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THE PARLIAMENTARY WORKING GROUP ON DIABETES
MALTESE PARLIAMENT**

MALTA, PARLIAMENT HOUSE

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SPEAKING POINTS

Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute to your discussions.
- Commissioner Borg has given you in his speech an overview of strategies, policies, activities, and initiatives at the European level which are relevant to diabetes.
- Allow me now to talk about some of these activities in more detail from a technical point of view.

Joint action

- Let me start with the “Joint Action addressing chronic diseases and promoting healthy ageing across the life cycle”.

- Joint actions are cooperation projects funded by the EU health programme, bringing together competent authorities in EU Member States and further eligible countries.
- This particular joint action is a first outcome of the reflection process on chronic diseases to support Member States in their efforts towards more efficient prevention and management of chronic conditions.
- It involves 23 Member States and some 37 associated partners that actively work on closing the gaps and improving the network for exchange and information on approaches to chronic diseases.
- One work package of the Joint Action will be devoted to diabetes – to serve as a case study on barriers to prevention, screening and treatment of diabetes.
- Specific attention will be paid to equity, and the impact that social determinants have on people's access to care.
- At the same time it looks to improve co-ordination and co-operation among EU countries.

- Emphasis will also be placed on supporting the development and implementation of National Diabetes Plans as well as on the exchange of good practice.
- I am pleased that the Health Ministry of Malta is taking part in the Joint Action as a Collaborating Partner. This project is a great opportunity to link with authorities and organisations which are working in the field of diabetes across Europe. In particular it will help to define key elements which have been proven to be effective for existing national diabetes strategies.

Prevention of chronic diseases

- Let me switch now to our work on prevention of chronic diseases. We have in place a EU strategy on nutrition, overweight and obesity related health issues since 2007. The key feature of our approach is to work in partnership. With Member States, we coordinate our policies, actions and approaches in the High Level Group on nutrition and physical activity. This Group has recently adopted the Action plan on childhood obesity, which the Commissioner mentioned.

- In parallel, we work with stakeholders in the EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health to generate initiatives to address the obesity epidemic.
- This work is directly linked to diabetes, because it addresses the main underlying factor behind the dramatic rise in type II diabetes. However, in view of the ongoing increase in obesity rates worldwide and in Europe, we need to identify smarter ways to educate and convince people to personally address this problem.

Financing

- To support Member States in their efforts to tackle these worrying trends, the EU Health Programme gives the opportunity to finance projects in the area of chronic diseases including diabetes.
- I would like to encourage Malta to take the opportunity to participate in activities under the EU health programme.

- In the past, the Commission has been financing numerous projects in the field of diabetes. Examples include "European Best Information through Regional Outcomes in Diabetes (EUROBIROID)", "Better control in paediatric and adolescent diabetes in the EU: working to create Centres of Reference (SWEET)" and "Development & Implementation of a European Guideline and training standards for Diabetes Prevention (IMAGE)".
- The latter three-year-project began in June 2007, and a multidisciplinary consortium has been created which involved healthcare professionals, behavioural and health scientists from 32 institutions and 16 countries.
- The main outcomes of the project are Guidelines¹, which are highly relevant for future work on diabetes prevention:
 1. A “European Evidence-Based Guideline for the Prevention of Type 2 Diabetes”,
 2. A “Toolkit for the Prevention of Type 2 Diabetes in Europe”,

¹ Hormone and Metabolic Research, S1Volume 42, April 2010, Page S1–S64

3. “Quality Indicators for the Prevention of Type 2 Diabetes in Europe”, and

4. more recently, a “Comprehensive curriculum for the training of diabetes prevention managers”.

- I believe that these outcomes are very useful and pragmatic tools, and that they should be taken in consideration when national policies and strategies for Diabetes prevention are established and implemented.
- In addition, substantial money is spent for research in the field. The Commission supports initiatives that aim to address the question of diet-related diseases.
- These efforts will be continued in the future with the Horizon 2020 Research Programme. It is essential to support European research that benefits patients whilst boosting competitiveness.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

- To effectively address diabetes we have to work on the broader context of health promotion and tackling risk factors, and on developing innovative approaches to prevention. One of these could be the new insights we receive from behavioural science which can help us to define strategies which 'nudge' people towards healthier choices.
- At the same time, we cannot forget the patients suffering from chronic diseases. This is why as part of our work with Member States towards making health systems more sustainable and effective. We assist them to find ways of making savings without compromising universality and quality of care. It is important that health and social systems adapt to be able to meet the challenge of chronic diseases. This means for example breaking down barriers between services, strengthening primary and community care, and empowering patients.

- There is also a link to demographic change and population ageing: the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing also provides important pointers towards interesting and innovative approaches across the continent.
- Let me close by also wishing you success in your endeavours in Malta, and by inviting you to take forward your work in cooperation with EU Member States and based on the good practice which has been developed in different parts of the European Union.