



French Presidency of the European Union: What's at stake in the healthcare sector?

Key messages

Making healthcare a real priority on the European agenda. The Covid crisis has reshuffled the cards and put health back at the heart of national, European and international priorities, calling for a collective, concerted response based on solidarity. European solidarity is an essential step on the road to global health governance.

Give impetus to the construction of a Europe of health, through stronger delegation of health issues to the European Commission, thus strengthening the prerogatives of the Health Commission, but also and above all through greater political coordination between EU member states, to move towards a common European health culture, which has yet to be created.

Understanding health issues on a global and continental scale. Health issues must be considered in their global dimension, or at least on the scale of the entire continent, and not on the institutional scale of the "Europe of 27".

Building a united European voice in global health governance bodies. All too often, the European Commission positions itself as a 28th State on the international stage, instead of representing the common visions and positions of its member states.

France has taken over the **Presidency of the Council of the European Union (PFUE)** for six months, from January 1, 2022, with the slogan: "Relance, puissance, appartenance".

What are the tasks associated with the Presidency of the European Union?

In a trio with the Czech Republic and then Sweden, who will succeed it, France will not only have to monitor the European legislative agenda, facilitating discussions (decisions are taken unanimously), but also organize and chair all meetings of the Council of the European Union, bringing together ministers by field of activity. One of the particularities of this PFUE is its overlap with the French electoral calendar (and the associated obligation to remain in reserve, from mid-March). The main events are therefore particularly concentrated in the first quarter of 2022.

What are the European Union's current competences in the field of health?

As a matter of principle, public health falls within the domestic remit of the Member States. Indeed, it is not an exclusive competence of the European Union (Article 4 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union \(TFEU\)](#)). On the other hand, Article 168 of the Treaty provides a basis for "supporting" action in the following areas: public health, health information/education, prevention of diseases and threats to physical and mental health, combating major health scourges, monitoring, warning of and combating serious cross-border threats to health, and reducing drug-related health damage. These issues are monitored by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG Health).

What are the major health projects for the PFUE?

Despite the appointment in 2019 of a woman doctor ([Ursula von der Leyen](#)) at its head, health is not explicitly mentioned in the European Commission's six [priorities](#) for 2019-2024. The lessons of the COVID crisis, and the EU's involvement in the response to the pandemic, are changing this.

For us, two projects stand out:

- The creation of a genuine Europe of healthcare, based on solidarity and coordination
- The emergence of a consolidated "European voice" in the global health debate and governance, notably through the adoption of a genuine European global health strategy.

The Europe of health

In May 2020, France and Germany jointly called for "Europe to be given very concrete competences in the field of healthcare". The principle of a European Health Union was clearly endorsed by the European Parliament on July 10. What exactly are we talking about?

The French presidency of the European Union will be central in that it will give impetus to ideas for **defining the practical details of this Europe of health**:

1- What **common minimum standards** are needed to ensure that all European healthcare systems are prepared for tomorrow's health crises? It is essential, for example, to ensure data interoperability and harmonize case registration methods, so that statistics are immediately comparable. Europe must show the way to what tomorrow's effective and supportive global governance can be.

2- What kind of "**European response mechanism**" is needed to rapidly coordinate actions and implement/share prevention plans? This PFUE will be an opportunity to draw lessons from the European response to the Covid-19 crisis. This will obviously involve highlighting the positive actions of the European response (standardization of the health pass, setting up patient transfers between European countries, etc.), but also the need for an honest assessment of what didn't work in the response to Covid-19 (such as competition over access to masks, for example). Finalizing the concrete operating procedures of the future European Health Emergency Response and Preparedness Authority (HERA) is an essential point, and will be one of the major challenges of the PFUE.

3- How can we strengthen **scientific cooperation** at European level? The map of research players is changing in Europe, as illustrated by the evolution, in France, of the Agence nationale de recherches sur le sida et les hépatites ANRS, which, by becoming ANRS-MIE, has broadened its historical mandate to include emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases (notably emerging respiratory infections, including Covid-19, viral hemorrhagic fevers and arboviruses). There needs to be a stronger European agenda for public health research and scientific cooperation, with a reinforced ECDC (*European Center for disease prevention and control*), capable of supporting

national institutions in drawing up prevention and response plans for future epidemics, as part of a win-win investment in research.

4- How can we develop **European development and production capacities for healthcare products**, ensure affordable and rapid access to vaccines and treatments as soon as they become available, and organize a common storage system for medicines and medical equipment, to meet European needs, of course, but also in the context of global public goods? The objective of public health must take precedence over commercial and industrial interests in the European pharmaceutical strategy.

5- How can we put the principle of a "one size fits all" approach into practice?

The aim is to create "health in all areas" (agriculture, transport, trade, etc.) and, above all, to lay the foundations for a European "**One health**" approach, establishing a continuum between human health, animal health and the environment? It is important, for example, to create "one health" exchange forums / to strengthen links between health/environment-climate/animal health specialists at European level.

6- Beyond the international health crises that are currently the focus of attention, the **health issues at stake at European level** are already numerous and important: monitoring toxic impacts, tobacco control regulations, European directives on food marketing, controlling access to medicines, human resources in health, reducing the impact of climate change, etc. Tomorrow's Europe will have to go further on these issues. Tomorrow's Europe of health will need to go further on these issues.



Map of European countries, January 2022 (source: Toute l'Europe). NB: Of the 56 European countries, 27 are members of the European Union.

Europe, a global health player

Beyond the Europe of Healthcare, and in the face of rising populism, it is essential for Europe to get involved in the governance of global healthcare, and not only to set up joint international projects (like the Team Europe Initiative, TEI), but also to speak with one voice, beyond the sum of the positions of its various member states.

It's not just a question of solidarity. As global health issues call for global responses, the health of Europeans also depends to a large extent on decisions taken at world level. For example, when it comes to pharmaceuticals, the challenge is not just one of European sovereignty (revising legislation, relocating production to Europe, defining common principles for setting prices, etc.), but also of taking strong positions at global level, for example on the transparency of costs and public subsidies for research and development of new drugs, or on the issue of patents.

The European Commission has demonstrated its willingness to play a leadership role by organizing the donors' conference to facilitate the worldwide dissemination of the diagnosis, treatment and vaccine (ACT-A) in May 2020.

Europe must become the primary forum for consultation between European countries, in order to move progressively and as far as possible towards common European visions and positions that are clearer and more influential on the international stage.

European countries would benefit from better joint preparation and even more systematic coordination of their positions on the boards of global health organizations in which they participate, for example (Table).

The PFUE must set itself three objectives to strengthen the place of the European Commission in the governance of global health:

Build a real European global health strategy, well beyond existing policy documents on the EU's role in global health, by reinvigorating the working groups set up in 2019 during the Finnish Presidency, with a clear roadmap towards establishing a strategy.

Launch a genuine European dynamic around three initiatives set up in 2021 in France and Germany: the WHO Hub on health monitoring in Berlin, the WHO Academy in Lyon and the Prezode initiative (collaborative platform led by France and Germany on the risks of emerging zoonoses and pandemics).

Develop a privileged partnership between Europe and Africa in the field of health, at the European Union/African Union summit. The agreement in principle should be translated into concrete projects, backed by financial commitments. A partnership between the European CDC and *the African CDC* would be a great opportunity.

Table - The European Commission in some global health governance forums

Organization	How to participate	Level of financing / specific features
WHO	Observer position at annual WHO Board meetings, World Health Assembly and Regional Committee for Europe meetings	The EU is WHO's third-largest donor, contributing a total of USD 373 million in 2020-2021. Cooperation framework established in 2001: exchange of information, coordination of actions carried out in non-European countries, with priorities: modernization of healthcare information systems, health inequalities, chronic diseases, innovation, health safety and financing.
Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria	Representation on the Board of Directors (in a delegation that also includes Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain) and on 15 CCMs worldwide.	A contributor since the creation of the Global Fund, the European Union is its 6 th largest donor, contributing around 180 million euros a year. Together with its member states, the Commission accounts for almost half of the Global Fund's total funding.
Gavi, Vaccine Alliance	Representation on the Board of Directors, in a delegation that also includes Germany, Luxembourg, France and Ireland	Between 2003 and 2019, the European Commission contributed 210 million euros. In 2016, its pledges rose sharply (200 million euros for the period 2016-2020). On June 4, 2020, the European Union announced a pledge of a further 300 million euros for the period 2021-2025, notably in response to the Covid-19 epidemic.
Universal Health Coverage partnership	Representation on the Steering Committee and participation in two working groups	Commitment of US\$135 million, which will support activities between 2019 and 2022 .

Dates clés – Santé et PFUE

JANVIER 2022

- 18 ● Conférence ministérielle santé (distance) - Résilience des systèmes de santé au service de la coopération à l'échelle européenne
- 27 ● Conférence ministérielle santé (distance) - Prévention de la perte d'autonomie par une meilleure coopération sur le phénomène des chutes

FEVRIER 2022

- 2 ● Conférence ministérielle santé (distance) - Citoyenneté, éthique et données de santé
- 8 ● Conférence One Sustainable Health Forum – événement parallèle labellisé PFUE
- 9/10 ● Réunion ministérielle informelle santé (Grenoble) - Ministres en charge de la santé (EPSCO)
- 10/11 ● Conférence ministérielle conjointe (Lyon) - Ministres des affaires étrangères et de la santé
- 17/18 ● Sommet – UE/UA (Bruxelles)
- 22 ● Sommet – UE/Indopacifique
- 28 ● Conférence ministérielle santé (Paris) - Parcours de soins et de recherche : pour une politique européenne des maladies rares

MARS 2022

- 3 ● Conférence économie, finances, relance (Paris) - Pour une Europe de la santé indépendante, compétitive et innovante
- 7 ● Conférence ministérielle santé (Paris) – Conférence « Une seule santé » dédiée à l'antibiorésistance
- 7/8 ● Conférence ministérielle travail (Paris) - Agir contre les cancers professionnels : pour une meilleure effectivité de la réglementation
- 14/15 ● Conférence ministérielle santé (distance) – Santé mentale des jeunes vulnérables
- 22 ● Séminaire agriculture et alimentation (Paris) - Plateformes d'épidémiologie
- 29 ● Conseil de l'Union européenne (Bruxelles) - Emploi, politique sociale, santé et consommateurs (santé)

AVRIL 2022

- 6/7 ● Réunion d'experts et fonctionnaires par l'ANSES (Maisons-Alfort) - Forum consultatif de l'autorité européenne de sécurité des aliments (EFSA)
- 13 ● Réunion d'experts et fonctionnaires santé (Paris) - Directeurs généraux de la santé

MAI 2022

- 4/6 ● Réunion d'experts et fonctionnaires par l'ANSES (Saint-Malo) - Chefs d'agence du médicament (HMA 2)
- 5 ● Réunion informelle d'experts et fonctionnaires santé (distance) - Groupe de travail UE et Santé mondiale
- 11/12 ● Conférence transition écologique (Paris) - Produits chimiques : mieux protéger la santé et l'environnement

JUIN 2022

- 1/2 ● Réunion d'experts et fonctionnaires santé (Paris) - Représentants des Etats membres du numérique en santé (e-Health network)
- 17 ● Conseil de l'Union européenne – (Luxembourg) - Emploi, politique sociale, santé et consommateurs (santé)