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E-000040/2017

E-000767/2017

Answer given by Mr Avramopoulos
on behalf of the Commission
(19.6.2017)

1. It is for Member States to investigate specific allegations of bribery of doctors by pharmaceutical companies. The Commission has prioritised the healthcare sector in its anti-corruption experience sharing programme, including a workshop for national experts held in Rome in November 2015.¹ In addition, the Commission will publish in 2017 an update of a research study first carried out in 2013 on corruption in the healthcare sector, including risks in relations between doctors and pharmaceutical companies.² The Commission also supports relevant work at the European Partners against Corruption (EPAC) – European contact-point network against corruption (EACN).

The fight against corruption is part of structural reforms envisaged in Greece's economic adjustment programme. The programme monitors the implementation of a national strategy against corruption, taking into consideration particular needs in high risk sectors such as national health services. For these sectors, specific strategies are designed with technical assistance from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

2. The Commission fully supports the objective of protecting whistleblowers against retaliation and has taken steps to protect whistleblowers in EU sector-specific legislation, ranging from audit and money laundering to trade secrets protection, market abuse, and other instruments regulating financial services. With a view to strengthening the protection of whistleblowers, the Commission is assessing the need, legal feasibility and scope for horizontal or further sector-specific action at EU level, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity.³ An impact assessment study is being carried out and a public consultation was launched in March 2017.⁴

3. The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has competence to investigate alleged misuse of, or damage to the EU budget. Any suspicion of misuse of EU funds by pharmaceutical or medical companies should therefore be referred to the Office. OLAF does not generally comment on cases it may or may not be investigating, to protect the confidentiality of investigations and to ensure respect for personal data and procedural rights.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/corruption/experience-sharing-programme_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-is-new/news/news/docs/20131219_study_on_corruption_in_the_healthcare_sector_-_summary_en.pdf

³ Commission Work Programme 2017 "Delivering a Europe that protects, empowers and defends", COM(2016) 710 final.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=54254