

Ethical Medicines Industry Group (EMIG) – Written evidence (FUI0005)

Follow-up inquiry on the impact of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland: EMIG submission

Introduction

This submission is on behalf of the Ethical Medicines Industry Group (EMIG), a pharmaceutical trade association for small and medium sized companies. We have 300+ Member companies and organisations, representing c. 50% of UK branded medicines sales.

As a pharmaceutical trade body, this submission will speak only to the current implications of the Northern Ireland Protocol on the supply of medicines in the Northern Ireland and will not consider the wider socio-economic implications.

EMIG position on the Northern Ireland Protocol

For the pharmaceutical sector, despite early concerns about the impact of the Protocol on the supply of medicines to Northern Ireland (NI), the recent directive from the European Union (EU) Council to introduce an exception to the Protocol around the supply of medicines has been hugely welcome.

The effect of this exception has been the removal of checks on medicines moving from Great Britain (GB) to NI, which in turn has facilitated the uninterrupted supply of medicines. This has been critical for access to medicines as historically the majority of medicines used in NI are from the GB market

(rather than from the Republic of Ireland) and switching supply routes would have been hugely costly and complex. (Unfortunately, due to the lateness of the announcement of this directive, EMIG is aware of many companies that had already switched supply routes at great expense.) There is now currently stability for the pharmaceutical sector under the Protocol.

However, the latest overtures from the UK government regarding the unilateral suspension of elements of the Protocol through the introduction of legislation are hugely worrying for the pharmaceutical sector. Whilst we recognise the importance of securing a long-term solution to the Protocol covering all sectors of the economy, including veterinary medicines (which are not covered by the EU directive), we are concerned that any effort by the UK to act unilaterally will result in retaliatory action from the EU. This will have a profound impact on the pharmaceutical sector.

It is important to recognise the global nature of medicines supply. Every month, 45 million packs of medicine move from the UK to the EU/EEA, with 37 million packs moving the other way. Consequently, any disruption to the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, brought about by the UK's unilateral action on the NI Protocol, risks severely damaging the availability of medicines for patients across GB, NI and the EU.

We are clear, therefore, that the UK's unilateral suspension of the Protocol will likely trigger a chain of events that results in the construction of barriers to the free transfer of medicines across the UK and EU. This will have a devastating impact on patients and patient care.

EMIG's preference would be the negotiation and implementation of a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) for the supply of medicines, as part of the Northern Ireland Protocol. If this is not possible, the next best option for the

pharmaceutical sector is the continuation of current arrangements around the acceptance of GB medicines in NI.

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