Press Release

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Future of EU Health Policies: Balancing Demands, Resources and Innovation: Roundtable Summary

ZPP – Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers together with SME Connect co-organized an event on *Future of EU Health Policies: Balancing Demands, Resources and Innovation*, 19 March 2025, hosted by MEP Adam Jarubas, Chair of the Sant Committee, in the European Parliament in Brussels under the patronage of the Polish Presidency. Experts and Brussels politicians discussed how the evidence-based approach could improve access to medicines in Europe and reduce the burden related to key health challenges, including processed food and tobacco policies.

With healthcare systems across Europe under increasing pressure, this event brought together policymakers, healthcare professionals, researchers, and industry leaders to shape forward-thinking, evidence-based strategies. The panel featured distinguished experts including **Milka Sokolović**, Director General at European Public Health Alliance (EPHA); **Dominik Dziurda**, President of Formedis HTA; **Grzegorz Rychwalski**, Vice President of Medicines For Poland, Vice-Chair of Business at OECD Health Committee, Advisor to the EESC, Member of the Critical Medicines Alliance DG HERA; **Marcin Nowacki**, Vice President of Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP), EESC Member, Employers' Group; **Seyide Direk**, Policy Analyst at the European Enterprise Alliance, and **Horst Heitz**, Chair of the Steering Committee of SME Connect. The discussion was moderated by **Agata Boutanos**, Director of the Representation to the European Union of the Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP). The event focused on developing adaptable regulatory frameworks that promote sustainability and resilience while driving competitiveness and innovation in the healthcare sector.

ADAM JARUBAS MEP, Member of the European Parliament (EPP, Poland) and Vice-Chair of the ENVI Committee, actively engaged in shaping EU health and pharmaceutical policies**,** highlighted the increasing pressures on healthcare infrastructure, citing factors such as an aging population, the rise in chronic diseases, and the escalating costs of medical innovation. He stressed the need for a forward-looking strategy that ensures a balance between public health priorities, economic sustainability, and technological progress. Mr. Jarubas acknowledged the commitments made by the European Commission in the early stages of the new legislative term, expressing optimism that health policy would be a priority. He pointed out that, in response to these challenges, the European Parliament had established a new permanent legislative committee dedicated to public health. He outlined key discussion points, including ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare across Europe, enhancing cross-border collaboration in research and crisis preparedness, fostering innovation and digital transformation while maintaining a patient-centered regulatory framework, and exploring sustainable funding models through public-private partnerships. Mr. Jarubas reaffirmed the European Parliament's commitment to advancing policies that prioritize patients while

supporting a competitive and sustainable healthcare sector. However, he emphasized that addressing these challenges required collaboration among policymakers, industry leaders, healthcare professionals, and researchers.

"*The European Parliament has established a new permanent legislative committee dedicated to public health, reflecting our commitment to equitable access to high-quality healthcare, strengthened cross-border collaboration, and sustainable funding models. Advancing patient-centered policies while fostering innovation and competitiveness requires collaboration — not just among policymakers, but also with industry leaders, healthcare professionals, and researchers. Only together can we shape a stronger, healthier Europe*." — ADAM JARUBAS MEP

MILKA SOKOLOVIĆ, Director General of the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), public health advocate and expert on health promotion, prevention, and sustainable health systems, noted that while many COVID-19 pandemic lessons have been forgotten, it is crucial to integrate them into current policy actions to avoid relearning them at a high cost. She highlighted **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** as a major yet underrepresented threat to healthcare systems, urging MEPs to prioritize AMR action. She encouraged policymakers to join the AMR Interest Group to help combat this challenge. On balancing healthcare demands with limited resources, Ms. Sokolović emphasized prevention as the most cost-effective solution, calling for greater investment in **health promotion and disease prevention** to reduce long-term healthcare burdens. Regarding **obesity and public health**, she stressed the need for health-promoting environments where the healthiest options are the easiest and cheapest. She urged stronger regulation against vested interests in the food industry and reminded policymakers of their responsibility to put public health above commercial interests. For **early cancer detection**, she highlighted the importance of universal screening programs, especially for marginalized populations, and called for better outreach strategies to ensure access to early diagnosis and treatment. Addressing **public health policies**, she warned against blaming individuals for "lifestyle-related diseases" and stressed the need for health considerations across all policy areas, particularly in agriculture and food policies. On **health system sustainability**, she underscored the impact of climate change on public health and the need for resilient healthcare systems to handle extreme weather events. She also stressed the importance of securing medicine supply chains through ongoing EU initiatives like the Critical Medicines Act. Lastly, she pointed to the **healthcare workforce crisis,** emphasizing that beyond wages, working conditions, professional recognition, and dignity must be improved to make the sector more attractive. She called for a renewed commitment to healthcare workers, acknowledging their sacrifices during the pandemic. She concluded by urging policymakers to act on these pressing health issues to build a stronger, more resilient EU healthcare system.

DOMINIK DZIURDA, health care expert in the field of pharmacoeconomics, reimbursement and health technology assessment (HTA), president of FORMEDIS HTA, co-author of the report "A systematic review of the safety profile of selected recreational nicotine delivery method" which analyses available research on the risk profile of new nicotine products, giving the first wide systematic approach to be used by decision makers during the revision of the tobacco directive, emphasized that health policies must be based on facts, undergo thorough assessments, and include comprehensive stakeholder consultations. He stressed that policies should not be imposed but shaped through broad engagement, citing the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe as an example of successful collaboration. He highlighted the importance of evidence-based policymaking, warning that without the right tools, discussions risk turning

into power struggles rather than constructive exchanges. Drawing from his experience in Poland's national health reforms, he pointed to systematic literature reviews and simulation modeling as two essential tools for effective policy development. Mr. Dziurda explained that systematic reviews help filter reliable evidence from misinformation, ensuring policies are grounded in research. However, as traditional studies often focus on short-term outcomes, he argued that simulation modeling is essential for protecting long-term impacts. As an example, he used the tobacco policies, which are part of the European Beating Cancer Plan, arguing that long-term statistical trends that are already available can provide simulation models to look at different policy options to reduce the burden related to tobacco. Hence, during the meeting, ZPP also provided a summary of his report. Concluding, Mr. Dziurda strongly encouraged a wider application of evidence-based tools, emphasizing that policies built on data rather than assumptions lead to smarter, more effective, and life-saving healthcare solutions.

"*Health policies must be based on facts, not assumptions, and undergo thorough assessment to anticipate potential consequences. While this may seem obvious, it remains a fundamental principle. Grounding input data in systematic reviews and utilizing simulation modeling to test the consequences of implementation can transform policy development into a truly evidence-driven process. Equally essential is comprehensive stakeholder consultation—because health policies impact patients, professionals, and industry alike, they must be shaped with their input to ensure balanced and effective solutions.*"

— DOMINIK DZIURDA

GRZEGORZ RYCHWALSKI, Vice President of the Polish Union of Employers in the Pharmaceutical Industry (PZPPF), actively engaged in European-level pharmaceutical policy debates with a focus on industrial resilience and critical medicines, highlighted the Critical Medicines Act (CMA) as a key topic in pharmaceutical policy discussions, not only within the European Union but also globally, as countries strive to build resilient and independent medicine manufacturing ecosystems. He noted that while the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe had been in development for many years, the European Commission's recent presentation of the CMA marked a major turning point in discussions. He acknowledged concerns about the lack of dedicated funding for pharmaceutical manufacturing but welcomed the subcommittee's support for including pharmaceutical manufacturing in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). This, he argued, was a positive sign that the issue would remain central in legislative discussions within the Council and the European Parliament. Mr. Rychwalski referenced previous discussions with health ministers and MEP Adam Jarubas, emphasizing that data should guide political interventions. He pointed to the European Parliament Research Service report, which detailed Europe's dependency on active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and critical medicines, as well as the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) opinion, both of which underscored the urgent need for action. He warned that low-margin essential medicines, such as statins, were increasingly being produced outside Europe due to cost pressures, regulatory burdens, and environmental policies. While EU policies aim to ensure competitiveness and innovation, he argued that initiatives such as the Green Deal were creating additional obstacles for European pharmaceutical manufacturing. He pointed out contradictions in EU policymaking, where the European Commission encourages local medicine production while simultaneously imposing costly environmental regulations, such as those related to the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive. He called for a balanced approach, ensuring both pharmaceutical independence and environmental responsibility. Concluding, Mr. Rychwalski urged MEPs to reassess regulatory

frameworks to support European medicine production while maintaining sustainability goals. He stressed the importance of data-driven policymaking and called for a coordinated approach to safeguard access to critical medicines for European patients.

TOMISLAV SOKOL MEP, Member of the European Parliament (EPP, Croatia), Rapporteur on the European Health Data Space regulation and active contributor to EU health legislative reforms, emphasized that health policy remains primarily a national competence, but the EU has a crucial role in regulating medicines and addressing challenges that individual Member States cannot solve alone, such as dependency on third countries for generic medicines and critical pharmaceutical ingredients. He welcomed the Critical Medicines Act (CMA) as a step in the right direction, particularly its provisions on common procurement, which would allow voluntary joint purchasing of medicines, giving the EU a stronger bargaining position and ensuring better prices and security of supply. Mr. Sokol also highlighted the importance of state aid in supporting pharmaceutical manufacturing within Europe, arguing that legal frameworks should be more flexible to encourage investment. He stressed the need for one-stop shops to simplify bureaucratic procedures for strategic healthcare projects. However, he noted that stockpiling measures were insufficient in the current CMA proposal and called for stronger European coordination on reserves to prevent shortages during health crises. Discussing pharmaceutical legislation, he outlined the ongoing negotiations, emphasizing the challenge of balancing innovation, market exclusivity, and patient access. He pointed out significant disparities in the availability of medicines across EU countries, particularly affecting Eastern European Member States, and argued for reforms to ensure faster access to generic and innovative medicines. He supported mechanisms such as the Bolar exemption, which allows the development of generic medicines before exclusivity periods expire, ensuring they are ready for the market immediately. Mr. Sokol also addressed the European Health Data Space regulation, which had been formally adopted but required a phased implementation over four to six years. He stressed the need for investment in digital infrastructure, training of healthcare professionals, and patient awareness to ensure a smooth transition. Finally, he emphasized the urgent need to defend and expand the EU health budget, arguing that a dedicated health program must be preserved to prevent healthcare funding from being diluted into broader EU programs. He urged both the European Parliament and national governments to fight for this funding, as the budget decisions would ultimately be made jointly by Parliament and the Council. Sokol concluded by calling for stronger EU coordination and investment to enhance medicine production, digital infrastructure, and healthcare access, ensuring that Europe remains competitive while prioritizing patient needs and public health security.

MARCIN NOWACKI, Vice President of the Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP), expert in digital health, representing business perspectives in regulatory discussions at EU level, acknowledged that regulation in the healthcare sector is essential for patient safety, product quality, and market stability, but warned that excessive complexity can slow innovation, increase costs, and limit patient access to life-saving treatments. He stressed the importance of striking a balance between a stable legal framework and fostering innovation among market players. He pointed to **long approval processes** for new medicines and medical devices— often exceeding **10 years and costing over €1 billion**—as a major barrier, particularly for **smaller European companies**. To address this, he advocated for a **risk-based, data-driven regulatory approach**, differentiating between **high-risk and low-risk innovations** to **accelerate approvals** while maintaining patient safety. Mr. Nowacki also highlighted fragmentation across EU Member States as a significant challenge, particularly in health data sharing. Reflecting on his experience in radiology and teleradiology, he noted that despite advancements, cross-border telemedicine remains nearly nonexistent due to medical

data restrictions. He stressed that harmonizing data access across Europe could improve healthcare quality, allowing specialists to provide high-quality diagnoses regardless of location. He further emphasized that health data access issues exist not only at the EU level but also within Member States, affecting both public and private sector cooperation. Without better infrastructure for data sharing, telemedicine and digital health solutions would remain underdeveloped. Lastly, Mr. Nowacki called for a **greater focus on health education and the promotion of healthy habits**. He cautioned against **demonizing specific food products** and instead advocated for **educational campaigns on balanced diets and healthy lifestyles**. He suggested that **self-regulation** across industries, based on **data-driven insights**, could help address public health concerns without relying solely on restrictive regulations. Concluding, he urged policymakers to foster innovation-friendly regulations, improve data accessibility for healthcare providers, and promote health education, ensuring a more efficient and effective healthcare system across Europe.

"*For smaller companies, the high threshold to enter the market creates limitations on growth and innovation, even for large regional European firms. To address this, we must shift towards risk-based and data-driven regulation—differentiating between high-risk and low-risk innovations to make market entry quicker and more cost-effective while ensuring patient safety.*" — **MARCIN NOWACKI**

SEYIDE DIREK, Policy Analyst at the European Enterprise Alliance and expert on EU health policy, with a background in economics, law & global studies. The author of the white paper "What is Next for EU Health Policy", which explores the future of European healthcare, focusing on regulatory reform, innovation, and resilience. She summarized the key systemic challenges in EU healthcare, highlighting demographic shifts, rising diseases, regulatory burdens, and supply chain vulnerabilities. She noted that over 20% of EU citizens are now over 65, a figure expected to grow significantly, increasing pressure on healthcare capacity and public budgets. The prevalence of chronic diseases, including diabetes, further strains healthcare systems and social security. She emphasized the need for balanced regulation, acknowledging the EU's role in ensuring patient safety and recognizing concerns about administrative burdens in pharmaceuticals and medical devices. She stressed the importance of maintaining EU competitiveness while safeguarding healthcare access. Ms. Direk also pointed out Europe's heavy reliance on China and India for 80% of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), making supply chain resilience a top priority. She conveyed that MEPs had voiced the need for better preparedness for future health crises, advocating for greater self-sufficiency and coordination across Member States. Another major issue she addressed was healthcare workforce shortages, exacerbated by an aging workforce. She called for greater investment in medical education, staff retention strategies, and cross-border recognition of healthcare qualifications to ensure sustainability. She also discussed the importance of fostering a competitive EU health industry and supporting pharmaceutical R&D and biotech innovation through a favorable regulatory environment. Additionally, mental health and the impact of social media were highlighted as growing concerns, particularly among young people. Ms. Direk cited research indicating that one in six Europeans experiences high levels of anxiety or depression, with social media being linked to increased psychological distress. She called for stronger digital well-being policies to address these risks.

In conclusion, Ms. Direk outlined key recommendations, including stronger evidence-based policymaking, comprehensive impact assessments, and healthcare resilience improvements, particularly reducing dependence on non-EU suppliers.