

# Stella Kyriakides

## Health

Hearing due to be held on Tuesday 1 October at 18.30 hours

European Parliament committee responsible: Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI).



Stella Kyriakides has been a Member of the Cypriot House of Representatives since 2006, representing the Democratic Rally Party (DISY). She has worked on health policy and other issues, and was deputy chair of the House Standing Committee on Health Affairs. Since 2013, she has been vice-president of DISY, which at EU level forms part of the European People's Party.

She was born in Nicosia in 1956, and studied psychology at Reading and Manchester Universities in the United Kingdom. From 1979 to 2006, she worked as a clinical psychologist at the Cypriot Ministry of Health, in the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

An advocate of raising awareness for breast cancer, she was president of the Europa Donna Cyprus Breast Cancer Forum (2000-2015) and of the Europa Donna European Breast Cancer Coalition (2004-2006). She has run training sessions on breast cancer patients' issues and rights in a number of European organisations. She is the author of the book *Adjuvant therapy for breast cancer* (2009), among others, and currently heads the National Committee on Cancer Strategy.

She has also served in various functions in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), including as head of the Cyprus Delegation (since 2012) and as chair of the Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development Committee. From October 2017 to January 2018, she was President of PACE.

*This is one of a set of Briefings designed to give Members of the European Parliament an overview of major issues of interest in the context of the hearings of the Commissioners-designate. The full set of Briefings can be found at: [https://epthinktank.eu/commissioner\\_hearings\\_2019](https://epthinktank.eu/commissioner_hearings_2019)*

## Background

Organising and delivering healthcare is the responsibility of the Member States. The EU's main [role](#) is to supplement their activities, helping them realise shared objectives, and to encourage cooperation. The EU's **health** policy is aimed at achieving a high level of health protection and focuses on [strategic objectives](#), including: fostering good health; protecting citizens from serious cross-border health threats; supporting dynamic health systems; and facilitating access to better and safer healthcare. EU action on health policy has been shown to [add value](#). **Food safety** policy [seeks](#) to protect consumers' health and interests in an effective internal market, by ensuring that consumer foodstuffs and animal feedstuffs are safe and nutritious. It is based on the precautionary principle, as well as risk analysis and traceability. The [overarching strategy](#) covers all operators in the food chain, implementation and control of food and feed safety standards, and the prevention of potential contamination risks. **Animal and plant health** policies centre on averting serious contagious diseases in plants and animals. As the European Commission President-elect outlines in her [mission letter](#), the new Commission will have a new structure and [working methods](#). The Health Commissioner will work under the guidance of the Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal on **food safety and animal and plant health**, and with the Vice-President for Protecting our European Way of Life on **public health**. She will be supported in her work by the Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, which will gain a [wider remit](#).

## Recent developments

In the 2014-2019 term, results were achieved on a number of issues within the portfolio area. Key developments in **health** include the establishment of virtual [European Reference Networks](#) of healthcare providers across Europe, to pool scarce resources to tackle rare diseases. Achieving more [effective, accessible and resilient health systems](#) remains high on the agenda: the '[State of health in the EU](#)' initiative was launched in 2016 to look at how health systems can remain fit-for-purpose and help people improve their health; and the April 2018 [Commission communication](#) on the transformation of digital health and care set out plans to enhance healthcare sector digitalisation, in the interest of [person-centred care](#). EU action to address vaccine hesitancy – including Parliament's April 2018 [resolution](#), a [Commission proposal](#) for a Council recommendation, a joint action ([EU-JAV](#)) and a [roadmap](#) – will require follow-up. So will the legislative file on [health technology assessment](#) (HTA), a [tool](#) to support decision-making by assessing the added value of health technologies. Parliament adopted its [first-reading position](#) in February 2019, while the [Council](#) is still divided over the [Commission proposal](#). On **food safety**, legislation was recently adopted on [novel foods](#); the possibility for Member States to [prohibit GMO cultivation](#) on their territory; [official controls](#) in Member States to ensure enforcement of food and feed law, as well as rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products; [veterinary medicines](#); and updated rules for [spirit drinks](#). In February 2019, Parliament and Council reached an agreement on a targeted [revision of the General Food Law](#) and eight related legislative acts. The new regulation is expected to improve public access to industry studies used by the European Food Safety Authority in risk assessments relating to food and feed safety.

## Priorities and challenges

### Public opinion

In a [Eurobarometer](#) survey for the European Parliament, over two-thirds of respondents expressed support for increased EU action on **health** and social security; support for greater EU involvement in this policy area grew from 63 % in 2016 to 69 % in 2018. According to a June 2019 [Eurobarometer](#), two in five EU citizens take a personal interest in **food safety**, but only one in five say it is their main concern when choosing food.

In the **health** area, the main 'unfinished business' from the last term is the legislative file on HTA. According to the European Commission, [priorities for EU action](#) in health for 2016-2020 focused,

inter alia, on achieving greater cost-effectiveness and promoting vaccination. Building a green, fair and social Europe, including good access to healthcare, is among the priorities identified in the European Council's [Strategic Agenda 2019-2024](#). Asked which health policy challenges would dominate the debate over the next five years, some stakeholders have pointed to deteriorating [access to healthcare](#) and the need to overcome health inequalities, particularly in [beating cancer](#), so that [patients](#) have timely and affordable access to the best [treatment](#) and care. In a [poll](#) in eight EU Member States, further challenges identified included innovation in healthcare, patient empowerment, and digitising health. Other stakeholders have pleaded for a [renewed focus on health and well-being](#), for instance by facilitating [multi-level governance](#) and cross-sectoral action. In her [political guidelines](#), the Commission President-elect undertakes to propose a strategy to protect citizens' health from environmental degradation and pollution, as well as plans to support Member States in improving cancer control and care. In her [mission letter](#), she asks the Commissioner-designate to support Member States in improving the quality and sustainability of their health systems, giving her specific tasks: to help ensure the supply of affordable medicines and support the European pharmaceutical industry in remaining innovative; focus on effectively implementing the new medical devices framework; use e-health to provide quality healthcare and reduce inequalities; centre on the full implementation of the European 'One Health' action plan against antimicrobial resistance (AMR); prioritise communication on vaccination; and put forward Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

The main 'unfinished file' in **food safety** is the revision of the [Drinking Water Directive](#), flagged as a priority by Commission and Council. New or updated legislation could be envisaged on plant protection products and pesticide residues, where the Commission is doing a [REFIT evaluation](#). As regards labelling, the Commission has [announced](#) an implementing act on labelling vegan and vegetarian food. It will evaluate the [country-of-origin-labelling for meat](#), and is preparing a report on EU-level harmonisation of [nutrition labelling schemes](#). [European citizens' initiatives](#) on these three labelling questions are currently under way. Concerning alcoholic drinks, the Commission concluded in March 2017 that the alcohol labelling exemption was no longer justified, asking industry to present a self-regulation scheme. To date, the [beer industry](#) and the [spirits industry](#) have committed to gradually providing information on labels and online; for the [wine industry](#), the question is now to be dealt with in the context of the ongoing CAP reform. The Commission is also conducting an [evaluation](#) on food contact materials.

Another area for possible legislation is new plant breeding techniques: in a July 2018 [judgment](#), the Court of Justice ruled that genome-edited organisms fall within the scope of European GMO legislation. This – while welcomed by some – has sparked [criticism](#) and [calls](#) to change the Union's GMO laws. In her political guidelines, the President-elect stresses that, under the European Green Deal, climate change, biodiversity, food security, deforestation and land degradation go together. In her mission letter, she asks the Commissioner-designate to lead on a new 'Farm to Fork' strategy for sustainable food; work on plant health, as well as endocrine disruptors; improve consumer information; ensure animal health and welfare; focus on the implementation of legislation on food safety and animal and plant health; and develop measures to combat food fraud.

## European Parliament

### Treaty basis and European Parliament competence

In accordance with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the EU has supporting competence in **health** ([Article 6](#)). Parliament and Council, as co-legislators, can adopt health legislation under [Article 168](#) (health protection); [Article 114](#) (approximation of laws); and [Article 153](#) (social policy) TFEU. **Food safety, animal health and plant health** are covered by [Article 43](#) (agriculture), Article 114, Article 168 and [Article 169](#) (consumer protection) TFEU.

Among **Parliament's main activities and priorities in the area of health** is ensuring patient access to innovative, safe, effective and quality medicines, a core element of the June 2016 [Council](#)

[conclusions](#). Its March 2017 [resolution](#) on improving access to medicines focused, inter alia, on the pharmaceutical market, pricing and transparency, and intellectual property. Addressing AMR has long been of concern for Parliament, and in September 2018 it adopted a [resolution](#) on reducing antibiotics use. Parliament's April 2018 [resolution](#) on vaccination calls for a stronger legal basis for immunisation coverage and for action to facilitate a more harmonised vaccination schedule across the EU. In its April 2019 [Mapping the cost of non-Europe](#) analysis, the European Parliamentary Research Service identified policy areas in which potential gains could be achieved if policies advocated by Parliament in these fields were to be adopted by the Union's institutions and fully implemented. In health policy, access to cross-border healthcare and better coordination of best practice between Member States could bring considerable benefits. According to the analysis, action to address major health inequalities could result in a potential efficiency gain for the European economy of up to €72 billion per year. One of Parliament's key recommendations is to introduce a health dimension to other EU policies, for instance stepping up use of the structural funds to improve health infrastructure.

**Parliament's work on food and food safety** include the setting up of a special committee (PEST) in the last term, to assess the Union's authorisation procedure for pesticides; a [resolution](#) with recommendations for review was adopted in January 2019. Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the implementation of the Plant Protection Products Regulation in September 2018, followed in February 2019 by a [resolution](#) on the implementation of the directive on the sustainable use of pesticides. During the 2014-2019 term, Parliament systematically [objected](#) to every authorisation of genetically modified food and feed, demanding the suspension of all GMO approvals until the authorisation process has been revised. In 2016, Parliament [asked](#) the Commission to draw up measures for food contact materials not yet regulated at EU level, and called for a ban on bisphenol A in all food contact materials. Parliament has also been calling for mandatory country-of-origin labelling for [meat in processed foods](#), [drinking milk](#), [dairy products and meat products](#). Also regarding food, Parliament succeeded in pushing the issue of the [dual quality of products](#) onto the EU agenda, which led the Commission to propose a [revision](#) of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive. Parliament adopted its [first-reading position](#) on this file in April 2019. Moreover, Parliament has been active on the issue of [tackling waste](#), including [food waste](#).

## FURTHER READING

Lomba N., [The benefit of EU action in health policy: The record to date](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2019.

[What Europe does for Me](#) website, in particular, 'In Focus' briefings on [Agriculture](#), [Consumer protection](#) and [Health and social security](#), EPRS, European Parliament.

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