OPEN LETTER*

to European political leaders and health authorities

1.
One of the most significant achievements in international social and health policies was the recognition that all public policies need to take into account their expected consequences on individual and community wellbeing:
The Maastricht European Treaty adopted in 1992 stated that “health protection requirements shall form a constituent part of the Community’s other policies.”
The “social clause” of the Lisbon European Treaty (2007) requires that “in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health”.
The European Commission’s White Paper Together for Health: A Strategic Approach for the EU 2008-2013(2007), establishes as one of its basic principles that of “health in all policies”.
In WHO’s European Health Conference (2008), all its member states adopted the Tallinn Charter where is stated that “Ministries of Health should promote inclusion of health consideration in all policies...”

Formally adopted European policy principles require that all public policies take into account their health impact and that alternative options, minimizing negative health effects, are explored and seriously considered.

2.
Since 2008 many European countries have been experiencing a financial, economic and social crisis of growing intensity and far reaching social and health consequences.
The current crisis is the result a complex set of factors:
• The crisis was initiated in international financial markets.
• It expanded because of well identified system weaknesses of the Euro architecture.
• It became more threatening due to lack of anticipation and late response to its effects.
• It produced more serious consequences on the most vulnerable countries, as a consequence of both their immediate and structural shortcomings.
• A large sector of these countries communities has not contributed to this crisis or benefited from its precursors in any way, but it is suffering the full burden of its consequences.

3.
Decision of critical importance for the economy and for social protection systems of a number of countries have been taken, particularly over the last two year by the EC, the ECB, the IMF and national governments.

There is no indication that in such decision making processes due consideration was given to possible alternatives taking into account objective assessments of their health impact, as clearly required by the principles reviewed above.
Such an oversight is not acceptable.

* This open letter is prepared by the Network: Health and Crisis of the 4 countries: Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain (and discussed during a Special Session in the 8th Panhellenic Conference of Management, Economics and Health Policy, December 13th-15th 2012).
4. Social and economic crises of the magnitude now experienced in many European countries have well known health implications:
   - Loss of self-esteem, depression and suicide;
   - Increased susceptibility for communicable diseases;
   - Enhancement of risk taking behavior both in terms of addictions and in relation to risk factors of chronic conditions;
   - Increased obstacles to proper health service utilization;
   - Depressed working conditions for health professionals.
   - Public services are been deprived from the funding necessary to perform adequately while community health need are increasing.
   - This is now happening: extensive and deep human suffering – an increased number of situations that defy our ethics and basic notions of human dignity.
   - Deteriorating health systems – as well as the outmigration of the most qualified among the young, long lasting unemployment and depressed fertility rates –will very likely have long term consequences, affecting future generations.

5. One of the most noticeable consequences of not anticipating the expected health impact of many of the financial decisions taken is the lack of appropriate monitoring systems for these ill effects of the socioeconomic crises and of a effective timely response, at international, national and local levels, to these adverse effects. This is most unfortunate.

6. The signatories of this open letter call upon the international and national political and health authorities to:
   - **Uphold** the principles that have committed themselves to, in advocating health protection and promotion within European and national governance;
   - **Ensure** that awareness of the health impact of the financial and economic decisions been adopted in the recent past results in a rapid review of such decisions, in order to urgently prevent further deterioration of health and health services in our communities;
   - **Act** immediately to minimize the health effects of the crisis already observed;
   - **Mobilize** and orient towards the common good the extraordinary potential of intelligence, knowledge and innovation of today’s societies, rather than undercutting health system’s ability to evolve, transform itself, better perform, become more citizen-centered and respond to current and future challenges.

**Signatures** (plus name and title)
from **Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain (selected from the academic and medical communities)**

- Portuguese signatories: 8
- Irish signatories: 6
- Greek signatories: 10
- Spanish signatories: 7

- Dr. José Aranda da Silva - pharmacist, 1st President of the Portuguese Institute of Pharmacies and Medicines. (Portugal)
Professor Joe Barry, Chair of Population Health Medicine, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Trinity College Dublin (Ireland)

Dr. Maria de Belém Roseira – Member of Parliament, Ex-Minister of Health (Portugal)

Prof. Adalberto Campos Fernandes – physician, Director of the Cascais Hospital. (Portugal)

Mrs Olymbia Chaldaioú – Bitrou, President, OEKK “Agaliazo”, National Association Against Cancer. (Greece)

Dr. Charalampos Economou, Assistant Professor of Health Policy, Dept. of Sociology, Panteion University. (Greece)

Prof. Ana Escova – hospital manager, President of the Portuguese Association of Hospitals. (Portugal)

Prof. Dr. José-Manuel Freire-Campo: Head of the Department of International Health at the National School of Public Health in Madrid. (Spain)

Professor Cecily Kelleher, Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health and Head of the School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Population Science, University College Dublin. (Ireland)

Professor John Kyriopoulos, Dean, National School of Public Health, Professor of Health Economics. (Greece)

Professor Christos Lionis, Professor of General Practice and Primary Health Care, Faculty of Medicine, University of Crete. (Greece)

Dr. Nikolas Maroudias, President of Hospital Medical Directors (Greece)

Professor Hannah McGee, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (Ireland)

Dr Paul McKeown, President of the Irish Medical organisation, Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology and Public Health in the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland and Consultant Physician in Public Health at the Health Protection Surveillance Centre in Dublin (Ireland)

Dr. Bodossakis-Prodromos R. Merkouris, President, Greek Association of General Practitioners: ELEGEIA (Greece)

Dr. Paulo Mendo – physician, Ex-Minister of Health. (Portugal)

Prof. Dr. Alfonso Moreno- González: Clinical Pharmacologist and President of the Spanish Council of Post-graduate Health Specialization. (Spain)

Professor Charles Normand, Edward Kennedy Chair of Health Policy and Management, Centre for Health Policy and Management, Trinity College Dublin (Ireland)

Prof. Vicente Ortún- Rubio: Health Economist and Dean of the Faculty of Economics of the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. (Spain)

Dr. George Patoulis, President, Athens Medical Association (Greece)

Professor Ivan Perry, Professor of Public Health and Head of the Department of Epidemiology & Public Health, University College Cork (Ireland)

Prof. Dr. José-Ramón Repullo-Labrador: Head of the Department of Health Planning and Economics at the National School of Public Health in Madrid (Spain)

Dr. Juan- José Rodríguez-Sendín: General Practitioner and President of the Spanish General Council of Medical Colleges. (Spain)

Prof. Dr. Joan Rodés- Teixidor: President IDIBAPS of the Clinic Hospital of Barcelona. (Spain)

Prof. Constantino Sakellarides – physician, Prof. Emeritus Health Policy and Management. (Portugal)

Prof. Dr. José-Maria Segovia-de-Arana: Emeritus Professor and Member of the Royal Academy of Medicine. (Spain)

Dr. Andreas Seretis, President of Central Health Council. (Greece)
• Prof. José Manuel Silva – Presidente of the Portuguese Medical Association. (Portugal)
• Professor Aris Sissouras, Prof. Emeritus, Operational Research (Health Policy and Management), University of Patras. (Greece)
• Prof. Manuel Sobrinho Simões – physician, Director of the Institute for Biomedical Research (IPATIMUT). (Portugal)
• Dr. Michael Vlastarakos, President, Hellenic Medical Association (Greece)