

The ["Parliament Magazine"](#) published on 28 April 2014 the position of the Bulgarian EPP MEP Andrey Kovatchev on the health inequalities problem

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**Andrey Kovatchev, MEP:**

**"Health inequality provoking 'patient migration'**

**Healthcare inequalities across the EU must be addressed at European Level to improve access to quality treatment for patients**

We often take life and health for granted, relying on recent tremendous medical progress but we realize how fragile health is when losing a beloved person whom we were not able to help although proper treatment exists.

Yes, it does exist ... but in another country, and there are patients in Europe who have no access to quality healthcare where they live!

Many patients don't receive timely diagnosis and proper therapy in their home countries. Insufficiently reformed healthcare systems, especially in the former communist countries, as well as crisis austerity measures exacerbate the problem further. In some EU Member States citizens' fundamental right of access to healthcare, as stipulated in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, is being violated - patients do not even have access to minimum standards of healthcare and prevention. Limited access to health care services reduces lifespan, and therefore the work force, and further burdens our social and pension funds.

Inequalities in healthcare services provoke migration of patients towards EU Member States where medical treatment is better, in some cases life-saving. The same holds true for healthcare professionals (doctors and nurses) who are leaving their countries for better jobs and this makes of the problem a common EU challenge. Therefore, it must to be addressed at European level, but the EU has not enough power!

If we are taking more care of animal welfare then of human health, why should we expect support from EU citizens for the European project? The problem should be tackled urgently and voices in favour of more commitment from the EU institutions need to be raised.

To outline possible first steps to improve the situation in June 2013 - together with the European Patients' Forum (EPF) and the Bulgarian National Patients' Organization (NPO) - I organized a conference in the European Parliament that gave a platform for discussion on health inequalities. Stakeholders - patients, doctors, nurses, pharmacy industry - discussed possible solutions. They agreed to establish a European Partnership on Equity of Access to Quality Healthcare that will serve as a platform combining the efforts and expertise of all stakeholders to identify new mechanisms for ensuring that patients have access to affordable and quality healthcare. The process of Partnership's creation that I strongly support is in its final stages. The EPF and NPO will be the co-founding members of the Access Partnership to ensure it is patient-led. The partnership will be established as a non-profit legal entity, in order to be able to receive funding. It will work as a network of partners that brings together the patients' movement, the medical community, the industry, policy-makers, and politicians to move forward on solutions and approaches to access that really work for patients and address the current barriers and inequities.

The good news is that the European Commission is reaching out its hand to stakeholders. In its answer to the [written question](#) that I tabled together with MEP colleagues at the beginning of this year, the Commission called on stakeholders to contribute to its efforts in creating a tool to measure access to healthcare.

I understand that alone the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Member States are not up to solving the problem. But I do consider our joint efforts able to make a difference and improve access to quality healthcare for patients in Europe".