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Pharma groups fined €180 million in Italy – High time for EU action

Pharmaceutical giants Roche and Novartis have been fined today 180 million euros by the Italian Antitrust Authority¹ for a cartel aimed at blocking the sale of an eye treatment 10 times cheaper than the one on the market. BEUC applauds the decision and urges the European Commission to launch an investigation at EU level.

The two pharma companies were found of having excluded a drug called Avastin from the market and channelled the demand toward a similar and more expensive drug called Lucentis. Both medicines can be used in the treatment of serious eye problems.

In a letter² to the European Commission in November last year, BEUC called for an EU-wide investigation taking into account that the two products are sold in many EU Member States.

Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation, commented: "The unethical tactics of Roche and Novartis to block the cheaper alternative at the expense of consumers are unacceptable. BEUC condemns such anticompetitive practices that put profits before consumers' health.

"This illegal conduct cost the Italian National Healthcare system more than 600 million euros a year. Due to the economic crisis, many EU Member States face difficulties in paying for medicines and ensuring access to treatments. This makes such practices even more deplorable.

"On the basis of the results of the Italian investigation, BEUC calls on the Commission to urgently launch an investigation at EU level to evaluate consumer detriment in all those Member States where Avastin and Lucentis are sold."

ENDS

¹ See press release from the Italian Antitrust Authority. <http://bit.ly/NuRjMf> BEUC Italian member Altroconsumo took part in the case.

² Avastin Vs Lucentis - BEUC letter to Vice President Almunia, 7 November 2013 <http://bit.ly/1ibMh5c>