

European AIDS Treatment Group Newsletter

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« Leadership at highest EU level is needed to implement the human-rights based HIV policies »



Opening of the patchwork on the World AIDS Day in Brussels

Political leadership across the EU in response to the HIV epidemic is needed

Although the HIV epidemic appears to have stabilized in most regions of the world, there is no reason for complacency in Europe.

According to the figures in the UNAIDS/WHO report "AIDS epidemic 2009", in Western and Central Europe national epidemics are concentrated among key populations at higher risk, in particular in men who have sex with men, injecting drug users and migrants. In some of these groups and in some countries of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia, HIV prevalence is higher than in some sub-Saharan countries suffering from a generalized epidemic. Furthermore, adequate treatment coverage cannot be taken for granted in all countries of the EU. Partly due to the economic crisis, treatment stock-outs have been reported in the Baltic States, with more stock-outs likely to occur in other European countries.

The EU Member States and the European neighbouring countries face a particular challenge due to the alarmingly high numbers of new HIV infections, and also due to associated infections like hepatitis and tuberculosis. In 2008 alone, more than 51000 new HIV cases have been reported, and the number of people living with HIV has reached more than 2 million. HIV prevalence remains clearly on the rise in particular in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Ukraine and the Russian Federation are experiencing especially severe and growing national epidemics, with injecting drug use remaining the primary route of transmission. Although access to antiretroviral therapy has expanded, treatment coverage remains relatively low. As the UNAIDS/WHO report highlights "by December 2008 only 22% of adults in need of antiretroviral

therapy were receiving it."

To address the HIV epidemic effectively, comprehensive human rights-based and evidence-informed HIV policies need to be implemented throughout the EU. The new EU communication "Combating HIV/AIDS in the European Union and neighbouring countries (2009-2013)", the second of its kind, sets out to bring about this kind of response in the EU. **"This important political signal from the Commission's side needs to be matched now by an unambiguous political leadership of all the EU institutions and the EU Member States alike."** stresses Anna Zakowicz, Chair of the European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG). **"We thus call on the European Parliament to continuously monitor and support the implementation of the EU strategy from within the European Parliament. To this effect, the European AIDS Treatment Group stands ready to help establish and support the work of a new informal cross-party intergroup."**

"Leadership at highest EU level is needed to implement human-rights based HIV policies which we know work, policies that are adapted to the most affected groups", urges Koen Block, Executive Director of the EATG, who raised this topic at a hearing in the Belgian Senate on the occasion of World AIDS Day. "We were delighted to hear that the Spanish Presidency will focus on HIV, and are keen to see the trio presidency – Spain, Belgium, Hungary – cooperate closely together to bring about sustained change in HIV policies across the EU - in particular in the field of early diagnosis and most importantly in the area of anti-discrimination."



The European Commission Berlaymont building on the World AIDS Day.

Contributing to European policy-making in the field of HIV

The EATG has advocated at European level since 1998 in the interests of people living with HIV and AIDS for better, more equal and quicker access to vital medication. The EATG proactively contributed to shaping the European health policy agenda of the EU Institutions.

The EATG has been instrumental in the launch of an important European initiative on HIV early diagnosis and early care: building on the momentum that had ensued during the **HIV in Europe 2007 seminal conference** in Brussels, the HIV initiative constituted itself to take forward the 'call to action' resulting from the conference. Since 2008 EATG holds the political secretariat of the initiative.

One of EATG's main activities in the context of the initiative consisted in working with members of the European Parliament on a cross party resolution on HIV early diagnosis and early care.

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By Nicole Heine (nicole.heine@eatg.org)

Contributing to European policy-making in the field of HIV

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The EP Joint Resolution was adopted in by the European Parliament in November 2008 - with the strongest level of European Parliamentary support for action in the history of HIV/AIDS.

In November 2009, the HIV in Europe follow up conference took place under the auspices of the Swedish Presidency. The workshop took stock of the current state of play concerning early diagnosis and early care and the momentum ensued since the first conference. One of the initiative's key achievements is having brought about a consensus as to the definition of 'late presenter'. Currently, throughout the EU an estimated 30% of HIV infected people receive their diagnosis late.

"The EU Communication on combating HIV/AIDS clearly recognizes the need for action and prioritizes testing, and we as community strongly support the fact that

France, Germany, the UK, Portugal and many other Member States scale up efforts on early diagnosis. It would be unethical not to act in face of the evidence and what we can do today. We thus call upon the Spanish and Belgian Presidency to use this window of opportunity and to work on Council Recommendations and Conclusions on early diagnosis and care in HIV in order to bring about effective and sustained change." says Nikos Dedes, EATG Policy Working Group chair and co-chair of the EU HIV/AIDS Civil Society.

The results of the HIV in Europe conference have been presented in a satellite session at the European AIDS Clinical Society conference and to the members of the EU HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum, and have been warmly welcomed by scientists and the community alike.

In particular during the French Presidency, the EATG continued its long-standing advocacy work to lift

travel restrictions people living with HIV face around the world. Under the auspices of the French Presidency, a high-level roundtable on travel restrictions took place. The 'Call for a European response to remove HIV specific travel restrictions in Europe by 2010' adopted by the EU HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum, was highlighted during the roundtable. Furthermore, EATG members were instrumental in republishing the Global survey on HIV-specific travel restrictions, jointly with the International AIDS Society (IAS) and Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe (DAH). Beginning of 2010, entry restrictions based on HIV status in the United States have been lifted.

"This is a milestone in the development towards evidence-based policies and as to what the protection against discrimination of PLWH is concerned. From a public health point of view, there is no rationale to restrict the right of free-movement of PLWH", says

David Haery (EATG).

"We now await the removal of restrictions that remain in other European countries", adds Peter Wiessner (EATG). The EATG is keen to participate in an upcoming workshop on the subject by UNAIDS which will take place in March 2010.

In 2008, the EATG joined forces with the National UK Trust (NAT) and Aids Action Europe (AAE) in a NAT-led-campaign calling on the European Union to prohibit discrimination against people living with HIV. The future of so-called Equality Directive which could comprise provisions to outlaw discrimination based on HIV status is currently unclear. Together with its partners and within its remit of the EU HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum, EATG will continue to engage the EU trio presidency to take action against discrimination of people living with HIV.

By Nicole Heine (nicole.heine@eatg.org)

ECAB European Community Advisory Board

EATG brings together civil society, scientific researchers and pharmaceutical industries within its European Community Advisory Board (ECAB).

ECAB is a volunteer, community-based structure, collaborating actively with national Community Advisory Boards in Europe and other groups sharing our philosophy in other geographical areas.

ECAB focuses on critical issues around drug development and access to treatment in the WHO-Euro region. Through a dialogue with the pharmaceutical industry, ECAB promotes the harmonisation of the best available clinical practices, standards of care and access to the latest and best available therapies and diagnostic tools. ECAB also reviews clinical trial protocols and promotes best practice procedures with a specific focus on ethics and Community participation.

In 2009, EATG organised six ECAB meetings with nine different pharmaceutical companies involved in HIV/AIDS drug development.

Scientific Research forward

The EATG is part of three HIV/AIDS Research Networks funded by the European Commission under the 6th and the 7th Framework Programmes.



The European AIDS Treatment Network (NEAT) is a Network of Excellence funded by the European Commission. Its mission is to strengthen European HIV clinical research capacity by building a clinical and laboratory network in HIV therapeutics. NEAT catalyses a critical mass of resources and expertise, with the direct involvement of 41 core partners from 16 countries and over 350 affiliated centres of established international reputation. Two scientific themes were identified as a priority to become the focus of NEAT clinical studies: treatment of antiretroviral naïve persons and treatment of HIV/HCV co-infection.



Europrise is a Network of Excellence funded by the European Commission. Its focus is on the successful development of preventative strategies against HIV: microbicides, vaccines or their combined effects. The principal aim of this project is to bring together EU scientists from the microbicide and vaccine fields to embrace a coordinated approach to HIV-1 infection prevention research. Partners in the Europrise consortium represent 13 projects funded by the European Commission from the sixth Framework Programme as well as four projects funded by the Gates Foundation. These projects involve 132 institutions from 22 countries.

www.europrise.org



Euconet is a support action project funded by the European Commission which aim is to provide an overview of the state of the art in HIV and TB research and disease management in the different partner countries, to identify global research priorities and to boost international cooperation between leading HIV and TB experts from Europe and those countries mainly affected by the two diseases.

By raising further awareness for the issue of co-infection in Europe as well as EUCONET target regions, this project supports the development of national policies and programmes, and help prepare future Community research and technological development policies.

www.euco-net.eu

By Laure Sonnier (laure.sonnier@eatg.org)



« Promoting Universal Access in Eastern Europe »

A project funded by the Levi Strauss Foundation

Recently, the Levi Strauss Foundation has confirmed that EATG will be receiving a one year grant for the project “Promoting Universal Access (UA) to prevention, treatment, care and support in Eastern Europe”.

Eastern and Central European countries demonstrate a lack of public, accurate information on HIV/AIDS. Therefore it is the EATG’s priority to supply this information to patients, care takers, social workers and counsellors, health professionals, etc. Eastern Europe - especially Russia and Ukraine have a high prevalence of HIV infection and low levels of knowledge among affected individuals, particularly among the intravenous drug users. Activists, patients and their supporters often face barriers when trying to advocate for better access to treatment.

At the beginning of 2009 EATG

developed a strategy on capacity building within its membership and network and identified Eastern Europe as a priority. Consulted partners from the region expressed their interest in developing HIV treatment and advocacy skills and wish to participate in a training program. Throughout 2009 EATG created a pool of trainers, developed a training module and manuals for treatment literacy and treatment advocacy, and provided 4 trainings.

After the strategic meeting at the end of 2009 at the EECAAC meeting (Eastern Europe and Central Asia Aids Conference, 28-30 October, Moscow) that aimed to draft an Eastern states strategy for its work in this region, EATG started a step-by-step approach to further reach out to the East and involve more people from the region. 2010

would be the year of creating such a longer-term strategy.

EATG also submitted a project proposal to the Levi Strauss Foundation that focuses on the key needs of the Eastern region by **improving the capacity of PLWHA and their health care providers regarding HIV/AIDS treatment literacy and by providing advocacy skills to highly vulnerable populations in Eastern Europe**. This support allows us to start the project in January 2010. The program aims at giving continuity to our training activities and actively reaching out to the East. The trainings that started in 2009 will be continued throughout 2010 and the trainers’ pool and training centre will be further consolidated. A 4 days training will take place in Kiev, Ukraine in June/July 2010 on treatment literacy and treatment advocacy.



EATG’s COPE project is a mechanism to fund the translation and adaptation of patient education materials. Several organisations are now translating patient materials into their own languages.

COPE funds the translation of materials from iBASE such as “Introduction to ART”, “Introduction to Combination Therapy”, “Avoiding and Managing Side Effects” and “Hepatitis C for people living with HIV”, and from NAM such as “Anti-HIV Drugs”, “HIV and Hepatitis C”, “Adherence” and “Viral Load & CD4”. Materials are translated into Eastern European languages, adapted, printed and distributed by local partners.

By Ana Lucia Cardoso (analucia.cardoso@eatg.org)

Brussels I / Sitges III

3rd International Workshop “Clinical Trial Design: Experimental HCV Drugs for HIV/HCV Co-infected people”

The 2009 Brussels I / Sitges III meeting built on the success of two previous meetings focusing on access to HCV experimental drugs for HIV/HCV coinfecting people, and development of a research agenda to facilitate the process. Sitges I and II, held in 2007 and 2008, were instrumental in advancing HCV drug development in co-infected people. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) issued guidelines and recommendations, for HCV drug development including pre-approval studies in HIV co-infected people. Although the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) has not formally issued recommendations, they also support pre-approval studies in HIV/HCV coinfecting people. Community members contributed to these guidelines. Some companies also initiated clinical trials in co-infected people, while others began consulting with the community to discuss their HCV

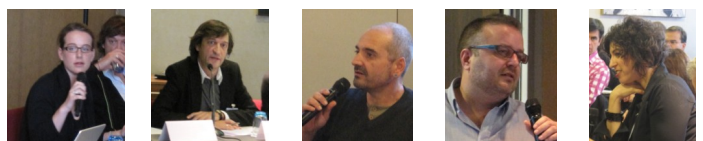
early drug development programs for HIV/HCV co-infected people.

The Brussels I / Sitges III meeting continued this momentum. The objectives were to promote a multi-stakeholder discussion on how to move HCV research and clinical trial design forward for HIV/HCV coinfecting people. The meeting was attended by approximately 50 participants: European and US Community Advocates from EATG, TAG, NATAP, Project Inform, HACA, ELPA, and the World Hepatitis Alliance; Regulatory agencies (FDA and EMA); Pharmaceutical companies (Abbott, Boehringer-Ingelheim, BMS, Gilead, MSD, Roche, Schering-Plough, Tibotec); Clinicians and Researchers, who are specialists in HIV and HCV treatment and clinical research.

The morning session was centered around the following presen-

tations: Dr Filip Josephson from EMA presented the EMA/CHMP guidelines on the clinical evaluation of DAA intended for treatment of chronic hepatitis C. Dr Kimberly Struble from FDA presented the FDA perspectives on clinical trial design for new HCV products. Dr Stéphane Chevaliez from the Department of Virology of the Hôpital Henri Mondor in France provided an update on the resistance to HCV Drugs & its clinical implications.

The afternoon session featured a dynamic roundtable of experts to discuss design of clinical trials for experimental HCV drugs in HIV/HCV coinfecting people.



Organizers: Laure Sonnier, Wim Vandeveldel, Diego Garcia, Joan Tallada, Tracy Swan.

By Laure Sonnier (laure.sonnier@eatg.org)

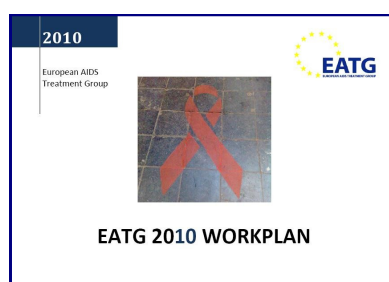
2010 dates to keep in mind

- **CROI 2010**, 17th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections, San Francisco, February 16-19, 2010
- **ISHEID 2010**, 16th International Symposium HIV & Emerging Infectious Diseases, Marseille, March 24-26, 2010
- **BHIVA 2010**, Second Joint Conference of the British HIV Association (BHIVA) with the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH), Manchester, April 20-23, 2010
- **Harm Reduction 2010**: IHRA's 21st International Conference, Liverpool, April 25-29, 2010
- **M2010**, Microbicides: Building Bridges in HIV Prevention, Pittsburgh, May 22-25, 2010
- **AIDS 2010**, 28th International AIDS conference, Vienna, July 18-23, 2010
- **ICAAC**, 2010 Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy, Boston, September 12-15, 2010
- **HIV10**, 10th International Congress on Drug Therapy in HIV Infection, Glasgow, November 7-11, 2010

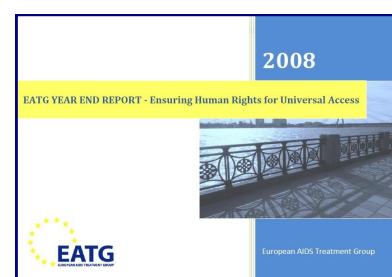
The European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG) is an NGO that represents and defends the treatment-related interests of people living with HIV and AIDS.

Since 1992 EATG has been at the forefront of the development of the civil society response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Europe.

Its mission is to achieve the fastest possible access to state of the art medical products, devices and diagnostic tests that prevent or treat HIV infection or improve the quality of life of people living with HIV, or who are at risk of HIV infection.



The EATG 2010 workplan is available at www.eatg.org



The EATG activity report 2008 is available at www.eatg.org

Our Partners

EATG has many partners and is part of various different networks. See below a non exhaustive list of partners and networks:

AIDES
 AIDS Action Europe
 AIDS and Mobility Europe
 AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition (ATAC)
 AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition (AVAC)
 Correlation European Network Social Inclusion and Health
 EU Civil Society Contact Group
 EU Health Policy Forum
 Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN)
 European AIDS Clinical Society (EACS)
 European AIDS Treatment Network (NEAT)
 European Forum for Good Clinical Practice (EFGCP)
 European Medicines Evaluation Agency (EMA)
 European Patients' Forum (EPF)
 European Platform for patients Organisations, Science and Industry (EPPOSI)
 European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
 Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM)
 Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+)
 Health Action international (HAI)
 i-BASE
 International AIDS Society (IAS)
 International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI)
 International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW)
 International Harm Reduction Association (IHRA)
 International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)
 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)
 NAM
 Open Society Institute (OSI)
 Terrence Higgins Trust (THT)
 UNAIDS

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