

**Dr. Andreas Agathos**

Director Cardiac Surgery  
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**Athens, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009**

Dear Minister Bursík,

Re: Potential ban on seal products in the EU

I am contacting you to express my concern regarding the proposed EU regulation on the trade in seal products.

After years of research in the United States (US patent No #08/678,196.) and Europe (EPO No EP1878407), I have developed a new bioprosthetic valve derived from the aortic, pulmonary and pericardial tissue of harp seals (*Phoca Groenlandica*). This new valve shows exceptional hemodynamic performance and excellent in vivo behaviour, without the calcification that represents the mode of failure of presently-used biological valves (porcine or bovine pericardium). I am currently in the process of applying for a license for clinical studies for these valves within the next few months.

Another ongoing research project that I have been conducting at the University of Athens (Greek Patent Office, OBI 1005718) is the development of a new bioprosthesis derived from the trachea of *Phoca Groenlandica*. This could be used to replace the trachea of a patient suffering from cancer, trauma, burn or congenital malformation, taking under consideration that there is no other alternative to date. In vivo experiments have shown the feasibility of such a bioprosthesis, with work for improvement yet to be done.

A ban on the trade of seal products into the European Community **will exclude European patients from the advantage** of using these new bioprostheses derived from *Phoca Groenlandica*. Having had the experience of harvesting the biological material from seal populations in Eastern Canada, I know very well the sealers' professionalism and their respect for the mammals they hunt. I urge you not to make such an important decision, as to ban the importation of seal products into the EU, without giving very serious consideration to the human and animal welfare implications involved.

Sincerely,

E. Andreas Agathos, MD, PhD, FRCS, FACS, FICS, FETCS, DG, LFIBA, DDG

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