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**Press Release**

**Brussels, 11 October 2011**

## **World Arthritis Day: New data on enormous costs of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases mobilise members of Parliament**

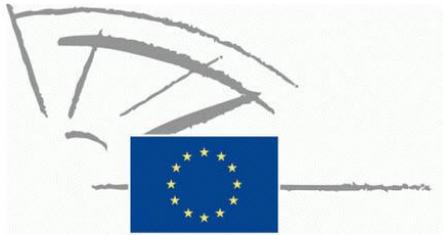
**Today, on the occasion of World Arthritis Day (12 October) 2011, Members of the European Parliament urged the EU institutions and Member States to commit to concrete, comprehensive and long term actions to fight against rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) in Europe. The call for action was the result of a debate on new scientific evidence that proves the enormous, disproportionate burden of RMDs on European health and social care systems as well as on EU economies. The new data presented in the European Parliament are a first result of the EUMUSC.NET project, an initiative co-funded by the EU Public Health Programme. During the presentation of these findings, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), representatives of Member States, scientific, patient and industry organisations discussed on ways to fight against these diseases and reduce their burden.**

Professor Loreto Carmona, from the University Camilo José Cela (Madrid) and representative of the EUMUSC.NET project, presented evidence produced by a group of leading experts from all over Europe. The data show that these diseases not only affect dozens of millions of citizens throughout Europe; in addition, they cost Europeans billions of Euros every year, undermining the sustainability of health and social care systems, and putting a huge strain on public budgets. Carmona demonstrated that RMDs are in the top 5 diagnostic groups in Europe in terms of health care costs. In terms of productivity loss RMDs were the largest single cause of work loss in Europe. 25% of prolonged sickness absence in Europe was due to bone, joint or muscle problems of the hips, legs or feet. Furthermore, RMDs were one of the leading causes for work disability.

MEP Edite Estrela, chair of the Interest Group, pointed out that “it is inadmissible that these diseases are still somehow overlooked by governments and public institutions. While some other disorders catch our attention due to their high mortality rates, we should look beyond mortality rates and pay much more attention to those diseases like RMDs which silently undermine our welfare states”.

The European Commission acknowledged the great impact musculoskeletal diseases have on European economies and the need to fight against these major illnesses. Ms Hana Horka from DG Health and Consumers (SANCO) said that the Commission was preparing a consultation on chronic diseases in Europe which should look deeper into the impact of chronic diseases such as RMDs.

To demonstrate that costs of RMDs can be significantly reduced by prevention measures, Ms Brenda O’Brien from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA) presented key elements of the planned OSHA campaign on occupational diseases to be launched in April 2012. The campaign “Working together for risk prevention” will be running in 40 European countries, highlighting



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innovative solutions to occupational diseases by promoting measures such as management leadership and worker's participation.

In his conclusion remarks Mr Jim Higgins, vice chair of the Interest Group, emphasised the need of a European strategy on RMDs to support Member States in the implementation of a consistent and comprehensive response to RMDs. "A European strategy should at least cover four areas: prevention, research and innovation, health and social inequalities as well as implementation of national plans to fight RMDs.", specified Mr Higgins. It should also require stronger cooperation between EU and Member States to effectively fight musculoskeletal diseases.

Participants to the event were impressed by the evidence provided by the EUMUSC.NET project and actively engaged in discussions on the relevance of RMDs vis-à-vis other chronic diseases as well as on what EU and Member States could do to reduce their burden and improve the health conditions of millions of citizens suffering from these diseases. Neil Betteridge, Vice-President EULAR, pointed out that "these data finally prove what many patients in Europe have been saying for years: what should make RMDs a policy priority is not the number of people dying from these diseases, but the number of people and their families affected as well as the social and economic consequences".

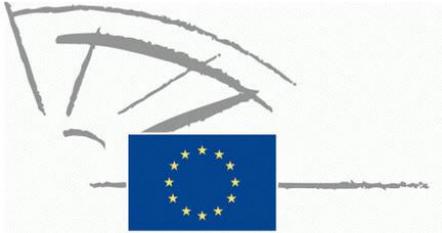
### **About EULAR**

The European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) is the European umbrella organisation which represents scientific societies, health professionals associations and organisations of people with arthritis/rheumatism throughout Europe. At the European level, EULAR is representing the interests of the entire rheumatic disease community and is the natural partner of European policy makers when policies and regulatory frameworks are developed. With 44 scientific member societies, 35 patient organisations coming together under the roof of the Standing Committee of PARE (People with Arthritis/Rheumatism in Europe), several health professionals associations, and corporate members, EULAR underscores the importance of combating rheumatic diseases not only by medical means, but also through a wider context of care for rheumatic patients and a thorough understanding of their social and other needs. For more information please visit the EULAR website ([www.eular.org](http://www.eular.org)).

### **About RMDs**

Rheumatic diseases comprise all painful conditions of the musculoskeletal system. More than 200 different diseases have been identified spanning from various types of degenerative joint and soft tissue disorders to osteoporosis, from arthritis to systemic connective tissue diseases. Rheumatic conditions affect the joints, tendons, ligaments, bones, and muscles. Common symptoms are pain, swelling, and stiffness. Some rheumatic diseases also involve internal organs.

People from all age groups and both genders can develop a rheumatic disorder. Rheumatic diseases affect the largest number of individuals in the industrialised world with up to one third of people of all ages being affected at some point during their lifetime. The consequences for the people concerned include impaired quality of life, reduction of physical function, disability and often premature death. Rheumatic diseases elicit the highest costs to European health care and socioeconomic systems by virtue of direct expenses for



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medicines, surgery, physiotherapy and hospitalisation. In addition, social care and production losses, sick leave, disability pensions, rehabilitative measures and expenses for caretaking result in enormous indirect costs.

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**More information on RMDs can also be found at the website of the World Arthritis Day:**  
**<http://www.worldarthritisday.org/>**