



## **A Look Forward: Diabetes in Europe with Commissioner Borg EU Diabetes Working Group Meeting Report 12 November 2013**

The EU Diabetes Working Group with the support of the European Coalition for Diabetes organized a meeting on 12 November this year entitled *A Look Forward: Diabetes in Europe with Commissioner Borg*.

The EU Diabetes Working Group meeting was hosted by Co-Chair of the EU Diabetes Working Group and Member of the European Parliament, Marisa Matias (PT, GUE/NGL). The meeting aimed to give an overview of the progress that had been made over the last 18 months since the adoption of the European Parliament Resolution addressing the EU diabetes epidemic of March 2012. Another objective of the meeting was to also review the impact the Resolution has had on Member States with regards to putting diabetes on the political agenda and establishing national diabetes plans. Furthermore, the meeting also hoped to explore future opportunities.



The EU Diabetes Working Group was extremely pleased to welcome Keynote Speaker Commissioner Tonio Borg. Commissioner for Health, Tonio Borg started by highlighting the extent of the diabetes burden in his home country of Malta and shared the concern of the European Parliament and the diabetes community about the alarming increase in diabetes. The Commissioner went on to give an overview of EU action in respect to diabetes and chronic diseases.

Taking action to address the determinants of diabetes is an important part of the European Commission's response to diabetes. Commissioner Borg made reference to the *raison d'être* and work of the EU Platform for action on diet, physical activity and health as well as to the high-level group of the EU Platform, constituted of Member State Ministries of Health; a group which is currently shaping a new action plan on childhood obesity.



Commissioner Borg evoked a possible rethinking of the European Commission's current strategy on chronic diseases, which presently focuses on risk factors and prevention. At next month's Health Council, Commissioner Borg informed the audience that he will be discussing the potential for further EU added-value action on prevention, care, research and information stemming from the Commission's reflection process on chronic diseases with Member States.

Commissioner Borg went on to reiterate the importance of diabetes; acknowledging and informing all those present that diabetes has been highlighted in the Joint Action on chronic diseases set to kick-off in January 2014, with one of the Work Packages set to work on the barriers to prevention, screening and treatment of diabetes. The Commissioner hopes that the Joint Action will improve cooperation and the sharing of best practices among Member States.

Tonio Borg added that "prevention is not enough" and that "we need to support people living with diabetes today". To this effect, the European Commission together with Member States will be convening a Chronic Diseases Summit in April of next year. The Summit aims to discuss how and where further EU action is needed in order to support Member States, stakeholders and citizens alike. The Summit will also be an opportunity to persuade Member States and governments to invest and benefit from long term savings and the necessity to keep chronic diseases high on the political agenda.



The Commissioner concluded by stating that the increasing burden of diabetes calls for a serious and sustainable debate on how we can adapt our health policies, improve our health and social systems and increase public awareness of the challenge ahead.

Ms Matias invited Anne-Marie Felton, President of FEND on behalf of the European Coalition for Diabetes to react to the Commissioner's speech. Ms Felton responded by thanking Commissioner Borg for a much welcomed discourse. Ms Felton brought to light a number of issues that added to the challenge evoked by the Commissioner. Ms Felton elucidated that the management of diabetes is no longer appropriate to today's situation. Systems of care are not equipped to address the demands of chronic diseases, diabetes related complications and poverty causing grave concern to the diabetes community and that access to novel technologies and medicines have a great potential to play in the good management of diabetes. Ms Felton ended by lending ECD's support to the EU's Summit on chronic diseases. Michael Stumvoll, Chair of EURADIA added the importance of "barriers research". To truly understand what a good prevention programme is, and therefore the successful implementation and outcomes, it is imperative that we have evidence based data to substantiate and back policies and actions, taking into account health economics, urban development and public health.



Dr Wendy Yared, Director of the European Cancer Leagues was invited by Ms Matias to share her experience of working on the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer. Dr Yared provided personal reflections, lessons learnt and key advice to how the Diabetes Community could make the best of the Joint Action on chronic diseases and Work Package on diabetes in order to benefit and improve the lives of the diabetes communities in Europe.

Dr Yared clearly stated that the Joint Action was an opportunity. Chronic disease communities are currently working in a fragmented way. The Joint Action is a chance for a multi sectoral and multistakeholder approach. Dr Yared insisted on the importance of including partners outside of the disease specific area in order to stop preaching to the converted and to capitalise on the potential benefit, outcome and result of such a partnership. Dr Yared ended by affirming that the Joint Action is a great opportunity for "improvement of cooperation among Member States to act on diabetes". This is what will make the difference to people living with and at risk of diabetes on the ground and as a result, this chance should not be wasted.



Ms Matias opened the floor to her fellow EU Diabetes Working Group Co-Chairs. Baroness Sarah Ludford MEP pleaded that we should not forget or neglect type 1 diabetes to which disease specific solutions are needed. Christel Schaldemose MEP echoed Baroness Ludford's call. Ms Schaldemose ended by reiterating the social and economic burden of diabetes and the urgency with which the EU and Member States need to act.

Marisa Matias MEP thanked both speakers and participants for their interventions and participation. Ms Matias informed participants of the numerous forthcoming World Diabetes Day events that were taking place during the week in addition to the launch of IDF Europe's "Access to diabetes medicines and medical devices for diabetes care in Europe" publication which was to be launched the following morning at a breakfast debate hosted by Sarah Ludford MEP. Ms Matias concluded by trusting that the meeting has set the diabetes cause in good stead for 2014.