

Ms. Kathleen Van Brempt
Parlement européen
Bât. ALTIERO SPINELLI
15G146
60, rue Wiertz / Wiertzstraat 60
B-1047 Bruxelles/Brussel

16 December 2022.

Dear Ms. Van Brempt

We are non-governmental organisations committed to the right to health and to access to essential pharmaceutical products for people in Europe, as well as in the rest of the world.

We have **welcomed the creation of the Special Committee on COVID-19** and are fully convinced of the necessity to analyse how we, in Europe, managed the pandemic, to learn from our experiences, and to prepare responses and policies to combat the next variants or the next epidemics.

Preparedness to future challenges imposes on us the need to reflect on the way actions and decisions were taken in a context of emergency, fear and uncertainties. It also requires us to take the opportunity of the current, less tense context to scrutinise the measures and policies adopted, evaluate their effect and retrospectively, their usefulness, effectiveness, or even, counterproductive impact.

Many questions need to be raised and addressed regarding:

- the funding of medical R&D and the relations with the pharmaceutical companies (from the negotiations of agreements and contracts to the fiscal policies, notably regarding tax subsidies and other support for pharma companies, in action);
- the assessment of the reliability and performance of medical devices and in vitro diagnostic medical devices placed on the market while going through emergency use authorization measures or even those placed on the market without CE marking;
- the financial and social costs of the actions and policies undertaken;
- the use and control of public resources and the issues around transparency and accountability of public spending and pharmaceutical policies;
- the means necessary for public health systems and health professionals to have the capacity to face challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, having followed closely the work of the Committee and the auditions, we would like to express several concerns. Indeed, **a lot of essential questions have been left unanswered** by speakers, while **others could not even be expressed clearly** for lack of time. While we are aware of the difficulties of organising the work of this Committee and about the possibility that MEPs will have to bring back some of the matters through amendments, we believe the frame of the discussion will already be set by the rapporteur. Hence, the time for deep inquiry will soon be over and it will be impossible to obtain important answers unless these are already included in the report.

We are thus concerned that **political criticisms, essential to guarantee our capacity to face future challenges such as a deadly pandemic while protecting our democratic functioning, are overshadowed or underrepresented in the political arena**. However, we are witnessing in the debates legitimate matters being amalgamated with typical far right rhetoric. We are worried that a policy of the empty chair and a lack of involvement of MEPs from other political groups have a very negative impact, as:

1. it validates confusion between statements and delegitimises relevant criticisms. In the context of the Special committee on COVID-19, it overshadows mistakes and abuses and waives accountability obligations;
2. it feeds the narrative according to which EU supporters are unable to listen to valid questionings that could improve the EU functioning, and have a paternalistic approach towards EU citizens.

The next European elections are in two years. Yet, we don't know when the next variant or pandemic will strike. We must address key social, economic and democratic matters that have been brought to light in the past two years and a half.

We would like to have the opportunity to exchange further on these matters with you, hear your understanding and get a better sense of your own positioning on the situation.

Best regards,

