Strengthening Europe in the fight against cancer - towards a comprehensive and coordinated strategy

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The Special Committee on Beating Cancer adopted the own-initiative report by Véronique TRILLET-LENOIR (Renew Europe, FR) on strengthening Europe in the fight against cancer – towards a comprehensive and coordinated strategy.

Europe represents less than 10% of the world's population, but accounts for a quarter of all cancer cases. Cancer is the **second leading cause of death in Europe**, after cardiovascular disease, and the first cause of death by disease in children older than one year.

Members welcome the European's beating cancer plan and urge the Commission to work towards a **common policy on cancer**, including legislative proposals where appropriate. They stressed that the EU's common policy should focus on the following areas of action:

Cancer prevention in all EU policies and funding programmes

The report called on the Commission and Member States to integrate public awareness campaigns on cancer prevention into all relevant policy areas and to design effective prevention measures at national and EU level based on independent scientific expertise, best practice and clinical advice.

Recalling that **tobacco use** causes 15-20% of cancer cases in Europe, the report strongly supported the goal of a 'tobacco-free generation', whose aim is for less than 5% of the population to use tobacco by 2040, compared to around 25% today. It urged the Commission to set interim targets in this regard.

Members also welcomed the Commission's target of reducing **harmful alcohol consumption** by at least 10% by 2025. They called for the promotion of actions to reduce and prevent alcohol-related harm as part of a revised EU alcohol strategy, including an EU strategy on underage drinking, accompanied, where appropriate, with legislative proposals.

Stressing the role of a **healthy diet** in preventing and limiting the incidence of cancer, the report stressed the need to combat the over-consumption of meat and ultra-processed products, as well as products high in sugar, salt and fat. It called on the Commission and Member States to encourage the adoption of harmonised and mandatory **EU front-of-pack nutrition labelling**, based on reliable and independent scientific evidence, to help consumers make informed, healthy and sustainable food choices.

The report called, *inter alia*, to: (i) support research and innovation related to obesity; (ii) encourage lifelong physical activity and sport, by funding public infrastructure, facilities and programmes; (iii) expand research on ionising radiation and exposure to radon and its decay products inside buildings; (iv) reduce pollution of air, food, water and soil, as well as exposure to chemicals; (v) strengthen information requirements on carcinogenicity under the Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals (REACH) Regulation.

The report strongly supports the planned revision of the European Code Against Cancer to develop, share and implement good practice in cancer prevention programmes, with a focus on **disadvantaged groups**, and the launch of a user-friendly European mobile application which supports people and covers from cancer prevention and education to care.

Inclusive screening and detection of cancer

The report encouraged the Commission and Member States, in partnership with cancer stakeholders, to organise **public health campaigns** to address any delays in screening, early detection and care that a health crisis might cause. Members supported the launch of a new EU-supported cancer screening scheme to help Member States to ensure that 90 % of the EU population who qualify for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings are offered screening by 2025.

In addition, Member States should work together to **reduce social and geographical inequalities** in cancer screening and early diagnosis services, especially in cross-border regions and isolated areas including mountain areas and urban areas remote from screening centres.

Equal access to cancer care

Members called for a reform of the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive to allow for mobility and access to highly specialised equipment and care through the reinforcement of the national contact points by providing them with more budgetary resources. They deplored the fact that in some Member States, public resources are inadequate to guarantee timely detection and treatment.

Members called for full **recognition of medical oncology and paediatric oncology** as specialised disciplines and for the establishment of pan-European quality standards for the administration and supervision of medical cancer treatment for both adults and children. They also called on Member States to provide integral and multidisciplinary **palliative care** services for cancer patients.

The Commission is urged to consolidate the **European market for medicines** to increase equal access to treatments, including innovative and personalised medicines, to reduce medicine shortages, to overcome the problem of high prices for innovative treatments and technologies, to encourage the use of generic and biosimilar medicines and to improve cancer treatments for adults and children.

Members also noted with concern that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already existing shortage of health workers and that there is an urgent need to ensure an **adequate supply of health professionals** specialising in cancer care.

The report stressed the need for strong support for cancer patients, survivors and carers and called for clear policy requirements on **paediatric cancer** research needs.

Policy instruments

According to Members, the plan should not be seen only as a political commitment, but as a set of **concrete and ambitious initiatives** that will support, co-ordinate and complement the measures adopted by Member States to reduce the mental and physical suffering caused by cancer. The plan should be implemented in close connection with the cancer research mission under the Horizon Europe programme.

Members reiterated their call for **sustainable funding** for competitive European cancer research. They called on Member States to increase by at least 20% the mobilisation of public research for innovation in cancer treatment, diagnosis and screening.