



NO TIME TO LOSE FOR THE EU: DRUG-RESISTANT TUBERCULOSIS IS A REGIONAL THREAT

Brussels, 24 March 2014 – On World Tuberculosis Day 2014, the TB Europe Coalition calls on European Union institutions to recognise multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) as a cross border health threat and to provide regional political leadership in the fight against MDR-TB in the European Region.

“TB does not respect national boundaries. In a globalised world and an integrated EU, failure to respond to the upswing in drug resistance in the region will have grave repercussions,” said Claudiu Tănăsescu, Romanian Member of the European Parliament.

TB is an ancient disease that continues to kill 1.3 million people every year. The spread of its drug-resistant forms, including some that are completely incurable, represents a serious threat to the control of the disease, especially in the European region. Last year alone, the World Health Organisation reported an estimated 74,000 cases of MDR-TB in the region, accounting for almost a quarter of all drug-resistant TB cases worldwide. MDR-TB does not respond to the standard TB treatment, which means it is much more costly and difficult to treat – in some cases, drug-resistant TB can cost 100 times more to treat than a normal case of TB.

Many governments in the region often do not have the resources or the political will to adequately fight TB and are often dependent on external support to finance their TB programmes. The phasing out of international donors, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria and USAID, means there is an increased risk of MDR-TB spreading throughout the EU on an even greater scale.

While the main responsibility for the provision of healthcare in the EU lies with national governments, there are cases when member states cannot effectively act on their own. In these situations, regional political leadership can complement and strengthen efforts already in place at the country level.

The TB Europe Coalition therefore urges the European Commission and member states to recognise drug-resistant TB as a cross-border health threat.

“A failure to act now will mean huge costs in the future, both in terms of lives lost and financial burdens on our health systems. The situation requires a regional response and we believe that the EU institutions are best placed to provide the necessary political leadership and cross-border coordination to fight this killer disease,” said Fanny Voitzwinkler, Coordinator of the TB Europe Coalition.

The EU has two options: to provide the leadership needed to contain this health threat now or to ignore the rising rates of drug-resistant TB and risk a greater public health emergency in the future.



TB EUROPE COALITION

Editors Notes:

- The TB Europe Coalition is an informal advocacy network of non-governmental organisations and individuals that share a commitment to raising awareness of TB and to increasing the political will to control the diseases throughout the WHO European Region and worldwide; www.tbcoalition.eu

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