

## Summary of hearing of Androula Vassiliou, Commissioner-designate for Health

### Environment

**"Health is wealth and I am determined to work hard towards ensuring high standards for our citizens, be they in Romania, Sweden, the UK or Cyprus" said Androula Vassiliou, the Cypriot Commissioner designate for Public Health, Food Safety, Animal Health and Welfare, at the start of her three-hour hearing before MEPs.**

Speaking to a meeting of the Environment Committee, joined by a number of MEPs from the Agriculture, Internal Market and Employment Committees, she said she was "fully conscious of the fact that the health portfolio touches upon and affects people's everyday life" and that "we need to work together to meet the high levels of public health and food safety that European citizens expect and demand". She also said she was "committed to ensuring a firm enforcement of EU law relating to health by all Member States".

Mrs Vassiliou underlined that regarding the important files already with the co-legislators, she "looks forward to working with the Parliament and the Council to drive matters forward on topics such as the completion of the Food Improvement Agents package, the proposals on plant protection products, and on novel foods and also the simplification of the rules for the marketing of feed."

### Patients' rights in cross-border health care

Concerning the ongoing debates on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare she said that she was "already working on the proposal and [is] determined to submit it for adoption by the Commission in June." She agreed with John Bowis (EPP-ED, UK) who said that the proposal was needed soon to avoid policy being decided by the Court of Justice and lawyers rather than politicians. She said she would persuade critics "that we are not talking about the freedom of movement of services but about the right of citizens to get healthcare all over Europe". Reacting to concerns raised by Linda McAvan (PES, UK) she said that her intention was "not to damage the existing health systems, but to improve them by cooperation and the exchange of the best practices available".

### Organ donation, cancer, mental health and vulnerable groups

Answering Adamos Adamou (GUE/NGL, CY) on the planned directive on organ safety, Mrs Vassiliou said that she intended to introduce standards applying to organ donation but that these measures should not lead to excessive bureaucracy and not intervene if the system is working, as, for example, in Spain. Replying to Marios Matsakis (ALDE, CY) on cancer screening, she added that the Commission would examine whether the targets had been reached in the Member States and, if appropriate, would review the relevant EU directive, to include other types of cancer that require early screening.

Asked by Françoise Grossetête (EPP-ED, FR) about what she intended to do in the field of Alzheimer's disease, the third cause of mortality in the world, she answered that she gives "primary importance to mental health", since "if we do not take action now, we will face many problems in the future". Reacting to Evangelia Tsambazi (PES, EL) on guarantees for the health and safety of the most vulnerable groups, like women, young people and people with disabilities, she said that where there was proof that issues have an impact on public health she would work with her colleagues to deal with them. Concerning people with disabilities, she would cooperate with Commissioner Spidla.

### Tobacco

To Jules Maaten (ALDE, NL), who asked if new legislation on tobacco could be expected before the end of the legislature, Mrs Vassiliou replied that "like her predecessor, she was interested in continuing the efforts to fight tobacco and that it "is important not to impose rules but to make people understand", adding that she would make appropriate proposals in the forthcoming third report on the tobacco products directive.

### Pesticides

Planned legislation on pesticides was brought up by Hiltrud Breyer (Greens/EFA, DE) and Dan Jorgensen (PES, DK), the latter saying that the legislation could lead to many countries allowing pesticides which they banned for environmental reasons. Mrs Vassiliou said that Member States may have stricter rules to protect workers or depending on whether the substances in question are candidates for substitution.

## **Food safety**

Liam Aylward (UEN, IE) asked the Commissioner-designate about measures she would take to ensure that imports of Brazilian beef meet EU standards. "Food safety is one of our priorities", answered Ms Vassiliou, adding that since the decision to suspend imports in January "we have ensured" that the 95 farms now allowed to export beef to the EU "fully comply with our rules".

Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (PES, PT) wished to know the Commissioner-designate's plans for tightening up food safety inspections on imports from non-EU countries given that the European Union is the world's largest food importer. "I know what is needed, I am aware of the context of shortages and price rises. I intend to look into these matters and take balanced decisions", she replied.

## **Animal health, feed and welfare**

Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM, IE) and Neil Parish (EPP-ED, UK) voiced concern about the welfare of animals in transport and asked the Commissioner-designate about her plans for revising the legislation and sticking to her predecessor's commitments in this area. "I hope that draft legislation on this subject will be ready by the end of the year", answered Mrs Vassiliou.

Lutz Goepel (EPP-ED, DE) mentioned the difficulties faced by livestock farmers owing to rising feed prices, when "the EU is continuing to destroy animal protein and import a great deal of fodder". Mrs Vassiliou indicated that the Commission envisaged submitting later this year a proposal on the possibility of reintroducing pig protein into poultry feed and poultry protein into pig feed. However, she stressed, "the aim is not to reverse the ban on inter-species cannibalism nor the ban on meat-and-bone meal for cattle" she stressed.

01/04/2008

*Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety*

In the chair: Johannes Blokland (IND/DEM, NL)

### **Contact:**

Constanze Beckerhoff

Press service

[envi-press@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:envi-press@europarl.europa.eu)

(32-2) 28 44302 (BXL)

(33-3) 881 73780 (STR)

(32) 0498.983.550

Hélène Cuisinier

Press service

[agri-press@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:agri-press@europarl.europa.eu)

(32-2) 28 32692 (BXL)

(32) 498 98 32 82

Nikos Salliaris

Press service

[typos-EL@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:typos-EL@europarl.europa.eu)

(32-2) 28 32017 (BXL)

(33-3) 881 74076 (STR)

(+32) 498 98 33 26