

***Opening Speech of Mrs Androulla Agrotou  
Minister of Health of Cyprus  
«Hepatitis B and C in Mediterranean and Balkan Countries»  
5-7/12/2012, Nicosia, Cyprus***

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Dear Organizers, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure being here today to declare the opening of this well promising Conference in the crucial area of prevention and control of Hepatitis B and C at regional level.

Available statistical data indicates that approximately 2 billion people worldwide have been infected with hepatitis B and more than 350 million people live with a chronic form of the disease. Additionally, the World Health Organisation (WHA63.18) recognises Hepatitis B and C as a global health problem leading to chronic disease in hundreds of millions of people and consists one of the most common causes of liver cirrhosis and cancer.

Hepatitis B and C belong to the category of communicable diseases which do not recognise borders and turned to become major diseases affecting mankind today. Thus, further actions towards their prevention and control shall be taken.

This is also confirmed in the case of Cyprus, where statistical data for the period between 2006 and 2012 shows that 67% and 90% respectively of the cases of Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C were imported.

At this point, allow me to inform you on one of the Cyprus Presidency's priorities in the field of health which is related to cross-border health threats with focus on communicable diseases and is interrelated with this Summit Conference's aim.

The Ministry of Health, acknowledging the efforts of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council for adopting a Decision on Cross Border Threats to Health and having in mind that the increasing interconnectedness of the world creates unavoidable risks

such as the re-emergence of communicable diseases on a cross border basis, has included the issue of the Cross border Health threats with focus on communicable diseases among its main priorities.

In addition, the Ministry of Health recognizes that the geographical position of Cyprus, being located in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea with its coastlines defining the south eastern border of the European Union, mandates a role to promote and safeguard public health security in the region. For this reason, an expert level Conference on “Cross Border Health Threads in the EU and its neighbouring countries-focus on Communicable Diseases” was held in Nicosia, on July the 5<sup>th</sup> 2012, in the framework of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The participants of the conference were experts from EU Member States, neighbouring EU and non-EU countries and international organizations or institutions, which had the distinctive opportunity to share expertise and best practices in the area of prevention and effective control of communicable diseases on a cross border perspective and to highlight the regional dimension of these diseases.

Based on the deliberations of the Conference, the Presidency proceeded with the issue of Conference Conclusions and Recommendations which underlined among others, the following:

- The identified need to upgrade inter regional cross border collaboration and coordination to face communicable diseases, in the areas of information sharing, joint intervention, institutional links, mutual technical assistance and joint human research development and operational research.
- Promote active vaccination campaigns targeting vulnerable population groups and anti-vaccine groups, in order to master vaccine preventable diseases and achieve and maintain high immunization coverage.
- Strengthen Public Health Capacity through training, including further development of programmes in the field of epidemiology and microbiology, flexible enough to support and complement national initiatives.
- International Collaboration and Communication is necessary for disease control and outbreak response and this requires strong leadership and a global vision. Areas for collaboration between EU and WHO have been identified and more linked communication networks need to be developed.

- The impact of the Financial Crisis on Preparedness and Response to cross border public health threats is recognized. There is an identified negative effect on controlling and treating communicable disease. Further research is needed to study this relationship. National and European policies need to mitigate the impact of the financial crisis.

Dear participants,

I hope that with the information provided, I was able to highlight the intensive efforts of the Ministry of Health Cyprus to address the need for coordinated actions for the prevention and control of Communicable diseases, including Hepatitis B and C at regional level. It is clear that in the case of communicable diseases in general and Hepatitis B and C in particular, countries cannot act effectively if they act alone and, as for that, cooperation is indispensable.

Allow me to close my speech and declare the opening of today's Summit Conference by wishing you every success to your deliberations, from which I am sure that important outcomes will be delivered for the health security of the citizens both at European and regional level.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH CYPRUS  
NOVEMBER 2012