



Drop case against cheap medicines, MEPs tell Novartis

MEPs will this week step up their campaign against efforts by the pharmaceutical giant Novartis to undermine India's law on providing affordable medicines.

On Wednesday (14 February), deputies from a variety of political groups will launch a written declaration urging the Swiss firm to drop its challenge against India's patent law. The declaration, which will become the Parliament's official policy once signed by a majority of the 785-strong assembly, comes a day before a court in India's fourth city Chennai is slated to begin hearing Novartis' case.

Novartis has faced a chorus of international criticism over its challenge to the 2005 Indian law which states that generic versions of patented medicines may be produced to address public health emergencies.

Last week several MEPs wrote to Novartis chief Daniel Vasella stating that if the firm's "legal action is successful, the consequence will be significant not only for India but globally".

Although India is a leading exporter of affordable medicines to other developing countries, the deputies warned that it may no longer be able to do so if Novartis wins its case. "We are also aware that around 10,000 patent applications, including for AIDS drugs and other essential medicines are currently awaiting examination by the Indian patent offices," said the MEPs, who include Dutch Socialist Max van den Berg and English Green Caroline Lucas. "Whether patents on these medicines will be granted may depend on the outcome of your case."

Meanwhile, Médecins Sans Frontières has called on the EU institutions to support other countries which have taken a similar approach to drugs patents as India. Thailand has recently decided to issue a compulsory licence to secure two drugs – one for HIV-AIDS, the other for heart disease.

Sources:

MSF press release: http://www.msf.org/msfinternational/invoke.cfm?objectid=6D778807-5056-AA77-6C0E9E5162B557F0&component=toolkit.pressrelease&method=full_html

Pacific slams Mandelson over 'harmful' trade tactics

The European Commission's "inflexible" position in trade negotiations with developing countries has been strongly criticised by governments from the Pacific region.

Hans Joachim Keil, Samoa's minister of commerce and chairman of the Pacific governments negotiating an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the Commission, has warned against rushing the talks to achieve an accord by a 31 December 2007 deadline.

In a letter to Peter Mandelson, the European trade commissioner, Keil criticised the Commission for rejecting submissions made by the Pacific governments, while seeking to introduce "competition policy and harmful tax policies" into an EPA.

Keil said that the Pacific had demonstrated its commitment to the EPA talks by tabling suggestions that would be compatible with rules set by the World Trade Organisation. "To date, by and large they have been met with what certainly appear to be rigid red lines and inflexible positions that do not reflect any genuine willingness to think creatively and arrive at a mutually acceptable solution that addresses the unique needs and circumstances [of the Pacific region]," he added.

Sources:

EEPA:

http://www.eepa.be/wcm/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=156&Itemid=58

Berlin claims victory in aid diversion battle

A €9 billion aid package for Asia and Latin America should "focus as much as possible" on reducing extreme poverty, according to Germany's EU presidency.

Friedrich Kitschelt, head of the European Union division in Berlin's Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, has said that his government is seeking changes to the plans for spending EU aid in Asia and Latin America drawn up by the European Commission.

Germany's efforts are proving successful, he said, in a letter to Eurostep and other non-governmental organisations. EU governments have unanimously convinced the Commission to withdraw plans for diverting development aid to the fight against terrorism. "The member states have made clear that they do not believe such activities should be financed through the DCI [Development Cooperation Instrument]," he said.

Kitschelt also said that a "maximum of the funds" earmarked for Asia and Latin America in 2007-13 should be used in a way that meets the criteria for aid set by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris.

Sources:

To read the whole German letter:

http://www.eurostep.org/wcm/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=190&Itemid=41

For an unauthorized translation:

http://www.eurostep.org/wcm/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=191&Itemid=41

Focus on poverty in EU's neighbours - Eurostep

Greater attention needs to be paid to poverty in countries bordering the EU, Eurostep has said.

Eurostep jointly organised a seminar with the environmental group WWF, Aprodev, a network of faith-based development organisations, and WOMNET last week (6 February) on the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI). Under this instrument, €12 billion in EU aid will be distributed to eastern Europe, the south Caucasus and the southern Mediterranean region in 2007-13.

Simon Stocker, Eurostep's director, noted that only two of the recipients – Russia and Israel – are not officially classified as developing countries. "Development policy should play an important role in the relations with neighbouring countries and the UN's Millennium Development Goals should be included," he said.

Mary Teresa Moran, the European Commission official in charge of coordinating the ENPI, said the aim of the policy is to work with the countries concerned, rather than to impose reform on them.

Sources:

Position of the Concord European Neighbourhood Task Force:

http://www.eurostep.org/wcm/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=189&Itemid=41

Article at EurActiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/ngos-ask-greater-eu-neighbourhood-policy/article-161482>

'We can do better on gender' - Michel

The European Commission has admitted it is not doing enough to “efficiently promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in development cooperation”.

Louis Michel, the commissioner for development and humanitarian aid, said his officials are preparing new guidelines on ensuring that gender equality commitments made by EU governments are honoured. “This overall policy framework for gender equality is going to promote equal rights, equal access to and control of resources and equal opportunities to achieve political and economic influence for women and men in the developing world,” he said, in a letter.

Michel’s letter came in response to comments made by the gender task force of CONCORD, an umbrella group of NGOs. CONCORD had complained that a “woefully inadequate” 3% (around €3.6 million) of an EU development aid scheme known as Investing in People had been earmarked for gender equality. This was despite how gender equality had been identified as a priority for that programme.

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