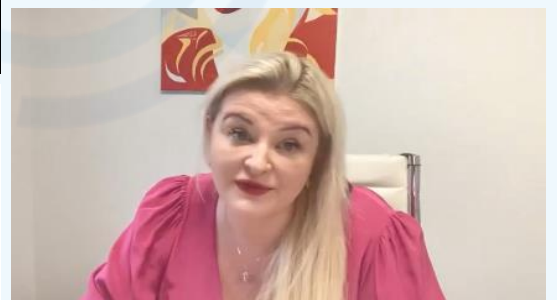
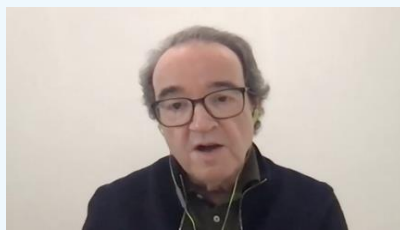


# Improving European policies to unlock radioligand therapies' potential: what is the state of play?

9 February, 13:00-14:30

## Event Report



## **About SPARC-Europe**

**SPARC-Europe (Stakeholder Political Alliance for Radioligand Cancer Therapies)** is a European political initiative aiming to build a comprehensive policy framework for radioligand therapies. The mission of the group is to provide expert knowledge and the necessary guidance for policymakers to support them in the creation of a clear pathway to institutionalise radioligand therapies and increase their accessibility for patients.

The overarching objective of the group is to work together with its Patron policymakers towards accommodating European innovation and changing the outcomes for cancer patients. By profiling the topic of radioligand therapies and providing expertise and patient voice, the Alliance has been engaging with relevant European policymakers to overcome existing barriers in access to radioligand therapies.

The Alliance works under the patronage of three Members of the European Parliament **Ms. Tanja Fajon (S&D, Slovenia)** and **Mr. Brando Benifei (S&D, Italy)** and **Marian-Jean Marinescu (EPP, Romania)**.

SPARC-Europe is composed of experts in the field of nuclear medicine and oncology, as well as patient representatives. Its Steering Committee consists of seven members and is strongly supported by the MEP Patrons.

*Radioligand therapies [RLTs] represent an innovative approach to cancer treatment in which radiation is delivered to cancer cells in a targeted and precise way. RLTs are composed of a targeting molecule (ligand) attached to a therapeutic radioisotope, which emits therapeutic radiation to kill cancer cells.*

### **Steering Committee Members**

*Martyn Caplin (Royal Free Hospital), Ignasi Carrió (Autonomous University of Barcelona, Research Institute, Hospital Sant Pau), André Deschamps (Europa Uomo), Nicola Fazio (European Institute of Oncology), Ken Herrmann (University Hospital Essen), Luka Ležaić (University of Ljubljana), Mark McDonnell (INCA), Dermot O'Toole (Trinity College Dublin), Bertrand Tombal (Chairman of the Division of Urology and Professor of Urology at the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL), Cliniques universitaires Saint-Luc)*

**Observers to the Alliance:** *Josep Maria Borrás (Catalonia Cancer Strategy)*

**MEP Patrons:** *Tanja Fajon (S&D, SL), Brando Benifei (S&D, IT), Marian-Jean Marinescu (EPP, RO)*

**Secretariat to the Alliance:** *RPP (Kinga Wójtowicz, Emily Phillips)*

**Funding partners:** *Advanced Accelerator Applications, Isotope Technologies Munich (ITM)*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 9 February 2022, SPARC-Europe organised a policy event to discuss the current state of play of European policies for delivering radioligand therapies.

Gathering more than 70 participants, the event served as an opportunity to gather policymakers from various European Union institutions and discuss how jointly the needs of radioligand therapies can be met through the implementation of the Beating Cancer Plan. The occasion was also grasped to inform the audience about the potential of radioligand therapies to advanced stages of prostate cancer, the current state of play as regards the application of treatment for neuroendocrine neoplasm patients as well as the discrepancies in the EU when it comes to the readiness of hospital infrastructure to welcome the foreseen uptake of radioligand therapies.

The event also saw the launch of SPARC-Europe's materials, such as the Investment Pathway and the patient stories video.

### Investment Pathway Guide for the Delivery of Radioligand Cancer Therapies

As one of the main objectives of SPARC-Europe's is to reduce inequalities in hospital infrastructures across the EU, the Alliance developed the **Investment Pathway Guide for the delivery of radioligand cancer therapies** to lay down the needs for adequate delivery of radioligand cancer therapies and to match those needs with available funding mechanisms at the EU level.

Through this guide, SPARC-Europe intends to bring policymakers' attention to:

- ❖ identified areas of opportunity to improve the delivery of RLTs,
- ❖ EU funding instruments that can be potentially deployed in these areas.



### Patient Testimonies Video

Alongside challenges related to hospital infrastructural gaps, patient education and understanding of the treatment remain some of the main barriers towards RLT acceptance.



To raise awareness within the patient community and policymakers about the benefits of RLTs and inform them about the challenges patients face, SPARC-Europe developed a **Patient Testimonies Video**.

The video was created in collaboration with the International Neuroendocrine Cancer Alliance and features the testimonials of three neuroendocrine neoplasm patients: Tom from Ireland, Blanca from Spain and Luc from Belgium.

The patient testimonies reflect each patient's concern about their disease, while also seizing their hopes for the treatment and the tremendous benefits obtained in accessing the therapy.



## Welcoming Remarks



**Member of the European Parliament and SPARC-Europe Patron Tanja Fajon** delivered the introductory remarks by highlighting the Alliance's main achievements of the last year, including the development of the [High-level position paper on Improving Access to Radioligand Cancer Therapies](#). She invited the audience, and in particular her esteemed colleagues, to read the document and understand better how to strengthen patient access to therapies through the Beating Cancer Plan's implementation process.

MEP Fajon also recalled monumental work done by SPARC-Europe to develop the patient testimonials, which features the inspiring stories of three patients with advanced neuroendocrine cancer, and the Investment Pathway Guide on Radioligand Therapies, which links the needs of healthcare infrastructure with the available EU funding mechanisms. Finally, she highlighted the hope that this relatively new treatment offers to patients and reiterated the continued support to promote access to radioligand cancer therapies.

**Member of the European Parliament and SPARC-Europe Patron Brando Benifei**, who was unable to join the meeting live, outlined in a video message the great effort that SPARC-Europe has offered in enabling policymakers to support the integration of RLTs in European healthcare systems.



One of the key components to be addressed is inadequate hospital infrastructure, which requires either renewal or appropriate maintenance. In this regard, Mr. Benifei said that the European Social Fund (ESF+) program can play a key role in developing specialized health infrastructure and capacity to gradually eliminate health inequality at the regional level.

For potential opportunities of reinforcing hospital capacities and medical activity for the uptake of radioligand treatments, he reiterated the need to ensure collaboration with national and regional authorities as well as providing information on the available instruments earmarked for interested stakeholders.

## Readiness of Hospital Infrastructure: Investment Pathway Guide



Professor Ignasi Carrió, from the Autonomous University of Barcelona's Research Institute and Hospital of Saint Pau, remarked on the importance of infrastructures for the appropriate delivery of the treatment and subsequent follow-up, which require a multidisciplinary approach and close collaboration among specialists. During his intervention, Professor Carrió spoke about the Investment Pathway Document produced by SPARC-Europe, which concisely explains what requirements and funding opportunities are required for appropriate and balanced delivery of the treatment.

When presenting recommendations encompassed in the mentioned document, Prof. Carrió outlined that it is paramount for nuclear medicine departments to be equipped with appropriate imaging instruments, shielded rooms, waste storage and protective requirement. In addition, he stressed that training and educational activities aimed at further fostering the use of radioligand therapies would require financial support.

The audience was also informed about the main differences across Europe when it comes to accessing the treatment and its unbalanced geographical distribution, leading to significant disparities at the national/regional level. In particular, one of the main disparities lies in the fact that departments fully equipped and demonstrating the readiness of radioligand treatments are mainly located in the capitals' hospitals.

### Setting the scene – Radioligand therapies in advanced prostate cancer

**Professor Bertrand Tombal**, Chairman of the Division of Urology, Professor of Urology at the University Catholic of Leuven and Clinic University Saint-Luc, spoke about the potential of RLTs in the treatment of advanced forms of prostate cancer.



He stressed that radioligand therapies represent a revolution for men with metastatic prostate cancer, who have only a few curative treatment options.

Prof. Tombal informed the audience that for many years both patients, as well as clinicians, advocated for new therapeutic option and stressed his content that, indeed, radioligand therapies, **have the potential to drastically change the outlook on the treatment options**. Given that **RLTs provide hope in significantly improving the overall survival of prostate cancer patients and maintaining their quality of life, there is an urgent medical need to ensure the treatment to all in the EU**.

**Prof. Tombal** also underlined that the misconception that only elderly men get prostate cancer shall change too, given that many factors contribute to the development of the disease.

### Challenges in access to RLT treatment for NEN patients: INCA global survey

**Mr. Mark McDonnell**, President of the International Neuroendocrine Cancer Alliance (INCA), presented the main outcomes of the INCA's Survey on Challenges in Access to Diagnostics and Treatment for NET Patients (SCAN) and raised the existing challenges when it comes to accessing the treatment in Ireland, Belgium, and Spain.



While presenting INCA's global survey, conducted in 2019, Mr. McDonnell highlighted that **responders saw the delay in being diagnosed as the main challenge**. The results showed that the mean time to diagnosis was 5 years, with almost half of the responders at the time of diagnosis having stage IV NEN. He then showcased SCAN in the three mentioned countries regarding RLTs.

When it comes to patient awareness of the RLTs, 75% of Irish patients knew about the therapy, while the results in Belgium and Spain were 39% and 62% respectively. When looking at the patients' knowledge about availability (patient's understanding on whether the treatment is available in their region), the result in Ireland was 6%, in Belgium 81% and Spain 37%. The low percentage in Ireland is explained by the fact that there is a lack of RLTs in the country. He further provided a detailed overview of the situation of radioligand therapies in Ireland, Belgium and Spain – making a link to the launched patient testimonials.

Elaborating on the video featuring NEN patients, Tom (Ireland), Blanca (Spain) and Luc (Belgium), Mr. McDonnell invited the audience to watch their testimonials and learn about their experiences when it comes to diagnosis and treatment pathway, treatment itself as well as listen to their recommendations on how the situation of future patients can be improved.

## Report on strengthening Europe in the fight against cancer - main outcomes



**Member of the European Parliament and SPARC-Europe Patron Marian-Jean Marinescu** outlined the main highlights of the [report](#) of the Special Committee on Cancer (BECA) on how to strengthen Europe in the fight against cancer.

He started by underlying his content when it comes to cancer being on the top of the EU agenda, deeming it necessary in order to improve the current state of **play as to significant differences in health between Western and Eastern**

**European countries.** He pointed out that citizens of Eastern Europe have an estimated 30% of lower chance to recover compared to patients living in Western Europe.

Concrete policies and initiatives are currently being taken to improve healthcare systems, through the Beating Cancer Plan, a European strategy to fight cancer, as well as one of the biggest funding mechanisms, the EU4Health Programme. The BECA report, structured around two main sections *areas* and *tools of action*, puts forward proposals on how to improve the entire cancer treatment pathway. In particular, through the adoption of the report, MEPs advocate for **the need to ensure equal access to multidisciplinary care teams, high-quality cancer care and treatment, as well as ensuring adequate funding to deliver the initiatives of the Beating Cancer Plan.**

In his concluding remarks, the MEP said he was conscious of the wide discrepancies among EU countries related to the lack of funding to improve hospital infrastructure and pointed out that the Cohesion Funds play a key role in changing the current status. This funding mechanism is available to Member States for, amongst others, improving access to healthcare by investing in the existing infrastructure.

## Panel discussion and Q&As

The panel discussion featured the following speakers:

- **Birgitta Sacrédeus**, Rapporteur, opinion of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) on Europe's Beating Cancer Plan,
- **Małgorzata Bogusz and Milena Angelova**, Rapporteur and Co-Rapporteur respectively, opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on Europe's Beating Cancer Plan,
- **Katarina Krepelkova**, Scientific project advisor, HaDEA
- **MEP Patrons: MEP Marian-Jean Marinescu, MEP Tanja Fajon.**





The discussion, moderated by Brian Maguire, started with a statement of Ms. **Brigitta Sacrédeus** who, in light of the presentation of MEP Marinescu, outlined the crucial role of the Cancer Knowledge Centre in addressing the national and regional discrepancies. Bearing in mind the role of regions and local authorities in improving regional hospital infrastructure, **she spoke about the need for close collaboration with the Committee of the Regions when implementing various initiatives outlined in the Beating Cancer Plan.** The need to have a standardised programme to learn about the availability and location of treatments was also mentioned.

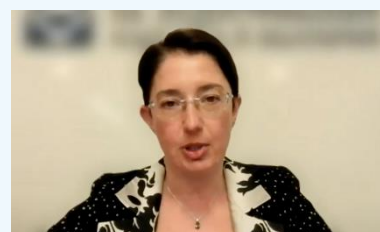


**Ms. Małgorzata Bogusz** touched upon the synergies between the opinions on the Beating Cancer Plan developed by the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, with both institutions ensuring appropriate synergies and making sure there is a common understanding of the main problems related to cancer treatment.

While elaborating on the main takeaways of the EESC's opinion, Ms Bogusz stressed that **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan should encourage national governments to reassess the readiness of existing cancer treatment facilities to accommodate radioligand therapies in terms of equipment, storage, facilities and personnel training.** According to Ms. Bogusz, this would entail understanding healthcare settings and considering infrastructural needs in nuclear medicine departments, which would be fundamental for the adequate delivery of radioligand treatment.

As being aware of the widening inequalities between countries and regions for cancer control and treatment, Ms Bogusz also endorsed MEP Marinescu's reflection on recognising the large disparities between Member States.

**Ms. Milena Angelova** pointed out how SPARC-Europe represents an excellent example for developing innovation ecosystems that bring together various stakeholders. **She further spoke about the existing differences between Member States, while also highlighting the need to provide high-quality treatment, in all European regions.** This aspect was one of the key ones that the EESC's opinion on the Cancer Plan touched upon: tackling inequalities between and within Member States shall be addressed through the implementation of the Beating Cancer Plan, through adequate investment. She also addressed the crucial role of health care workers in bridging the existing disparities.



**Ms. Katrina Krepelkova** presented the [EU4Health Work Programme 2022](#) and elaborated on the opportunities that radioligand therapy and prostate cancer stakeholders may use to address the existing gaps at the national level: as regards healthcare professional training or tackling the discrepancies. In particular, she listed calls that the actors should be mindful of, namely calls for proposals to **support the roll-out of the second cohort of the inter-speciality cancer training programme** as well as a call to monitor and strengthen the implementation of innovative approaches to prostate, lung and gastric cancer screening. Ms. Krepelkova also mentioned that the programme foresees a direct grant to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), with the goal of contributing to the progress of the Cancer Inequalities Registry and mapping disparities and inequalities between Member States and regions, with a focus on socioeconomic inequalities.

When outlining the calls within the programme, Ms. Krepelkova strongly encouraged the audience to constantly monitor the [Funding and Tenders portal](#) of the European Commission, where all relevant opportunities will be published throughout the current year.

**MEP Marinescu**, when asked about the next steps following the end of the BECA Committee's mandate, informed the audience about the **plans of the European Parliament to establish a subcommittee on COVID-19**. While the **focus of the subcommittee will be COVID-19-related at first, the plans of the Members of the European Parliament are to expand the focus to health dossiers, including cancer**.

While actively contributing to the discussion, Professor Tombal also pointed out the necessity of overcoming the different requirements and safety regulations applied to countries and regions. For this reason, greater harmonisation of the different legislations would be key for unlocking the way forward.

When questioned about hospital infrastructures and the available funding opportunities, **Prof. Carrió** addressed an **important call to policymakers attending the meeting to show financial support towards radioligand therapies**.

To the question on the plans of SPARC-Europe for this year, **MEP Fajon announced that SPARC-Europe will devote attention to disseminating the launched patient stories video and the Investment Pathway Guide**. The video will be translated to various languages and with the support of INCA, disseminated at the national level with the objective of raising patients' awareness about the treatment, while the Pathway document will be widely shared with European and national policymakers. In addition to this, **the expertise of SPARC-Europe will contribute to the implementation of the Beating Cancer Plan, in collaboration with various EU institutions as well as through the Health Policy Platform of the European Commission**.

## Closing remarks



In her concluding remarks, MEP Tanja Fajon stressed that the post-COVID-19 pandemic world may lead to an increase of cancer patients due to their inability to visit specialists and of being adequately diagnosed during the lockdown. In this regard, she outlined the importance of SPARC-Europe activities in ensuring that policymakers do not overlook the needs of cancer patients.

*If you are interested in learning more about SPARC-Europe or  
you would like to join the Alliance, please contact the  
Secretariat*

[secretariat@sparc-europe.com](mailto:secretariat@sparc-europe.com)