

Brussels, 22 November 2006

For the attention of the Members of the Committee for the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

On 27 November next, you will have to express your opinion on the draft report of the Green Paper entitled "*Promoting a healthy diet and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic disease*".

We would like to congratulate you on this draft report, which covers most of our *warhorses*. However, some of the proposed amendments seem to steer away from the reality with which we are confronted. For this reason, before expressing your opinion on a document that covers a matter of major importance for the European population, we would invite you to consider the following points:

- The fight against obesity must – according to the European Commission – become a **political priority in each of the Member States**. Do we have to remind you that, according to the WHO, obesity is the greatest challenge to public health in the 21st century? Since 1980, the number of people affected by obesity in Europe has increased very alarmingly, particularly among children. Recent estimates suggest that, in Western countries, between 2% and 8% of all health costs are incurred through obesity. 'Obesity is one of the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century. Since the 1980s, the numbers of those affected in the WHO European Region keep rising at an alarming rate, particularly among children. Obesity is already responsible for 2-8% of health costs and 10-13% of deaths in different parts of the Region'. The costs associated therewith vary between €70 and 150 billion annually in Europe. In some regions, obesity is the cause of death of 10 to 13% of the population. In 2004, an article published in JAMA¹, demonstrated that obesity is on the point of becoming the principal cause of mortality, robbing tobacco of its hardly enviable position of Number. For the first time, our life expectancy is threatened – our children could have a shorter life expectancy than we have.

¹ Mokdad et al. Actual causes of death in the United States, 2000. JAMA 2004, 291:1238-1245

- As the WHO said in 2002, obesity **must be recognised as a chronic disease by all the Member States of the European Union**. That recognition will effectively contribute to ending the stigmatisation of which overweight and obese people are victims². Recognition of obesity could also lead to **access to appropriate treatment under the national healthy system of each member State, in accordance with the multidisciplinary approach**, the only approach that has been validated notably by the EASO (European Association for the Study of Obesity) and the NIH (National Institutes of Health – a completely independent American government institution). This approach, the veritable cornerstone of the treatment, is based on three main principles: diet, physical movement and an understanding of the eating habits of patients. Investing in better treatment of overweight and obesity will have a significant impact on the health of European citizens since, as you know, overweight and obesity are the cause of many pathologies³. We would suggest that you invite the Member States to consider the treatment of obesity not as a cost, but as a long-term investment. By recognising obesity as a chronic disease and supporting the access to appropriate treatment under the national healthy system, you will be playing a pioneering role in Europe and will be sending a clear signal to the Member States.
- We suggest that the promotion of the **behavioural approach**, being one of the three main principles of the multidisciplinary approach which is not mentioned in your draft report, should be added to it. In order to lose weight, it is in fact essential that the patient understands why he eats, when he eats and in what circumstances. This is a success factor that is just as important as diet and movement in losing weight.
- It would be useful for patients to be involved in the platforms that concern them directly. Thus we regret that we were not invited to take part in the **Platform of Diet, Physical Activity and Health** initiated by the European Commission.

Thanking you in advance for your attention to our claims,

Yours truly,



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² Moreover, the insurance companies have already acknowledged that overweight and obesity are an disease. In many European countries, life insurance policies are linked to the index of Body Mass.

³ Type 2 diabetes (non-insulin-dependent), cardiovascular disease, hypertension, insomnia, certain cancers, arthritis, etc. are only a few on this list