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FOCUS GROUP ON THE EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL CARD

FIRST MEETING – 31 JANUARY 2014

Meeting Report

Following a call for expression of interest in the introduction of the European Professional Card (EPC) published on 18 October 2013¹, the European Commission proposed² the creation of a Focus Group on the European Professional Card and a more thorough examination of the EPC introduction criteria for seven professions (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, engineers, real estate agents and mountain guides).

The first meeting of the Focus Group took place in Brussels on 31 January 2014 with representatives for the seven professions from those European level professional associations/organisations and networks who have responded to the call for interest or sent spontaneous applications and from national competent authorities (two representatives per Member State).

The Commission started by presenting the background and the general principles of the functioning of the EPC, as well as setting out the further process aiming to introduce an EPC. The Commission particularly highlighted the public consultations organised in this context: call for expression of interest in the introduction of the EPC aiming at identifying the interested professions; invitation to other stakeholders, such as competent authorities, to comment on the interest expressed by European organisations from the seven professions mentioned above; questionnaires to be published aiming to collect data on the regulation of the professions, mobility and cost of the recognition procedures; creation of the Focus Group. The Commission presented also the next steps in the procedure: assessment of the suitability of the EPC and of its impact on the Member States followed by a formal proposal for an Implementing Act introducing the EPC for certain professions. The adoption of this Implementing Act is foreseen by the end of 2014.

¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/docs/policy_developments/131018_call-for-interest_en.pdf

² Results of the call for expression of interest in the introduction of the European Professional Card, see http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/docs/policy_developments/131206_results-call-for-interest_en.pdf

The Commission continued by presenting the possible technical implementation of the EPC in the Internal Market Information System, explaining some possible functionalities of the system for the professional, the home and the host Member State competent authority, and for third parties. Technical implementation is estimated to require roughly one year and will be finalised by the end of the transposition period for Member States in January 2016.

The Commission presented the role of the Focus Group in the consultative process leading to the introduction of the EPC and gave examples of issues (taking into account particularities of each profession concerned) to be discussed by it. The Commission stressed that the legal framework of the EPC was laid down by the amended Professional Qualifications Directive, therefore the Focus Group should focus on implementation issues specific for the professions concerned.

Finally, the Commission presented the results of the call for expression of interest in the EPC and how it intended carry out a more thorough assessment of the introduction criteria for a selected number of professions. The Commission invited the representatives of the competent authorities to state their views regarding the interest expressed by the professions, and to present their concerns or questions. This was followed by remarks made by the representatives of the professional organisations.

There was a quite large support for the continuation of the work for the sectoral health professions (doctors, nurses, pharmacists), while some participants argued for a pilot project to test the functioning of the EPC. The Commission clarified that there is no pilot project foreseen for technical and legal reasons.

The introduction of the EPC for professions which are not regulated in all Member States (ex. engineers and real estate agents) was more debated. As far as engineers are concerned, participants expressed, in case an EPC is introduced for this profession, a preference for an EPC covering all specialties.

Participants expressed some general concerns as well regarding the EPC, such as fraud with documents and possibility to check against originals, ID theft, availability of translations, security of IMI and of the electronic document regarding the recognition decision and to be made available in IMI, link with the alert mechanism, deadlines, and workload for the home Member State.

As far as the organisation of the next meetings is concerned, many of the participants proposed splitting the group according to professions or at least into two groups: health professions / other professions in order to be able to involve more competent authorities in the meetings.