

## Foreword

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I am happy to introduce this particular edition of *Pharmaceuticals Policy and Law*, focussed on rare diseases, and specifically on rare plasma-related disorders. Rare diseases, including all rare plasma disorders, are addressed in several European Union public health policies. As the European Commissioner for Health, these are issues that I feel deserve particular attention at European level. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight European developments and actions in this field during the last decade.

The Commission has been very active in the field of rare diseases. From 1999 to 2003, the Community action programme on rare diseases contributed to ensuring a high level of health protection in relation to rare diseases. More recently, rare diseases were identified as one of the priorities in the EU Public Health Programme (2003–2007) and will continue to be a priority for action in the new Health Programme (2008–2013). Furthermore, during the past two decades, the successive European Community Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development have contributed significantly to advancing knowledge on rare diseases through collaborative and coordinated research projects throughout Europe.

A specific example of collaboration at EU level is the European Hæmophilia Safety Surveillance (EUHASS) Project, funded in 2007, by the EU Public Health Programme. The project aims to establish a pharmacovigilance program to monitor the safety of treatments for people with hæmophilia. In addition, it will develop and maintain a database of all the hæmophilia centres in Europe and establish a Rapid Alert System for immediate notification in case of unexpected or serious adverse events.

On 11 November 2008, the European Commission adopted a Communication and a proposal for a Council Recommendation on rare diseases, setting out an overall Community strategy to support Member States in diagnosing, treating, and caring for the 36 million EU citizens with rare diseases. European cooperation will help to bring together the scarce resources for rare diseases that are fragmented across the EU. I believe European action will help patients and professionals to collaborate across Member States in order to share and coordinate expertise and information. This is an important initiative in the Europe for Patients Campaign that I launched in September 2008. The campaign aims to put patients at the centre of EU health policy by better informing citizens and patients on what Europe can do for them.

I hope that this edition will further increase visibility and raise awareness of rare diseases and specifically rare plasma-related disorders, an objective shared by me and my colleagues at the Commission.

I would like to thank the editors for the opportunity to highlight the Commission's support of rare diseases and I hope you find this edition both informative and enlightening.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Vassiliou', with a horizontal line underneath.

*Androulla Vassiliou*