

Who wants the dissolution of the Greek pharmaceutical industry?

Article by Mr. Theodore Tryfon*

During a critical circumstance for our country's future, one would expect that the national economy's growth, to be everyone's primary concern, but also a basic option for the "institutions". However, instead of this, we are facing a theater of the absurd, where it is attempted to impose as "prerequisites", certain anti-developmental measures – measures, which if implemented, will lead to the country's de-industrialization and to intractable damages to the national economy.

The issue of interventions in the pharmaceutical policy, characteristically illustrates a persistent tactic of undermining national strategic interests.

After a 5-year period, a period of time which deconstructed pharmaceutical healthcare in Greece, specific interventions are being effectuated shaking the Healthcare system to its foundations. The only issue that seems to be concerning the "institutions" (and it has been put forward in Athens in a pressing manner, as mandatory legislative regulation) pertains to the implementation of a pricing system, a system which blatantly leads to a massive, uncontrollable, entry of generics from third countries, as well as to the dominance of expensive, imported, original drugs.

It is obvious that the creditors' proposals do not yield any benefits neither for the Funds, nor to the patients, or to the national economy. On the contrary, damages, at multiple levels, are caused. This is due to the fact that they want to impose further unilateral price reductions on affordable, domestically-produced drugs, which are notably available at a 70% discount, compared to the original prices of imported drugs. Therefore, we are facing the irrational demand to reduce the price of a Greek drug, which costs for example €3,5, while a newer imported drug costing €20 remains in the system, accounting for a large portion of the country's prescriptions.

Aside from the effects on the patients and the Healthcare system, this leads to an unbelievable further price compression of Greek drugs, which have already been subjected to a 60% reduction over the last 5 years; this is inconceivable amidst the current production and funding circumstances. Sooner or later, cheap Greek drugs will be driven out of the market, and as a consequence, the insured in Greece will only have access to expensive, imported products.

Certainly, releasing unique, innovative, imported drugs with a particular therapeutic value, in the Greek market, is useful and indispensable for the Healthcare system. Nonetheless, this is something completely different from the fact that the Greek pharmaceutical industry currently provides cost-effective and quality pharmaceutical treatments, which can replace many expensive, imported products.

The question that should concern those involved in the domestic economy, is the following: what is the rationale behind the unilateral pursuit of adopting this particular measure (as a sole prerequisite), when in fact all European governments are currently focusing on issues related to the control of prescribing, the compensation of expensive drugs, the implementation of therapeutic protocols and the provision of incentives for the use of cost-effective drugs? Why is it that in Greece, we cannot implement a policy that will promote affordable generics, something which is a primary option in other European Healthcare systems?

These specific schemes are particularly provocative, even bordering on being illegal!. It is of paramount importance, now more than ever, for the government and the political parties to take a stance. Besides, it is established by the European legislation that each government defines its own national pharmaceutical policy. Why can't this happen in Greece as well, especially when there is a closed drug budget in effect, and therefore no further burden to the State exists? Let alone the fact that the Greek pharmaceutical industry has repeatedly confirmed its potential to be able to cover 60% of the outpatient healthcare needs, and 40% of inpatient care, with quality and affordable drugs, which are being constantly controlled by EOF. This would annually save more than €300 million.

It is clear that the proposal put forward by the "institutions" is suspicious, and if adopted as a "prerequisite", it creates a leverage, distorts the market and leads to monopolistic situations.

With more than 60% of employment positions and 90% of total investments in the pharmaceutical sector over the last decade in our country, the Greek pharmaceutical industry considers that it is necessary to have an equal distribution system for pharmaceutical expenditure, based on structural measures – similar to what applies in all countries of the European Union.

Establishing a drug policy can only be an issue of urgent national importance in every country – particularly though for Greece, which needs a long-term, strategic, growth plan. The Greek pharmaceutical industry is one of the few stable pillars of growth for our national economy. Will we undermine it?

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