

Speech by Commissioner Andriukaitis at the Plenary Session of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on the Prevention & Control of Non-Communicable Diseases

Ms President, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

Non-communicable diseases are a global health challenge, closely linked to poverty and inequalities. As the leading cause of mortality in the EU, they account for most of our healthcare expenses, costing EU economies EUR 115 billion, or 0.8% of GDP annually.

NCDs represent a major barrier to the socio-economic development of many low and middle-income countries. Hence, we need to address actions on the social determinants of health.

Since the last high-level meeting on NCDs in 2014, we have adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a specific target on NCDs.

We welcome the political declaration of this High-Level Meeting, as a concise and action oriented document, that calls for an accelerated response and renewed commitment. We would like to thank the co-facilitators Italy and Uruguay for their able leadership in the negotiations.

Notable progress has been made in fighting NCDs globally. Take, for example, the coming into force of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, the first legally binding instrument adopted under the WHO Framework convention. I am proud of the EU leadership in negotiating this significant achievement.

I would like to highlight four key elements in the fight against NCDs: promotion, prevention, protection and participation.

Health promotion is essential for all, but particularly for children. It helps to tackle health inequalities also addressing the broader determinants of health. The European Union supports initiatives that raise awareness about healthy lifestyles and promote mental health and well-being.

EU initiatives also aim at reducing the exposure of children and adolescents to marketing of unhealthy diets.

We have also taken important steps in the area of food reformulation, which will bring our diets closer to the recommended intake levels of fat, salt and

sugar.

Prevention is key; Prevention and control of NCDs require resilient, equitable and sustainable health systems with robust primary care systems. Prevention also requires a comprehensive approach towards fighting the major risk factors causing the rise of NCDs – such as malnutrition and physical inactivity. Digital technology can increase the efficiency, accessibility and strength of our health systems and we need to maximise this potential.

Protection is also crucial taking a “one-health-approach” and focusing on environmental determinants of health, such as air pollution and climate change.

Participation is a must – be it across sectors such as agriculture, environment, education, sport and research, with all our partners in civil society, academia and the private sector as well as between different groups of health professionals providing services from prevention to specialized care. Inclusion is essential if we are to make progress in creating healthy environments.

At European level, Member States learn from one another, and exchange and implement “best practices”. Our new IT tool collects best practices and makes them available to everyone.

The European Union is also working very closely with the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States and partners in other regions of the world on a health system-strengthening program; an envelope of close to EUR 30 million will be dedicated to fighting non-communicable diseases with the World Health Organisation.

I am proud that – just recently – the EU made a pledge to the newly created “Defeat NCDs Partnership”, which will improve access to essential medicines for NCDs in developing countries.

We are also here today to voice a warning. We need to do more and we need to do it quickly.

Let us grasp this opportunity, redouble our efforts and further invest in managing NCDs more effectively. This means investing in health promotion and disease prevention. Every cent invested will yield a two-fold return: fostering economic growth and development and at the same time delivering better health and well-being for population.

Thank you for your attention.