

**Seminar on TRANSFATY ACID REDUCTION IN FOODSTUFFS, 4/4/2016**

Permanent Representation of Hungary to the EU

Speaking notes for ALOJZ PETERLE MEP (10 mins)

Distinguished guests, dear Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

Before I start with my presentation: I hope you all had a healthy meal today and that you avoided trans fats as much as possible – as we will have them on the menu for the rest of the afternoon.

Since overcoming cancer some years ago, I fast every Monday. It's one of routines that keep my body in good shape. Cancer was an experience which made me even more aware of the importance of healthy lifestyle, including healthy diet.

Hungarian Permanent Representation to the EU is fully legitimate to host such an event due to national experience with regulating trans fats. I would like to take this opportunity not only to thank you for organising this important Seminar and for inviting me speak today as a Co-Chair of the EP Environment Committee Health Working Group, but also to congratulate Hungary for implementing health policies in the food products and tax legislation. I believe the meeting today will not only highlight the necessary measures concerning the health risks associated with trans fats, but also advance the way to make reduction a reality in all Member States.

In the last few years I have been speaking many times about the health related risks of trans fats consumption, the importance of healthy diet and the relevance of practicing an active lifestyle. I am pleased to see many familiar faces in the

room, officials from the member states and the WHO, and also representatives of the industry, business associations and NGO's. Without you, we cannot achieve the changes we want for the benefit of citizens.

Speaking of transfats, allow me to be as clear and concise as possible

In the EU, it is estimated that more than 5 million people consume more than 5 grams of these artificial trans fats per day, which significantly increases their risk of heart disease.

The negative impact of artificial trans fats on heart health is beyond dispute, no beneficial health effect has been identified.

Although the amount of artificial trans fats found in food has fallen over the last 10 to 15 years, many popular foods still contain high amounts of trans fats. This is particularly the case in eastern and south-eastern Europe. Also, in some EU member states the availability of this type of food has actually increased substantially since 2012.

Many food products are imported into and exported from the EU, so it is important to tackle the issue at EU level.

To date, only 5 EU member states (Austria, Denmark and Hungary, Latvia and Sweden) have set a legal limit on industrially produced trans fats, but other countries could follow unless the Commission comes forward with EU-wide legislation.

## Overview of activities in the EP

In the European Parliament we have trans fats on the plate for more than 9 years now, so we do not consider it as novel food any more.

Already in April 2007, four MEPs presented a declaration calling for more restrictive regulation of trans fats in the EU. In November 2008, Parliament's Policy Department published a study examining different models of regulation in EU and non-EU countries, and recommending that a ban of industrial trans fats shall be considered at the EU level.

In recent years, in the EP we have intensified actions: Several MEPs posed questions to the Commission insisting on the introduction of legislation to regulate the presence of industrially produced trans fats in food marketed in the EU.

In November 2013 my colleague Madam Willmott (the other co-chair of the Health Working Group) hosted a Workshop on Trans fats aiming to discuss the risks posed by trans fats in human health and to exchange views on the existing solutions to this issue – in particular we were pleased to hear that in Denmark the ban had not caused a significant rise in the price of the food products involved, nor had it impacted their availability. Dr LANGKILDE emphasised that a survey conducted before and after the ban had demonstrated a gradual decline of industrially produced trans fats in food products in Denmark, and argued that the EU should follow the same legislative approach.

We also heard from the EC that they are preparing a report that aims to assess the presence of trans fats in foods and in diets across the EU. I am glad this report finally came to light and that we had a chance to exchange views with Commission about it at the Public Health and Food Safety Committee two weeks ago.

Additionally, one year ago, the MEP Heart Group – of which I am member myself and which actively promotes measures to reduce the burden of cardiovascular diseases – organised a panel discussion on this subject leading to a letter to Commission President Juncker, calling on him to bring forward a proposal to set legal limits on the use of trans fatty acids in foodstuffs in the EU.

As we were eagerly anticipating reaction from the Commission, Health Working Group hosted another Workshop related to healthy diets last October, with guest speakers Dr BERTOLLINI from WHO and Madam LØGSTRUP from the European Heart Network among others who are both here today as well. Scientific evidence, especially with regard to prevention of cardiovascular disease, was presented and the prevalence of chronic diseases in the EU was highlighted.

I am sure they will tell us more about this, so let me focus rather on possible means to address transfats consumption.

Citizens are only able to make informed food choices if they are aware of the health effects of a high transfats intake. Under current legal provisions, they can only infer from the ingredient labelling whether partially hydrogenated oils are

contained in a product. This however does not allow a precise estimation of the actual trans fats content and is only valid for pre-packed foods.

EFSA concluded that "trans fats intakes should be as low as is possible within the context of a nutritionally adequate diet", and the World Health Organization recommends to consume not more than 1% of total daily energy intake.

### So how to get there?

Available evidence indicates that all existing trans fats reduction strategies appear to be associated with significant reductions in food trans fats levels. It has been noted in particular that "national and local bans were most effective at eliminating trans fats from the food supply, whereas mandatory trans fats labelling and voluntary trans fats limits had only a varying degree of success, largely depended on food category."

Across the Atlantic, US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) concluded already in June 2015, based on a thorough review of the scientific evidence, that partially hydrogenated oils are not "generally recognized as safe" for use in human food. Food manufacturers have three years to remove partially hydrogenated oils from products (unless they are otherwise approved by the FDA).

### EU legal limit on the industrial TFA content of food

I strongly favour introducing a legal limit which is expected to achieve the biggest reductions in industrial trans fats intake, applying to all products, pre-packaged and non-packaged.

Potential public health benefits would be the highest for this option as all products should be covered and all population groups would benefit from reductions, including the more vulnerable people.

That would be a good example of better regulation working in the best interests of EU citizens.

Imposing a legal limit for whole EU would also help diminishing any prospective divergence with US regulatory standards, thus avoiding the emergence of unnecessary regulatory barriers in bilateral trade.

It's a challenge that cannot be solved by politicians alone. I believe we should join forces and work together on product improvement.

We need The food industry, the caterers, restaurants, canteens, supermarkets and other food suppliers are the key players here. Their role is crucial. Not just crucial for the health of our citizens. Not just a social responsibility. But crucial as well for their own future.

We need innovation and fair competition. Producing food that is both tasty and healthy, will give our companies a worldwide business advantage.

### To conclude

Our health depends much on our diet. Citizens should be central when promoting a healthy diet.

Healthy eating, healthy diets are one of our main challenges.

Hence, it's our duty to facilitate informed and healthy choices by consumers and foster the acquisition of healthy dietary habits.

We all agree that level of trans fats should be decreased, and some multinational food companies are even asking us to legislate.

So, let's do this together!

More Europe should mean less trans fats and healthier citizens.

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