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Lengthy drug cartel case shows need for better competition rules

Today, Italian consumer organisation and BEUC member Altroconsumo is being heard at the European Court of Justice (ECJ) on the Avastin & Lucentis case.

Altroconsumo lodged a complaint with the Italian Antitrust Authority against pharma group Roche in 2013 for secretly agreeing with its subsidiary Novartis not to request authorisation for its eye treatment drug Avastin to enter the EU market. This makes Novartis' Lucentis, which is up to 10 times more expensive than Avastin, the only official drug to treat a common eyesight condition.

Both companies have been fined a total of €180 million by the Italian Antitrust Authority in 2014. The case has been brought to the ECJ by an Italian court following an appeal of the two pharma companies.

Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC, has commented:

"It is disheartening when patients do not have access to the medicines they need and there are too many instances when anti-competitive behaviour is to blame. The Avastin & Lucentis case has been stuck in court for years and consumers still struggle to access the medicines they need because they are wildly expensive.

"Competition rules must protect consumers. The EU should heed our call, echoed by Member States last year, and ensure EU competition policy is fit for purpose to protect consumers from excessive pricing."

ENDS

Letter to European Commissioner Margrethe Vestager

Press statement 'BEUC calls for EU inquiry after Italy punishes pharma cartel', March 2014