

Bringing back hope to patients on waiting lists all over Europe: Statement by Vytenis Andriukaitis on the occasion of European Day for Organ Donation and Transplantation

On 9 September we celebrate the 18th European Day for Organ Donation and Transplantation. I am in Lithuania at an event marking the 30th anniversary of the first heart transplant in the country. It is an emotional moment for me because 30 years ago, as a young surgeon, I had the privilege to take part in that operation. Since then, the number of transplantations, of all types, has increased a lot in the EU and worldwide, only between 2010 and 2015 the increase was 14 per cent.

A large part of this is thanks to higher donation rates. Therefore we should honour the contribution of the countless everyday heroes in the EU who have helped extend and save hundreds of thousands of lives. Improvements are also due to surgical advances, better coordination between clinical teams, improved transport and safety standards for organs, and an increase in the cross-border exchange of organs.

The EU has also contributed. We have EU-wide legislation on quality and safety standards for organ transplantation. When it comes to cutting waiting list times, we have developed a European IT tool that enables doctors in one Member State to find suitable donors for their patients in another Member State. In just two years, almost 90 transplants have taken place, mainly for children, which would not have been possible without this. We will soon publish a report that will clearly illustrate that pooling resources and knowledge across the EU can significantly improve clinical outcomes. No country alone has the capacity to treat all rare and complex diseases. This is why earlier this year we launched a new initiative to improve the sharing of knowledge across Europe. The virtual European Reference Networks allow healthcare providers across Europe to share information on complex or rare diseases and conditions that require highly specialised treatment and a concentration of resources.

Unfortunately, nevertheless 16 patients die every day waiting for an organ in the EU; thousands of patients remain on transplant waiting lists. As a doctor, I know exactly how far we have come, medically speaking. As a European Commissioner I know the fundamental importance of coordination at a European level when we're talking about organ donation and transplantation. I believe that together with our Member States we can do more. Where there is a will there is a way.