



## Clean air petition targets European Commissioners on World Heart Day

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**Brussels, 29 September 2015:** Europe's top heart doctors, patient representatives, policy makers and the public have petitioned European Commissioners for Health, Environment, Climate Change and Transport in Brussels to tackle air and noise pollution.

The petition was presented today in a meeting called by the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), the European Association for Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation (EACPR), the European Heart Network (EHN) and the MEP Heart Group on the occasion of World Heart Day, which this year focuses on creating heart healthy environments.

Cardiovascular diseases (CVD), including heart disease and stroke, are the leading cause of death worldwide and in Europe, where they are responsible for the deaths of more than 4 million people per year (1).

Air and noise pollution are environmental health risks which have severe consequences on heart health (2–5) just as low physical activity, high salt diet, high cholesterol and tobacco use (2). Noise pollution alone is estimated to contribute to at least 10 000 premature deaths due to heart disease and stroke in Europe each year (6).

The petition, which obtained 2 500 signatures in a very short time (7), was a result of the 'Environment & the Heart Campaign' which was held to raise awareness about the need to create healthy environments for the protection of heart health and to encourage policymakers' action.

Supporters of the campaign want the EU to:

- › Add air and noise pollution as modifiable risk factors for CVD in an EU strategy for CVD
- › Include clean air and noise reduction in all policy areas
- › Adopt EU wide limits for air quality in line with WHO recommendations
- › Foster green urban planning to reduce pollution and promote physical activity
- › Promote clean modes of power generation
- › Secure EU funding for research on the effects of environmental stressors on the cardiovascular system
- › Set 2018 as the Year for Chronic Diseases, encompassing health inequalities, and social, economic and environmental factors.

Pressure is thus mounting on policymakers to take more action on environmental issues, as today's petition comes only 60 days ahead of the UN Climate Change conference in Paris, which will aim to achieve a new international agreement to keep global warming below 2°C.

Today's meeting was attended by Vytenis Andriukaitis, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety; Lanfranco Fanti, Cabinet of Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs & Fisheries; Mairead McGuinness MEP, MEP Heart Group Co-Chair; Professor Frans Van de Werf, ESC Chair of European Affairs; and EHN President Simon Gillespie.

Commissioner Andriukaitis said: "I was pleased to meet the 'Environment & the Heart' campaign representatives today. It is great to see professionals and the public joining forces and pushing for more action to fight air and noise pollution which affect our citizens' health on a daily basis. This is an important issue that we need to continue discussing in the EU."

Commissioner Vella, represented at the meeting by his Cabinet, let it be known that: "I am delighted that the World Heart Day campaign is raising the profile of pollution's role in cardiovascular health. Poor air quality causes more than 400 000 premature deaths every year in Europe, mainly through heart and lung problems, and a further 6.5 million people suffer from strokes, asthma and bronchitis. This costs the economy billions in lost work days and healthcare costs. I join with my colleague Mr Andriukaitis in calling for urgent action and in particular for accelerated progress on the Commission's Clean Air Package."

Ms McGuinness MEP said: "It is important for policymakers to be aware of the impact of pollution on the heart and to ensure that CVD is addressed at the top level of European politics. This includes campaigning for environmental risk factors to be included in the EU strategy on chronic diseases, which is currently in the pipeline and fostering research on CVD."

Prof Van de Werf, ESC Chair of European Affairs, said: "There is strong scientific evidence that noise, air pollution and other environmental factors are damaging for health, and cardiovascular disease (CVD) in particular. It is the moral duty of the EU to tackle Europe's number one killer and we trust that the 'Environment & the Heart' Call for Action will be decisive in ensuring action is taken to reduce noise and air pollution."

Mr Gillespie, EHN President, said: "Given the large number of people living in the EU with cardiovascular diseases and the likelihood of their exposure to air pollution, it is imperative the European Union acts to ensure that the levels of air pollution do not exceed the standards recommended by the World Health Organization. This will also help reducing the risk of heart attack and stroke for the EU's population."

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**Authors:** ESC Press Office  
Tel: +33 (0) 4 92 94 86 27  
Email: [press@escardio.org](mailto:press@escardio.org)

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**About the European Society of Cardiology** <http://www.escardio.org/Pages/index.aspx>

The European Society of Cardiology (ESC) represents more than 90 000 cardiology professionals across Europe and the Mediterranean. Its mission is to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease in Europe.

**About the European Association for Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation**

The European Association for Cardiovascular Prevention & Rehabilitation (EACPR) is a registered branch of the ESC. Its aim is to promote excellence in research, practice, education and policy in cardiovascular prevention and rehabilitation in Europe.

**About the European Heart Network** <http://www.ehnheart.org/>

The European Heart Network (EHN) is a Brussels-based alliance of heart foundations and like-minded non-governmental organisations throughout Europe. EHN has member organisations in 25 countries.

**About the MEP Heart Group** <http://www.mepheartgroup.eu/>

The main objective of the MEP Heart Group is to promote measures that will help reduce the burden of CVD in the European Union and to raise awareness of the disease among target audiences through a series of dedicated activities. The MEP Heart Group is led by two Co-Chairs, Mairead McGuinness MEP and Karin Kadenbach MEP. The European Society of Cardiology and the European Heart Network provide support to the MEP Heart Group by running its secretariat.

**About World Heart Day** <http://worldheartday.org/>

World Heart Day takes place on 29 September every year and is a chance for people across the globe to take part in the world's biggest intervention against cardiovascular disease.