

PARLIAMENTARY WORKING GROUP ON DIABETES
MALTESE PARLIAMENT

MALTA, THE PALACE, VALLETTA

13 OCTOBER 2014

SPEAKING POINTS

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute to your discussions here in the Diabetes Working Group.
- Let me take this opportunity to compliment the Working Group on its efforts to shape recommendations to fight diabetes here in Malta.
- I would like to focus on what the EU is doing to help fight diabetes. Strong synergies between efforts at national and European level are important to succeed in fighting this growing disease.
- Current diabetes trends are indeed worrying.

- In the EU alone, 32 million people are living with diabetes. If this trend continues, this is estimated to rise to 38 million by 2035 – over 8% of the European population.
- The situation is quite varied across the EU, as prevalence ranges from **5.7 % in Sweden to 12.7% in Portugal**.
- Here is Malta, prevalence is high - 9.5% - which translates into more than 30,000 people suffering from Type II diabetes.
- The burden on health systems is substantial. In Malta in 2011, 11.2% of the total health expenditure was spent on diabetes care.
- We all know that 9 in every 10 cases of diabetes are Type II; Type II which is largely preventable and closely linked to over-nutrition and insufficient physical activity.
- When we look at the number of people who are overweight, obese and physically inactive in the EU, it is – to put it mildly – alarming.
- Based on the latest estimates over half of Europe's adult population is overweight or obese.

- Malta is top of the league with an estimated 74% of adult men and 58% of adult women being overweight or obese.
- More worrying is that over 20% of school-aged children are also overweight or obese – over 12 million children in the EU alone. Consequently, we are seeing more and more cases of Type II diabetes amongst children as well.
- Malta fares worse than the European average.
- 10 and 11 year-olds in Malta are the second most overweight and obese in the world, according to new research, surpassed only by Greece.
- These trends all point to a need for greater investment in effective and targeted prevention.
- Yet encouraging people to adopt healthy lifestyles – including balanced nutrition and sufficient physical activity – is much more easily said than done.

- There are a number of initiatives where the EU can help. The EU addresses diabetes as part of its broader approach to tackling chronic diseases and its risk factors.

- Addressing obesity and promoting physical activity is a European Union priority.
- The European Commission works closely with Member States in this regard. Earlier this year, Member States have agreed on an Action Plan on childhood obesity – at the High Level Group on nutrition and physical activity, where Malta is represented.
- In addition, the EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health provides a Forum in which we work with stakeholders to generate initiatives to address obesity.
- I convened a Summit on chronic diseases in Brussels in April to explore what additional added value action the EU could take to help prevent and fight chronic diseases such as diabetes.
- The Summit called for a European Coalition to address these diseases to be created in partnership between Member States and stakeholders.
- I presented these developments in July at the United Nations in New York – where global progress on fighting chronic diseases, including diabetes, was reviewed.

- The European Commission already launched a Joint Action on Chronic Diseases in January this year.
- This Joint Action – with a budget of almost €10 million – will support EU countries to move towards more efficient prevention and management of chronic conditions.
- This Joint Action has singled out one disease – and one disease only – diabetes. The Joint Action includes a work package dedicated to diabetes, with the aim of shaping a set of good practice guidelines to address diabetes in a comprehensive manner.
- To get there joint work is focusing on prevention, identification of people at high risk, early diagnosis, and comprehensive care.
- In addition, this work is supporting the development of National Diabetes Plans; and the exchange of good practice, and cooperation among EU countries.
- Progress is encouraging: all EU countries have taken some action towards tackling diabetes and many have developed national plans or guidelines on treatment.

- The Commission is also initiating a 1 million euro pilot project requested by the European Parliament on the prevention of diabetes.
- Finally, the Commission supports research and innovation initiatives that aim to address the question of diet-related diseases.
- The research framework programme alone devoted 402 million Euros to diabetes research between 2007 and 2012.
- Thus the European Union is very active in supporting Member States in their fight against chronic diseases in general and diabetes in particular.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Diabetes Working Group has an important mission towards a national diabetes policy and strategy for Malta, addressing key issues, such as prevention, early diagnosis, treatment and care.

- I would strongly encourage you to continue and intensify this work within the Joint Action on chronic diseases as this important project takes shape and rolls out.
- The increasing burden of diabetes in Europe calls for a sustained commitment of governments, non-governmental organisations and people suffering from Diabetes.
- It calls for a commitment to move from words into action.
- We need innovative and determined approaches to win the battle against diabetes.
- I wish you well in this very important work.

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