

Mr Olivér Várhelyi
Commissioner for Health and
Animal Welfare
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200

B-1049 Brussels

BEUC-X-2024-110

Brussels, 01/12/2024

Subject: The Consumer Mission Letter

Dear Commissioner Várhelyi,

On behalf of BEUC, The European Consumer Organisation, I wish to congratulate you on your recent appointment as European Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare. Created in 1962, we represent 44 national consumer groups from 31 European countries. Thanks to our members' markets watchdog role, product testing and daily contacts with consumers from across Europe, we can support you with evidence-based recommendations to ensure the European economy delivers to consumers.

We fully support your mission to promote a One Health approach in policymaking and step up work on preventive health. We welcome that you will present an EU plan for cardiovascular health, also addressing obesity prevention – especially in young people. Your continued work on front-of-pack nutrition labelling will be critical in this respect, alongside addressing food reformulation and the marketing of unhealthy food to children and contributing to the forthcoming Vision on Agriculture and Food.

We also welcome your mission to strengthen the European Health Union. The Commission must do more to ensure the supply of affordable medicines, a key priority for consumers. Addressing health inequalities will require sustained action and ambition during your mandate.

Consumer organisations can, and must be, part of this process. For you to be a true consumer champion, we believe that the below proposals should be part of your mission.

The current shortcomings

Today, Europeans' diets are neither healthy nor sustainable. Unhealthy diets are responsible for 800,000 deaths each year in the EU, mostly due to cardiovascular diseases, and have huge costs for our economies. While [consumers are willing to change their food habits](#), many struggle to do so because the unhealthy, unsustainable choice is the [most available and advertised and is often the cheapest one too](#). On the safety front, consumers continue to be exposed to harmful chemicals present in food packaging.

In addition, medicine shortages have been on the rise in the EU, impacting negatively consumers' health and pockets. At the same time, high medicine prices contribute to inequalities in patient access to treatment, by impacting reimbursement decisions and the level of out-of-pocket costs.

Consumers' proposals for your mission

Publish the long-awaited proposal for an EU front-of-pack nutrition label

We urge you to publish the revision of the **Food Information to Consumers Regulation**, including the proposal for a mandatory EU front-of-pack nutrition label, the withdrawal of the unjustified labelling exemptions granted to alcoholic drinks, and the establishment of nutrient profiles to prevent food high in fat, sugar or salt from claiming it is healthy.

Protect children from exposure to unhealthy food marketing

Healthy nutrition starts early, and as you rightly mentioned during your hearing, the figures about childhood obesity in the EU are 'horrifying'. **Regulating the marketing of unhealthy food to children**, offline and online, should be an integral part of a strengthened EU Child Guarantee – and would be in line with your mission to address the multiple impacts of social media on people, especially the youth.

Ensure the Vision on Agriculture & Food addresses food consumption

Working with the Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, we call on you to ensure that the **Vision on Agriculture and Food** spells out how the EU and Member States will make healthy and sustainable diets – where consumption of animal vs plant protein is rebalanced – the easy and affordable choice for all consumers, as recommended by the Strategic Dialogue. An **EU Action Plan for Plant-Based Food** should be part of this endeavour.

Enhance food safety and protect public health by reforming EU food packaging legislation

We urge you to **reform EU food contact material legislation** to improve public health and food safety. From a consumer perspective, the reform must deliver protective rules for all food packaging materials and products based on the principles of precaution and ‘no data, no market’ combined with strict enforcement and improved information to consumers.

Improve animal welfare

Almost [9 in 10 consumers support new laws](#) to improve the welfare of farmed animals in the EU. We call on you to **publish the proposals for a revision of the EU legislation on farmed animal welfare**, including a phasing out of cage systems, the introduction of the method of production labelling for animal source foods (modelled on the eggs label), and a requirement that EU rules should also apply to imported products.

Support a consumer-centric EU pharmaceutical legislation

We expect you to play a key role in ensuring that **pharmaceutical legislation improves access to medicines in a meaningful way**. We urge you to work to better prevent and mitigate shortages through stronger obligations on companies. In addition, the legislation should include a modulated system of regulatory incentives to ensure earlier consumer access to generics for certain medicines.

Promote EU joint procurement and transparency in medicine pricing

EU joint procurement helps improve medicine availability and affordability. We urge you to **facilitate joint purchases by Member States beyond cross-border health threats** (e.g., for expensive cancer and rare disease treatments). We also expect DG SANTE to continue supporting information exchange amongst pricing and reimbursement authorities, and to contribute to increased [transparency in medicine pricing](#). This is crucial to avoid that public health systems and consumers overpay for medicines.

Contribute to enhanced medicine supply security

We call on you to support the [diversification](#) of medicine supply chains at various levels. The future **Critical Medicines Act** should ensure that any support to companies operating in the EU is aligned with competition rules and principles. This support should include conditions that maximise public return on public investment (e.g., clauses to ensure medicine affordability). The Act should also support **non-profit production**

models and geographic diversification of manufacturing through partnerships with third countries.

Ensure the availability of safe medical devices

We support the ongoing efforts and additional actions planned by the European Commission to ensure an **effective and swift implementation** of the Regulations on medical devices and in-vitro diagnostics. At the same time, we urge you to ensure an evidence-based evaluation of the existing rules before rushing into any legislative revision.

The way forward

We are aware that you have a busy agenda but hope nonetheless that you will find the time to meet with us. We would be keen to discuss our proposals with you and would like to elaborate more on the expectations of European consumers towards European decision-makers.

Please count on our support if you need information about the consumer perspective in your policy area.

Please find enclosed our priorities for this new Commission.

I wish you a most successful mandate.

Yours sincerely,

Agustín Reyna
Director General

Encl.: *Europe, Consumers Count on You – BEUC priorities for the next European Commission (2024-2029)*