

Press Release

Belgium misdiagnosis puts medicines' supply and patients at risk

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On 28 March 2019, the Belgian Parliament will vote for a complete export ban for wholesale distributors in Belgium.

Health Minister Maggie De Block's proposal is intended to address medicine shortages but is likely not to serve its purpose. The proposal targets all medicines and not only those experiencing shortages. The proposal jeopardises the delivery of medicines and ultimately may put patients' health at risk.

As other European countries, in recent years Belgium has been facing temporary shortages of medicines. The proposed law aims to offer a solution, introducing an export ban for wholesale distributors. While initiatives to address medicines shortages are welcome, with the proposed export ban, one thing is clear: the wrong diagnosis is being made. The complete export ban goes far beyond other countries measures which place limited exports restrictions for medicines experiencing or at risk of shortages yet even these have limited impact.

Wholesale distributors are tasked with guaranteeing that patients receive medicines needed on a daily basis in their local pharmacy and the proposed legislation will counter-productive to this duty. The Belgian medicines' distribution model is one of the most efficient in the world, with a strong presence on the national territory, thanks to an extensive network of pharmacies and the daily deliveries of wholesale distributors. Wholesale distributors try to ensure their daily deliveries in an extremely competitive environment. The export ban will put further pressure on their every decreasing remuneration, and this may jeopardize their service to the pharmacists and therefore put the timely supply of medicines to patients at risk.

Furthermore, the export ban will not contribute in improving medicines' availability in Belgium. In fact, in those countries where limited export restrictions are applied, shortages have not meaningfully decreased after the introduction of such limitations. This is mainly due to the fact the real reasons for shortages lie elsewhere: i.e. problems in the production, transport or supply of raw materials, or quotas provided by manufacturers for the local market. Additionally, alternatives for patients will often be more expensive. And in the end, the pharmaceutical industry will be the big winner in this situation.

Finally, it is important to underline that the export ban is also a flagrant violation of the free movement of goods and services as established by the Treaty of the European Union.

The export ban will not solve the issue of shortages, and it will jeopardize the distribution of medicines in Belgium!

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European Healthcare Distribution Association (GIRP) ([website](#))

GIRP, the European Healthcare Distribution Association, is the umbrella organisation for pharmaceutical full-line wholesalers and distributors of healthcare products and services in Europe. It represents the national associations of over 750 pharmaceutical wholesalers serving 33 European countries, as well as major international and pan-European healthcare distribution companies. GIRP members employ over 140,000 people and distribute around 15 billion packs of medicines as well as a wide range of healthcare products per year. As the vital link in healthcare, they are committed to developing and providing innovative and efficient healthcare products and services to improve health and wellbeing of patients across Europe.

NVGV-ANGR ([website](#))

NVGV-ANGR is the GIRP's member national association of wholesale distributors in Belgium.