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Letter of support to Croatian Doctors approved in Porto General Assembly 5th October 2013

Since 1996, FEMS had followed with great attention the main problems encountered by Croatian doctors in their request to negotiate their working conditions with the Ministry of Health.

FEMS is particularly concerned about the worsening of the material and moral condition of the medical profession in Croatia.

The FEMS General Assembly, held in Porto on the 4th and 5th October 2013, was informed about a more and more critical situation of negotiations between the Croatian Doctors' Trade Union HLS and the Minister in charge.

The Tribunal invalidated the national collective agreement for doctors and health workers, signed in October 2011, due to procedural mistakes. After a series of unfruitful negotiations with the Minister of Health, the doctors' Trade Union was compelled to promote, on the 18th of September, a general strike to defend their rights that had been frustrated.

Salaries and benefits of Croatian doctors don't correspond to their social status, their competencies, their responsibility, their effort engaged in a prolonged and stable work, often beyond the European Working Time Directive, that Croatia, now a welcome EU member State, is expected to apply.

The proposed salaries are among the lowest in Europe, far below the EU average, and ignore the heavy responsibilities and don't take into account the intellectual equilibrium that is necessary to cure and care for the patients. Doctors' bad working conditions demonstrated to cause errors and worsening of the care, which endangers the patients. At the same time, a low quality of care increases the costs of the system.

FEMS supports the struggle of the doctors of Croatia and recommends the ruling health authorities to reopen the dialogue with doctors' Trade Union representatives. In particular, effort must be done to consider the benefits the profession and the citizens would have by a separate collective agreement for the doctors, which is a practice in most EU member States.

We would like to remark that, in EU, doctors and health workers are becoming a precious and limited resource, as the demographic trends already show their dramatic decrease with a still more negative trend in the near future. Besides, in EU there is a free circulation of professionals and patients (consider the approved directive on crossborder healthcare), therefore bad working conditions of Croatian doctors, much lower than in the EU average, poses a risk for the future of the Croatian Health System.

Enrico Reginato
FEMS President



Brussels October 13th 2013