



**European Economic  
and Social Committee**  
Civil Society Organisations' Group

**AIM (Association Internationale de la Mutualité) Anniversary Event  
75 Years of Solidarity – Building a Healthier Tomorrow**

**Speech by Civil Society Organisations' Group President Séamus Boland**

*EESC, 12 June 2025*

Dear Mr Caubo, esteemed speakers, ladies and gentlemen,

- It is with great pleasure that I would like to welcome you to the European Economic and Social Committee for your **75-year anniversary event**;
- When I look at the list of high-level speakers who are lined-up, I would even go so far as to say it is an honour to host you!
- Of course, we have a long-standing relationship with the **International Association of Mutual Health Funds (AIM)**, including through my dear friend Alain Coheur;
- Alain has convincingly persuaded the Civil Society Organisations' Group to keep the topic of health high on our agenda;
- Most notably last year in **Liège**, when we organised an extremely successful event with the very modest title '**The State of Health in the EU**'!
  
- I understand today's event as a celebration of the **solidarity, shared values and actions of AIM** over the last 75 years;
- It is a celebration and a **recognition**, of the **pivotal role of civil society organisations (CSOs)** in ensuring more just and equal societies;
- All of which is at the very centre of my personal beliefs and of my life's work;
- In that context, I would like to make a few remarks on the topic of today's event, which is 'Building a Healthier Europe Tomorrow'.
  
- Everyone in this room has their own memories of the **Covid-19 pandemic**, some of which I am certain, are very painful;
- In contrast, at the macro-level, there were **four good things** that came out of that health crisis;
- The **first**, was **European cooperation** in terms of **research** and **distribution of the vaccines**;
- The **second**, was **European solidarity on joint EU debt**, specifically the **Next Generation EU**;

- The **third**, was that CSOs successfully lived-up to the immense challenge that the crisis presented them with;
  - There is no doubt that **CSOs played a pivotal role** during that crisis, providing key services and working closely with communities to shelter **vulnerable individuals** during those very difficult months;
  - There is a **fourth and final** positive development from the Covid-19 pandemic and that was that **health was catapulted to the very top of the Union's political, strategic and policy agenda.**
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- The EU speeded ahead towards the creation of the **EU4Health programme**;
  - And it launched the **European Health Union (EHU)**, which laid the foundations for an **EU vision** on health and healthcare systems;
  - Regrettably, the **geo-political developments** of the last three years have significantly waned those ambitions;
  - And although we all share the concerns for increasing the EU's security and defence capacities, I still maintain that **health should remain a key EU strategic priority.**
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- However, 'Building a Healthier Europe Tomorrow', which is the title of your conference, is also recognising that the health sector can only **properly function**, alongside **accessible, adequate and high-quality social services and public social policies**, which are staffed with sufficient numbers of **well-trained health professionals**;
  - Let me remind you that it is estimated that **by 2030**, there will be a **global shortage of 10 million healthcare workers!**
  - And without proper planning, financing, upskilling and reskilling of the health workforce, there is a very real risk of **increasing poverty and inequality levels** within our societies;
  - **Access to quality healthcare will be reduced**, starting with the most poor and vulnerable;
  - It is precisely this **sense of urgency** that we must continue communicate to the European Institutions and to our national governments.
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- 'Building a Healthier Europe Tomorrow', also implies addressing the **sustainability of health systems**;
  - And this comes back to the usual debate on how **health** should be viewed as a **social investment**, rather than as a pure cost;
  - **Within the EU every Euro invested in healthcare has an economic return of 14 Euros!**
  - However, finding the right balance between quality care and the most appropriate use of resources will always be challenging.
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- Finally, I am certain that your discussions will focus on the importance of **placing the patient and civil society organisations at the centre of the European health systems**;
  - Here I refer to the **four Ps**, whereby healthcare should be **predictable, preventive, personalised and participatory**;
  - Coming from the civil society sector, I am strongly in favour of giving **patients a degree of direct involvement and responsibility**;
  - The same must apply to CSOs, active in the health and care sectors;
  - Clearly, the take up and success of European health initiatives and programmes are dependent on **transparent, regular and structured dialogue with CSOs**;
  - Their ability to carry out this work is in turn dependent on obtaining **sustainable and predictable funding.**

- I will bring my comments to a close with a few words by the father of medicine, **Hippocrates**, who 2.500 years ago said that: "*Healing is a matter of time, but it sometimes is also a matter of opportunity*";
- Within the EU, we still have many opportunities with regard to health and solidarity – **we just have to seize them!**
- Thank you.