

Commitments made at the hearing of

STELLA KYRIAKIDES

Commissioner-designate Health and Food Safety



The Commissioner-designate, Stella Kyriakides, appeared before the European Parliament on 01 October 2019 to answer questions put by MEPs from the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI). During the hearing, she made a number of commitments which are highlighted in this document. These commitments refer to her portfolio¹, as described in the [mission letter](#) sent to her by Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, including:

- Protecting and promoting public health; and
- Food safety and animal and plant health.

Please note that the quotes included in this document only make reference to oral commitments made during the [hearing](#). The [verbatim report](#) of the public hearing is available on the [Commissioners-designate hearings website](#). The Commissioner-designate was also sent some written questions in advance of the hearing to which she provided [written answers](#).

¹ In their evaluation, the ENVI coordinators suggested that the title of the portfolio of Ms Kyriakides be changed to “Health and Food Safety”, in order to better reflect the areas of competence of her services.



Protecting and promoting public health

Supply of affordable medicines

"I want to ensure that we have the right means to keep our citizens healthy, and for this, a steady stream of affordable medicines is vital. The EU pharmaceutical system has given citizens access to high-quality and affordable medicines for decades."

"There is a legal obligation on the pharmaceutical industry to ensure that patients have access to and supply of medicines. We need to work closely and try to have a holistic pharmaceutical strategy, so as to be able to deliver what we need for patients."

"We need to ensure access to innovation and to medicines for people with TB, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis. [...] These diseases have an impact on a very large number of European citizens. That would be my first priority to take up in the new Commission."

Medical devices

"I will focus on implementing a modernised and more robust legislative framework for medical devices. This needs to be done in order to improve patient safety and consolidate the EU's role as a global leader in this field."

Health Data Space and e-health

"Digital technologies and artificial intelligence need to be leveraged in this effort, as they can bring concrete benefits to patients and to healthcare professionals. I want to maximise this potential and I see the creation of a European Health Data Space as an important step in the right direction."

"Digitalisation is a very important part of any health agenda and it is extremely significant for citizens. [...] We are committed to digitalisation as a Commission. It's something that would promote research and innovation, we already have the European reference networks and these are allowing people with rare diseases and paediatrics, to be able to have this access and I believe that it can radically change patient care and treatment."

"Unfortunately, one of the drawbacks of what we see in today's digital age, is how easy it is to spread misinformation through so many media. [...] So we need to work together through education and through health in order to fight and challenge the misinformation that is now out there and that is directly impacting on human health."

"[...] we need to be careful as well with data protection for patients. So this is something that we should always have in mind when we're talking about e-health."

Anti-microbial resistance

"[...] I will advocate for an international agreement on the use and access to anti-microbials. For that main reason I will also prioritise the implementation of the European one-health action plan against anti-microbial resistance."

"I have mentioned industry and innovation. I believe that the European Union must lead by example in this, in moving forward so that we have new anti-microbials available for patients."

Vaccination

"We have the science which shows us that it is important that we use vaccines and yet we have in the last few years seen a number of diseases breaking out in Europe: we have measles because of vaccine hesitancy. And I will not say that that is only due to misinformation, because it is also related to the programmes that Member States have for vaccination – there seems to be no uniformity. [...] we need to fight any source of misinformation which in fact impacts negatively on where we know that there is a solid science."

Beating Cancer Plan

"I see our Beating Cancer Plan touching upon all the actions in my mission letter, farm to fork, the Green Deal, anti-microbial resistance, innovation, affordability of medicines. It needs to address prevention, diagnosis, treatment, research, survivorship and palliative care. It needs to involve sectors and industries beyond the health sector, including education and environment."

"Making a difference in the life of cancer patients has always been my guiding principle. And speaking from personal experiences, I can assure you that it will continue to be my guiding principle in my current mission [...]."

Organ donation

"[...] whether we put forward an umbrella strategy for Europe on organ donation, I would like to see the evaluation which is expected at the end of 2019, so as to be able to see where we are and how we move. We need to move with evidence, with science, so we're making the right decisions."

Health technology assessment

"[...] this, I believe, is something that I would work really very strongly towards, trying to build a consensus so that, finally, the Commission proposal of 2018 concerning health technology assessment moves forward, because I think it is an imperative part of any health system that we, as Europeans, want to promote."

"[...] I would work very closely with patients, but I would also work closely with all other stakeholders in order to try and find a way forward for this consensus for health technology assessment. It's become obvious that the voluntary way is not working. We need the standard and we need to move forward."

Mental health

"[...] I would do my utmost to put it [mental health] back on the agenda. Because I believe that mental health is an area that for many Member States does not receive the attention that it deserves, and it is important that we do something to reverse this trend. I'm not only speaking about depression in adults, but if we look at the problems that we're seeing with adolescents in terms of behavioural problems, in terms of increases in self-destructive behaviour, we need to work preventively."

"[...] I would work with other Commissioners to bring in a mental health thread across many of the policies. I believe that I would be able to be a voice for this and I intend to be a voice for this."

Human rights

"I would put as my primary foundation, the uppermost for me, is the protection and promotion of human rights. I believe that this needs to be in an area like psychiatry, something which is extremely sensitive because it's extremely easy to put a label in terms of a psychiatric diagnosis and this can sometimes be very subjective, depending on the culture from which someone is."

Research and innovation

"We are committed to innovation. We are committed to moving ahead and investing in research. The Horizon 2020 programme has already committed to that. So, I would definitely consider this to be a priority because moving ahead with innovation and science can only be more effective for European health. Because this will affect industry, it will affect medicines, it will affect the Green Deal, and it will affect the food we are eating."

"So what I would aim for is having a very responsible voice in the College, using science as a basis, but also taking into consideration and sharing other concerns, to be able to convince others that we need to move forward with many of the policies that we know are needed to protect human health."

Food safety and animal and plant health

Pesticides

"[...] I can commit to decreasing the dependence that we have on pesticides and to trying to invest and

encourage the finding of low risk alternatives. [...] I intend to follow this very closely so as to be able to deliver."

"The general food law will, I hope, change the level of transparency that has been a big problem in creating citizen mistrust, but I can't commit in a louder way to the lowering of the dependence of pesticides and to finding low-risk alternatives."

"But what I would like to be absolutely clear on, is that this is not something that is in isolation to everything else. It's part of the Green Deal that we're all going to work towards and it's part of farm to fork. And building this into it, we cannot have an effective farm to fork strategy or an effective Green Deal if we are not facing and able to face and deal with issues such as pesticides."

"What I can commit to [...] is that there will be no lowering of the bar on the protection of bees and other pollinators. [...] Bee protection needs to be a centre of our policies and this is also part of the policies of the Green Deal [...]. For myself, decreasing the use of neonics and finding alternatives is a primary concern."

Endocrine disruptors

"I know that they [endocrine disruptors] impact on human health and I know that we need to do something about it and this is going to be my commitment to taking this up. We're waiting for the fitness check. I would look forward to working with you to seeing what we need to do to move forward, because it is definitely not an area that we can afford to leave behind and I'm clear on that."

"So I think it is extremely important when we were talking about endocrine disruptors, about neonics, about new breeding techniques, and about pesticides, that we do look at the science that is there."

Improving consumers information

"It [nutrition labelling] is in fact mandatory on pre-packed food. Citizens want this. They want nutrition profiles. It's obvious that when we're going to pick something off the shelf, we are more and more looking to see if what we are reading is something that we want to buy. [...] The nutrient profiles are important. They are important for citizens. There is a 'front of pack' report coming out at the end of this year. I would wait to see the results and move forward, and I would like to see a common approach across Member States [...]."

"We need to find common ways [for origin labelling] so that consumers have access to reliable information when they are purchasing or having access to food. This is something that is now being evaluated. I would look at all the information and then come forward with a proposal."

Animal health and welfare

“First of all, I want to be absolutely clear that I consider animal welfare and animal health as part of my one-health [...]. [...] we cannot talk about one-health if we don’t look at the whole area, and this includes human, environment and animal and plant health.”

Food waste

“[...] I would like to be able to deliver a five-year action plan to deal with food waste because I think it’s a very important part of the sustainable food effort that we’re making.”

Food contact materials

“This [food contact materials] is an extremely important subject, as it’s about substances entering into the food and potentially changing or affecting human health, but also changing the constituents of the food. [...] I would look at the science and I would move ahead with prioritisation, starting off with those that we know are potentially more harmful to human health.”

Relations with the European Parliament

Cooperation

“I will work with the European Parliament, with Member States, stakeholders, my fellow Commissioners, to improve public health and secure a sustainable future for Europe. Where we diagnose weaknesses in our systems, we must come together to deliver a cure, working with energy, ambition, and commitment.

Building partnerships based on trust, honesty, transparency and accountability.”

“Yes, I always respect democracy, and the second one, and it wasn’t empty words, is that I will listen to Parliament and I intend to be available and work closely with you, because on a lot of these issues, like GMOs, like new breeding techniques, Parliament has played a crucial role in highlighting them, bringing forward resolutions, and that has led to change.”

Transparency and accountability

“Transparency needs to be at the heart of what we are doing and, if we’re all honest in this room, with ourselves, one reason that we have lost citizens’ trust in a lot of what we do in terms of food safety, in terms of innovation, in terms of protection, has to do with the fact that they feel that there isn’t the transparency of many of the results that they should have access to. In this sense, I have mentioned before the changes in the general food law, based on transparency, that will, I hope, help us build a better relationship and citizens’ trust. I think that this is imperative.”

“[...] I’m going to hit the ground running if I’m appointed Health Commissioner, and I will always engage transparently and constructively with you, because after all we are accountable to you.”

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