

# ALEA JACTA EST - ready for the next five years in Brussels



## Sebastian Emig ponders the coming changes following the elections that have reshaped the political landscape in Europe

**THE** May 2019 EU elections brought some interesting outcomes and will result in some new drifts in the political decision-making that will affect the advocacy and outreach for our sector. But first, some outcomes in a nutshell...

The elections attracted more interest from citizens, with an 8-percentage point increase in the EU-wide participation rate. However, the 'Grand Coalition' of the EPP (centre-right) and the S&D (centre-left) will not have a majority of seats in the European Parliament. Although this was expected, it still represents a major change in the dynamic of the institution.

This loss of influence of the traditional power bloc and a more fragmented European Parliament means that the liberal ALDE group (now renamed 'Renew Europe') and to some extent the Greens will be the new king makers. In other words, the two biggest groups will no longer be able to bring initiatives through the Plenary by themselves and more bargaining can be expected to ensure intra-group cohesion/coalitions. The Greens went from 20 to 75 seats and are expected to have more influence on key sustainability issues for the food and drink sector, such as single-use plastics, greenhouse gases, soil degradation and so on. Owing to the increased influence of the Greens, sustainability in general is expected to take on more importance as the other groups will increasingly address these issues as well.

Positively, and contrary to widespread media speculation in the run-up to the poll, the far-right populists did not triumph at the ballot

box. Nevertheless, euro-sceptics like Le Pen, Salvini and Farage all enjoyed electoral victories in France, Italy and the UK, respectively.

This new EU institutional composition and environment could take the following form for this term: a) a politically weaker Parliament (at least at the beginning); b) a stronger and more influential Council as Member States are taking back control over EU integration; or c) a less political European Commission that is more subordinated to the Council.

For the European savoury snacks industry, the next five years are expected to be both challenging and filled with new opportunities. Policy trends from the past five years are expected to stay and the growing 'politicisation' of science could constitute a challenge. However, the sector will take the opportunity to engage with newly elected MEPs (turnover is estimated at over 60% of new MEPs!), and with the reshuffled Commission by the end of the year, while consolidating its presence in the Member States.

### UNDERSTANDING FOOD PROCESSING

Cookies, yogurt, fortified water, infant formula and a pizza. What do these products have in common? According to a public health movement that's sweeping the planet, they are all so-called 'ultra-processed' foods. A few public health nutrition advocates are using this terminology to judge a beverage or food impact on health, arguing that it is the processing aids and methods (as opposed to the nutrient composition) that are

contributing to obesity and disease. But what exactly makes a food or drink 'ultra-processed'?

It is complicated. Certain processes or ingredients that cannot be found in your grandmother's kitchen and are intended to enhance the palatability and acceptability of foods (such as carbonation or added whey protein, for example) land many common and even nutritious staples in this category, making it difficult to determine what foods meet this definition.

So where did the term come from? The notion of so-called 'ultra-processed' foods and beverages was created in Brazil in 2009, when Dr Carlos Monteiro, Professor of Nutrition and Public Health at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, developed the NOVA system. NOVA defines allegedly 'ultra-processed' products as 'cheap industrial sources of energy and nutrients, plus additives, using a series of processes'. Five years later, Brazil's dietary guidelines adopted this idea, encouraging Brazilians to 'avoid ultra-processed foods'. Since that time, other countries such as Uruguay, Canada and France have followed Brazil's lead. Recommended dietary guidelines like these lead to restrictions around some foods and beverages through front-of-package warning labels, marketing restrictions and other policies.

The science supporting recommendations to limit processed food consumption is still evolving and quite controversial. Studies in Brazil, Spain, New Zealand and the UK, however largely observational in nature, have found some

associations between allegedly ultra-processed foods and obesity, metabolic syndrome, hypertension and cardiovascular disease. Yet critics have pointed out significant limitations in these studies, including small sample sizes, the inability to distinguish the effect of high caloric content from that of processing, inconsistent definitions of processing and not controlling for affordability. Some contend that the focus on processing is flawed because it fails to acknowledge the role processed foods can play to promote health and provide affordable, accessible and practical options.

Recently, the renowned Professor Michael Gibney said at the 2019 event of the Institute of Food Science & Technology that 'there is no clear biological basis to believe that either processing or additives are linked to chronic disease' and that 'creating a large category of foods, and using that single category in epidemiology is retrograde'.

At the ESA we believe that food and drink have an integral and special place in people's lives. They are firmly embedded in people's social, cultural and economic fabric, they bring joy to our families every

day and they are part of every celebration.

Innovation, in compliance with the highest food safety standards, is central to what our members do, allowing them to produce nutritious food more efficiently and at a greater pace, whilst reducing the environmental and social impact. Thanks to food processing, today's food is safer, of higher-quality and has a longer shelf-life than it has ever had before.

Our members are committed to supporting food literacy and information so that consumers can be best-informed and best-prepared to make the optimal choices for their individual diets, and stigmatising foods is not the right way to do so.

### SNACKEX WAS HOT HOT HOT

This was one for the books as any figure related to the event pushed boundaries, and I am not talking about the 40°C-plus temperatures outside the Barcelona fair ground. This edition of SNACKEX attracted around 3,000 visitors from around the world to visit the stands of more than 175 exhibitors. A number that was never reached before and was only limited by the space the fair ground

could offer. Some late comers had to be turned down, so we intend to ensure that they will get a chance to show their latest products and innovations at the next edition.

Participating in SNACKEX, which is THE hub for the savoury snacks industry, saves time and money by bringing everyone together in one place. Moreover, it sets the industry gold standard in terms of delivering information about upcoming trends through the entire value chain, be it processing, packaging, marketing, seasoning, ingredients, etc.

The feedback we received from exhibitors, visitors and conference delegates was overwhelmingly positive and we will make sure to further improve the show to attract even higher numbers for next time in two years. Please find more information on some of the highlights at the exhibition and conference in this edition of the magazine. ■



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\*in his capacity as permanent representative of PrimeConsulting BXLBCN SL



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