



European Court of Justice in Case C-606/21—Doctipharma

Distance selling of medicinal products without a prescription

The ECJ clarified the conditions under which a Member State may prohibit a service connecting pharmacists and customers for the online sale of medicinal products.

Until 2016, Doctipharma operated a website on which it was possible to purchase pharmaceutical products and medicinal products not subject to prescription from pharmacy websites. In practical terms, the Doctipharma website made products available via a pre-registered catalogue. Customers selected the medicinal products and their order was then sent to the pharmacies whose websites were hosted by Doctipharma.

Not qualified pharmacists

Payment of the purchase price was made via a single payment system common to all pharmacies, using a dedicated account. The Union des groupements de pharmaciens d'officine (Union of Pharmacy Groups, "UDGPO") challenged the legality of that website: in its view, the service provided by Doctipharma via its website involved the latter in the e-commerce of medicinal

products and was therefore contrary to national legislation prohibiting the sale of medicinal products by persons not qualified as pharmacists.

The Court of Appeal, Paris (France) asks the Court of Justice, first, whether Doctipharma's activity is an information society service and, secondly, whether EU law allows Member States to prohibit the provision of such a service, which consists in connecting, by means of a website,



vice of connecting dispensing pharmacists and potential patients for the sale of medicinal products falls within the concept of an “information society service” within the meaning of EU law.

In its judgement, the Court holds as follows:

- Where the service provider who is not a pharmacist is considered to be selling medicinal products not subject to prescription itself, the Member State in whose territory it is established may prohibit the provision of that service.
- By contrast, where the service provider concerned merely connects sellers and customers by means of a service that is specific to and distinct from the sale, Member States may not prohibit that service on the grounds that the company concerned is involved in e-commerce for the sale of medicinal products without having the status of pharmacist.

While the Member States alone are competent to define the persons authorised or entitled to sell medicinal products not subject to medical prescription to the general public at a distance by means of information society services, they must

also ensure that medicinal products are offered for sale to the general public at a distance by means of information society services and cannot therefore prohibit such a service for medicinal products not subject to prescription.

Note

A reference for a preliminary ruling allows the courts and tribunals of the Member States, in disputes which have been brought before them, to refer questions to the Court of Justice about the interpretation of European Union law or the validity of a European Union act. The Court of Justice does not decide the dispute itself. It is for the national court or tribunal to dispose of the case in accordance with the Court’s decision, which is similarly binding on other national courts or tribunals before which a similar issue is raised.

Source: Press release of the ECJ on 29 February 2024

pharmacists and customers for the sale, via the websites of pharmacies that have subscribed to the service, of medicinal products not subject to prescription. In that regard, the Court states that the ser-

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