

Pharmacy Chain Operators Joining Forces

The national associations of pharmacy chain operators in three Central European countries have joined forces in founding the European Federation of Pharmacy Chains (EFPC). The establishment of the international association, which will be headed by Zdeněk Blahuta, the former director of the Czech regulator (State Institute for Drug Control), was announced in Prague today.

Prague, Czech Republic, January 10, 2019 – The European Federation of Pharmacy Chains brings together pharmacy chain associations from the Czech Republic (APLS), Hungary (HGYSZ), and Slovakia (APSL). The EFPC was officially established on October 10, 2018, with operation to launch in January 2019. “The EFPC’s objective is to defend the interests of patients and pharmacy workers and owners. Among other activities, we want to bring attention to actions that go against these interests,” says the organization’s Executive Director Zdeněk Blahuta.

Such activities include promoting the concept of “pharmacy for the pharmacists”. “This principle is unheard of in any other field. Moreover, it embodies an approach to the pharmacy sector that benefits only a limited number of pharmacists who are pharmacy owners,” commented Director of APLS Czech Republic Daniel Horák. His counterpart from APSL Slovakia Róbert Nemčický added, “In Slovakia, efforts to put this concept into practice have thankfully been stopped, as common sense has prevailed in the sense that there is no correlation between the quality of care and the form of pharmacy ownership.” Nonetheless, this model was implemented in Hungary and Poland in 2017. In Hungary, pharmacies were essentially expropriated with retroactive effect. In response, the European Commission has launched an infringement procedure against Hungary. “The changes in the pharmacy sector have not been received well by the vast majority of Hungarian pharmacists. Nonetheless, they have to comply with the new rules,” added HGYSZ Chairwoman Karolina Korodi.

“The collapse of the totalitarian regimes of the Second World has provided Central European countries with the opportunity to redefine the pharmacy sector so as to achieve a major improvement in the availability of care and the quality of service provided to patients. Efforts in this regard have been successful, and there is no reason to change the well-functioning liberal model that we’ve established,” explained Blahuta, pointing out that the same model has been adopted by very conservative countries in recent years. According to the EFPCs boss, Nordic countries, such as Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, can hardly be accused of disregarding the interests of their citizens. In contrast, rigid markets, such as those in Austria and Germany, are exhibiting serious structural problems. More than a third of Austrian pharmacies are loss making, and Germany currently has fewer pharmacies than before its unification. Logically, certain efforts towards liberalization can be observed in these countries as well. “The purpose of the EFPC is to ensure that the interests of particular interest groups hidden behind populist slogans will not ultimately prevail over patients’

interests. The example of Poland shows that calls for the return of pharmacies to Polish hands lead to a worsening of the availability of pharmacy services,” concluded Blahuta.

Organizations in other countries are considering joining the EFPC, particularly associations in Poland, Romania, Serbia, and the Baltic states.

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