



BMA annual meeting: Doctors oppose EU and UK signing transatlantic trade agreement

Abi Rimmer

BMJ Careers

Doctors have said that the European Union and the United Kingdom should not sign the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

Delegates at the BMA's annual representatives meeting in Belfast on 20 June voted in favour of a motion saying that the EU (if the UK voted to remain in the EU in the referendum on Thursday 23 June) or the UK (if the referendum resulted in the UK leaving the EU) "should not sign TTIP." The agreement, which is supposed to promote trade and economic growth, would reduce regulatory barriers to big business, and concerns have been raised about the implications of this.

The motion also said that a remain vote in the referendum "must be followed by continuing pressures for reforms in procurement laws, more active social and environmental policies, less bureaucracy, and a recognition that health is more important than markets."

The motion said that if the UK voted to leave the EU steps should be taken "to ensure that employment, consumer, and environmental protection in the UK do not fall below European standards and that new flexible collective social and environmental arrangements should be negotiated."

Presenting the motion, Stephen Watkins, from the BMA's council, said, "Let us be in no doubt that if we vote to leave then the 'Brexiters' are going to be attacking consumer rights, workers' rights, regulations that protect working conditions, and regulations that protect consumers."

He said that if the UK voted to remain in the EU, however, that would not be a perfect situation either. "We'll be left with a

European Union that thinks that trade is more important than public health."

Watkins added, "On Friday, when we know the result, we have to start tackling whatever of those two sets of unsatisfactory consequences we face."

Yannis Gourtsoyannis, from the BMA's Junior Doctors Conference, said that neither a vote to remain in the EU or one to leave would automatically be good or bad for the NHS. "This motion recognises that, whatever the EU referendum outcome, this government will continue to bend its entire will to further the interests of market forces over the public good," Gourtsoyannis said.

Mark Porter, chair of the BMA's council, said that BMA lobbying had secured a commitment from the European Parliament to call formally on the European Commission to exclude public health services from the scope of TTIP and other trade agreements.

"We've had extensive lobbying on a similar line in the United Kingdom, and I have to say that, although the UK government gives us a number of friendly indications, they have so far failed to give anything like the guarantees that the European Parliament has."

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