

## Welcome/opening address

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**Cancer Summit - "UNITED AGAINST CANCER",**  
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»Dear European Commissioner, Dr. Janez Potočnik, dear European Member of Parliament, Mr. Alojz Peterle, dear Mrs. Lynn Faulds Wood, respected colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honour to welcome you to today's Cancer Patient Summit "United Against Cancer", dealing with the issue that receives a lot of attention in the world, Europe and, naturally, in Slovenia as well.

Cancer has been and remains one of the most serious issues in public health, affecting every society and health care system in the world in spite of numerous activities and measures undertaken in the member states and the European Union. The incidence of Cancer and mortality caused by cancer are growing in most European countries. Life expectancy is also increasing and the generation that will suffer from cancerous diseases is becoming more and more numerous. One in three European citizens will be diagnosed with cancer, and one in four will probably die from the disease. Nevertheless, public health care measures to control cancer still frequently lack connection and comprehensiveness.

According to projections of cancer incidence and mortality rates in Europe, the burden of this disease will increase further by the years 2010 and 2020. 3 million Europeans will suffer from cancer in 2010 and this disease will kill almost 2 million of them. The forecasts for 2020 are even more worrying; almost 3.4 million people will be diagnosed with cancer, with more than 2.1 million dying from it.

If this data is cross-referenced with data about the expected burden arising from non-communicable chronic diseases and about the ageing of the European population, the problem turns out to be even more pressing. At the same time, not enough time is devoted to focused and effective action. Improvement to the prevention and treatment of cancer is extremely important to lessen the burden of this disease on the EU member states and the quality of life of individuals.

Some indicators of the cancer burden place Slovenia in the middle, between Western and Eastern Europe. In Slovenia, as in other countries, the commonest form of cancer in men is lung cancer while in women it is breast cancer and the incidence of this are still on the rise. The share of adult male smokers has dropped over the last years, though unfortunately this cannot be said for women. Cervical cancer ranks sixth in terms of frequency and its incidence in Slovenia is among the highest in comparison to other EU countries. Precisely for that reason, Slovenia introduced opportune screening decades ago, and in 2002 it launched the organised national screening system for early detection of precancerous changes of the cervix. The purpose of a system organised in this manner is to reduce the morbidity of the invasive forms of cervical cancer, decrease mortality and improve the quality of life for the affected women.

Breast cancer is the most frequent form of cancer diagnosed in women in Slovenia and the EU. The rise in the morbidity of breast cancer is paralleled by a slow decrease in mortality rates in women between 40 and 59 years of age, however, such a trend is not present in the older population. Several years ago, with the aim of the early detection of breast cancer, Slovenia has introduced biennial opportune screening for women aged 50 to 69. This means that every woman from that age group can undergo preventive mammography on her own initiative or on that of her gynaecologist or personal physician. However, since such screening did not yield the desired results, we are gradually introducing organised mammographic screening whereby all women from this age group will be invited to a mammography every

two years. However, organised screening represents only a part of the activities within the scope of comprehensive treatment of breast cancer in Slovenia. It will enable the optimal availability of preventive as well as quality diagnostic and therapeutic treatment to all women.

A worrisome fact is the rise in the occurrence of colorectal carcinoma in both genders, which to a high degree may be attributed to unhealthy lifestyle (unhealthy diet, obesity and lack of physical exercise). For this reason, it is necessary to highlight the importance of prevention. With regards to the promotion of a healthy life style, Slovenia has adopted the National Nutrition Policy Programme 2005 - 2010 and is preparing the Strategy on Physical (Motor) Activity to strengthen health, along with strategic guidelines and action plans for preventing the consequences of alcohol abuse.

The fight against cancer has a long history in the Community in comparison to other health care-related activities. Activities involving epidemiological monitoring, screening, prevention, the exchange of good practices and research into cancer have been developed and financed on the level of the EU. They have significantly contributed to the complementation and support of national strategies related to this issue.

The Community public health programme, framework research programme, public health strategies and other initiatives for promoting healthy life style, control of tobacco, reduction of alcohol consumption, healthy nutrition and increased physical exercise are extremely important for all the European citizens. Moreover, new possibilities are emerging for participation in European networks, accompanied by the exchange of experience and telemedicine.

The Council of the EU adopted a recommendation on cancer screening at the end of 2003 that proposes that the member states introduce screening procedures for the early detection of cancer based on scientific evidence. The recommendations specify cancer diseases for which screening conducted according to all the principles and recommended procedures is justified and effective. The European Commission expects member states to submit the preliminary reports on the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations by the end of 2006, while the final report is to be prepared by the end of 2007.

We are also aware of the invaluable co-operation of the civil society, both in raising the awareness of people, responding to their needs, seeking solutions and in introducing new programmes. As such, it represents an important partner to the state and the local communities.

In the first half of 2008, during the EU presidency, Slovenia will highlight the "Gap in Health Care and Cancer" as a priority theme. Within this scope we will focus on the European dimension of the integral approach to cancer management.

We believe that we will gain extensive support for further endeavours that will greatly contribute towards improved measures for managing all aspects of this disease; from primary prevention, early detection and screening to effective treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. At the same time we will concentrate on joint approaches, harmonised activities and measures on the EU level to improve the conditions for reducing the risk of cancer diseases.

I would also like to emphasise that individual aspects of cancer prevention are related to the priority themes of previous Presidencies, for instance:

- the promotion of a healthy life style (Finland's theme - Health in All Policies)

- the early detection of cancer in some areas of the population (Austria's theme - Women's Health)
- reducing inequalities in health (Great Britain's theme).

In the end, let me stress that during Slovenia's Presidency in the first half of 2008 we will further strive to promote solidarity, equality and the equal availability of cancer treatment.

We firmly believe in the added value of co-operation at the level of the EU and in the possibilities of cancer management.

I wish you successful work!«