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OTC *bulletin*

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Romanian OTC market put under the microscope

Consumer healthcare firms operating in Romania could soon have to navigate a host of regulatory changes after the country's Competition Council launched an investigation into the "production and marketing of non-prescription medicines and food supplements".

The investigation would "analyse the structural conditions" of the two sectors and the "contractual relations between the different actors involved", the Competition Council said, and also include a "detailed analysis of the applicable legislative framework".

Should it find evidence of restricted competition, the Council said it could propose "amending or revising the existing regulations", or even issue "clarifications or warnings to the industry or the public administration". Such moves would be made to "improve the economic efficiency of the sector and to protect consumers' interests".

Any potential violations or infringements of the law – or allegations of such activity – uncovered during its work would also be thoroughly investigated, the Council promised.

All key stakeholders in the OTC medicines and food supplements industry have been urged by the Council to "actively cooperate" with the investigation, and to present "information and documents" when requested.

The Council pointed out that its role was not only corrective, but also preventative. Its duty was to monitor the "behaviour" and "methods" of the various industry players,

"with the final goal of protecting the interests of consumers".

"The pharmaceutical sector is very important to us," commented Council president, Bogdan Chiritoiu, "and our activity in recent years proves this. We made a series of recommendations on draft normative acts and have also been involved in sector inquiries and investigations into anti-competitive practices, some of which resulted in sanctions."

Romania's self-care market was worth around €680 million in 2017, with OTC medicines accounting for around two thirds of sales and food supplements and medical devices making up the remainder, according to figures from local industry association RASCI (*OTC bulletin*, 16 February 2018, page 15).

So-called 'lifestyle' OTC products accounted for 22.2% of the total market, RASCI revealed, followed by cough, cold and allergy products with 21.5%.

Gastrointestinal products, together with analgesics, accounted for a further 33.2%, the association said, while vitamins, minerals and supplements (VMS) took a 12.6% share and dermatologicals another 8%. Other products accounted for the remaining 2.5%.

Speaking to *OTC bulletin* earlier this year, RASCI's chief executive officer, Diana Mereu, said there was a need for a "transparent and predictable legislative framework" for Romania's self-care market that was in line with European and international regulations and best practices.

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