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EUROPEAN PUBLIC HEALTH ALLIANCE

VISION

The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) believes EU trade policy should promote a healthy European food system. This requires creating the conditions to make the healthy option the easiest option (known as creating "healthy food and drink environments"). A healthy European food system takes into account a range of factors such as the quantity, diversity, and relative prices of foods available for consumption, as well as the way in which they are marketed.

A healthy food system should also ensure food quality, and reduce dependence on agri-chemicals and intensive animal farming methods, which lead to problems such as antimicrobial resistance. Trade policies should support action to reduce alcohol-related harm, promoting high social, public health, and environmental standards, as well as the right of governments to legislate on those issues. Trade policies should not provide unnecessary levels of protection for investors which could be used to undermine crucial policies and standards designed to promote better health.



PROBLEMS

———— Price competitiveness & yield maximisation - the current focus on delivering price competitiveness and on maximising yield results in a very narrow definition of value in the food system. The external costs (to society and to the environment) are not reflected in production methods, or in the prices paid by consumers. This narrow focus also fails to value the nutritional quality of diets and encourages the increasing use of agro-chemicals and antibiotics. Excessive use of these contributes to water pollution and to antimicrobial resistance.

———— Investment protection & regulatory cooperation – the Investor Court System (ICS) and other similar investment protection mechanisms encroach on governments' right to regulate in the interest of public health through the threat of sanctions and costly litigation. Regulatory cooperation, a key principle in current EU trade negotiations, appears to be synonymous with the relaxation of standards in the interests of increasing trade, harming efforts to create a healthy European food system.

———— Industry investment - studies have linked foreign direct investment (FDI) and the associated market penetration of multinational food corporations with a shift towards “western” diets – resulting in an increase in consumption of energy-dense, processed foods, high in fat, sugar and salt. The dominance of these products contributes to the spread of obesity and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

———— Inequality - the impacts of trade policies affect society in asymmetric ways, with the poorest affected most. Those on the lowest incomes are most sensitive to changes in food prices. Opening markets tends to result in unhealthy food products falling dramatically in price, leading to increased consumption and worsening health, particularly among disadvantaged socio-economic groups.

DEMANDS

———— **Race to the top** – regulatory cooperation (in the context of trade, and in other contexts) need not amount to deregulation. The EU should use its trade policy to build and promote a food system that ensures nutritious, healthy and sustainable diets in the framework of a sustainable farming system. This could be encouraged by applying standards to imports on the basis of an agreed, evolving set of principles. For example, Denmark has banned the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in animals, and closely monitors the sale and use of antibiotics in animals and humans. In this case, trade policy should allow Denmark to impose conditions that require animal imports to comply with their domestic standards on antibiotics.

———— **Promoting positive policy initiatives** - EU trade policy should encourage governments to take positive steps to protect human health and the environment through food and agriculture policies. That would mean no investment protection measures in deals between stable democracies with established court systems. For example, initiatives to tax sugar-sweetened drinks in Spain, Estonia, Portugal, Ireland and the UK should not be threatened with potential litigation through private investment courts.

———— **Pro-health and social investment** - EU trade policy should require investments that fall within the remit of EU treaties to comply with investment guidelines addressing public health, social and environmental goals, including promoting food safety and quality, helping to create a sustainable food and drink environments, and reducing or countering agricultural impacts on climate change, air quality, the environment, biodiversity, and preventing the spread of anti-microbial resistance.

———— **Reducing inequality** - the EU must take action to fully understand social inequalities in the EU, including the interaction with health and with environmental protection in the context of trade policy. Based on this research, the EU must work to ensure its trade policy does not disproportionately damage the health and wellbeing of the poorest in society. EU trade deals and policies should be subject to a comprehensive health impact assessment, including investigating the impact on health inequalities.

