

## Speech

Dear President DA EMPOLI,

Dear friend Dolors MONTSERRAT,

Distinguished participants,

I wish to thank the Institute for Competitiveness for organising today's event on Cancer.

++++

Cancer concerns all of us, in one way or another.

Promoting our European Way of Life is about values, dignity and synergies; that is what any policy on cancer should build on.

The European Commission, led by President Von der Leyen, has placed cancer at the core of its **priorities**. We have committed to deliver an ambitious European beating cancer Plan and we will present it before the end of the year.

Last **4th of February**, I had the honour to participate in an event at the European Parliament marking the World Cancer day. At that moment, we launched a broad consultation on the Plan, to reach all those who have something to say in order to produce the best work.

++++

The preparatory process was abruptly impacted by the outbreak of **COVID-19** pandemic, but our political will to deliver was not.

During this challenging period the Commission engaged actively with stakeholders in the cancer field. We have received around 2,400 written contributions!

This unprecedented health crisis has had an immense effect on many aspects of our daily lives, from education to family organisation, from social protection systems to our economies, from our freedom, to our socialising and travels.

It has also had a severe impact on cancer prevention and care. The pandemic is disrupting cancer treatment, delaying screening, affecting access to medicines, adding a new layer of risk for patients, and creating more worry for families.

However, I want to assure you that our work in the area of cancer has not stopped and, as I just said, the timeline for adoption of the Plan by the end of this year remains unchanged.

Today's event comes timely at the time when we are consolidating all the ideas received to further guide our preparations for the Plan.

I wish to **thank I-Com** for the paper you have prepared and will be presented here today on “Best practice tools to prevent cancer across Europe”, which provides pertinent orientations to the debate.

++++

Our **aim** for the Plan is that cancer should no longer mean chances fading away, dropping out from projects, or stigmatisation.

Instead, one day, cancer shall mean accessible treatment, recovery and, therefore, life opportunities for all affected people.

And this is possible. Up to 40% of cancers can be prevented. So, the scope for action and potential to reduce the number of cases in the EU is immense.

++++

I am sure that you know that this month is **Childhood Cancer Awareness Month** (September).

I am proud to say that cancer is now high on the public agendas and there is political commitment to improve cancer prevention and care.

Cancer in children is rare, but it contributes considerably to childhood mortality and late effects in survivors.

More than 20,000 children are newly diagnosed with cancer across Europe and 6,000 paediatric cancer patients are dying each year.

The average survival rates have improved in recent decades but in some types of cancers the outcomes remain very poor.

+++

The European Beating Cancer Plan will have **four pillars**, each one looking at every key stage of the disease: prevention, early diagnosis, treatments and survivorship. Moreover, each of them will build on **three main premises**.

First, is that **everybody matters**. This means that the chances of surviving cancer should be the same regardless of in which corner of Europe we are.

This angle is very close to my heart and a key issue for the Commission. There should be no first and second class cancer patients. We want to promote equal access to affordable and high quality cancer care across the European Union. Citizens expect us to act on this issue.

However, at the moment, still too many differences exist between Member States. Let me give you some examples:

-

- Participation in breast cancer screening: 0,2% is lowest and 82,1% is highest!
- Breast cancer survival rates: 75% is lowest and around 90% is highest.
- Death rate from cancer: lowest is 194 deaths from cancer per 100 000 inhabitants; the highest is 345.

This is unacceptable in a European Union that seeks to represent, protect and give opportunities to all of its inhabitants. Each citizen deserves the same high quality of care, the same access to new medicines and the same innovative treatments.

Second, is the need to maximise **research and innovation** and to make the best use of new technologies. This is the only way to find promising therapies and improve diagnosis and treatment.

We will develop strong synergies between the Cancer Plan and the Mission on Cancer under Horizon Europe program. This approach will ensure a smooth and effective interaction between research goals and realistic policy objectives.

At last week's Research & Innovation Days (22-24 September 2020), 13 recommendations were officially presented by the mission board under the very telling title, which I fully subscribe: "Conquering Cancer: Mission Possible". These will make a significant contribution to our Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

And let's not forget the value of data. With the advent of new technologies, health data becomes one of the most powerful tools to prevent and deal with cancer. However, challenges remain in a complex and fragmented European health data landscape.

This is particularly true for oncology, where data sources struggle to keep pace with the increasing speed of innovation and new treatment paradigms. We need a clear framework in order to boost the potential of health data to fight cancer.

Finally, action on cancer should be **holistic**. Governments and public health authorities cannot address the cancer challenge alone.

A health-in-all-policies and multi-stakeholder approach is needed to effectively reduce the impact of cancer in our lives and economies. We should bring together patients associations, industry and research institutes too.

We need to better tie health measures to other areas such as the environment, climate, digitalisation, or pharmaceuticals or food and nutrition.

We need appropriate funding too. I am pleased to say that with the new **EU4Health programme** proposed by the European Commission, we will be able to support Member States and stakeholders in their own efforts. Despite the cuts decided by the European Council in July, the negotiations with the European Parliament are still open. And, in any case, the allocated funding represents already a significant increase of financial resources to address public health in general, and cancer in particular, compared to the exiting programme.

Finally, a holistic approach also means promoting smooth collaboration during the different stages of the illness – with a general practitioner and an oncologist, with a dietician, a clinical nurse, a psychologist, a physiotherapist.

Dealing with cancer takes a whole of team approach.

+++

This brings me to the last point of my intervention.

Dear President, Dear all,

As a final word, let me stress the importance to join forces to beat cancer.

The **European Parliament** has long been active in addressing cancer and its causes. We very deliberately chose the Parliament for the launch of the public consultation on Europe's Beating Cancer Plan earlier this year.

I am very pleased that the Parliament has created the Special Committee on Beating Cancer, which held its opening meeting on 23 September.

Under the chairmanship of Bartosz Arlukowicz, we very much look forward to cooperating on our shared goals and the Special Committee is ideally positioned to do just this.

The Europe's Beating Cancer Plan will open a new era in cancer prevention and care.

Most importantly, it will put patients at the centre, every step of the way.

Together, we should join forces to bring hope and life opportunities to patients, their families and friends.

On that note, I wish you a productive and insightful conference.

+++