



European Parliament votes for strategic approach to cancer control and creation of EU cancer task force

MEPs adopted on Thursday 10th April 2008 a “**Resolution on combating cancer in the enlarged European Union**”. This is the third Resolution on major diseases, following on from the Cardiovascular and HIV/AIDS Resolutions. Credit must go to all members of **MEPs Against Cancer (MAC)**, to whom citizens and cancer patients are indebted for their efforts in bringing the Resolution about. At the first MAC meeting in March 2006, the interest group agreed upon and signed the **7 point MAC Statement** which forms the basis for MAC’s work to support EU citizens in their fight against cancer. Issues covered include the need to urgently develop and improve national plans, to make high quality and up to date prevention, treatment and care attainable for all and to set up a cancer task force. This MAC Statement is the foundation of the Resolution.

Also key was the “*Written Declaration on the need for a comprehensive strategy to control cancer*”, which was adopted in September 2007 with 435 signatories and helped to propel political momentum forward.

One central demand by the European Parliament made is for the Commission to set up an EU Cancer Task Force, composed of Members from the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament. This body would meet on a regular basis, to collect and exchange best practice for prevention, screening and treatment and to provide leadership for improved cancer control in Europe.

Member States are called upon to implement statutory cancer registration with European standardised terminology. This would generate comparable data and would provide the means for a population-based evaluation of prevention, screening, treatment and survival rates in different Member States. Prevention campaigns are another focus. The Commission and the Member States are asked to support and implement comprehensive tobacco control policies and to implement the Council recommendation on cancer screening.

Further demands include optimal treatment of patients by multi-disciplinary oncology teams, psycho-social care, and palliative care guidelines, European guidelines for patients’ rights charters and the recognition of the specialty of medical oncology. The Commission is called upon to allocate funds within the Seventh Framework Programme in order to encourage more research and innovation.

Adamos Adamou MEP and MAC co-chair insisted on the importance for optimal treatment of patients by multi-disciplinary oncology teams. He emphasized that “*the recognition of medical oncology as a specialty across the EU is important for best care of patients*”. He also made a strong case for EU action in cancer research. “*Many individual Member States are currently performing valuable studies in the cancer field but we lack better coordination in Europe. Cancer is a very complex set of over 200 different diseases. The market economy fails to provide*

adequately for research in all cancers. This is a key area where Europe can add value supporting academic and translational research. We can use funds from the Seventh Framework Programme to encourage research and innovation in the areas of primary prevention, screening and early detection, and new anti-cancer medicines and treatments, particularly in the realm of rare and difficult to treat cancers which may be considered unprofitable by industry. Moreover, we can revise the political framework to stimulate further research”.

This EP Resolution comes at a time when the Slovenian EU Presidency, who has made cancer their health priority, is deliberating with Member States about a Council Conclusions on “reducing the Burden of Cancer”. The Resolution and the Council Conclusions will make a crucial contribution in providing the EU with the necessary strategic direction which MEPs expect will be taken up by the French and later Presidencies. The Parliament Resolution will now be forwarded to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of Member States.

Newly appointed **Health Commissioner Androula Vassiliou** gave her support to improved cancer control in her speech to MEPs during plenary. The cancer burden, she said, had enormous health, social and economic costs and was a particular concern for her. It was *“something which is so serious for the whole of the European Union... that we cannot be complacent and it will always be among our priorities.”* She announced that the Commission would next year *“present a Communication on a cancer action plan for the European Community which will focus on a number of important aspects of cancer control, such as prevention, early detection, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care.”* These positive words were strongly welcomed by MEPs. Also encouraging was the announcement that the forthcoming Communication on Rare Diseases would include rare cancers.

Georgs Andrejevs MEP, one of the principle authors of the Resolution, examined the outlook for future European action in the cancer field. *“We have much to celebrate but the momentum must not stop here. Future Presidencies have a responsibility to use the Slovenian Presidency Conclusions to continue the excellent work that the Slovenians have begun. The coming six months offer France an opportunity to adopt a leadership role in cancer control in Europe. France already has a comprehensive and integrated cancer plan in place which could serve as an excellent example of best practice of what a truly patient-centred plan should cover. Moreover, the French cancer plan recognises that there is a European dimension to fighting cancer. Therefore, I would like to strongly encourage the upcoming French Presidency to follow up on established initiatives and to keep cancer high on its agenda. An overall cancer strategy, be it European or national, would help conquer the fragmentation and inequalities that haunt the cancer field.”*

The three MAC co-chairs who have led the **MEPs against Cancer** initiative from a small to a sizeable 67 member-strong all-party interest group, voiced their satisfaction with progress made. One of the central components of a cancer strategy is the proposed EU Cancer Task Force, a body for which **Alojz Peterle MEP** and co-chair of MAC, regularly acts as advocate. *“The Cancer Task Force is a central pillar of the EU strategy to combat cancer across the Union. Many MEPs have been repeating the call for years; we are delighted that the new Health Commissioner Mrs Vassiliou has agreed to examine it at the next Health Council. I had the opportunity to put forward the European Parliament’s position on the need for a cancer task force, when I was invited to the informal health ministerial meeting. We very much hope that my own country, Slovenia, will get agreement for this in the Council. National cancer plans such as the French, draw their strength from an inter-ministerial cancer force, we need the equivalent at European level, if we are going to co-ordinate best-practice and exchange proposals. Let us come together and finally put this plan into action.”*

MAC co-chair, **Liz Lynne MEP**, a member of the Parliament’s Employment Committee, drew upon her expertise in disability rights in considering discrimination against cancer patients. *“We need to make sure that those diagnosed with cancer are not discriminated against in the workplace. That should be covered by the Employment Directive 2000 on combating discrimination in the workplace, but many Member States do not class chronic illness and cancer*

as a disability. That is why we need a definition of disability at EU level that could include people with cancer. This Resolution is an enormously important step in the battle against cancer and supporting our citizens in their struggle to return to leading a normal life. Member State governments are ultimately responsible for health policy, but we can and must do much more at EU level, setting up mechanisms to ensure that best practice is shared more effectively between Member States.”

EDITOR’S NOTES

About MAC - MEPs Against Cancer

MEPs against Cancer is an all-party informal group of over sixty-seven MEPs committed to promoting action on cancer as an EU priority and harnessing European health policy to that end. For more information please visit the MAC website: <http://www.mepsagaincancer.org>

EP Cancer Resolution

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2008-0121&language=EN&ring=B6-2008-0132>

To join MAC

Please contact the MAC Secretariat provided by the European Cancer Patient Coalition hildrun.sundseth@ecpc-online.org

Press Releases

<http://www.epp-ed.eu/press/showPR.asp?PRControlDocTypeID=1&PRControlID=6971&PRContentID=12211&PRContentLg=en>

<http://www.epp-ed.eu/press/showPR.asp?PRControlDocTypeID=1&PRControlID=6969&PRContentID=12209&PRContentLg=en>

<http://www.socialistgroup.eu/gpes/newsdetail.do?id=79186&lq=en>

http://www.lizlynne.org.uk/news/000988/join_forces_to_fight_cancer_meps_urge.html

http://www.peterle.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=820&Itemid=1

<http://www.andrejevs.eu/?t=a&id=49>

<http://www.friedabrepoels.be/>

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/health/commission-asked-draft-cancer-action-plan/article-171759>

About the European Cancer Patient Coalition

ECPC was founded in 2003 with the aim of giving all cancer patients a voice in shaping the European Union’s policies that impact on cancer care. ECPC’s objectives are to:

- Promote the fundamental rights of European cancer patients
- Increase cancer patients’ representation and influence at the highest level of decision-making Europe-wide
- Help patients obtain timely access to appropriate and accurate information, prevention advice, medical diagnosis, treatment and care
- Promote the advancement of cancer research
- Empower patients to become true partners in the healthcare system

Cancer in Europe: Key facts and figures

- There are more than 2,2 million new cases and more than 1,1 cancer deaths in the EU 25 each year
- Every day, over 6000 Europeans are diagnosed with cancer and more than 3000 die from their disease
- In women breast cancer is the most common form of cancer, amounting to nearly 31% of all incidence cases
- In men prostate cancer is the most common form of cancer, amounting to 24% of all incidence cases
- Colon or colorectal cancer is the second cancer in women and third in men,
- Breast, prostate, colon and lung cancers count for more than half of the entire cancer population of the European Union in both sexes
- Most of the other cancers are fortunately seen in smaller numbers and affecting not more than 5/10,000 people in the EU
- The number of Europeans with cancer will increase dramatically by 2015 due to the ageing population

Figures based on estimates of the cancer incidence and mortality in Europe in 2006 published in the Annals of Oncology by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

<http://www.iarc.fr/>