

Prof Danuta Hübner

“The EU’s solid health policy component must be embedded in a strong institutional and legal framework”

Working Document on Institutional Reforms in the Face of the COVID-19 Crisis and Other Potential Future Crises: a health Union and new emerging social needs, crisis preparedness.

**Meeting of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs
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This paper builds a holistic approach to a pivotal challenge the European Union has to face. The special Eurobarometer on the Future of Europe demonstrates what we all currently experience in our political life. Propensity of our citizens to express opinions, ask questions, reflect on the future and engage in debates has increased. It does not come as a surprise that 6 in 10 Europeans agree that Covid-19 crisis has made them reflect on the future of the EU.

When it comes to the future of Europe, comparable living standards (35%) and stronger solidarity among EU Member States (30%) are seen as the two most important expectations from Europe, followed by a common health policy (25%).

The health crisis triggered by COVID-19 has shown that to reap the full benefits for our citizens from the European integration in a globalised and interconnected world, the EU must have a strong health policy component, embedded in a strong institutional and legal framework. The health crisis revealed gaps in the institutional

preparedness and response tools and forced us to realise that we must put health much more at the core of European politics, and that a rapid implementation of a European Union for Health is more than essential.

The European Union should be in charge of managing great health projects, including bringing together the best minds for projects on medicine. It should also have an enhanced coordination competence to manage future pandemics, to make sure no Member State, no European citizen suffers from drug shortages. We should look thoughtfully at strengthening the role of the European Medicines Agency, lowering the European Union's dependence on third countries and give consideration to Europe's supply chain autonomy. There is a space for action to overcome the growing inequality of healthcare access across Member States and for setting common European standards. Furthermore, we should extend and strengthen the Joint Procurement Agreement to harness the European scale in the purchase of strategic medical products and medicines.

The pandemic tested European health capacity and needs. Healthcare should be given a higher priority within existing European policies. Investment is needed to ensure equal access to healthcare facilities across Europe.

But we have to look as well at existing institutional and legal framework, decision making procedures, existing unused potential of the current treaties. Above all, however, we should focus on the added value that solutions delivered at the European level can provide.

The Parliament has drawn attention on different occasions to the fact that the incomplete institutional setup of the Union, and here I am referring to the unanimity rule, can have detrimental consequences to the pace of taking decisions at EU level. I agree as well that it is important to make full use of existing passerelle clause.

There are many good ideas in your paper, some of them warrant more in-depth reflection. And I hope that the issues you touch upon will find sufficient space for reflection during the Conference on the Future of Europe.