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Any hope for sustainable and safe food policy with new proposed EU commissioner?

Jean Claude Juncker proposed Vytenis Andriukatis as commissioner for Health and Food safety. Despite some promising elements in Andriukatis' mission letter, for example on energy efficiency and public investment, overall we may doubt about any positive influence on our health, nor food safety as Juncker is clearly in favour of the currently negotiated TTIP EU-US agreement. However, we will take the Commission president at his word when he says he will not sacrifice Europe's safety, health, social and data protection standards or our cultural diversity on the altar of free trade.

Ostensibly, the fact that the proposed commissioner for health and food safety Vytenis Andriukaitis has a medical background is a plus, particularly given the worrying implications of our current industrial food system on public health. However, we have concerns with the brief he has been given, which would view this crucial portfolio for the European public from a narrow economic and commercial perspective as his work aims to be partly coordinated by the Vice-presidents for Growth, Jobs, Investment and Competitiveness.

It is worrying that the whole approach to this sensitive area for public health and European consumers seems to be framed in a commercial and pro-big business context. Responsibility for medical products, for example, will be scandalously shifted to the Commission's enterprise directorate. Furthermore, a clear part of the brief is to "simplify existing legislation", which is shorthand for scaling backing existing EU standards and regulations.

It is however promising that the only concrete task Juncker has set out for Mr Andriukaitis is to review the current EU system for deciding on the authorisation of GMOs. President-elect Juncker has stressed that the current "undemocratic" authorisation system, clearly opposed by member states and citizens must urgently be reviewed. The Greens/EFA Group expects the Commission to make sure the important and necessary overhaul of the EU authorisation system is not jeopardised by the controversial proposal to allow member states to opt out of GMO authorisations, which cannot be a trick to allow easier EU authorisations.

The initial impressions are also not good as regards the EU's role in building a sustainable food system. The outgoing Commission has already shelved a draft EU action plan on 'building a sustainable food system'. We would be concerned with indications that Juncker intends to leave this up to individual member states to act or not. There are clear arguments for a European approach, notably including binding targets to reduce food waste. We hope that M. Andriukatis intends to push for a sustainable food system and will publish the shelved EU action plan on this issue.

The Greens/EFA Group will take the opportunity of the hearing of the proposed commissioner to exchange views on the aforementioned issues. We also expect Mr Andriukatis to advocate clear traceability and labelling requirements as regards food from clones or their descendants. We will as well bear in mind the question of the precautionary principle as a cornerstone of EU policy-making and wish next commissioner to defend it.

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