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To whom it may concern

Brussels, 13 June 2018

Concern: EFN support to Slovak Nurses

Dear President,
Dear Prime Minister,

In all categories of health care, human resources policy in the field of health care has been underestimated and neglected in the long term. Nurses are no exception to that. Nursing shortage in Slovakia has been ignored despite the fact that the national policy and decision makers have been drawn attention to these trends for long, with concrete good practice examples.

Today, the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) has been informed by the Slovak Chamber of Nurses and Midwives (SKSAPA) that the Slovak Government changed the law and renamed the healthcare assistants to "practical nurse". This, without asking the nurses' views, and without changing the healthcare assistants' curricula. This goes totally against EU law, and in particular the Art 31 of [Directive 2013/55/EU](#). This non-compliance with the EU Directive will have serious legal consequences, and will bring infringement procedures to Slovakia!

Please remind that healthcare assistants cannot be seen as practical or any other category of nurses. A healthcare assistant is a professional in the field of nursing care, with an education of 2.170 hours of theoretical and practical training, while a nurse has at least 4.600 hours of theoretical and clinical training, as defined in the Directive 2013/55/EU, which makes that nurses across the EU are educated at a higher level so that they can perform tasks efficiently and with high standards of patient safety and quality of care. To protect patient safety and increase the quality of care, EU Member States are investing in nursing as a profession, by implementing article 31 of the Directive, and its [eight competences](#), into the nursing curriculum.

With this law change, the Slovakian government is putting a whole healthcare system at danger and compromising the patient safety, as well as the quality of care. Lack of nurses means lower accessibility of health care and the change of the name of 'healthcare assistants' to "practical nurses" threatens the quality of healthcare services.

Gambling with terminology instead of solving the main problems - low wages and bad working conditions, is not a solution! Changing terminology only creates the illusion that the decision makers are bringing a conceptual solution to the core problems for the profession

and the healthcare system. But, the lack of nurses in Slovakia is a reality, and this will not bring better healthcare conditions for patients, nor better working conditions for the nurses!

The responsibilities you are putting on the healthcare assistants, as carrying out of activities within the scope of basic nursing care autonomously and on the basis of attending physicians' indication, such as satisfying of patients' biological needs; monitoring and recording of patients' vital functions; collection of biological samples (urine, stool, sputum), just to name a few, represent a major interference with direct nursing care, and is seriously compromising the safety and quality of the healthcare delivered to EU citizens.

There is clear evidence the Slovakian government is taking the wrong decisions. Please create health policies that are evidence-based, and do not put patients at risk. It is crucial to invest in the nursing workforce. And the excuse of economic savings in the health sector are unacceptable, threatening the quality of healthcare services and putting patients at risk!

Therefore, the EFN urges the Slovakian policy- & decision-makers to take this issue seriously and start taking steps and implement measures to keep patient safety and quality of care high on their agenda. Nurses are the largest occupational group in the health sector, providing frontline care, 24 hours/7 days in a roll, 365 days a year. Therefore, when redesigning health and social care ecosystems at local, national & EU levels, it is critical to foster nurses' views and solutions to strengthen integrated care and workforce development.

Yours sincerely,



Paul De Raeve
EFN General Secretary

The European Federation of Nurses' Associations (EFN) represents over 36 National Nurses' Associations and its work has an effect on the daily work of 6 million nurses throughout the European Union and Europe. The EFN is the independent voice of the nursing profession and its mission is to strengthen the status and practice of the profession of nursing for the benefit of the health of the citizens and the interests of nurses in the EU & Europe.