EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Event Report
WIL EU Breakfast Debate
Digital Health

On the **30th of January**, WIL Europe organised an **EU Debate** on **Digital Health** at the European Parliament in Brussels. The event was hosted by **MEP Lieve Wierinck** (ALDE Group) and featured a high-level panel of speakers, including **Belgian Minister of Health Maggie de Block**.

In light of the European Commission's recent adoption of its "**Communication on Digital Transformation of Health and Care in the Digital Single Market**", and Belgians innovative strides to build a "**Digital Belgium**" and "**Digital Health Valley**", this event provided the opportunity for different perspectives centered around digital transformation within the health sector, to come together. Both possible opportunities and challenges around digital health, were shared and deliberated. Talks relating to the link between health policies and improved patient, and societal outcomes, were just one of the many fascinating discussions that took place.

The panel discussion, moderated by **Laura Batchelor**, Director of Health and Life Sciences Practice at **FIPRA International**, featured a high-level panel of **speakers**, representing various organizations:

- **Dr Ann Aerts**, Head of the Novartis Foundation
- **Elena Bonfiglioli**, Managing Director Health and Life Sciences, EMEA, **Microsoft** and WIL Board Member
- **Marco Marsella**, Head of the eHealth, Well-Being and Ageing Unit, European Commission
- **Bart Vermeulen**, Deputy Head of Office of Belgian Minister Maggie De Block

Picture Gallery

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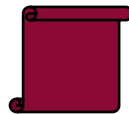
OUR BREAKFAST DEBATE AT A GLANCE

Picture (from left to right): MEP Lieve Wierinck, Thaima Samman, Minister Maggie de Block, Laura Batchelor, Ann Aerts and Elena Bonfiglioli.

EU PARLIAMENT BRUSSELS

- **1 NETWORKING SESSION**
- **1 PANEL DEBATE**
- **2 KEYNOTE SPEECHES**

6 HIGH LEVEL SPEAKERS

30+ PARTICIPANTS

18+ NATIONALITIES

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Elena Bonfiglioli (left), Managing Director Health and Life Sciences EMEA at Microsoft, Event Chair and WIL Board Member, sharing on the importance to address the topic of Digital Health

Thaima Samman, a Partner of SAMMAN Law & Corporate Affairs and WIL President, welcomed- on behalf of the *European Network for Women In Leadership-* the participants of our EU Breakfast Debate. She reminded the audience that WIL Europe serves as a platform, not only to meet and exchange, but also as a way to **discuss crucial issues for the future of Europe,** as such, Digital Health.

"**83% of EU citizens believe that sharing health data could be beneficial to improve treatment, diagnosis and prevention of diseases.**"

Elena Bonfiglioli, Managing Director Health and Life Sciences EMEA at Microsoft, Event Chair and WIL Board Member, also highlighted the importance of addressing this issue.

"**The world will be a shortage of 13 million health-care workers by 2035!**"

She reminded that such shortage, if not addressed now, will have serious implications for the health of billions of people across all regions of the world. Hereby Elena underlined that, in such a context, technology can act as a fundamental change by **empowering both the health-care workers and the patients.**

Thaima and Elena highlighted that digital health exhibits **political importance**, both at the national and European levels. We were therefore pleased to have had, **MEP Lieve Wierinck**, the host of the event, and **Belgian Minister of Health, Maggie de Block**, among the keynote speakers.

Lieve Wierinck, Member of the European Parliament (ALDE Group)

Technology and inventions exist to support humanity, to make our lives easier, better and healthier.

In searching the cure of tomorrow, the answer is right in front of us: it is in the manifold stories of patients and their families that are shared and retweeted every minute. Their stories and experiences, wishes, fears and desires are what matters most. We just have to learn how to listen!

During her keynote speech, MEP Lieve Wierinck underlined the fact that taking our healthcare system into the digital age holds enormous potential for patients who can benefit from improved diagnosis, treatments and rehabilitation. However, we were reminded that in order to make the best of this digital transformation, it is be crucial to **place individuals at the center of healthcare**. In other words, data-centered health should be a **patient-centered health**.

Maggie de Block, Belgian Minister of Health and Social Affairs

What we can and must do in the government is chart the course of digital transformation in healthcare, for the sake of our patients. It's up to us to support, facilitate and urge the development of digital solutions. And it's up to us to ensure that the quality and safety of our healthcare remain safeguarded.

If we can get people to experience how technology can bring them further in caring for their patients, then keeping them on board will become much easier.

Following MEP Wierinck, Minister de Block reminded the audience that **information technology is already the backbone of the Belgian healthcare system,** as it is bound with every imaginable aspect of healthcare. This is why her Ministry has sought to make digital health policies and the use of big data a priority, not as an end it itself but with the objective of improving healthcare for the patient. In 2015, the Belgian Ministry of Health presented the "Action Plan 2.0" to include a new chapter on mobile health and make health apps an official part of Belgium's national healthcare system. **"Action Plan 3.0"** will follow and run from 2019 until the end of 2021, with us focus on **continuity and operational excellence** as well as a number of new accents, such as exploring the possibilities of telemedicine.

Click here to read Minister de Block's full speech.

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PANEL SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

The keynote speeches were followed by a high-level panel debate moderated by **Laura Batchelor**, Director of Health and Life Sciences Practice at FIPRA International and WIL Member.

Marco Marsella, Head of the eHealth, Well-Being and Ageing Unit, European Commission

We need to make sure that all citizens have access to data in a secured way: to empower citizens through digital data for better outcomes and wellbeing, and to improve workflows, prevention, diseases diagnosis and care.

Data protection and cybersecurity are key to manage trust in this digital revolution.

Marco Marsella presented the package put forward by the European Commission, published on April 2018, on **the role of data in digital transformation of healthcare** (more information [here](#)), which includes two key initiatives:

- [Communication on enabling the digital transformation of health and care in the Digital Single Market; empowering citizens and building a healthier society](#);
- [Artificial Intelligence Action Plan](#).

He placed specific focus on the **three priorities of the European Commission in terms of digital health**: ensure citizens' secure access to their health data (also across borders), personalize medicine through data analysis, and empower citizens through digital tools to obtain a person-centered care.

Learn more about the EU Commission's Digital Health infographics [here.](#)

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Dr Ann Aerts, Head of the Novartis Foundation

Digital is not an option, it is a must to achieve universal health coverage; it should become an integral part of every health system as essential as hospital beds are.

Non-communicable diseases like heart and lung disease, cancers and diabetes have become one of the most pressing health issues of our time – responsible for more than 41 million death every year. Evidence has shown very clearly that digital technology can make a real difference in addressing this problem and can provide better and faster healthcare, which is:

- *More empowering and accessible for patients*
- *More efficient for providers*
- *More cost-effective for health systems*

Doctor Ann Aerts brought a perspective from the medical field and underlined **the role of the Novartis Foundation in the use of digital health through programmatic interventions on the ground to transform the way healthcare is delivered in low- and middle-income countries**. Ann highlighted that digital does not just lead to better access to care but also to better quality of care in the community. She showcased the Community-based Hypertension Improvement Program (ComHIP) in Ghana, which brings care and blood pressure screening points closer to the community where people live work and shop (e.g. barbour shops). A simple digital system ensures complete coordination for those referred for further tests. An SMS reminder system was also used to empower patients to self-manage their hypertension. Integrating digital into healthcare systems is crucial, as many more people die from the insufficient quality of care rather than from the lack of access to care.

Please find some examples of the work of the Novartis Foundation below:

- [Community-based Hypertension Improvement Program (ComHIP) in Ghana](#)
- [Expanding health access in Ghana via telemedicine](#)
- [Accelerating leprosy elimination with innovative artificial intelligence](#)

European Network for Women in Leadership

Elena Bonfiglioli, Managing Director Health and Life Sciences, EMEA, Microsoft

Privacy is a human right, and this is not about healthcare, this is about privacy of the individuals fears, of all our data.

People want to move forward, and we need to allow ourselves to deal with the complexity and uncertainty, being sure that companies are committed to preserve privacy. From the perspective of leading the health service in EMEA at Microsoft, I couldn't do it without companies that uphold these values.

During the panel debate, Elena Bonfiglioli insisted again on the importance of trust, stating that **people will adopt and use only the technologies they trust**, especially when it concerns one's own healthcare and genomics data. This is one of the reasons why **Microsoft took GDPR as an opportunity to improve its standards** and make them applicable not only in Europe, but worldwide. Microsoft went further than just implementing this regulation, it identified **6 ethical principles to guide the development and use of artificial intelligence:** fairness, inclusiveness, reliability and safety, transparency, privacy and security, and accountability (see here).

One of the top priorities for Microsoft is therefore to ensure **privacy, security and innovation** are given equal consideration. Consequently, to ensure an optimal balance between set policies on privacy, and the continuance of innovation, **clear guidelines** must be identified and implemented.

Learn more about **Microsoft's Privacy and Data Security** here and about its approach to deliver better care more securely here.

Bart Vermeulen, Deputy Head of Office of Belgian Minister Maggie De Block

We should evolve in a direction that we don't have to cure the patient, but we have to keep him or her healthy.

As an authority we have all the data, and we have all the technological opportunities, and it's up to us to use it to keep the population safe.

Bart Vermeulen underlined the importance of the European Union to serve as a **discussion platform across Europe** in which the best practices can be shared. In addition, he specified the possibility of creating **a joint and common framework,** as evolution is going fast, and with the many questions AI in healthcare is posing (e.g. about computing power, data management and data analysis…) for healthcare authorities that are still unanswered.

 According to Bart, there is also a need to foster **international collaboration and action.** At some point, countries need to go beyond the initial plan and start moving forward, although they may not progress at the same pace, the EU can serve as a fundamental foundation upon which they can grow.

The role of the EU was also highlighted by the moderator Laura Batchelor in her conclusions.

Laura Batchelor, Director of Health and Life Sciences Practice at FIPRA International

It is clear how important it is to take learnings of best practice across the EU as well as from the developing world, in order to best realize a digital transformation in health. It will be incumbent on the new European Commission and Parliament to work with member states in order to identify how to rapidly deliver on the promise of digitalization and realize better patient and societal outcomes for citizens in Europe.

Thank you again to the **speakers** and **participants**, to **MEP Lieve Wierinck** for hosting the event, and to **FIPRA** and **Microsoft** for sponsoring it!

TO BE CONTINUED …

Due to the high interest in our event, WIL Europe will follow up on this crucial topic in the framework of its upcoming initiatives. Do not hesitate to share your ideas and recommendations for a future debate, so that different perspectives and findings can be bought to the foreground. With this, we aim to help build a stronger Digital Health in Europe!

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