



To the attention of

Prime Minister Victor Ponta

Palatul Victoria
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Bucharest, 011791
Republic of Romania

CC:

Minister of Health, Nicolae Banicioiu

Brussels, 18th June 2014

Dear Prime Minister,

From the 19th to the 22nd June, the European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC) will organise its 2014 Annual General Meeting in Bucharest. More than 100 delegates from 30 different EU and non-EU countries will gather in the Romanian capital for a three-day meeting revolving around our common objective: making patients' voice heard to provide them with better, more efficient cancer care.

We are honoured that Prof. Dr. Dorel Săndesc, State Secretary of the Romanian Ministry of Health, will attend the conference, hence demonstrating that the Romanian Government is close to the cause of cancer patients, not only in Romania, but also in Europe. Acknowledging your interest, we believe that this event represents a great opportunity to bring forward serious issues affecting the Romanian healthcare system in the field of cancer care.

Notwithstanding the promising research developments and the important results achieved in Europe, inequalities in access to cancer care are still tearing our continent apart.

Through our collaboration with prominent academics, researchers, physicians and policy makers, ECPC gathered worrying information regarding the state of art of the current radiotherapy in Romania. We are aware that twenty-nine centres have radiotherapy facilities throughout the country, served by 110 radiation oncology specialists. However, a recent analysis revealed that overall the **equipment is out-dated and insufficient**: only **16 centres have high-energy radiotherapy machines** (11 linear accelerators and 15 telecobalt



machines, 6 of them out-dated). There is **one megavoltage machine /1 million inhabitants** (while the EU standard recommends **1 machine/300000 inhabitants**). In other terms, **only 27% of the patients that require radiotherapy have access to treatment**, mostly because of lack of facilities. Therefore, concomitant chemo-radiotherapy is rarely used.

Only a truly **multidisciplinary approach** can effectively raise the patients' outcome. The international scientific community widely agrees that **radiotherapy is a pivotal pillar** of cancer care, to be **jointly used** with chemotherapy and surgery. Scientific literature supports this statement: it has been calculated that **62.5% of all cancer patients** need radiotherapy treatment to effectively cure his/her cancer¹.

This unbearable disparity gravely endangers Romanian cancer patients' possibilities to get past cancer. Figures² unfortunately demonstrate this: **survival in Eastern Europe is generally low and below the European average**, particularly for cancers with good or intermediate prognosis. It is unacceptable that curable cancers are not properly tackled within the borders of the European Union. A growing divide in cancer survival between East and Western Member States is tearing European cancer patients apart. ECPC intends to fight this inequality, both at the national and European level.

We are glad to report that the shortage of essential chemotherapy drugs³ (such as Bleomycin, 5-Fluorouracil, Methotrexate, Procarbazine, Vincristine or Vinblastin, etc.) available as relatively cheap generic preparations has finally been tackled in Romania and we are aware and grateful of **your personal contribution in this respect in spring 2013**. However, the problem of access to radiotherapy in Romania represents but one of the many faces of cancer care inequalities in Europe. Thanks to its network of **more than 300 Members in 46 EU and non-EU countries**, ECPC is aware that in each EU Member State we can find national specific problems, but also the **local reflections of pan-European issues**, such as the timely and equitable access to new treatments. In this respect, we regret to report that Romania is the slowest country in Europe as per the approval of reimbursement of new drugs, adding up to thorny situation we register also in other EU Member States.

¹ "Radiotherapy capacity in European countries: an analysis of the Directory of Radiotherapy Centers (DIRAC) database." *Lancet Oncology* 2013;14:79-86

² De Angelis R.; Sant M.; Coleman M.P.; Francisci S.; Baili P.; Pierannunzio D.; Trama A.; Visser O.; Brenner H.; Ardanaz E.; the EURO CARE-5 Working Group.; et al. : "Cancer survival in Europe 1999-2007 by country and age: results of EURO CARE-5-a population-based study" *Lancet Oncology* 2013.

³ Sikora K.; Advani V.; Korolchouk V.; Magrath I.; Levy L.; Pinedo H.; Schwartzmann G.; Tattersall M.; Yan. S.: "Essential drugs for cancer therapy: A World Health Organisation consultation"; *Annals of Oncology* 10; 385-390, 1999



ECPC believes that the solution to the Romanian radiotherapy issue cannot be solely national, but shall comprise a **European perspective**. From this standpoint, ECPC Members represent a model: more than 100 delegates from 30 countries will be present in Bucharest to work with us so to share best practices, develop ideas, and collaborate on new projects that can effectively impact cancer care in Europe. ECPC will be glad to humbly share with you the outcome of our work, with the hope that from a more coherent collaboration with cancer patients might spring a renovated interest for the problems surrounding cancer.

ECPC is looking forward also to engage with the Romanian government at the EU level, within the crucial work of the second Joint Action on Cancer (CANCON), where ECPC horizontal contribution will ensure the inclusion of patients' perspective within the next edition of the European Guide on Comprehensive Cancer Control.

Furthermore, we are eager to work with the **new European Parliament** and the **new Commission**. Once established, a new advocacy phase for cancer patients' advocates will open, based on the **European Cancer Patients' Bill of Rights** and its implementing act, **ECPC Call to Action**. To date, **seven MEPs** out of **29** endorsers of our Call to Action are **Romanians**. Those MEPs committed themselves to defend the rights of European Cancer Patients, creating the **first Parliamentary intergroup on cancer**. Among them, we can count also on the committed work of **MEP Daciana Sârbu**, whose long term collaboration with ECPC resulted in major successful initiatives, like our white paper on head and neck cancers. Her commitment encouraged us, reinvigorating our hope for fruitful cooperation to be built on this successful precedent. We hope that the existing link can become the cornerstone for future, more inclusive and concrete partnership between ECPC and Romania in the field of access to healthcare, and in particular regarding the implementation of the Cross-border Healthcare Directive.

From our side, **ECPC remains at full disposal** to cooperate with Romania on the issues affecting our Members all over Europe. As this Annual General Meeting demonstrates, ECPC believes in the dialogue among all relevant stakeholders, including policy makers, to achieve the best outcome for cancer patients.

Cancer does not respect national borders, it knows no boundaries, either geographical or social - it affects all parts of our society. It is not a problem of any single nation; we must all contribute to the solution. **Therefore, as Europeans we must stand together, Patients, Health Care Professionals, Researchers, Industry and Politicians, united in our goal to address our common enemy – Cancer.**

Sincerely



Francesco De Lorenzo
ECPC President