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European Parliament sets out plans for improved access to life-saving drugs

Access to medicines

The European Parliament has today backed a report calling for improved access to medicines. At present, many vital drugs are overpriced due to abuse of patent rules by pharmaceuticals and the imbalance in the negotiating powers of pharmaceutical companies and Member States. The report sets out a number of proposals to counter these problems.

Commenting after the vote, Greens/EFA shadow rapporteur **Margrete Auken** said:

"The report is a great success for the Greens and for patients all over Europe. We have to make sure that all patients have access to the drugs they need. Often, people cannot access life-saving drugs due to prices inflated not by research and development costs, but by abuse of patent law and by pharmaceutical firms buying up patents to turn a quick profit. These problems are compounded by the negotiating advantage of big pharmaceutical companies, which put national health authorities at a major disadvantage. The market for medicines is not working today. The public sector often pays twice for new medicines and the pharmaceutical sector charges exorbitant prices, of which a large amount goes to marketing and lobbying rather than research and development.

"One pressure we must resist is the push towards fast-track authorisation of medicines. While we want to make sure that safe and effective medicines are available as soon as possible, we cannot bargain on patient safety in Europe or compromise on the safe and transparent clinical trial procedure."

Pascal Durand, who was rapporteur for the opinion on the report in the Committee on Legal Affairs, added:

"We need to make sure that patents are only granted where they are truly deserved and to make better use of Member States' existing powers to intervene in the case of market failure. Member States already have the power, where public interest warrants it, to authorise compulsory licences for patents, thereby ensuring generic drugs come onto the market. Unfortunately, these powers are not being implemented, and we need to make sure they are utilised more often to help push prices down."

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