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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: **Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council**
meeting on 16 June 2017
Round table meeting for European Health Ministers and Heads of
pharmaceutical companies (Malta, 9 May 2017)
– *Information from the Presidency*
(Any Other Business item)

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Presidency on the above mentioned subject in view of the Council (EPSCO) meeting on 16 June 2017.

Round Table meetings for European Health Ministers and Heads of Europe of Pharmaceutical Companies, held on the 9 May

The search for solutions to guarantee access to new and innovative medicines is a major challenge to the sustainability of health systems. Meaningful changes are needed in the mechanisms of pharmaceutical pricing to ensure that European patients can benefit from access to innovative medicines while guaranteeing the sustainability of health systems and supporting innovation from the Pharmaceutical industry.

In order to discuss these issues at the Highest Level in 2016 the Netherlands took the initiative to set up the first *Round Table Meeting* seeking to bring together EU Health Ministers, leaders of pharmaceutical industry, innovative and generic industry associations, as well as patients' organizations, to promote a broader dialogue on the main challenges in the pharmaceutical realm. A first meeting was held in May 2016. The second *Round Table Meeting* was held in December 2016, in Lisbon, where it was proposed to set up a 'High Level Group' (HLG) to inform and oversee the implementation of the actions set out during the Round Table meetings and to prepare forthcoming meetings thus ensuring continuity of this important initiative.

The third *Round Table Meeting* was held in May 2017 in Malta. The Malta Round Table meeting registered unprecedented high interest with the active participation of health ministers, heads of pharmaceutical companies and patient organisation representatives. At the Third Round Table meeting participants adopted the Terms of Reference of the High level Group (HLG). It was agreed that the High Level Group (HLG) is to deal with structural and pragmatic solutions to guarantee European patients' access to innovative and affordable medicines in a sustainable way for health systems while providing incentives for high value-added innovations. The HLG will jointly identify and characterize the challenges in the pharmaceutical system and suggest ways for possible action, including sustainable prices of new medicines, promoting competition including generic and biosimilars policies, increasing transparency and the search for alternative business models.

The discussions at the Round Table focused on the sustainability of the current model. Discussions ensued on the role of research. Calls for research to match patient needs together with a call to retain pharma research and development in Europe through appropriate incentives for rewarding innovation whilst calling for holistic solutions were highlighted. It was noted that sustained access to medicines cannot focus solely on pricing but also on funding and hence the need to engage on how research affects pricing and how this could contribute towards horizon scanning and new funding models. Stakeholder engagement was encouraged on biosimilar policies.

The need for patient safety was also brought to the fore and that this should not be compromised in order to obtain quicker products on the Market. Improving price transparency and narrowing the gaps between retail and negotiated prices was another area of expressed concern.

In order to ensure that the HLG functions effectively Minister Fearne, who presided this meeting held that a permanent secretariat would need to be set up. Towards this end Malta will be taking up all the necessary coordination work until the secretariat is established so as to ensure that the HLG functions effectively.

By way of information Minister Fearne informed participants that eight health ministers subscribed to the Valletta Declaration on the 8th of May, namely, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain followed by Ireland and Romania on the 9th of May. In doing so, health ministers demonstrated their commitment to guarantee patient's access to new and innovative medicines and therapies while ensuring sustainability of health systems. Health ministers expressed a clear political will to set up a technical committee to explore possible ways of voluntary cooperation including but not limited to, sharing information, identifying best practices, horizon scanning of innovative medicines and therapies, exploring possible mechanisms for price negotiations and joint procurement. The first meeting of the technical committee is to be held in Cyprus.