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## **Eurofedop Seminar**

**Malta, 25-27\_10\_2007**

### ***Services and health for sale?***

#### **Introduction**

Eurofedop created a unique momentum in Malta by inviting experts from different fields all over Europe who discussed the future of SSGI and health services in the EU. The Eurofedop/UHM seminar served as the perfect platform for those people to meet, exchange and learn. The main aim of this seminar was to discuss and to gain a better understanding of the role of 'Europe' in the context of health care services and to exchange experiences. ECJ case law shows that even though health care is a typical national issue, it does affect the systems of other Member States due to increased mobility of European citizens.

A protest action of nurses took place during the opening of the seminar. The press paid attention to the seminar as well. During a visit to the brand new Mater Dei hospital, a TV Malta camera crew was present, asking the participants for their impressions of the hospital. Whilst the seminar on health services was taking place, a 'historic agreement' was signed in Malta on the improvement of working conditions for nurses and midwives, involving Health Minister Louis Deguara and UHM. The following day Minister Deguara held a speech at the Eurofedop/UHM seminar.



#### **The Seminar**

Some fifteen key speakers with different expertises from all over Europe actively participated in the seminar. UHM president Gaetano Tanti opened the seminar and underlined the importance of being prepared for the changes within the sector, as social partners. Raf Chanterie, president of the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) referred in his speech to some elements of the so called 'Treaty of Lisbon' which the European heads of state agreed on just a week before this seminar. There is a new article in the Treaty (article 136) which states that the European Union recognises the role of the social partners and that it aims to facilitate dialogue between the social partners, respecting their autonomy.

The agenda was divided into three themes and each theme was led by a moderator. The first theme, 'Health and services for sale?' was led by Esther Reyes Diez, Secretary for the international relations in the Spanish nurses' union SATSE. The second theme 'Booming sector' was led by Magdalene Bertone, vice president of SYNA, Switzerland. The third theme 'Trends and challenges' was led by Bertrand Grosz, in charge of European affairs within the French union CFTC-Santé.

### **Health for sale?**

Dr. Simon Busuttil, Member of the European Parliament for Malta in the EPP-ED group, spoke about the developments within the health care sector at European level. Health services should never be for sale, he stressed, and it is a good thing that health services were excluded from the scope of the Services Directive. However, Dr. Busuttil emphasised that there is indeed a role for private players. The private sector's role can be to complement and support the public sector work. Even though this statement brought about some criticism among the participants, Eurofedop incorporated the issue of public private partnership (PPP) in its seminar conclusions. Social partners both at national and European level need to reflect on the shape which such cooperation should take. Leon Vincken, a trade union delegate from CNV Publieke Zaak (The Netherlands) presented a dilemma to the participants. While presenting the case of The Netherlands, where market regulation has entered to a large extent into the health care sector, he was wondering out loud whether the trade unions should oppose this development and undertake actions, or whether they should join in and try to have as much influence as possible.

Dr. Erich Laminger spoke about the challenges in the different health care systems throughout Europe. He stressed the importance of asking ourselves if the job in the health sector is done effectively (to do the right things) and efficiently (to do the things in the right way). For this he also sees a role for the private sector. He emphasised that the most costly and therefore most decisive factor is the personnel. Dr. Laminger also correctly pointed out that the public sector still has a task in increasing its image, and better selling itself.

### **Booming sector**

A loud and noisy action with balloons announced the next theme 'Booming sector'. Ms. Charmaine Sammut, e-health programme manager at the Maltese Ministry for Health and Elderly care, held a presentation on e-health. She highlighted that within Malta's e-health strategy, the main achievement is the Integrated Healthcare Information System within the newly developed Mater Dei hospital. Nathalie Muscat and Paul Micallef gave a duo presentation on the health sector as a booming and flourishing sector, with the Mater Dei hospital as a case study. The developments that are visible today are not limited to the health care sector. Christian Truong-Ncog, member of the Eurofedop board and delegate from CFTC-PT France, gave a presentation on 10 years liberalisation in the telecommunications sector.

### **Trends and challenges**

The theme 'trends and challenges' opened with an action illustrating the increasing lack of qualified health care workers. The patient lying alone in his bed sadly illustrated the worst-case scenario; who will be there to hear the alarm in 2018? Viorel Rotila presented the results of his study on migrating health care personnel from Romania. The issue of 'brain drain' was also discussed by the Maltese Minister of Health, Elderly and Community Care. A Spanish case study was given by Amelia Amezcua, representative of SATSE, a Spanish trade union for nurses.

### **Closing remarks: 'shifting the paradigm'**

The president of Eurofedop Fritz Neugebauer briefly addressed the accession of Malta to the European family. Today we all live in a European community founded on three hills, the Acropolis (democracy), Golgotha (peace) and the Capitol (rule of law). The Maltese Minister of Education, Youth and Employment closed the seminar by stating that with regard to health services the paradigm needs to be shifted from medicalisation to personalisation. This situation needs to be created both at national and European level and it is a task for the politicians and the social partners, and the people.