



Briefing | EP ENVI - Exchange of views with Mr Janez Poklukar, Slovenian Minister of Health

Dods - Committee Summary

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Subject: Exchange of views with Mr Janez Poklukar, Slovenian Minister of Health

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Documents: [Agenda](#) (item 4) | [Presidency Programme](#)

On July 12, EP ENVI held an exchange of views with Janez Poklukar, Slovenian Minister of Health, to present the programme of the Slovenian Presidency in matters of health. The minister noted the key health priorities for the next six months would include the Three-Pack legislative texts on the European Health Union: the expansion of the roles of the EMA and ECDC, and new provisions on dealing with cross-border health. Working with all institutions and stakeholders towards getting a proposal on HERA on the table by 2022 would be another key priority. He also noted that the Presidency would oversee the evolution of the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP). He also took the time to praise the EU Digital Covid Certificate (EUDCC) system for its early successes.

Please read below for a summary of the meeting.

Pascal Canfin (RE, FR), Chair, opened the meeting by noting that the Health Union is a more urgent issue as every day goes by. There are three legislative proposals that will be negotiated during the Slovenian Presidency: EMA, ECDC, and cross-border health threats. He hoped to hear the minister's views on the work that needs to be done going forward, as well as the ongoing management of the COVID-19 crisis.

Janez Poklukar, Slovenian Minister of Health, opened his statement by welcoming the opportunity to present the priorities. He introduced himself as a doctor by profession with experience in hospital management. As director general of the largest hospital in Slovenia until February 2021, he noted that they were faced with shortages during the COVID-19 crisis. They set up a special ward, and though vaccines lacked at first, he welcomed the EU's efforts on procurement. This crisis has revealed the weaknesses of public health system, and we need to work together to overcome these issues.

They look forward to close collaboration with the EP in the coming months. This is the second time that Slovenia has held the Council Presidency. This is a responsible task that requires collaborations between all institutions. The framework of the Presidency was outlined in the 18-month programme, and he thanked the German and Portuguese Presidencies for their work.

The presidency programme focuses on many aspects, but the key will be to foster the resilience and recovery of the EU, as well as strategic autonomy. On health in particular, he noted that they need to make progress in two key areas: finding solutions to implement innovative health solutions for resilient systems. They will identify options for how member states can pool their resources to make this happen

and will be done in cooperation with the Commission and international organisations. The idea is to reduce inequities and improve efficiency, which will lead to better competitiveness on the world market.

He also noted that a lot of work needs to be done on medicines in general, especially on AMR, the repurposing of medicines, and the changes to the pharmaceutical legal framework. We need to build a European Health Union and that includes solutions on accessibility and availability of medicines. He noted that there will be much work to do on the legislative proposals regarding the EMA, ECDC, and cross-border health threats. He hoped that the proposal on HERA will be ambitious, and this will be given priority during the Slovenian Presidency. Meetings with health ministers will happen twice, once informally, he noted.

In the coming months, Slovenia will also be involved in the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, he added. Slovenia will also foster an environment in which we can learn from the key takeaways of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Peter Liese (EPP, DE) first asked about cooperation: how should the EU deal with the Delta Variant? Should we not be vaccinating more young people? On cancer, he noted that experts face obstacles when trying to perform cross-border research. Should we not enable this type of research by creating a new role within the Commission?

Jytte Guteland (S&D, SE) noted that we need to deepen our collaboration and stand together in defence of European values. She noted that her group has many expectations in this area, especially funding and facilities for the EMA and ECDC. What does the Slovenian presidency intend to do to make these agencies more resilient? On the pandemic, she stressed the preventative aspects: we need to tackle the origin of pandemics. HERA is another priority: we need to halt the spread of new variants, she insisted. We also need to be transparent on the implementation on this new mechanism. We need to do more on vaccination, especially amongst young people, she argued.

Veronique Trillet-Lenoir (RE, FR) welcomed the fact that setting up the Health Union is being taken seriously. She warned against the potential threat of cyber-attacks. She asked if Slovenia would take a leading role in fighting pandemics worldwide. On cancer, she asked about setting up a European virtual institute against cancer.

Tilly Metz (Greens/EFA, LU) asked about HERA: we should learn the lessons from the crisis and agreed that collaborating with the private sector is important, but some boundaries should be applied. We have launched ourselves, with the crisis, into many PPPs without setting clear objectives without setting clear guidelines on what the public side wants and expects. We need to make sure that HERA will be protected from pressure from any side: political or business. She praised the Presidency programme for prioritising non-profit-based medical production.

Franc Bogovic (EPP, SI) noted that the pandemic has highlighted the inequalities between health systems of member states. He asked the minister if the Health Union proposals would help alleviate this. He asked about the vaccination rate in the EU, especially among young people, and asked about certain national policies which only let vaccinated people enter.

Sara Cerdas (S&D, PT) asked how the minister would work with the member states to reach a consensus, especially in the context of competences. One of the main lessons learned was that society was not ready for a pandemic; will all policy areas be considered when trying to prepare ourselves for future crises?

Veronique Trillet-Lenoir (RE, FR) asked about mobility and especially the decision by Malta to close their borders to non-vaccinate people. This is a violation of the law, and we should send a message to member states not to copy such an idea.

Jutta Paulus (Greens/EFA, DE) asked about AMR: how does the Slovenian plan on addressing this issue?

Cyrus Engerer (S&D, MT) asked if increased collaboration on health will only happen in crisis situations, or more generally. How does the presidency plan on tackle vaccine hesitancy?

Janez Poklukar, Slovenian Minister of Health, first answered MEP Liese, and he agreed that a joint approach is the only way forward to help health systems. On the response to new variants, we need to be aware of the progress made at the EU level: He thanked the EP for passing the legislation on EU Digital Covid Certificates (EUDCC). On variants themselves, he noted that it is 50% more contagious, and therefore we must focus on vaccinating quickly and implementing other measures to ensure that we can fight the pandemic effectively.

On the EUDCCs, we need to ensure that entry to a member state occurs if a person is vaccinated, recovering, or has a negative PCR test. These are the criteria for the EUDCC and derogating from them should not be permitted. Member states should sequence all positive tests related to the Delta variant, he argued – that way we would know how many cases there are Europe-wide.

On cancer, they will organise several events, including on an innovative partnership to fight cancer. This will be an opportunity to showcase what progress has been made in the implementation of the EBCP. Cancer is an epidemic that we will need to face soon, he warned. He reminded that 12 million people have beaten cancer in Europe, but we can do more by working together to lift standards across the Union.

On strengthening the Health Union, he noted that the three-pack (EMA, ECDC, cross-border health threats) needs to be adopted ASAP. Likewise, for HERA. The legislative bases are progressing at satisfactory pace, he noted.

On vaccinations, globally speaking, the EU needs to take a leading role. The pandemic will only be beaten together, when everyone is safe. We can use all the knowledge we have in Europe to increase vaccination rates as much as possible, he argued. There are also bilateral treaties which we can leverage for donation, he noted.

On cybersecurity, he noted that the safety of data is of crucial importance. Progress is being made in this area. On HERA, he agreed that we need to reach a level of meaningful implementation ASAP. We need to institutionalise this initiative by early 2022, he added.

On medicine shortages, we need to work to find the best possible solution, including a crucial stockpile as well as strategic autonomy to ensure all citizens have access to the necessary medicines, even in times of crisis.

On AMR, he welcomed that the topic is high on everyone's agenda. A sensible approach here will help save lives where it really matters, he noted. There is a silent pandemic in this area, and this needs to be examined by the Presidency, as well as HERA once it becomes operational.

He once again emphasised the importance of coordination between member states.

Ljudmila Novak (EPP, SI) asked about antibiotics and their use in veterinary medicine: what is the Minister's position on this? Will we be able to use them in severe cases, or will they be banned?

Romana Jerkovic (S&D, HR) *[the quality of speaker's connection prevented transcription, and she was later cut off]*

Cesar Luena (S&D, ES) asked about ageing and how we adapt our health systems. He also asked about the overall vaccination strategy.

Janez Poklukar, Slovenian Minister of Health, noted that the use of antibiotics in veterinary medicine and medicinal feed was recently regulated by the Commission and will be reduced by 2022. This is to reduce the use of antimicrobials to strengthen our position against AMR. He acknowledged that ageing would have an impact on our health systems and society at large. We need to work on a balanced development of society: with a strategic approach to long-term care, we will already be well ahead. We need to be aware that we can only beat COVID-19 together if we want to go back to the way things were before the pandemic. At the moment, all vaccination centres in Slovenia have an open-door policy, which has

helped increase the vaccination rate in the country. People who were reluctant for various reasons were convinced to get their shots. They also deployed mobile vaccination units to reach rural populations. Citizens knowing that vaccines are safe and effective is the only way to convince them to get their shots. Vaccinating all citizens must be a priority for the EU, he concluded.

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