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EU PARLIAMENT: NUTRIENT PROFILES REJECTED BY THE ENVI COMMITTEE

This morning, in Brussels, the European Parliament Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) has approved with a 50 to 18 majority an important amendment, introduced by German MEP Renate Sommer, aimed at **abolishing nutrient profiles**.

Nutrient profiles are an attempt to distinguish foods in good and bad according to their content, in particular the amount of sugar, salt and fat. They are the main legal basis to the traffic light labelling system and many other possible measures, such as taxes on certain products or restrictions on advertising. However, nutrient profiles are only ideologically motivated since they have no scientific foundation whatsoever. Obesity and overweight depend on many factors – eating in excess, lack of physical exercise etc. - and only a thorough analysis of the overall diet and lifestyle of an individual can provide accurate information about his or her state of health.

A similar amendment was rejected, by only one vote, in a plenary session of the EU Parliament in 2010. On that occasion, MEPs ended up being equally split, 309 on a side and 309 on the other. However, before landing in the plenary session, five years ago the Sommer amendment had passed the ENVI Committee by only three votes. It is therefore extremely encouraging that today it was approved by such an overwhelming majority.

Since 2010, the EU Commission has never been able to implement Regulation No 1924/2006 on nutrition and health claims (which included nutrient profiles), probably because of the very strong opposition recorded in the EU Parliament with that 309-309 vote. The new Sommer amendment acknowledged this fact and recalled the new Regulation No 1169/2011, which substantially improved food information to consumers. Such new Regulation makes nutrient profiles useless and redundant, a view that was widely shared among MEPs.

Here follows the Sommer amendment, as approved this morning by the ENVI Committee:

6a. Calls on the Commission, in view of the serious and persistent problems which arise in the implementation of Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 on nutrition and health

claims made on foods, including problems of distortion of competition, to review the scientific basis of this regulation and how useful and realistic it is, and, if appropriate, to eliminate the concept of nutrient profiles; considers that the aims of Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006, such as ensuring that information which is provided concerning foods is true and that specific indications are given concerning fat, sugar and salt content, have now been attained by Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers.

The amendment will be discussed from a legal point of view by the Juri Committee on June 16th. If approved, it will be voted by the whole Parliament in July.

WHO GOVERNANCE, GROWING SUPPORT FOR ITALY

It is also encouraging that the discussion on the development of guidelines and recommendations at the World Health Organization, proposed by Italy and included in the agenda of the 137^o WHO Executive Board (May 27-28), has raised a lot of interest. Recent contacts with some of the 34 members of the Executive Board have shown that there is a growing support for the Italian position, aimed at allowing the publication of guidelines or recommendations only if they are supported by a robust quality of scientific evidence. It must be remembered that, last January, an Italian amendment to the document on the outcome of the 2^o International Conference on Nutrition, which asked for a robust quality of scientific evidence for any policy paper published by the WHO, was unanimously approved by the Executive Board. However, after just over a month, on March 4th the Secretariat published a new conditional recommendation to limit daily sugar intake to less than 5% of total calories. Such recommendation, according to the GRADE ranking system adopted by the WHO, is based on scientific evidence of “very low quality” and is supported by studies on dental caries and not on nutrition that presented a “serious risk of bias”.

