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Dear Mrs. Nowak,

Thank you for your interest in the topics to be discussed during our meeting on 31st May 2017.

The "inequalities" are meant in a broad sense. The field where we would like to draw the European Commission's attention are those inequalities that make the free movement of physicians in the EU a one-way drive in the direction east-south -> west-north. If the inequalities didn't exist, the migration of physicians would follow a more or less chaotic pattern without such a distinct trend, at least from one metropolitan area to another. We could still observe the drain of doctors from peripheries into larger metropolitan areas (which is not a EU-wide, but a local concern), but no particular one-way drain from eastern and southern metropolitan areas into western and northern ones.

The consequence are the distortions of the single EU labor market where nobody is happy: the countries of immigration have difficulties to integrate such a huge number of physicians and their families and maintain the same standards for domestic and immigrating doctors, while the countries of emigration face the lack of doctors and the problems to maintain minimum standards required for the public healthcare to function properly. Migrations by themselves are a positive movement as long as they are due to the optimisation of the systems (e.g. make one central hospital instead of numerous smaller ones in each town, provided that the logistics challenges are solved) or when they happen in a random/symmetric pattern due to the natural desire of professionals to move, to exchange experiences etc. But when they become a one-way trend without any particular desired effect on healthcare optimisation, they are not positive anymore, rather a symptom that somewhere something is wrong. EU, and even most of EU member states internally, go for a more decentralized public healthcare (in organizational and budgetary terms), which is good for the local population, but it poses major challenges if the labor market is disbalanced. A disbalanced doctors labor market eventually causes disbalanced healthcare standards across EU which converts people, otherwise in favor of the European integration process, into its opponents.

The measure of inequality on the EU level should be the doctors' **migrations asymmetry** among various EU member states. It may be true that Slovenia or Czech Republic, but also Austria, Germany or Italy can maintain or even increase the net number of physicians despite emigration, but not because the systems are stable, but because they are geographically on the way between poorer and richer EU member states. The doctors' deserts become apparent in the least developed EU countries first just because they are the starting point of the journey, not because they are the only ones with inequalities. And on the destination side of the journey, the countries make economies to educate physicians because they can take the advantage to

absorb more immigrants - at the expense of education budgets of poorer countries - another symptom of the same problem.

It seems that the main inequalities that require more concern are the following:

- the disproportionate level of salaries, even when adjusted with purchasing power parity (PPP);
- a confused way of the implementation of the EU working time directive in various states, partly due to the lack of doctors and partly due to low levels of basic salaries;
- no equalization schemes between the budget which pays for the doctors' education and the budget the doctors later pay taxes to;
- no maximum standards on workload in terms of number of patients' visits, number of patients a doctor is responsible for in the hospital departments, number of hours spent in emergency departments etc.
- poor hospital governance: no obligation of member states to increase budgets and introduce non-pecuniary measures to improve the overall working environment in healthcare facilities (like reducing stress) if a non-symmetric personnel drain is detected

In conclusion, we would like to define the way of communication with your directorate and to find a way to promote the topic in the frame of EU health policies.

If you need any further explanations, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,

Bojan Popovič, Secretary-General

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