

**Question for written answer E-002284/2019
to the Commission**
Rule 138
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Subject: Medicine shortages in the Member States

As early as last year, doctors, pharmacists, NGOs and, above all, patients in many Member States were pointing out the issue of medicine shortages. Since then, the situation has deteriorated. The problem affects both Western European countries (France and Belgium) and Central and Eastern European countries (Poland, Slovakia and Romania). There are shortages of the most popular drugs, and in particular the cheapest ones, which points towards the practice of profit accumulation through excessive parallel imports. The current system allows medicines to be transferred from countries where they are cheaper to those where they are more expensive, completely disregarding the health and safety of patients from countries whose markets are drained of medicines. Pharmaceutical companies also take advantage of their privileged position, including through the provisions of patent law, which allow for the introduction of slightly modified medicines in order to maintain a guaranteed high price, and by abandoning production of effective medicines whose patent protection has expired.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that 60 % of the active ingredients in medicines are produced outside Europe, mainly in China and India. They often fail to meet European standards, and supplies are increasingly exposed to risks. If the EU is to achieve a degree of autonomy, it needs to focus on the pharmaceutical and food markets. A good example is the United States, where the government supports a non-profit factory that produces the most important active substances.

However, the actions taken by the network of Heads of Medicines Agencies (HMA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA)¹ are insufficient and do not address the structural problems.

What measures does the Commission intend to take to help the Member States in addressing this problem?

¹ including reporting on shortages of specific medicines and collecting best practices in informing the public about problems as they arise <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/medicine-shortages-eu-network-takes-stepsimprove-reporting-communication>