



## European week against cancer: Alojz Peterle

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By Alojz Peterle - 24th May 2013

**The EU should place as much urgency on the fight against cancer as they have on tackling the economic crisis, argues Alojz Peterle.**

Since its beginnings, the "European week against cancer" has strongly

" We cannot ensure sustainable growth and balanced budgets if we do not have a healthy individual

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contributed to spreading the word about cancer prevention. After 24 years it has reached an established position on the agenda of governments and cancer leagues. But, I am afraid that cancer proliferation has reached pandemic dimensions and it is winning the race.

within a healthy society"  
Alojz Peterle

In Dublin this week, the Irish cancer society has chosen to focus on promoting a healthy lifestyle and tobacco control.

Cancer is already the second most common cause of death (two out of 10 deaths in women and three out of 10 deaths in men). In Europe, the most frequently occurring types of cancer are colorectal, breast, prostate and lung cancer. Every year, 2.4 million EU citizens are diagnosed with cancer and the trend is worsening. If we do nothing, one in three men and one in four women will be directly affected by cancer during the first 75 years of their lives. Moreover, there are worrying inequalities in cancer control and care within and between states.

We have reached the tipping point where cancer is not the exclusive concern of healthcare but basically a challenging political question. European decision makers should deal with the problem with the same urgency and intensity as they are dealing with the economic crisis, the stability of the financial system and the rebalancing of budgets. We cannot ensure sustainable growth and balanced budgets if we do not have a healthy individual within a healthy society. Furthermore, inequalities among states are the result of seemingly unequal approaches towards health, implying that more common action should be considered.

The fight against cancer needs a comprehensive and holistic approach integrating a diverse list of stakeholders such as insurance companies, unions, educational institutions, family associations, patient associations and pension systems, among others. We ought to expand prevention lines and avoid including only those already known, such as tobacco control. Once again, it is not that tobacco control is not important, but the disease should be pushed away with the same intensity for all possible forms of the disease, meaning that we should keep exploring and acting against new causes. Ultimately, our strategic goal should be to reduce the inflow of new cancer patients and reverse current trends.

When it comes to treatment, a paradigm change is also needed within traditional medicine. Following the same holistic approach, complementary and alternative medicine should be included in the agenda for cancer treatment as well.

I expect that the week will render the necessary political message for governments and citizens that prevention, mainly through a healthy lifestyle is the key weapon against cancer. In times of spending cuts, investments in preventive education and universal spread of high quality and timely information should be kept and improved,

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essentially to avoid in the future, higher expenditures due to treatment. The more stakeholders we include in prevention, the better the results. Politicians should link efforts and interests towards the single strategic goal.



At European level, we must ensure that the new tobacco directive presented by the European commission won't tumble due to the extreme pressures from the tobacco industry. Currently, with the old directive of 2001, Europe is not well equipped for preventing new smokers, principally among the younger population. Thus, the creativeness of the industry has been successful so far.

Prevention through a healthy lifestyle is the key answer for reducing the inflow of cancer patients and also the cheapest one. I believe this will be this week's message.

### Alojz Peterle is chair of parliament's MEPs against cancer group



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