



Conference of the Louis Bonduelle Foundation
Eat Well to Live Well?
The Impact of New Lifestyles and Eating Habits on Citizens' Health
European Parliament
22 November 2011

Mrs. Sophie Auconie, Member of the European Parliament (EPP, FR), Host of the event and chairperson of the panel

Sophie Auconie introduced the discussions with the objective to analyse how the motto "good food, good life" is relevant and to show how meals are essential today as public health tools but also as social and family ties.

Mr. Jean-Bernard Bonduelle, Louis Bonduelle Foundation

Jean-Bernard Bonduelle first presented the Bonduelle Group, whose principal mission is to "make vegetables the future of food".

According to him, it is part of the responsibility of the agrofood industries to be concerned about citizens' health. This objective represents a logical and positive interaction between firms and society. Bonduelle, as a vegetable specialist, has a legitimate and very special place to take at the core of the current nutritional issues.

Public health recommendations regarding the consumption of vegetables exist in many countries. However, if 75% of EU citizens know that it is important to eat more vegetables, only two out of three do not eat a sufficient amount of vegetables. Food is an act of very high socio-cultural dimension that cannot be reduced to a simple nutritional arithmetic.

Therefore, the Louis Bonduelle Foundation decided to act first and foremost on the improvement of eating habits. The main objective of the Louis Bonduelle Foundation is indeed "to promote sustainable and better alimentary behaviours, focusing on the advantages of vegetables". The Foundation is active in four European countries (Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, France), and also displays its efforts in Canada since 25 January 2011.

It operates through three pillars:

- **Information to the public and to health professionals**, through its website www.fondation-louisbonduelle.org, conceived to disseminate relevant information on vegetables and their benefits in an interactive way ;
- **Active support to scientific research** concerning relevant issues of nutrition and eating behaviours, under a medical, sociological and agronomic point of view ;
- **Field actions**, by implementing concrete and focused operations aiming at improving the image of vegetables and increasing their consumption in the daily life.

The Louis Bonduelle Foundation is co-founder of the Heart and Arteries Foundation, which develops research programs on chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, obesity and diabetes. The Foundation has a partnership with ECOG (European Childhood Obesity Group) to reward a research or a public health action in the fight against childhood obesity.



Dr. Stefaan DE HENAUW, Professor at the Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Ghent University (Belgium)

Stefaan De Henauw presented the IDEFICS study ("*Identification and prevention of Dietary- and lifestyle-induced Health **EF**fects In Children and infants*") and its results to fight against obesity and diseases related to diet, as well as children's lifestyles in Europe. The study, which covered 16 224 European children aged from two to ten, demonstrated the importance of the practice of a physical activity, adequate sleep according to each age and the familial and social environment on the risk of overweight or obesity.

The predominant model for the prevention of obesity is sociological. Indeed, there are different levels that influence the child in terms of its lifestyle starting from household and the family, to his community, his school, but also national policies, etc. The aim is to work at each level in terms of prevention, such as at the school level for instance: what type of playgrounds or sports courses are organised, etc.

In today's society, the problems of obesity are influenced by several factors, namely social, economic, environmental, etc. For example, eating at the table together allows not only to eat, but also to interact with others, and to facilitate the social transmission of knowledge, a habit which has evolved significantly in the recent decades.

Another study published in the journal "Pediatrics" focuses on the households' routine, to see if households consider meals as an important social time in the family and to study children's sleep and the time they spend in front of a screen. The results of the study show that children who eat with their families are much less likely to become obese than the other children, and this is the same for children with more sleeping hours and fewer hours spent in front of a screen.

The IDEFICS study focuses on two key messages in terms of food: to boost the daily consumption of water and to stimulate the daily consumption of fruits and vegetables. The challenge now is to mobilize this commitment at the political level.

Southern Europe countries are among the Member States with the highest rates of childhood obesity. . In Italy, 16% of children say they are always eating and watching TV simultaneously. In that sense, it is important to note that Italy has a strong prevalence of obesity.

Mr. Marc Tarabella, Member of the European Parliament (S&D, BE)

Marc Tarabella was rapporteur for opinion in the Parliamentary Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) on food labeling and nutrition. According to him, too much information kills information: the objective is not to inform more but to better inform the consumer in order that he/she fulfill his/her cart thoughtfully. We must therefore give up additional data.

In the future, basic food products should stop travelling around the world: for Marc Tarabella, it seems quite logical that milk from New Zealand should not be imported in Europe, but also vice versa. For meat, milk, and basic food products, areas of food self-sufficiency should be created.

Concerning the regulation on food information to consumers, published on 22 November 2011 in the Official Journal of the European Union, the place of provenance (last transformation of the product) was preferred to the place of origin, which is nevertheless highly important. Marc Tarabella is opposed to the introduction of traffic lights and also to the implementation in some European countries of a tax on fat products, introducing "false good ideas."



Finally, he reported on the important measures introduced by the labeling regulation:

- **Nutrition declaration:** the energy content and amounts of fat, saturated fat, carbohydrates, sugars, protein and salt must all be stated in a legible tabular form on the packaging, together and in the same field of vision.
- **Allergens:** allergen substances will have to be highlighted in the ingredient list. The new rules also state that information on allergens must be given for non-packaged foods, for example on food sold in restaurants or canteens.
- **Country of origin:** the mention of origin is extended to fresh meat from pigs, sheep, goat and poultry. Before extending the labeling of the country of origin to other categories of food, such as meat when used as an ingredient, milk or unprocessed foods, the Commission will proceed to impact assessments.
- **Consumers must not be misled:** the new rules will ensure that consumers are not misled by the appearance, description or pictorial presentation of the food packaging.

Ms. Anne-Sophie PARENT, Secretary General of the AGE Platform Europe

The AGE Platform Europe has been working for some years with the Louis Bonduelle Foundation on several actions, including intergenerational solidarity, cooperation, the coalition of the European Year 2012, and the elderly abuse and malnutrition.

Eating is representing an important pleasure for older people: there is indeed a strong emotional and social dimension of meals. Preparing and sharing meals is also important. For the oldest persons, it is a challenge for some local authorities to give a meaning to time through eating, to learn again how to eat, but also to do the necessary shopping to stay independent.

Intergenerational activities and the transmission of knowledge to the next generations during meals are also of great significance.

In the context of the European Year for Active Ageing 2012, many initiatives will be implemented to assist in maintaining employment, social participation in the community, and in living independently. In addition, the starting point of the Pilot European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing was the management of chronic diseases. The AGE Platform Europe pushed for the prevention and nutrition to be also part with the aim to increase up to two years the average age spent in good health by 2020 (currently 61.1 years for men and 61.3 years for women).

Dr. Antonyia Parvanova, Member of the European Parliament (ALDE, BG)

Food and diet matter for our health and bad practices in terms of food consumption have increased in recent years, resulting in an increase of overweight and obesity rates in Europe. This situation has further deteriorated due to the recent crisis which has reinforced bad habits. One must notice that cardiovascular diseases is the leading cause of death in the EU and the expenses related to these diseases alone cost about 192 billion euros per year.

Moreover, the "European heart network" highlighted the fact that 4% of diseases in developed countries are due to an insufficient consumption of fruits and vegetables. If every person in the EU-27 consumed 600g of fruit and vegetables a day, this would avoid 134.000 death (from heart disease) per year. It is therefore necessary to make each citizen realize that a regular consumption of fruits and vegetables is essential.



All these figures are known and are enough for most of our citizens and the many NGOs that are active in this area. However, it is important for policy-makers to take the measure of this phenomenon and to draw the lessons: it is necessary that the legislator intervenes.

Several initiatives are noteworthy, such as:

- The EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, launched in 2005;
- The legislation on food labeling;
- The Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy that allows us to ask questions about what we produce and for what purposes.

Antonyia Parvanova finally questioned the fact that the sugar market still continues to benefit from subsidies in 2011, although the dangers of an excessive consumption of sugar are well-known.

Mr. Philippe ROUX, Deputy Head of Unit C.4 Health determinants - Directorate General for Health and Consumer Policy (DG SANCO), European Commission

There is a strong link between chronic diseases and diet. Obesity is a well-known risk factor for many health problems, including hypertension, cholesterol, diabetes, respiratory problems (asthma), muscle diseases (arthritis) and various forms of cancers. At least 2.8 million people die each year from a consequence of obesity.

It is important to mention that there we are nowadays talking of diabetes in the case of young people. This phenomenon, which results from the combination of overweight and obesity, did not exist twenty years ago.

The European Commission put emphasis on Physical Activity in the European health strategy 2007-2013, partly because criticisms were made on the significant accent that was put on food. Other aspects are also equally important, namely the reformulation of products, the promotion of fruit and vegetables, responsible advertising, etc.

The answer proposed by the Commission was original, with the establishment of a European Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. The EU has led both stakeholders and Member States to work together within the platform.

A similar approach was carried out with Member States, one of the first results is the establishment of an agreed framework for action on reducing salt (-16% over the period of the strategy).

Some initiatives have also been implemented, such as through the EPODE project. This project enables local authorities to engage in initiatives that promote an environment that facilitates the adoption of healthy lifestyles for families, or promotes physical activity among young people.

The Directorate General for Health and Consumers is seeking to work cooperatively within other policies and with other DGs of the European Commission, including initiatives from DG AGRI, in particular the "School Fruit scheme" program which also commits Member states. The objective is to improve the performance of the pilot projects and to develop sustainable consumption of fruits and vegetables by the youth.

In 2013, the "School Fruit schemes" initiative will be supported once more, as well as the Member States' strategies concerning food and physical activity. The European Commission will also work on gathering database and strengthening the work carried out with WHO.



Questions and Answers

- **Jean-Louis Rastoin, Emeritus Professor at Montpellier SupAgro**, conducted a study on the global food system. According to the WHO, foodborne non-communicable diseases represent 50% of all deaths in the world. In high-income countries, health-related spendings increased significantly: in France, they are now representing 10% of households' expenditure, while the food budget decreased to 10% of households' expenditure. We must therefore examine how food is produced and support the model of local food. Can we make a connection between the agricultural policy and the food policy?
- **Sarah Lee, Interel**, stressed the importance of changing eating habits while most of the policies relate to changing food as such. In this regard, has the EU a role in changing eating habits? How to exchange best practices between the different Member States?
- **Antonyia Parvanova**: 12% of EU citizens do not have the ability to read, understand and use the information in health. We must therefore focus on changing eating habits but also on improving health literacy.
- **Anne-Sophie Parent**: food products available at low prices are not very qualitative. Greater investment should be made for safe and quality products.
- **Marc Tarabella**: the CAP should become a common agricultural and food policy, and even an environmental policy. Short circuits should be encouraged and more coherence should be developed between health, agriculture, environment and development.
- **Stefaan De Henauw**: scientists from the Mediterranean countries all agree that the Mediterranean diet no longer exists: it used to be a mix between diet and lifestyle. Today, Cypriot, Italian, and Spanish children are eating like children in Norway, France, etc. The question remains why these children have the highest prevalence. The reasons are that they are less active, more often in front of a screen, but one can also cite cultural differences that affect eating behaviors.
- **Philippe Roux**: as far as the link between food policy and agricultural policy is concerned, the challenge lies in promoting a comprehensive approach. The EU has no role in changing lifestyles in the strict sense, since this role belongs to the Member States. However, the Commission supports the Member States in the promotion policies to better eating habits.
- **Sophie Auconie**: it seems that we have sacrificed the meaning of food and meals on the altar of new lifestyles. We must change the habits and ways of life, but also consumption and production.
- **Jean-Bernard Bonduelle**: One of the missions of the Louis Bonduelle Foundation is to change consumers' eating behaviors: the panel gathered today is one of the contributions brought to this issue. This is the first discussion of a cycle of several conferences to be held in 2012.