
**BELGIAN PRESIDENCY OF
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**THE COMMITMENTS OF THE BELGIAN
SOCIALIST MUTUAL BENEFIT SOCIETY**



A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTOR



La Mutualité
Socialiste

LA FORCE DE LA SOLIDARITÉ



Socialistische
Mutualiteiten

SOCIALIST MUTUAL BENEFIT SOCIETY^[1]: A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTOR

During the belgian presidency, the socialist mutual benefit society, which has been at the heart of social and health-related activity for more than 150 years, remains particularly vigilant with regard to the future of the European social policy in the context of a difficult economic period in which the desire to reduce public spending is paramount.

With the new “Europe 2020”^[2] strategy, the European Union undertakes to achieve five major goals with regard to employment, research and development, reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and education and social inclusion levels, particularly by reducing poverty.

The issues are crucial. On the one hand, the financial, economic and social crisis encourages member states to implement large-scale structural reforms while, on the other hand, the European Union is committed to introducing measures to revive the single market by strengthening competitiveness, productivity, viable growth potential and economic governance^[3].

As far as the socialist mutual benefit society is concerned, the measures to be taken will have an impact on the social policies of member states at a time when the links between social inequalities and health inequalities have been clearly established; instead of being reduced, the scale of these inequalities is growing both in Belgium and the rest of Europe. These inequalities have repercussions for the level of growth and economic development and generate huge costs in healthcare budgets. Almost 80 million people live below the poverty line (i.e. 60% of the average income of their country), which comprises 17% of the population of Europe. For 8% of Europeans, a

job is not in itself enough to guarantee an escape from poverty. In most member states, children are more vulnerable to this menace than the rest of the population – 19 million of them have been affected.

With regard to health, these differences are even more striking; a woman born in France can expect to live on average 7 years longer than a woman born in Lithuania. Differences in life expectancy at birth vary between EU member states and can be as high as 8 years for women and 14 years for men. It has been established that the risk of mortality is greater among people with a low level of training than among those with a higher level of training, with differences between 22% and 43% for men and between 20% and 32% for women. In Belgium, a woman with a degree can expect to have a healthy life 18 years longer than an unqualified woman of the same age.

The social dimension of the 2020 Strategy is not ambitious enough given that the reduction of these inequalities requires European decision-makers to demonstrate a strong political will that is scarcely evident.

The belgian socialist mutual benefit society undertakes to support the initiatives, conclusions and resolutions taken by the belgian Presidency in those areas concerning the fight against poverty, the reduction in all inequalities for groups at risk, the strengthening of social rights between the genders and the improvement of legal provisions for social services of general interest.



[1] The word ‘mutualité’ is quite clear in French language. In English it is close to the principle of ‘provident funds’ and ‘friendly societies’ (not ‘insurance mutuals’ or US-style ‘mutual funds’). In this publication the term is used to represent ‘mutualité’: ‘mutuality’, ‘mutual sickness fund’ and ‘mutual health fund’.

[2] Communication (Com 2010 2020), a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

[3] Communication (Com 2010 367/2) on Tools for stronger EU economic governance.

FOR A DYNAMIC SOCIAL EUROPE COMPATIBLE WITH THE INTERNAL MARKET

There is no doubt that the achievement of the internal market has been one of the major European success stories. It has enabled the provision of a solid foundation for the Union, a modern legislative framework, protective 'acquis communautaire', constant vigilance on the part of the Commission with regard to competition, state aid and the transposition of the range of Community law into internal law. It is due to this internal market that businesses have been able to develop, thrive and create wealth.

However, improving the health of citizens, reducing social inequalities, improving the quality of life of the elderly and disabled, taking action on the deciding factors of health, education, lifestyle and the quality of housing and environment all comprise an integral part of the European project. From this perspective, it is no longer acceptable to pass down the requirements of the internal market and competition without taking account of considerations of social policy and solidarity.

It should be noted that, since the most recent enlargement of the EU, many Member States have adopted the idea of a wider liberalisation of services, including social, health and education services. Combined with the current crisis, the long-standing social models organised and financed by solidarity and redistribution mechanisms are subject to considerable pressure to reform them or to reduce their field of activity.

In the future, it will be essential to enable the national and European levels to coexist. It will effectively be up to each Member State to provide, promote, improve and extend social security cover. These choices, on a national scale, reflect the cultural and social values, the history, the institutions and the level of economic development but, at the same time, on the European scale, these different social and health models reflect a body of common and

fundamental values^[4] that should be supported and defended.

Given the imperatives of free competition and the internal market, the Commission must be sorely tempted to limit the margins of manoeuvre of Member States at the risk of causing defensive reactions with the sole aim of maintaining and protecting social benefits. If any harmonisation of social legislation is impossible, it is now more than ever the time to act on a real strengthening of the instruments available to the European Union since the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty: the application of the horizontal clause (Art. 9 TFUE) intended to measure any new European Union initiative or policy against the yardstick of the social effects that could arise, the implementation of a policy (Art. 14 TFUE) intended to guarantee social services of general interest, to rely on the Charter of Fundamental Rights (Art. 6 TUE and annex) for a social policy, the active use of the open method of coordination...

Europe must place its economic policy on a genuine social foundation. The socialist mutual benefit society calls on European authorities to form a SOCIAL PACT on a European scale.

The Belgian socialist mutual benefit society specifically requests the preparation of a new social agenda in order to set the objectives of a social pact to which the Commission would commit itself, demonstrating its desire to structure its 2020 strategy on the three pillars of employment, the economy and social services.

[4] Conclusions of the Council on the values and principles common to health systems in the EU, 2733rd session, Luxembourg 1 and 2 June 2006. Resolution of the European Parliament (2005/2248) on the European social model.



THE MUTUAL BENEFIT SOCIETY – A POSITIVE VALUE AND A GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR EUROPE

The Financial crisis has highlighted a number of deficiencies in the governance of major companies. A way out of the crisis and lasting growth can only be assured if governance methods are improved or redefined.

The governance method and operational principles of the socialist mutual benefit society are part of its history and have formed its current identity. In carrying out its activities over more than 150 years, it has played a precursory role in a field as important and recognised by everything that forms part of social security and has thus been a basis for social cohesion throughout the country. The socialist mutual benefit society has come to be entrusted by Belgian legislators with the management of compulsory health insurance. But the socialist mutual benefit society also carries out its activities in the field of complementary health insurance, where we develop a global view of the health policy taking account of the needs of the citizens. The socialist mutual benefit society deals with the “social environment” by means of health-related information, awareness, education and promotion and supports its members in the complex field of health.

The mutual benefit society in Belgium is not an exception in Europe, but whatever role it plays in health insurance or social services and whatever its size, it can be characterised by the universality of the principles that identify it. This positive value of mutual benefit societies for our health systems is often ignored by European authorities.

Our principles are based on solidarity, the non-exclusion of risks and the absence of any form of discrimination. The mutual benefit society does not pursue any profit-related goal, and its social and innovative nature can be measured in its plans for coverage of new medical options that cannot always be covered by compulsory insurance.

Our organizations are not represented by shares or membership equity that would provide holders with an income. They operate using funds principally consisting of member contributions; these funds are therefore collective and indivisible. As a non profit oriented organisation surpluses are primarily intended for members services interests.

Autonomy of management is assured by private organizations with a legal personality, completely separate from the state and organisations directly connected to public authorities and having their own decision-making procedures. As self-governing organizations, they do not depend on public subsidies, with the exception of missions assigned by the legislator.

In the field of insurance, mutual benefit societies have a duty to observe national and European legislation, but as their operational principles and organisational form are not recognised by an appropriate European statute, they are subject to unfair competition compared to private commercial insurers.

All these factors underline the relevance of the mutualist response in a time of crisis, particularly the absence of any pursuit of capital profitability and the lack of exposure to financial market speculation.

The Belgian socialist mutual benefit society invites European authorities to take an initiative aimed at acknowledging the positive mutualist value of its principles, governance and organisation as forming a part of the organisations that have enabled the founding of the European social model and still play a role in its development.

SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

The socialist mutual benefit society believes that a number of political initiatives must become a reality through legislative developments:

The EU's 2020 strategy must be truly ambitious and cannot make do with minimalist goals. The socialist mutual benefit society pleads for:

- The establishment of the fight against poverty and social exclusion as a priority of this strategy without assuming that it will result automatically from a policy of economic growth. The proposed objective to reduce by 25% the number of Europeans living below the poverty line (i.e. 25 million people) is not ambitious enough;
- Tackling the causes of poverty by ensuring a better redistribution of wealth and a reduction in social and economic inequalities;
- A guarantee of the participation of civil society and, more particularly, those people experiencing poverty in the preparation and application of regulations that concern them^[5].

To achieve this, the socialist mutual benefit society requests:

- a. that the progress of the 2020 strategy is measured by means of social indicators and not simply economic indicators;
- b. the strengthening and improvement of the open method of coordination (social OMC) so as to have an impact on poverty, social exclusion and inequalities: costed objectives, improvement in governance and popular participation in the preparation of national action plans;
- c. that the implementation of the platform against poverty does not amount only to a simple forum for consulting civil society, but has the resources to tackle all elements of poverty: environment, housing, education, health, employment and social protection.

- a. implementing the EU Recommendation on active inclusion and linking it with national action plans that have been reconsidered while taking into account, amongst other things, the fact that if employment is a significant factor in the fight against poverty, it is not systematically so;
- b. making progress on the question of a suitable amount for minimum income;
- c. making progress on the question of a framework directive relating to quality jobs;
- d. guaranteeing the right to quality social and public services at affordable prices via a framework directive;
- e. adopting a Council recommendation on child and family poverty resulting from the conference at the end of the European year for combating poverty.

[5] Cf. the method of dialogue practised in Belgium in the context of the inter-federal service for the fight against poverty (of which the UNMS is a member of the support committee), in the wake of the general report on poverty.

POLICY FOR DISABLED AND CHRONICALLY ILL PEOPLE^[6]

The socialist mutual benefit society believes that 5 principles underlie a real European policy:

- 1. Recognition of each person as a fully-fledged citizen.**
- 2. “Disability mainstreaming”: the disability aspect must be taken into consideration in all the fields of the society.**
- 3. “Empowerment”: this means that the disabled person must be able to acquire the necessary knowledge in the intended field, with the desired result.**
- 4. Consultation: disabled people must be consulted throughout the discussion and decision-making procedures.**
- 5. Autonomy and life choices: regulations must provide disabled people with the ability to manage and be responsible for their lives autonomously.**

The socialist mutual benefit society demands a strongly proactive approach in terms of European legislative developments.

1. Non-discrimination directive:

The transverse directive project relating to equal opportunities for groups subject to discrimination, presently under discussion, should be strongly supported by the Belgian presidency to help it succeed.

2. The 2020 strategy

The wording of the 2020 strategy, characterised by five objectives and nine significant initiatives, does not cover the disability aspect.

The Presidency must therefore convey in concrete terms the questioning of the representatives who invited the European Commission to propose a European pact for disabled people.

The Disability Action Plan 2010-2020 (EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020) must have support for the autonomy of disabled people as its guiding principle and set medium- to long-term objectives with regard to indicators of monitoring and evaluation procedures. The Belgian presidency must have these options validated.

3. An acceptable income and the fight against poverty by disabled people

To have a basic economic capacity constitutes an unqualified requirement. Most disabled people live below the poverty line. This line must be raised at a European level, and the objective of reducing the number of poor people by 20,000,000 must be backed by efficient indicators, one of which is disability.

4. Ratification of the International Convention on the rights of the disabled

The ratification of the International Convention on the rights of the disabled and the provision of a monitoring procedure must constitute one of the priorities of the European Union.

[6] These claims are covered by the association ASPH of the socialist mutual benefit society



5. Reinforcing and developing the concepts of support and autonomy for disabled people

A disabled person's autonomy, his/her participation in society and the resources that must be provided to enable him/her to assume the rights and obligations that are part of being a citizen, are all essential.

This must be set out in restrictive terms for countries in all fields and at all levels.

6. Reciprocal national recognition of the status of disabled people (legitimation card)

A European recognition card should be introduced, along the lines of that which already exists for parking in reserved spaces. Such a card would guarantee the clear and unequivocal legitimation of the status of a disabled person anywhere in the European Union and in any circumstances. It would guarantee the disabled person freedom of movement and the protection of specific regulations, provided that the legitimation was validated in his/her country of origin.

7. The development of regulations concerning full access to all buildings, modes of transport and means of communication

Localised and restrictive regulations progressively improve access for the disabled to transportation (trains, planes, etc.), but this is not enough in terms of guaranteeing access to property and services for everyone.

We must commit ourselves to ensuring accessibility at all levels to property and services.

It is essential that joint and restrictive minimal standards are established. Out of concern for universal access for everyone, these standards should always be inspired by the principles of design for all.

8. Guaranteeing a specific limit on the principle of freedom of competition in the property and services market

The "public services of general interest"^[7] directive authorises the Court of Justice of the European Community to requalify the nature of the service by taking account of the service itself and not of the public sector it is intended for. The possibility of such a requalification makes potentially obsolete the articles of the directive that allow some disability-related services not to be subject to the principle of free competition: particularly for those sectors related to health and education, states can limit the responsibilities of these services to approved and recognised structures.

This situation is of great concern, and the liberalisation of services markets has not had a positive effect for the consumer, but has had negative consequences for the most "fragile" consumers, who more and more frequently end up in a spiral of poverty and excessive debt.

The European Parliament must re-examine and increase the number of exceptions to free competition, with a view to ensuring access to affordable quality services for all.



[7] Directive 2006/123/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market, OJ of the European Communities, 27.12.2006

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES – SOCIAL RIGHTS FOR MEN/ WOMEN^[8]

1. The individualisation of social rights

At the end of World War II, European social security systems were designed based on rights attributed to a family group (in the person of its 'head') and not on the basis of the rights of the individuals themselves (except for the contributions, which are individually based). This has resulted in serious direct and indirect discrimination between men and women.

The European Union has for many years been the driving force behind the promotion of the idea of the individualisation of social rights. It believes that there is a compulsory progression that must occur for there to be real (rather than simply superficial) equality between men and women with regard to socio-economic rights^[9]. It must, however, be acknowledged that the status quo remains largely unchanged, despite some advances.

The family-based concept of social security is not only responsible for socio-economic inequalities between men and women, but it also results in many cases in the dependence and the lack of "social citizenship" of the married woman. It is also an important vehicle for poverty, as the full benefits are not granted to both members of a couple who have made equal contributions. It causes many harmful effects such as "false separations" or a hesitancy to live together as a couple, this step effectively proving to be an impoverishing factor. And finally, it nips in the bud any "natural" alliances, whether between a married couple or family members.

In the opinion of the socialist mutual benefit society, the same rights must be guaranteed to everyone, regardless of their family status.

[8] These demands are covered by the association FPS of the socialist mutual benefit society

[9] See, for example, the Council directive 79/7/CEE, the Community Charter of the fundamental social rights of workers, adopted in Strasbourg on 9/12/89, the White Book Com (94) 333 of 27/7/94...

2. Parental leave

Out of concern for the welfare of children, fairness in the employment market and, more generally, equality between men and women, responsibility for the support and education of children must be taken by the two parents.

Motherhood must not be allowed to impede women's access to the employment market, and male participation in this same market cannot be allowed to prevent the development of the family. We consider that extending maternal leave goes against these principles. Beyond the period of a few weeks of rest required by pregnancy and childbirth, and obviously restricted to women, any additional leave should be considered not as medical leave but as social leave, enabling the welcoming of the newborn child into society and into the family. This part of the leave must be shared equally between both parents.

With the aim of underlining the importance and legitimacy of the participation of fathers in the education and care of children, paternity leave should be increased and made compulsory.

As far as parental leave is concerned, we maintain that to offer men and women an untransferable period of leave of equal duration encourages men to exercise their right to this leave.

The loss of salary associated with taking parental leave that is not, or only partially, compensated, is also a disincentive to taking the leave, particularly for men. We therefore call for compensation for parental leave that is proportional to occupational income.

The belgian socialist mutual benefit society believes that the following actions are required:

- **Making paternity leave compulsory and increasing its length**
- **Making parental leave untransferable and of equal length for both parents**
- **Providing compensation for parental leave in proportion to income**



3. The clause for the most favoured European women

The principle is to coordinate at a European level the legislation most advantageous to women in 5 basic areas; i.e. the choice of giving life, the family, combating violence, employment and politics. Each member state will implement a legislative package for its female citizens consisting of the most advanced existing laws in each of the 27 countries of the EU.

The clause promotes three principles. Firstly, there is an emancipatory objective underlying the clause. Secondly, the clause is intended to unite women and put an end to the existing inequalities of rights of European women and to introduce a uniquely European – and better – right for 253 million European women. Thirdly, the clause constitutes a lever for the whole of Europe. Improving women's rights is contributing to the advance of ways of thinking to help Europe as a whole move forward.

The Belgian socialist mutual benefit society requests the introduction and application of the most advantageous legislation for all European women in the following areas: the choice of giving life, the family, combating violence, employment and politics.

4. Abortion

The decriminalisation of abortion practised in good conditions and free, easy and informed access are necessary in respect of fundamental rights: that of women to manage their own bodies and the right to health and the care that each state must guarantee all women, without distinction.

Banning abortion does not prevent women from having an abortion illegally, with all the risks that attracts for their health and even their lives, resulting in often disastrous consequences for them. What is more, such a ban constitutes an inequality with regard to the right to health, as access to an abortion carried out under good conditions is then much easier for women who can afford to pay for an abortion privately or abroad.

There have been recent advances in some European countries (Spain, Portugal...) in the field of abortion, but other countries still do not recognise this right (Ireland, Poland, Malta and Cyprus).

Although legislation on abortion is a matter of national jurisdiction, the question of abortion is dealt with at a European institution level along several lines: the right to health, women's rights and men's rights.

The Belgian socialist mutual benefit society requests the decriminalisation of abortion in all member states.

SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST (SSGI)

In 2006 the Commission^[10] identified the two major types of SSGI (with their legal regimes and additional social protection regimes, in their various forms of mutualist or professional organisations), and one year later, in November 2007, in the context of the internal market^[11] review, it shelved the development of services of general interest, including social services of general interest^[12]. The Commission merely opened a website on which anyone is free to question the Commission without any legislative solution.

Since then the approach of the Commission has consisted of denying the problems of tension between some of the provisions of Community law of the internal market with the achievement of the missions of general interest with a social purpose. And yet, if the operators of social services are subject to typical rules of the internal market, their key role of providing assistance and care to the elderly, the disabled, the very young and young offenders risks being damaged.

The approach consisting on the one hand in opposing SSGIs, standards relating to competition, state aid and public procurements, and on the other hand the concepts of “general interest” and social cohesion can put in jeopardy the future of the European social model.

There is currently no legal wording that defines social services of general interest. The subtle balance established in many European countries of maintaining market led activities together with non market health and social activities risks being upset to the disadvantage of the most vulnerable population groups. The increase in costs caused by the commercialisation of many unmarketable activities would radically change significant sectors of the population in precarious situations.

The economic sphere is based on the EU's strong and direct competencies, while decision making process concerning social protection is based on the principle of subsidiarity. Now bit by bit, without any great fuss, the social sphere is losing ground and being surpassed by stronger economic fields.

How can one claim to want to create an internal market for European citizens without examining the question of the political balance to be achieved on services of general interest? How can the fundamental liberties of the internal market be reconciled with the public regulation requirements of the supply of social services whose purpose is to achieve their missions of general interest, solidarity and social protection?

The Belgian socialist mutual benefit society believes that it is essential to reconcile social services with the internal market and the competition policy. The SSGIs will only be able to fully play their role (social inclusion and combating poverty) within the framework of the 2020 strategy if they have legal clarity and security. As for public procurements, social criteria should be included in their allocation and particular attention should be paid to meeting social needs when public procurements are awarded.

The Belgian socialist mutual benefit society requests that on completion of the 3rd Forum on social services of general interest, the Presidency makes the necessary provisions to ensure the monitoring of all projects, reports or initiatives in progress or yet to come from the European Parliament, the Social Protection Committee, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission in order to assemble the main elements necessary for a policy ensuring consistency between social services and internal market.

[10] Final COM (2006) 177 of 26 April 2006

[11] Final COM (2007) 724 of 20 November 2007:

[12] Final COM (2007) 725 of 20 November 2007

THE SOCIAL ECONOMY – A DRIVING FORCE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The social economy represents 10% of all 2 million European businesses, or 6% of total employment.

Cooperative, mutual, associative and participative enterprises referred to by the concept of the social economy actively contribute to improving and strengthening the European social model. The social economy is based on a social paradigm that corresponds to the fundamental principles of the European social model. Mutual benefit societies share many characteristics with social economy enterprises (internal democracy, lack of dominant shareholder, accumulation of collective capital rather than individual profit and aim to answer to general interest's needs).

Social economy enterprises play an important role in protecting and strengthening this model while managing the creation and the supply of many social services and services of general interest. Social economy enterprises have a great potential to create and maintain stable jobs, principally due to the fact that these activities, by their very nature, cannot be delocalised.

The European social model is built on the provision of a high level of services, products and jobs created by the social economy and is as well benefiting from the capabilities of foresight and innovation developed by its promoters. The social economy has proved that it can substantially improve the social status of disadvantaged people. It constitutes a significant reservoir of social innovation, by encouraging those faced with difficulties to find solutions to their own social problems, for example with regard to work-life balance, gender equality, the quality of family lives childcare and care for the elderly and the disabled.

The role of social economy enterprises should be given more visibility in the context of achieving the objectives of economic growth, employability, training and human services that can be found in all European policies.

In spite of their increasing importance, social economy enterprises are still not very well known, and they lack institutional visibility in some member states.

The Belgian socialist mutual benefit society considers that the social economy can only thrive and display its full potential if it benefits from favourable conditions and appropriate political, legislative and operational measures.

The Belgian socialist mutual benefit society requests that the European Commission takes the necessary actions to ensure the growth of the social economy at a European level in line with the recommendations expressed in the European Parliament's resolution on social economy^[13].

The Belgian socialist mutual benefit society urges the European Commission to act on the conclusions of the conference on social economy in the fields of social innovation, technological innovation, training and sustainable development in order to implement concrete policies in support of the social economy.

[13] Report by Madame Toia: EP A6-0015/2009

OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION

In complement to making up of European regulations, the open method of coordination is the main instrument for convergence of social policies at the EU level. The open method of cooperation is a voluntary process of political cooperation based on the establishment of common objectives and indicators. It was initially applied in the field of employment policies and extended to social inclusion, pensions and access to quality healthcare. Apart from articles 145 - 149 of the TFUE regarding employment matters, the OMC has no legal ground, it is part of the so called "soft law" framework.

While recognising that the OMC aims to set up a mutual apprenticeship with regard to a detailed examination of institutional policies, programmes and systems portrayed as constituting "good practice" in national reports, it is nevertheless weakened by a lack of symmetry between (restrictive) economic policies and social issues (principle of subsidiarity).

While "peer review" encourages the distribution of good practice between member states by evaluating the effectiveness of the principal policies or institutions, it is not necessarily an instrument of progress as it also highlights the failings of states in their social policies (members do not want to name and embarrass their peers).

The belgian socialist mutual benefit society is delighted by the desire to support the social OMC, although the latter must encourage the progression of existing social models in the different countries of the European Union.

The belgian socialist mutual benefit society believes that strengthening instruments (objectives, indicators and guidelines) can only affect social policies if the recommendations from the OMC are restrictive in nature and if the European Commission ensures they are followed up and applied by member states.

The belgian socialist mutual benefit society also requests that a bigger role is given to the civil society in the debates on the OMC.

In addition, article 9 of the Treaty (TFUE) introduced the idea of a horizontal clause requiring European institutions to check that their actions and policies do not conflict with social requirements and imposed an examination of the social impact (Social Impact Assessment SIA) of all European legislation.

The belgian socialist mutual benefit society considers this clause to be a significant advance that should lead to consideration of all the social consequences of European policies related to the implementation of the internal market. Although at a European level the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) already exists, the socialist mutual benefit society calls on the belgian Presidency and the European Commission to make concrete proposals to improve the use and effectiveness of the IIA.

PATIENT MOBILITY AND THE PHARMACEUTICAL POLICY

In Europe, and since 1994 the socialist mutual benefit society was a pioneer, with the support of European funds from FEDER (European regional development fund), of a patient mobility policy in cross border areas which suited to the respect for European Regulations. We have welcomed the rulings of the Court of Justice, and Belgium was the first country to transpose these legal case law into national legislation.

Based on this unique experience at a European level, the socialist mutual benefit society welcomed the new proposal for a directive on patient's rights in cross-border healthcare, approved in June by the Council. We will pay particular attention to the wording during the 2nd reading in the European Parliament.

In the cross-border areas, where the socialist mutual benefit society is particularly active, mobility policies take shape that are perfectly adapted to the needs of the populations who can constitute development models on the subject of cross-border care. The socialist mutual benefit society requests, in line with article 168 TFUE, §2, that the Commission takes an initiative in concert with the relevant authorities and local actors to learn from the experiences that have taken place until now.

Like health, the market for pharmaceutical products are dissimilar to others ; patients are not consumers, and exclusively supporting the competitiveness of firms must not allow the Commission to forget its major responsibility protecting the public health of European citizens (art 168 TFUE, §1). The different current legislative initiatives, i.e. the directive on counterfeit medicines and pharmacovigilance, constitute real advances.

The belgian socialist mutual benefit society believes that the interests of pharmaceutical companies must never take precedence over the general interest and public health.

As regards the project of the directive on information for patients, the socialist mutual benefit society points out that the "information" supplied by pharmaceutical companies, whatever methods are used, is promotional by nature, and the use of the term "information" in this context comes close to being improper, constituting what is effectively no more than publicity. The socialist mutual benefit society considers that this information should be provided by independent organisations and not through the industry itself. So that citizens can make well-informed choices, this information must be reliable, transparent, comparative, comprehensible and suitable for consumers.



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