



## Open letter to the European Institutions and the US Mission to the European Union regarding the PRISM Program

Brussels, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2013

Dear President Barroso,  
Dear President Van Rompuy,  
Dear President Schulz,  
Dear Ambassador Wood,

The Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) represents national medical associations across Europe. We are committed to contributing the medical profession's point of view to EU and European policy-making through pro-active cooperation on a wide range of health and healthcare related issues.

We would like to share with you our deepest concerns about the allegations by which the United States' authorities would have been accessing and storing data of European Citizens during almost a decade.

It is believed that some telecommunication companies enabled the US National Security Agency (NSA) to access their clients' information, though it is still unclear what type of data was accessed and how important the scope of the surveillance program was. We are worried that individual persons' health data might as well have been accessed by US State authorities.

The medical profession is obliged to professional secrecy. Confidentiality has been an integral part of medical deontological tradition since the Hippocratic Oath: trust is the very basis of the therapeutic relation and therefore of the quality of medicine and access to healthcare. Many European states further endorse physicians' duty to secrecy legally, some through penal codes, in order to ensure confidentiality of patients' health and personal information. The CPME reminds that the good conduct of medicine is based on the premise that patients' confidentiality shall not be breached. Hence no third party – be it an individual or an institution - should breach the trust relationship established between a physician and his patient.

Furthermore, many health applications have been developed in the past years by major IT companies; this is the case for instance for the Google Health and Microsoft HealthVault applications. These applications have been used by patients who trustfully entered their personal health information in the systems. We therefore are concerned that - likewise other services such as emails



or phone conversations - personal data contained on health applications' servers were transferred to US Authorities.

With this letter,

- We ask US Ambassador Robert Wood whether any personal health data of European Citizens have been transferred to the US authorities;
- We ask the European Commission, the Member States and the Parliament, what measures they foresee to effectively protect patients' rights against unlawful access to their personal data.

We feel compelled to request these clarifications since it is our duty to address policy makers when patients' right to confidentiality and therefore the quality of and access to healthcare are at stake.

Sincerely,

Dr Katrín Fjeldsted  
CPME President

Birgit Beger  
CPME Secretary General