In 2005, EUROPA DONNA – The European Breast Cancer Coalition has been relentlessly lobbying in the European Parliament: meetings of the European Parliamentary Group on Breast Cancer (EPGBC) were held in January and June, and the week-long exhibition and the reception in the Parliament building in Brussels in October. MEPs from both old and new EU member states participated in the EPGBC meetings, where expert speakers told them what they need to know to implement the European Parliament Resolution on Breast Cancer and the European Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Breast Cancer Screening and Diagnosis. The 18 October reception to inaugurate the “Breast Cancer in the EU-25” poster exhibition attracted more than 200 people, including advocates, policy makers, MEPs and representatives of the EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection. All these events reinforced the need to implement mammography screening programmes and to establish specialist breast units in accordance with the European guidelines.

The participation of the head of cabinet of the Commissioner at the European Parliament reception in Brussels and the participation of the Commissioner himself at the 7th EUROPA DONNA Pan-European Conference in Rome on 5-6 November illustrates that EUROPA DONNA’s voice has reached the highest levels of Parliament. Health Commissioner, Markos Kyprianou, commended the work of EUROPA DONNA and reiterated the Commission’s commitment to improving breast cancer care for women across Europe. This is exemplified in the Commission’s publication of the 4th edition of the European guidelines, in which EUROPA DONNA had an active role in the revision process. Karin Jöns, MEP and Head of EUROPA DONNA Germany, also made a call for action on mammography screening programmes and particularly specialist breast care units first in Brussels and then in Rome.

 EUROPA DONNA’s lobbying activities in 2005 have not been limited to Brussels: its advocates have been busy across Europe in the Coalition’s 38 member countries, which include all 25 EU member states. EUROPA DONNA members have been active setting up all-party parliamentary groups and contacting their MEPs. Efforts to ensure that advocates are prepared continue with the 5th annual European Breast Cancer Advocacy Training course, held in Milan on 18-20 November and supported by a grant from the European Commission. The Coalition has also been present at various meetings, such as the 13th European Cancer Conference in Paris.

In the words of EUROPA DONNA President, Stella Kyriakides, “We need to advocate towards adhering to European guidelines, so as to change the face of this disease that affects hundreds of thousands of women, men and their families across Europe. Our aim and vision is to see the implementation of the European Resolution of June 2003 across Europe.”
As the highest profile lobbying event of 2005, the EUROPA DONNA-EPGBC exhibition and reception at the European Parliament reinforced the message that the 2003 Resolution on Breast Cancer must be implemented equally across the Union. More than 200 people, including numerous MEPs, attended the reception on 18 October, where they witnessed the presentation of the new edition of the European Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Breast Cancer Screening and Diagnosis. They also heard the Health Commissioner’s representative, Head of Cabinet, Margaritis Schinas, express the Commission’s commitment to secondary prevention of breast cancer. Mr. Schinas, along with EUROPA DONNA President, Stella Kyriakides, and MEP and Head of EUROPA DONNA Germany, Karin Jöns, all reiterated the need for member states to implement mammography screening programmes according to these EU guidelines. The week-long event was another significant step toward acquiring equal detection, treatment and follow-up for all women across Europe, and the result of years of effort and advocacy.

In her opening remarks at the official inauguration of the exhibition “Breast Cancer in the EU-25”, Karin Jöns applauded the progress that has been made but underlined that much remains to be done. EU guidelines for the early detection of breast cancer have existed since 1992, yet figures from the European Breast Cancer Network (EBCN) indicate that only nine of the 25 member states (Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK) have truly nationwide mammography screening programmes in compliance with these guidelines. Ireland, Italy and Portugal have partial programmes, and programmes have been initiated in Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany and Greece.

“Please help to ensure that, through benchmarking and pressure on national politicians and doctors, screening according to EU guidelines is made available everywhere as soon as possible. Make it clear, in the new member states particularly, that EU structural funds can also be used for that purpose,” she said.

Ms. Jöns also emphasised the need for multidisciplinary breast care units, as stipulated in the Resolution on Breast Cancer and the need to eliminate the variation of up to 25% in survival rates between member states. She added that the creation of the first EU guidelines for quality-controlled breast care units, included in the revised edition of the guidelines, should help to ensure more quality in treatment. Yet to be established are EU guidelines on the accreditation of these breast units.

Mr. Schinas, who spoke on behalf of Health Commissioner Kyprianou, presented the new extended edition of the EU guidelines, which is complete and soon to be published by the European Community’s Office for Publications. He added that the new edition of the guidelines draws on the results of a Europe-wide review process orchestrated by the EBCN with contributions from public health specialists, oncologists and EUROPA DONNA.

The 4th edition of the EU guidelines will include new chapters on communication in screening, the physico-technical aspects of digital mammography, certification of diagnostic and screening units, multidisciplinary diagnosis, and specialist breast units. The revision also accounts for the extended Europe of 25 Member States and reflects the scientific progress made since the previous 2001 edition.
“Having established that effective prevention and screening policies can and do deliver results, the challenge across Europe is to ensure they are put firmly into practice,” Mr Schinas said. He furthermore commended the work of the EPGBC and EUROPA DONNA and the political momentum their efforts have achieved.

Susan Knox, Liz Lynne (MEP UK) and Stella Kyriakides

In her address, Stella Kyriakides outlined the progress made since EUROPA DONNA’s first reception at the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 2000. Since then, the Coalition has seen the establishment of the EPGBC, the first poster exhibition in Brussels in 2002, and the passing of the Resolution on Breast Cancer in June 2003. She emphasised EUROPA DONNA’s aim to ensure the implementation of the Resolution across Europe. Currently six of the 38 EUROPA DONNA member countries have all-party parliamentary groups, while EUROPA DONNA advocates from 10 other member countries have contact with their parliamentarians and are working toward this goal.

Ms. Kyriakides acknowledged the collective effort that has led to such major accomplishments in a short period of time and offered special thanks to Karin Jöns for her passion, commitment and help in raising the voice of EUROPA DONNA to a European level. It is through these achievements and contacts that the effect will be felt at a national level.

“We have travelled a long way along this journey but still have a long way to go, to see the end of the inequalities that exist between and within countries that directly affect the lives of so many women and men,” she said.

“Implementing the Breast Cancer Resolution is not about upholding a commitment or a promise, it is not about the accomplishment of a mission, it is life itself, and nothing is more precious than that,” she concluded.

Later in the evening following the reception, Parliament President, Josep Borrell Fontelles, Ms. Jöns and EU Commissioners Vladimir Spidla, Neelie Kroes and Danuta Hübner gathered outside the Parliament building to light up the Parliament with pink floodlights to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

More than 200 MEPs, Parliament staff and visitors toured the poster exhibition “Breast Cancer in the EU-25”, which was on display in the European Parliament from 17-21 October 2005. Susan Knox, Executive Director of EUROPA DONNA and co-ordinator of the event, commented, “It is truly gratifying to see the sincere interest shown by MEPs in supporting and looking for ways to get the 2003 Breast Cancer Resolution implemented in their countries.”

In the exhibition, 19 posters covered topics ranging from breast cancer statistics and incidence, to a summary of the Breast Cancer Resolution and background on the EPGBC. A poster concerning the European Code Against Cancer listed healthy lifestyle measures for prevention, while two from the EBCN explained the progress of the EU guidelines and their implementation, and the importance of radiographical training for mammography. EUROPA DONNA posters outlined the Coalition’s members and goals, recent publications, and the results of its survey on the implementation of the Resolution. EPGBC posters traced the history of the group, the website www.epgbc.org, the history of the fight against breast cancer in the European Parliament and requirements for specialist breast units. A poster from the European Commission listed the 23 research projects on breast cancer backed by the European Parliament.

Meetings of the EPGBC

The exhibition and reception were the culmination of the EPGBC and EUROPA DONNA’s efforts in European Parliament this year. Two well-focused EPGBC meetings held in January and June attracted a large number of MEPs and helped to provide the tools needed for the implementation of the Resolution on Breast Cancer. The first was dedicated to furthering the understanding of the EU guidelines and the need for high-quality mammography screening performed by trained specialists. Dr. Lawrence von Karsa, Co-ordinator of the EBCN, and Dr. Karl Freese, Policy Officer from the European Commission Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General in Luxembourg, were the guest speakers. The second meeting brought in experts on regional policy from the European Commission to explain how European structural funds can be obtained for the implementation of mammography screening programmes, particularly in the new member states.

Peter Ungar from the European Commission Directorate-General Regional Policy provided an overview of the European Structural Funds and Dr. Chris de Wolf, consultant to the EBCN and medical director of a breast cancer screening programme, gave the MEPs present an analysis of mammography costs in 23 European countries. Full reports on these meetings are available on www.epgbc.org.

EUROPA DONNA and the EPGBC will continue their efforts to encourage and facilitate the implementation of the Resolution. A mid-term review of the member states’ progress in its implementation should take place in 2007. The Resolution asks the member states to create by 2008 the conditions required for a 25% reduction in the breast cancer mortality rate in the EU and, at the same time, for a reduction to 5% in the disparity in the survival rates between the member states, which can currently be as high as 16% (EU-15).
The European Parliament Resolution on Breast Cancer of June 2003

- Calls on the EU member states and the Commission to make the fight against breast cancer a health priority and to implement strategies for improved care
- Calls on the EU member states to implement nationwide mammography screening programmes in accordance with the European guidelines
- Calls for all women with breast cancer to be entitled to be treated in multidisciplinary breast units according to the European guidelines
- Sets the target for EU member states to create the conditions required for a 25% reduction in mortality and for reducing to 5% the disparities between the member states by 2008

Advocacy targets

- Appeal to national governments to invest EU Structural Funds to set up mammography screening programmes, and EU Social Funds for training programmes. EU candidate countries may apply for Pre-Accession Funds to implement screening programmes. See http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy for more information on EU regional policy
- Advise national governments of the mid-term review on the implementation of the Resolution to be carried out by the European Commission in 2007
- Lobby national governments for implementation of specialist breast units according to new EU guidelines
- Lobby for the creation of EU guidelines on specialist breast unit accreditation

www.epgbc.org

The joint EPGBC-EUROPA DONNA website continues to be updated regularly with press releases and reports on the group’s activities. It offers background information on the Resolution, its implementation, the European guidelines and other key documents.

7th EUROPA DONNA Pan-European Conference
Rome, 5-6 November 2005

More than 210 breast cancer advocates attended the EUROPA DONNA Pan-European Conference in Rome, where over half of the programme was dedicated to issues key to lobbying. Presentations by Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou, EUSOMA President Luigi Cataliotti, EBCN consultant Astrid Scharpantgen and MEP Karin Jöns all focused on how to institute high-quality breast cancer care.

Advocacy training 2005

Supported by a grant from the European Commission, EUROPA DONNA’s 5th annual European Breast Cancer Advocacy course in Milan on 18-20 November welcomed 55 advocates from 38 member countries, enabling them to hone their lobbying skills. The 2.5-day course briefs advocates on the latest in breast cancer medicine and policy and how to use them to influence change. Faculty for the course represent many prestigious European cancer institutes.

Save these date
21-25 March 2006
5th European Breast Cancer Conference
Nice, France

For further information contact:
EUROPA DONNA
The European Breast Cancer Coalition
Via G. Previati, 12
20149 Milan, Italy
Tel.: +39 02 8907 9660
Fax.: +39 02 8907 9664
Email: europadonna@mclink.it
www.europadonna.org