefore, it is formed by the most expert, experienced, cultured, skilled, active people, members of associations of EU member States in the field of healthworkforce. We are invited to take note that the EU Commission decided to adopt rules that exclude doctors' representatives from a working group that will orient the decisions of the Commission on the Health Workforce problems.

In a recent document, the Commission had recommended the Member States not to cut resources to healthcare in this difficult period of crisis, but a high number of Member States ignored the recommendation and made huge cuts to healthcare financing. The highest cuts were on the workforce.

It is obvious: the workforce represents the most consistent voice in the healthcare budget, therefore cutting the number of workers represents a very quick method for saving money. Unfortunately, the cut of health workforce means a dramatic lowering of the quality of care. Healthcare is handmade, men and women carry it on, from the lowest simplest manual activity to the use of the most sophisticated instruments. On the other extremity of the instrument, there is a living, often scared, human being. Reducing the workforce makes everything more difficult, less people making the simple actions, and less doctors, tired, stressed, unhappy, demotivated, burnout, using the sophisticated, high risk instruments. And we know, and international literature informs us, that tired, stressed, unhappy, demotivated, burnout workers are less attentive, make more mistakes, more people can see their disease worsening and even die. And patients are more and more scared.

Our members know it better than anybody else, because they, not only feel the burden on themselves in their daily professional activity, but they, also, must take care of the problems of their colleagues, who delegated them to follow the important, neverending story of their working conditions. FEMS collected, and still collects data concerning the working conditions of doctors who work in the public and private healthcare institutions, to crossmatch the different situations, elaborating documents, studying the different models of EU National Healthcare Services, to give our members the weapons to perform their actions in their national situation.

We know well, better than others, what's happening in EU healthcare, because we are every day on the spot, with our profession and our national institutional duty, and we exchange informations among us.

Unfortunately the EU Treaty leaves full autonomy to every single Member State in the healthcare organization and we see a too feeble Commission activity to improve the National Health Systems and to block evident mistakes that, in some Member States, the rulers do in the healthcare organization. We strongly believe in Europe, we often asked for a deeper initiative concerning the need for supranational rules, to overcome some evident inequalities.

Our members, I repeat, are the most expert, experienced, cultured, skilled, active people in healthcare, we represent many hundred thousands of doctors in Europe, but the Commission, decided that, in a working group for EU healthcare workers, FEMS must be excluded.

May I ask you on what experts of what categories the Commission counts to try to solve the problem of healthcare workers? With what specialists?

Currently, in the EU somebody counted up to hundred Euroskeptical Parties in 24 Member States. UK people already decided to quit EU, under the pressure of some politicians. Some of those Parties are followed by a high percentage of voters and are representing a great danger for the future of Europe. One of the leitmotifs of these Parties is that Europe is in the hands of beaurocrats who don't understand the real problems of people. I believe that this is an instrumental argument to justify their nationalism of return, but it works to convince people, of a feeble European culture.

Today, with the decision of excluding FEMS from the Working Group that will discuss about the working conditions of the health workforce, the Commission gave these anti-European politicians one more occasion to demonstrate their statement: the "Bruxelles bureaucrats" decided that the real experts cannot be involved in a working group of their concern.

Dear Dr. Andriukaitis, we met in Brussels at the beginning of your nomination, in occasion of a EPHA meeting on EU inequalities; you are a cardiac surgeon like me, you know personally how heavy is our work and how important are the working conditions in the quality of healthcare.

I appeal to your experience to ask you not to exclude the contribution of doctors' Trade Unions and National Medical Associations for improving the healthcare working conditions in Europe.

On behalf of FEMS, I also take the occasion to ask you to be received for a meeting, like we obtained with Mr Borg.

Yours sincerely,
Enrico Reginato

