

Championing a renewed EU agenda on Allergy and Airways diseases for a healthier Europe

Summary report on the policy meeting of the European Parliament Interest Group on Allergy and Asthma

20th March, 2019, European Parliament
Brussels, Belgium

A renewed EU agenda on Allergy and Asthma

On March 20, the European Parliament Interest Group on Allergy and Asthma held a policy meeting on championing a renewed EU agenda on Allergy and Airways diseases for a healthier Europe.

Besides the two hosting Members of the European Parliament (MEP) Sirpa Pietikäinen (Finland, EPP) and Pavel Poc (Czech Republic, S&D), high-level representatives from



From left to right: Mikaela Odemyr, Dr. Maria-Leen Meulenbergs, Dr. Ulla Närhi, Bjorn Hansen, François Wakenhut and Pavel Poc

international, European and national institutions participated in the event to share their views on how to boost interventions for better care, prevention and research on allergy and airways diseases. The attendees, amongst which policy makers, health organisations and many representatives of national patients' organisations for people living with allergy, asthma and COPD, being members of EFA, warmly welcomed the panellists Dr. Leen Meulenbergs (World Health Organisation), Dr. Ulla Närhi (Finnish Permanent Representation), Bjorn Hansen (European Chemicals Agency) and François Wakenhut (European Commission).

Health in all policies was the core of the debate

Opening the policy meeting, MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen, Chair of the Interest Group on Allergy and Asthma welcomed all participants.

While referring to the high prevalence of allergy and asthma in Europe, Ms Pietikäinen launched

the Blueprint of the Interest Group, a document that reaffirms the commitment of the group Members to forward looking EU policies in prevention, care and research to the benefit of people living with allergy and airways diseases.

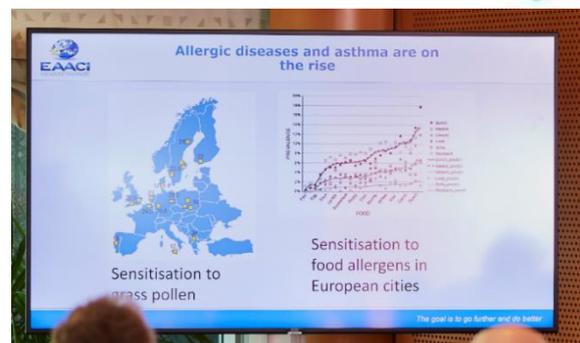


Sirpa Pietikäinen, Member of the European Parliament (EPP, FI)

MEP Pietikäinen further emphasized that the **health** perspective and the needs of patients should be integrated **in all policies**, ranging from clean air and agricultural policy to circular economy and transport initiatives. She highlighted that dedicated pan-European **Centres of Excellence** on allergy and asthma can help to scale up best practices for prevention, management and care, and demanded a newly set-up **EU Directive on Patients' Rights**.

Allergologists outlined the value of a one-health approach

Prof. Ioana Agache, President of the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) participated in the event through a video presentation. Pinpointing that allergies and airways diseases are on the rise, with already 30 % of children living with asthma in Europe, Prof. Agache emphasized the need for



Presentation by Prof. Ioana Agache: Allergic diseases are on the rise

a **one-health approach** and advocated for united action among politicians, healthcare professionals and patients, also when it comes to challenges and unmet needs in prevention, management and care of allergies and airways diseases.

She especially called for progress in the implementation of precision medicine, in patient access to medicines, and when it comes to the EU legislation on environmental control.

Patients call to #ShowLeadership on allergies and airways diseases

Mikaela Odemyr, President of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) presented #ShowLeadership, a **patient driven campaign**



EFA President Mikaela Odemyr presented #ShowLeadership that encourages action among decision-makers to help people with allergy and airways disease living better lives. The campaign, running throughout 2019 and beyond, is based on data from a pan-European patient-centered survey, carried out by EFA, on patients' access to early diagnosis, care, prevention and their participation in care and research. The **ground-breaking results** will be unveiled on a monthly basis.

Panellists discuss renewed EU health agenda

The following debate, moderated by Stanimir Hasardzhiev, Secretary General of Patient Access Partnership (PACT), focussed on how to

renew an EU agenda on allergy and airways diseases in Europe. In the beginning, MEP



Dr. Maria-Leen Meulenbergs (WHO) and Dr. Ulla Närhi (FI)

Pietikäinen expressed her hopes that after the upcoming European elections, the Interest Group on Allergy and Asthma will expand its influence.

Focusing on actions to address non-communicable diseases (NCDs), Dr. Meulenbergs from WHO pointed out that allergies are part of the WHO Europe action plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases in the WHO European Region 2016–2025 but that the way to tackle them are through the Sustainable Development Goals framework. This is improving air quality, environment and health processes, and the prevention of NCDs.

François Wakenhut, Head of Unit Clean Air within the European Commission, stressed that **patients' well-being** is of big importance when discussing environmental policies.

He further emphasized the need to combat air pollution, which is the **"new tobacco"** and should be tackled with the same approaches. He claimed that in the EU the economic impact linked to air pollution is 34 billion per year on direct costs and 900 billion on indirect costs.

He also highlighted that a cross sectorial approach to tackling the sources of air pollution is required, noting that the links between air quality and health are evident.

ECHA Executive Director, Bjorn Hansen laid out that **1 in 4 chemicals** available in the market

cause allergies. To prevent the use of such chemicals, we need research. Authorities such as ECHA play an important role in gathering the science and protecting citizens. He expressed the **importance of citizens' voice** and made the point that civil society might be a key partner to identify relevant chemicals.

During the debate, Dr. Ulla Närhi from the Finnish Permanent Representation highlighted that the Finnish Council Presidency, starting in July 2019, will focus on economy and well-being.

Patients' advocates bring ideas for better policy

Participants to the discussion asked questions to the panellists. Among others, Carla Jones, representing EFA Member Allergy UK



Carla Jones (Allergy UK) and Luciano Cattani (Federasma e Allergie) put comments to the panellists

emphasized that **pollen** should not be forgotten in air quality policy and as an allergic trigger. Luciano Cattani, representing EFA member Federasma Italy, highlighted the need to have **specialized centres** to ease patients' access to right diagnosis and treatment.

Sophie Perroud, representing the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) was asking whether after the elections, and the new Commission set-up, health will still remain an alone-standing pillar besides the important **health in all policies** approach. Liliya Gentet from Fédération Française des Associations et Amicales de malades, Insuffisants ou handicapés Respiratoires (FFAIR), also EFA Member, asked about the inclusion of **tobacco**

smoke as an air pollutant and for action against smoking prevalence on a national level.



Sophie Perroud (HEAL) and Lylia Gentet (FFAIR) commented the debate

Concluding remarks by Pavel Poc

Having been an allergic asthma patient for more than 30 years and experiencing the challenges that people living with allergies and airways diseases face, MEP Pavel Poc passionately closed the event.

He noted that, while chemicals are tested on potential negative effects only one by one, the **cocktail-effect remains an unknown risk** for



Pavel Poc, Member of the European Parliament (S&D, CZ)

citizens. Mr Poc emphasized the need to protect people in Europe from allergies and airways diseases by addressing the causes that can be prevented, such as exposure to chemicals and pollution.

He further asked legislators to take public health elements into account when evaluating legislations or when initiating new laws. The European Parliament is an initiator of positive change and progress, pushing the Commission for the required necessary changes.

Closing his speech, Mr Poc urged his colleagues within the European Parliament to offer their commitment and to promise their engagement in the new parliamentary term of the upcoming five years.

For more information on the Interest Group visit

<https://allergyasthmaparliament.eu>,

follow us on twitter ([#EPAllergyAsthma](https://twitter.com/EPAllergyAsthma)) or contact

office@allergyasthmaparliament.eu

