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Bisphenol A, an old artificial oestrogen, still allowed in out dated and industrial food packaging

Have you ever heard about endocrine disrupters (EDCs)? If so, then you've probably also heard of BPA, aka « bisphenol A », one of the world's most famous EDCs. But if you never heard about those chemicals that irreversibly affect the hormonal system, even at very low doses, especially during pregnancy and childhood, there's no way you've escaped « BPA- free » labels on food containers for our little ones. It is even used as a selling argument.

Since the beginning of the golden age of mass consumption, varnishes and coatings containing BPA have commonly been used in the inside of food and drink cans, whereas plastic articles such as reusable drinking bottles, tableware and food storage containers may also contain BPA. Before becoming a widely used plastic hardener by the food industry, it was discovered that BPA acts like an artificial oestrogen and was even a candidate for use as a pharmaceutical.

In other words : something that almost ended up on the market as a pharmaceutical with strict clinical trials, strict information on side effects and strict pharmacovigilance rules managed to invade our supermarkets and kitchens without going through any of these three steps even though BPA can leach from food contact materials into food and drink.

In June 2017, the Member States Committee of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) unanimously classified BPA as an EDC stating that it 'is a substance with endocrine disrupting properties for which there is a scientific evidence of probable serious effects to human health' and 'the range of experimental effects is predictive of serious health outcomes which are permanent and irreversible'.

So, the most logical way to deal with such a substance, when you are in charge of protecting public health, is to simply ban it in all food contact materials. This way you can be sure that not infant, no child, no teenager and most importantly no foetus would be exposed. This is what France did.

But the European Commission surprisingly did not propose this option. Instead, the administration working under the responsibility of Health Commissioner Andriukaitis failed to take into account the ECHA classification, as well as the precautionary principle, and instead decided to propose a so called « migration limit » for BPA from certain food contact materials, based on a 2015 opinion from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Well, good luck for those who are to implement the limit: as it's very difficult to determine how much BPA migrates - that depends on the consistency of the food, storage

temperature, how often the food has been heated in the container. How exactly is this migration level to be measured and the limits enforced?

The Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament attempted to build a majority to oppose this unenforceable measure based on outdated scientific paradigms. For the moment, we did not yet succeed, for lack of support by conservatives, liberals and, surprisingly, even socialists.

But the battle of the phasing out of bisphenol A is far from being lost: fortunately, the current societal trends are those the Greens have been advocating for decades: towards circular economy, zero waste and zero marine litter. This requires food packaging that does not become waste.

We just don't need toxic packaging around our foods. What we need is simply long lasting, solid, reusable and chemically stable ways of storing and conserving our food and drink. And, obviously, no long distance migration of ...food.

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