

## ***Patients are leading the fight against Cancer***

Brussels, 10 April 2008

Cancer patients took their fight against cancer to Brussels on the **7th and 8th April** when the **European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC)**, an umbrella organisation for all cancer patient groups across Europe, held its Summit at the Committee of the Regions.

Under the patronage of the **Slovenian Presidency**, ECPC members rallied together with their friends in arms: **MEPs against Cancer (MAC)**, health policy makers and the health and oncology community in order to form a partnership for change. The focus was on the Slovenian Presidency, which has chosen to make cancer a priority. The Presidency conference conclusions were under intense discussion: how the burden of cancer could be reduced and how we could better tackle the inequalities that currently exist and improve the survival rates across Europe and its regions.

The newly appointed **Health Commissioner, Ms Androula Vassiliou**, opened the Summit with the first speech of her tenure. She addressed the need to tackle the *“burden of cancer...one of the greatest burdens of ill-health throughout the Community.”* This required *“joining forces”* and working *“together in partnership.”* She rekindled hope in cancer patients by revealing that next year, the European Commission would *“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.”*

**Commissioner for Research, Dr Janez Potočnik**, who had participated in the United Against Cancer meeting organised by the ECPC in Slovenia, November 2006 informed delegates that the creation of a coherent approach to cancer research across Europe was a major facet in the fight against cancer. He described cancer as a problem that *“deserves the best response that we can provide.”* He revealed that the Commission expected to devote directly to cancer research *“450 million euros during the period 2007 to 2013”* under the 7th Framework Programme for Research. Cancer research opportunities were also available under the new European Research Council and the Innovative Medicines Initiative. He concluded that the key to transforming the struggle against cancer was to have *“greater coherence and coordination between the EU Members States.”*

**Dr. Marija Seljak, Director General of Public Health, representing the Slovenian Minister of Health** revealed the motivations behind the decision to make cancer a priority during their Presidency. *“There are such large inequalities existing in cancer care that we wished to grasp this opportunity to do something about it. Our goal during this Presidency is to highlight the gaps in cancer care and encourage everyone to take the necessary steps towards making improvements. Patients have an important voice informing all of us how best to do that. In the realm of prevention, we need to engage the help and of our citizens in order to combat cancer.”*

With 1 in 3 Europeans diagnosed with cancer, the disease is a major killer of over one million EU citizens a year. Tackling cancer from prevention to treatment, improving care and encouraging further research are causes worthy of collectively flexing European muscle. Under the motto *“Nothing About Us, Without Us”*, ECPC came into being four years ago to give **all** cancer patient groups from the major to the rarer cancers a voice in Europe and to address this challenge. It was born of the need to fill the political vacuum following the end of the **Europe Against Cancer** programme and aims to muster the political will to combat cancer across the EU.

*“Cancer touches all of us in one way or another, and many Europeans look for leadership from the European Union in their fight cancer. They can now count on the European Parliament, whose members, in close touch with their citizens, have adopted a Resolution for combating cancer in the enlarged European Union with an overwhelming majority. ECPC thanks MEPs for this Resolution. It simply makes good sense that if we all work together across national borders and share our expertise, knowledge and creativity, we are better equipped to fight this disease that in so many different ways shatters peoples’ lives,”* said **Hildrun Sundseth, ECPC head of EU policy**.

The conference carried a major message that to make a difference, policy makers, politicians, doctors and patients must unite as partners for change.

**President of the Committee of the Regions Luc Van den Brande** said that he was proud that his institution had been chosen to host the conference. *“It’s within the different regions that our citizens live, get their treatment and care and are exposed to variable levels of health services, hospitals and provision of qualified doctors. The Committee of the Regions fully supports all efforts in helping to close the gap in cancer care in the different regions of the EU.”*

MAC members were present to give Parliamentary support to the conference. *“ECPC has been partnering MAC right from its creation”* said **MAC co-chair Alojz Peterle MEP**. *“Cancer patients are at the forefront of our discussions in Parliament, of course, as MEPs we are always trying to do our best for our citizens. That is why we are addressing the challenge head on with a Cancer Resolution. MAC is delighted to take part in this conference as a partner for change. Let’s hope that together we can push EU measures forward, including a European cancer control strategy and cancer Task Force.”*

**Lynn Faulds Wood, President of ECPC**, expressed her hope that the strong support from so many different political levels would play out in real improvements for cancer patients. *“With the help of MEPs against Cancer and the Slovenian Presidency, cancer patients are driving forward the movement for change. There is so much more that could be done at the European level to save lives. We owe it to cancer patients to put the necessary mechanism in place. Surely, with the EU Presidency of the Council, Parliament and the Commission, and the Committee of the Regions all working in harmony, Europe can and must make this move.”*

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**The European Cancer Patient Coalition** was founded in 2003 under the slogan "Nothing About Us, Without Us. It is committed to improving cancer prevention, screening, early diagnosis and best treatment, reducing disparity and inequality across the EU. ECPC seeks to ensure that policy makers, politicians, health professionals, the media and the general public recognise the serious nature of cancer and the need for concerted action to reduce unnecessary death and suffering. Further information can be found at [www.ecpc-online.org](http://www.ecpc-online.org)

**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

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- 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/>*

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