

**WORKSHOP 1: FREE MOVEMENT OF PRODUCTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Conclusions of the rapporteur

Mr. Chairman

Ladies and gentlemen

1. One question which was in the center of the debate in working session 1 was the necessity to agree on the ultimate goals and trade-offs of a EU pharmaceutical policy. Generally speaking we can say that promoting a strong and internationally competitive research industry and ensuring an acceptable degree of accessibility of all EU citizens to drugs are the two final goals.

In the session is clearly underlined that there must be more effort to find a good balance, to try to find an equilibrium between these conflicting goals and between the different interest of citizens, health professionals, health authorities and the industry which is quite predominant in the sector of pharmaceuticals and medical devices.

Several speakers asked also to put a clearer hierarchy and transparency, not in procedural sense of the term, but in the sense of making clearer the motivation of the decisions, taken on EU and national plan. The concern about health must always be present.

2. A simple statement

There are still great differences in tariffs and reimbursement systems

3. A third general remark stressed the fact that until now in the field we are considering, there is a more attention to the supply side than on the demand side, in which a distinction must be made between health professionals and patients.

4. It is clear that a shift is going on from the patient as consumer to the patient as a citizen. In this context we had a debate about information and the use of information.

There was mentioned that the EU is preparing an initiative on direct information to the patients on their demand (AIDS, COPD, diabetics). Several persons underlined the necessity of more neutral and comparative information prepared on independent way. In this field, there are naturally the practical difficulties to make a distinction between information and promotion, and also the fact that internet is now available all over the world can not be neglected.

5. But also the health professionals need more adequate information. In that field there were two interventions; one in favour to create and enforce networks concerning the good use of medical procedures and techniques, so called health technology assessment in which Belgium is not on the first row. A good understander knows what I try so say.

On the other hand there is the evolution to the use of medical guidelines. The limits and the possibilities were clearly indicated. It is evident that in the European Union member states must agree that it is only useful to fix good guidelines, when those are based on a common methodology and on valid technics.

It was clearly mentioned that the goals of these efforts must be clearly defined. It concerns measures to improve quality, with possible side effects on the budget. When this last principle is the ultimate goal there is as such no guarantee for succes.

6. A sixth element which was illustrated clearly in the session was the role of competition law which could be a threat for the fundamental organisation of the health system based on social dialogue. This is the case in Germany where the reference price system is subject of a principal debate before the European Court of Justice. It is in a way a paradoxical situation because the system of reference price aims to create more competition on the market.

Naturally we must specify that reference pricing is an effective but partial solution, as it does not provide an appropriate answer to the pricing or financing of innovative patented drugs that do not have close substitutes or equivalents.

7. Another consideration is that the sector of medical devices is a kind of terra incognita. Nevertheless it concerns an industry with 250.000 persons with great impact on health expenditure. With the genetic revolution before us there is a real need to define the requirements for clinical investigations with human materials.
8. Further there was a plea for an additional harmonization and initiatives concerning market authorisation for generics and more proactive positions of the European Community. Also there exists a need to get a clearer picture on parallel trade.
9. The accession of a new set of countries to the EU is likely to worsen the conflicts between industrial and social goals.
10. Last but not least there was the fundamental consideration that we must pay attention for the fact that internal market policy on pharmaceuticals has its influence on a broader level, namely the poor countries.

The key question on this symposium nevertheless concerns the definition of the future role of Europe in the field public health, especially on the demand side. There was no proposition made in favour of creating new regulatory agencies or other European bodies of such approach or to enlarge substantially the competences of the Commission. Always the question is there : what could be the benefit or added value. One keyword frequently mentioned nevertheless was networking and cooperation.

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