

New EUROPEAN regime creates new OPPORTUNITIES



With both the new European Parliament and the European Commission now largely in place, the European Snacks Association is ready to work with contacts old and new to present us as the responsible industry that we are, says Sebastian Emig

THE FIVE-YEAR CYCLE BEGINS

AFTER having a closer look at the European Parliament in the last edition, I want to focus this time on the new Commission. As *TSM* went to press, the Commission was largely approved, but the launch was being delayed - probably until December - to accommodate some hiccups over appointments in the areas of Transport, Neighbourhood and Enlargement and the Internal Market (see p16). However, none of these was expected to impact much on the department most relevant for our sector: the Directorate-General of Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE).

DG SANTE's remit has expanded to include increased responsibilities and authority. Medical devices will now fall under SANTE, while the Biotechnology and Food Supply Chain, as well as the Health Technology and Cosmetics units - both previously part of DG GROW - will now be part of SANTE. This will make the DG more important within the Commission but potentially gives it less focus on food-related topics.

Stella Kyriakides, the Commissioner-designate for Health, is a medical psychologist with many years of experience in the field of social affairs, health and cancer prevention. In the mission letter from Commission President von der Leyen, Kyriakides is asked to take the lead on a new 'farm-to-fork' strategy for sustainable food; which is supposed to cover every step in the food chain from production to consumption, and feed into the Commission's circular economy objectives. It

should combine regulation with communication and awareness campaigns and have full buy-in from local, regional and sectoral actors, as well as Member States and European institutions.

Furthermore, she is asked to reduce dependency on pesticides and protect citizens from exposure to endocrine disruptors; improve consumer information - especially on the health and sustainability of food products; and implement and enforce the already extensive legislation in the areas of food safety and plant health. Nutrition does not however appear in the mission letter instructing Kyriakides.

So those are the expectations from her boss at the Commission for the next five years. What about the European Parliament?

At the beginning of October, Members from the Parliament's ENVI Committee 'grilled' Kyriakides with difficult questions, dealing with food safety, food labelling and agricultural technologies.

The two words Kyriakides used most frequently in the hearing were 'transparency' and 'science' and she made clear commitments towards science-based decisions for her mandate. Referring to evidence and science-based decisions even seemed to be a strategy to respond to some of the most difficult and suggestive questions of MEPs on the most contentious issues. This is a very good sign for our industry, since all our outreach and advocacy efforts are based on facts and underpinned with figures.

Food labelling will remain a

key issue for this new Commission mandate. In her written answers, Kyriakides highlighted her willingness 'to explore nutrition and health labelling in a holistic way' and in her hearing, she also insisted that she 'would like to see a common approach across Member States.' Further discussions and actions on the harmonisation of front-of-pack (FOP) labelling schemes, as well as on nutrient profiles are now expected. One reason for this is that the European Commission's Report on FOP nutrition labelling is still pending but will in all likelihood be issued in early 2020. Kyriakides highlighted that 'Nutri-Score would be considered' and could therefore serve as a basis for future proposals.

Committing to include 'the food we eat' in her plan to fight cancer, food and nutrition was another main theme in Kyriakides' address. She aims to tackle it from the dual perspectives of production (pesticides) and information.

Surprisingly, despite the food system touching on so many critical aspects related to the environment and health, MEPs from the ENVI Committee paid little attention to the 'farm-to-fork' strategy for sustainable food in their questions, in spite of the fact that the future Health Commissioner has been tasked to lead on the strategy.

Except for topics related to labelling, Kyriakides did not provide much indication of how nutrition will be dealt with at the European level. On the contrary, her response quickly shifted the debate as she announced a five-year action plan on food waste.

HELPING THE SAVOURY SNACKS INDUSTRY SUCCEED



+200 international members

+70 countries

- Industry representation at EU level
- Platform for sector-wide co-operation
- Technical expertise / input to EU policy
- SNACKEX flagship trade fair & conference
- Industry best practice courses
- Quarterly industry magazine
- Networking events
- Members' newsletter
- Industry companies database

Become a member now

We welcome worldwide membership from any company with an interest in the European savoury snack and nut sector.

European Snacks Association
The voice of the industry in Europe

Rue des Deux Églises 26, BE-1000 Brussels, Belgium
T: +32 (0)2 538 20 39 F: +32 (0)2 218 12 13

esa@esasnacks.eu | www.esasnacks.eu | www.snackex.com

Overall the hearing did not reveal many new initiatives and workstreams in food policy but rather a continuation of what had been already undertaken by the Juncker Commission. Even Kyriakides' lack of clarity on nutrition is comparable with the policy of her predecessor. However, her commitment to science-based decisions is nevertheless an important reassurance for industry. It should enable us to defend the single market for food and ensure the fair treatment of all products and technologies using independent risk assessment and non-discriminatory authorisation processes.

The road ahead remains filled with challenges. The European Commission will have to reckon with the present nationalist wave in Member States and a more polarised and populist European Parliament, which might further interfere with EU harmonisation and the risk-based regulatory system. Even with the Commission taking a science-based approach, the nature of the MEPs' questions indicates that the emotional element in politics will be a relevant part of the regulatory process.

REMINISCING AND OUTLOOK

Looking back at 2019, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all ESA members that strongly supported the Secretariat in crucial areas, as well as helping to raise the profile and visibility of our sector among policy makers.

Looking ahead, the next year will be full of challenges. We will likely see increased pressure concerning the level of food processing, as well as a focus on so-called 'unhealthy' additives and contaminants. This pressure will be on a reputational as well as a legislative level. Furthermore, with the increasing uptake of the Nutriscore system and the announced European Commission meta-review of existing FOP labelling systems, we will likely see an EU-wide scheme slowly emerging over the next year. It will be voluntary – at least at first - unless the Commission decides to review the food labelling regulation. With the single-use plastic regulation in place and a strong focus on plastics, our sector will most likely be in the frontline of developments and expectations will be high. Frans Timmermans, European Commissioner-designate for the European Green Deal, is likely to oversee the signature climate and environmental policy package in the new executive, which aims to make the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050.

Despite all those challenges I am confident that we are and will be ready to tackle the requests from legislators, NGOs and consumers, as well as our own expectations, in order to be seen and understood as the responsible industry that we have all contributed to in recent decades.

I would like to thank all the ESA members personally for supporting the Secretariat this year and I think we can look with confidence into our sector's and association's future.

All that remains for me, on behalf of the entire ESA team, is to wish you and your families all the very best for the festive season and for a happy and prosperous New Year. ■



Director General Sebastian Emig*

*in his capacity as permanent representative of
PrimeConsulting BXLBCN SL