

A European market for health services? Is that why healthcare is not excluded from TTIP?

(28 November 2014) On 27 November the European Commissioner for Health and Food, Vytenis Andriukaitis launched the idea of an EU "single market for health services". EPSU has asked for a meeting with the Commissioner to clarify what is intended. EPSU has serious concerns about this idea and how it would achieve better quality care for all EU citizens. An internal market would involve a fundamental reform of healthcare systems including competition and privatisation. Discussing this without full involvement of citizens and the workers concerned that deliver care - junior and other doctors, ambulance drivers, registered, community and other nurses, cleaners, paramedical staff and administrative workers - is not acceptable. And if the comparison with the EU internal market for energy is anything to go by, Member States and the Commission should better think twice. If the European Commissioner shares the ambition that all people in the European Union should enjoy quality healthcare - a fundamental right anchored in the EU Treaty - then he should understand that more competition is not the way to achieve this.

There is another concern. EPSU, ETUC and many others have called for the exclusion of public services including health care from the Free Trade Agreements like TTIP. An article similar to the one on the exclusion of audio-visual services would suffice, i.e., to state that "public services/healthcare services are not covered by this agreement". The Commission and Member States have so far resisted to do this and EPSU can only presume that it is because they want to open up certain health services (and other public services) to more competition. Are some Member States plotting in secret to push for EU liberalisation of health services? The leader of Europe's liberal party ALDE has also called for reform of labour markets, pensions and health systems as the way to address the lack of economic growth in the EU. Europe's people are not waiting for such schemes. All health care services, however they are organised and financed, were excluded from the EU's Services Directive for good reason. The EU should not undo this important compromise.

Background

The idea to create an internal market for health services was mentioned by the Commissioner in an interview in the European Voice. It says: *After all the hesitations over who does what in the new European Commission, Vytenis Andriukaitis is visibly impatient and ambitious to meet his responsibilities as Commissioner for health and food safety. In the run-up to the first council of health ministers that he will attend in his new role – on 1 December – he is eager to share his vision of where EU policy should be heading. “Moving around Europe is taken for granted, so systems should be in place that can take care of everyone wherever they are”, he told European Voice. **Mirroring the logic of the EU’s bid for a single market for energy, he envisages “a single market for health services”.*** [European Voice, 27.11.2014](#) (you need to register). Details of the EU Commission plan are not available and the Commissioner might have been quoted not correctly.

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