

# HAPPY ANNIVERSARY EU



Despite the difficulties facing the European Union, there are plenty of good reasons to celebrate the 60th birthday of Europe's great project, says Sebastian Emig

**HAVE** you noticed recently the increase in the amount of times you have seen the European flag in newspapers, linkedin profiles and Facebook posts? Yes, there has been something going on: the European Union has celebrated its 60th year of existence. Given the tremors that are coming from within and reaching our shores from outside, I must say that it still stands pretty strong.

The citizens of this marvellous creation - regardless of all societal and economic hardship in recent times - benefit from so much more than the renowned four freedoms, and I like to call those extra benefits the invisible forces of good. Why invisible? Because I think the big majority takes many things that are being provided by the EU for granted.

Look, for example, into the food and beverage sector, where recently we have celebrated the 15th anniversary of the EU Food Law. Which other governing body applies such high standards of food safety across multiple states guaranteeing daily safe nutrition for millions of consumers? Which other organisation provides a framework in which many million food products are labelled appropriately to the benefit of informed and interested consumers? It is the European Union after all, and even if Brussels is sometimes abused as scapegoat by others when things go wrong, I wouldn't want to have it any other way.

However, the above-mentioned tremors seem to have produced some cracks in the system. Some are even calling it a constitutional crisis or the beginning of the end of the European Union. But every crisis offers also an opportunity. It's a time to step back and assess the situation and make some tweaks or profound changes.

## WHERE NEXT FOR THE EU?

From the perspective of the European Commission, now is the right time to perform this analysis. Jean-Claude Juncker, the current president of the Commission, recently issued its White Paper on the future of Europe. Juncker outlines his thoughts in five scenarios that can be summarised as follows: "carrying on", "nothing but the single market", "those who want more, do more", "doing less more efficiently" and "doing much more together".

The paper starts with a sombre tone, acknowledging the existential struggle the EU is facing owing to crises over Brexit, migration and the eurozone. "Europe's challenges show no sign of abating," the paper says. It also notes the difficult balancing act facing the EU, as "many Europeans consider the Union as either too distant or too interfering".

The paper continues to describe a Union struggling with change: one that has doubled in size in 25 years and undergone three separate Treaty revisions, but which is sliding in global power terms and approaching a breaking point. Even though recent economic data show signs of slight improvement, there are still the reverberating shocks felt on the Continent from the UK's vote for Brexit, populist parties on the rise elsewhere in Europe, religious extremism, and a new US president whose position towards the EU is still unclear.

Many complained that the paper does not give a clear indication of the European Commission's position, but Juncker said that was precisely his point: to present a set of options, not one of which would necessarily stand on its own. Instead, taken together, the scenarios would spark a conversation across the Continent. Most strategically,

it was aimed at silencing some of the bloc's loudest internal critics by forcing them to take a position in favour of some vision of Europe, rather than just barking about what they don't like now.

## AU REVOIR, UK?

The day this article was written was the day when EU history was written as well, because the UK handed its good-bye and farewell letter to the EU: Britain's formal notification of its intention to quit the EU. It is a first milestone along a difficult path of negotiating a *modus vivendi* between the Continent and the UK that will look not only into economic matters.

Even though the EU will not want to play hardball during the negotiations, it cannot allow itself to be too lenient or to take a weak position. It will need to set a precedent for other Member States pondering leaving the EU, which - in my opinion - will lead to unfavourable outcomes for the UK in many areas. Both parties will strongly depend on spin-doctors on both sides of the Channel to persuade voters that the results are better than the pre-Brexit conditions. If and how a "Scotxit" will take place and if this will have knock-on effects in other parts of Europe (e.g. Catalonia) remains to be seen.

## REGULATING ACRYLAMIDE

After this brief overview of the macros that are already or will be affecting our industry, I would like to zoom in on some topics that are most relevant at the moment. The first one I'd like to highlight is acrylamide.

It's been over ten years now since acrylamide was detected in fried or roasted food and beverage products and the savoury snacks industry has been voluntarily implementing mitigation

measures ever since. After having seen a tremendous downward trend (for which ESA's members have been applauded by the European Food Safety Authority), we welcome news that the European Commission intends to create an appropriate legal framework for the mandatory implementation of said mitigation measures.

ESA strongly supports this move, which clearly follows the ALARA (As-Low-As-Reasonably-Achievable) approach and takes into account the natural variability and the seasonality of raw materials. There are still some nuts and bolts to be clarified in the upcoming stakeholder consultation for the draft regulation, but we are confident that the European Commission will continue to follow its science-based approach and will not allow itself to be distracted by unreasonable, non-scientific and unfounded requests from a few Brussels NGOs.

### COLOURS ALL AROUND

Following a ten-week test of four different front-of-pack (FoP) labels at the end of 2016 in 60 supermarkets in four regions on 1,200 different products (no savoury snacks), the French Ministry of Health recently announced "the winner": the Nutri-Score label. The label design uses a letter (from A to E) and colours (from green to red) according to each product's nutritional composition, and is based on Rayner's score, which is used in the UK for restricting the marketing of foods to children.

The decision was based on the fact that the Nutri-Score system proved to be the most effective at improving the nutritional quality of consumers' food baskets, even when considering consumers that buy less-expensive products.

The French Health minister intends to issue a national decree in early April and the logo will be voluntary and applicable to chilled ready-to-eat food (e.g. salads, ready-made dishes), industrial pastries (e.g. croissants, brioches), industrial bakery (e.g. sandwich bread), and canned ready-made dishes (e.g. cassoulet, paella).

For the moment, there is no indication about whether this label could be extended to savoury snacks and we will keep our members abreast of any new developments.

In an unexpected move at the beginning of March, six leading food and drink companies (Coca-Cola, Mars, Mondelez, PepsiCo, Nestle and Unilever) unveiled their intention to develop an evolved EU-harmonised colour-coded nutrition FoP labelling scheme based on portions, rather than 100g/100ml content.

The signatories consider that the current Reference Intake scheme - which the industry has voluntarily implemented - "could be further enhanced specifically by integrating colour coding to allow for an easier interpretation", and they believe that "smaller portion sizes (based on credible portions) play a key role to support

healthier consumer choices and should therefore be recognised as such in an evolved nutrition labelling scheme".

Obviously, this move comes at a time when it would be wise to avoid a proliferation of national schemes (such as the French one mentioned above) that would further hamper consumer understanding and be a barrier to the single market. The six companies have committed to set up a task force, which will look further into the details and which will be open to comments and feedback from stakeholders. The ESA Secretariat will take part in this task force and keep members informed of developments.

### ALL-TIME HIGH FOR SNACKEX!

Looking at the numbers, I can hardly believe what I read. At the time of writing we have over 142 exhibitors from more than 32 countries and over 250 delegates from more than 30 countries.

More than 150% of the originally booked stand space went to exhibitors who are hungry to showcase their latest innovations. It is already a record-breaking event and I can only invite you to become part of it. See you in Vienna!



Director General Sebastian Emig\*  
\*in his capacity as permanent representative of  
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## ESA Get to grips with SNACK NUT PRODUCTION challenges

THIS year's snack nuts production course from ESA takes place in **VALENCIA ON 16-18 OCTOBER**. With analysts anticipating a healthy compound annual growth rate for global nuts and seeds of 4.5% between 2016 and 2020, this popular course provides a chance to optimise production challenges in this rewarding savoury snacks segment.

Compared to most other savoury snacks, a high proportion of nuts are sourced from a wide variety of global origins. In fact, the European Union is the largest import market for edible nuts in the world, representing more than 40% of total world imports. What's more, import volumes are steadily increasing.

Understanding agronomy, sourcing and supply chain issues are

therefore the vital first steps in producing a successful snack nut product, and ESA's course kicks off by focusing on origins, sourcing and import considerations. A scheduled visit to the Valencia Port Health Authority facility enables course delegates to see for themselves how import controls are applied.

While many consumers love the taste of unsalted nuts, snack lovers in general are always on the lookout for new experiences and snack nuts are no exception. ESA's snack nut

production course therefore puts flavours under the spotlight, exploring trends and flavour development, as well as the challenges of successfully applying a coating and making it stick. The practical flavour development workshop enables course

delegates to create their own flavour profiles from ingredients provided.

Whether to air roast or fry nuts is a big processing decision. The snack nuts production course lays out the pros and cons of each in order to help manufacturers choose the option that's right for them and their target consumers.

Packaging is the final stage of the manufacturing operation, and the course sets out the latest developments in multi-head weighing and bag forming that can help maximise productivity and deliver the perfect, on-the-go healthier snacking option to consumers.

Finally, it's worth noting that ESA's popular snack production courses always ends up being more than the sum of their parts. The snack nuts production course provides an opportunity to meet suppliers and other manufacturers, to swap best practice tips and make new contacts. Last time the course attracted 55 delegates and Valencia's event looks set to be even bigger.

