

## Press Release

Brussels, 8 November 2018

### Parkinson's disease: understanding the causes to find a cure

As our populations live longer, we are confronted with an increase in age-related diseases and conditions, and the subsequent physical suffering, emotional distress, and economic burden that this provokes. Proactive and more efficient options to discover and develop treatments are needed if we are to face such challenges.

On 8 November, speakers from the scientific community, alongside Members of the European Parliament, and representatives from the European Commission and the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) came together to discuss the way forward in treating Parkinson's disease, but also the causes for this neurodegenerative disease.

Chaired by Member of the European Parliament Pavel Poc, and jointly organised by the European Chemical Society (EuChemS), and the European Federation of Medicinal Chemistry (EFMC), the session provided a kaleidoscopic, timely, and stimulating overview of the current medical and scientific understanding of the disease, as well as the political efforts and support that exist in developing treatments. "I believe that today's discussions will allow us to better understand the current state of affairs of Parkinson's disease" commented Pilar Goya, EuChemS President. "Many challenges remain for the research into the pathophysiology and pharmacology of Parkinson's disease".

From current treatments, as described by Per Svenningsson from the Karolinska Institute to new targets and drug discovery, presented by Uli Hacksell from Medivir, the complex nature of Parkinson's, as well as the unknowns that still exist were highly emphasised. Parkinson Institute of Milan's Roberto Cilia highlighted the difficulty in fully understanding the cocktail of causes that trigger Parkinson's disease, whilst Angela Cenci Nilsson, from Lund University, described the vital but complex use of animal models to move forward in our grasp of the disease. "Parkinson's disease, and other neurodegenerative diseases are highly complex and require a strong medicinal chemistry approach" commented Yves Auberson, EFMC President. "Both academia and industry struggle with the long-term investments required as the discovery and development of new drugs is challenging and expensive".

The potential causes for Parkinson's disease, besides ageing and genetic predispositions, may include exposure to environmental factors such as pesticides or metal ions. Head of EFSA's Unit on Pesticides, Jose Tarazona, provided a clear-cut overview of how health risk assessments are made, and the need to carefully make use of scientific advice provided to

avoid harmful chemicals affecting people, and the environment around them. Silvia Villanueva Ferragud, from the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission, provided a comprehensive summary of the many initiatives and projects linked to developing treatments for Parkinson's disease that the European Commission funds or supports.

Finally, EuChemS General Secretary, Nineta Hrastelj, emphasised the importance that the future EU research framework programme, *Horizon Europe*, can play in helping to take a step forward in finding a cure for Parkinson's. She moreover highlighted the need to support the best science in Europe and the need for more ambition if such an aim is to be achieved.

"Hosting the event here in the European Parliament is significant, because it enables us to stimulate the discussion between the scientific community and policymakers" concluded Pavel Poc, Member of the European Parliament. "Whilst the focus of this session is Parkinson's disease, it is also a case study of similar age-related conditions that will only increase in the years to come – further underlining the need to be proactive if we are to efficiently deal with it".

Ends.

#### **About EuChemS**

EuChemS, the European Chemical Society, coordinates the work of 48 Chemical Societies and other chemistry related organisations, representing more than 160,000 chemists. Through the promotion of chemistry and by providing expert and scientific advice, EuChemS aims to take part in solving today's major societal challenges.

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