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European Commission's Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health

On this 10th of December the European Commission has published its Green Paper on 'the European Workforce for Health'.

This document does reflect in its majority the draft Green Paper which had been distributed to you some days ago now by the FEPI Secretariat thanks to the contacts of CEPLIS within the European Commission DG SANCO. Mr. Martin Dorazil, Policy Officer at the Unit 'Health Strategy and Health Systems' of European Commission's DG SANCO attended the CEPLIS Permanent Committee as invited guest speaker, to inform the participants of this Permanent Committee meeting of the main issues tackled by the Green Paper. As member of CEPLIS and Chair of the CEPLIS Health Working Group, FEPI was of course present to this meeting, represented by its Policy and Press Officer, Mr. Louette.

Mr. Dorazil informed the audience that the paper in question focuses on three main topics:

- the factors influencing the workforce for health in the EU and the main issues to be addressed
- the impact of new technology
- the role of health professionals entrepreneurs in the workforce

The Green Paper enumerates 6 factors that can influence the workforce for health in the EU:

- 1) Demography and the promotion of a sustainable health workforce
- 2) Public Health Capacity
- 3) Training

- 4) Managing mobility of health workers within the EU
- 5) Global migration of health workers
- 6) Data to support decision making

1) *Demography and the promotion of a sustainable health workforce*

Under this item, the Green Paper is tackling the issue of the ageing of population and the feminization of the workforce. For the European Commission, the key to maintaining a sufficient workforce, in the face of the impending retirement of the "baby boom" generation, is "to educate, recruit and retain young practitioners while reinvesting in mature workforce".

At this purpose, the European Commission proposes some areas for possible actions, such as Ensuring better working conditions for health workers, increasing staff motivation and morale and Considering recruitment and training campaigns, in particular to take advantage of the growth in the proportion of over-55s in the workplace and those who no longer have family commitments.

FEPI firmly believes that opening discussion on this so important topic is a very good idea and welcomes this move from the European Commission. However, FEPI expresses its reserves to the area proposed by the European Commission 'Promoting more social and ethnic diversity in recruitment', FEPI indeed fears that this proposal may be wrongly understood and lead to some positive discrimination in the stage of recruitment, troubling the fair game of the recruitment procedures.

2) *Public Health Capacity*

The public health function consists of a range of diverse activities to protect and to improve the level of health and well being of the general population, tackle health inequalities, and address the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

To face this issue, the European Commission advances some areas for possible actions, as strengthening capacity for screening, health promotion and disease prevention and collecting better information about actual and potential population health needs in order to plan the future development of the public health workforce.

3) *Training*

On this very important point, the Green Paper proposes to ensure that training courses are designed to take into account the special needs

of people with disabilities, to focus on health professionals' continuous professional development and to provide management training for health professionals.

4) Managing mobility of health workers within the EU.

Once again the European Commission is tackling the issue of the mobility of health-related issues within the EU, after its Directive's proposal last July, now the European Commission, through this Green Paper proposes some reflections on the issue of mobility of the health workers.

Although this needs to be saluted and as stakeholder active in the field of health, FEPI welcomes this discussion, it is to be noted that some of the proposed areas of actions may lead to ethical problems. Indeed, when the European Commission suggests to "Investing to train and recruit sufficient health personnel to achieve self-sufficiency at EU level", this could be problematic and lead to the enshrining of the EU market and to create the idea of an EU fortress protecting itself from the health workers coming from non-EU countries. To this point, Mr. Dorazil made very clear that the European Commission's intention was absolutely not to set up the basis of an EU-fortress, but to *'encourage the free-movement of health-workers through the establishment of cross-border agreements meanwhile appropriately develop the network of health workers to establish self efficiency'*.

5) Global Migration of Health Workers

To this purpose, the Green Paper advances some proposal as 'the Supporting the WHO in its work to develop a global code of conduct for ethical Recruitment'. FEPI welcomes this proposal area of action and believes this could open a path to more efficient external relations for the EU health sphere.

6) Data support to decision making

For this item, the European Commission proposes a series of possible actions, such as Ensuring the availability and comparability of data on the health workforce, in particular with a view to determining the precise movements of particular groups of the health workforce.

FEPI notes that under item number 6 of the Green Paper, entitled 'the role of health professionals entrepreneurs in the workforce', the European Commission

omits to notify the nurses, within the numerous health professions the European Commission is giving as example of health professionals entrepreneur. The Green Paper enumerates the physicians, psychologists, dentists, podiatrists, physiotherapist and occupational therapists but obviously ignores the nursing professionals.

As you all know, many of nursing professionals are actually running their own medical centres or their own SME's as medical unit in many EU Member-States. FEPI deeply regrets this omission by the European Commission and hopes this wasn't deliberate.

President Sasso, The Executive Board and all of us in the Brussels office would like to wish you and your beloved-ones the Merriest of Holidays and a 2009 full of energy, health, happiness and love

