



## Chairman's Conclusions

### Summit for Equal Quality of Products for All

Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2017

The Summit held on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2017 in Bratislava invited the Representatives of Member States, the European Commission, European Parliament, Consumers' and Producers' associations to jointly address the problem of alleged dual quality of products and in a coordinated manner, identify possible ways towards avoiding unjustified discriminatory practices.

The results of preliminary tests suggest that a number of products that are being sold in the European Single Market under the same brand, present differences in composition and/or sensorial characteristics in individual Member States.

The participants acknowledged that the active approach and presented guidelines of the European Commission can contribute to addressing properly these practices. In this regard, it is essential to direct our future actions in full respect of relevant EU legislation - as confirmed in the Commission's guidelines.

The participants agreed that all EU consumers should be treated equally and fairly.

The participants came to the agreement that, the protection of consumers should cover not only safety of products, but also cases where consumers are not informed about the difference in quality of products which are sold with very similar presentation or packaging to those sold in other Member States. In pursuance of achieving this goal and while recognising that collecting conclusive evidence is of capital importance, it was agreed that further development of a common testing approach under the co-ordination of the Joint Research Centre is necessary. This can be used as a uniform tool to detect alleged problems and provide national authorities with reliable evidence when enforcing the relevant legislation on dual quality practices.

Further consultation and discussion in cooperation with Member States and all relevant actors on EU level and national level would be of immense value with a view to moving forward and continuing to tackle this issue together and thus more effectively. The existing High Level Forum for a Better Functioning Food Supply Chain was put forward as an appropriate platform to host multi-stakeholder political-level discussions on this issue.

During the meeting, the participants reiterated that consumers within the Single Market may generally expect branded products to be of a similar quality regardless of the countries where they are sold and therefore may have difficulties in understanding possible differences. The brand symbol acts in the mind of consumers as a certificate for a controlled and constant quality. Consumer purchasing decisions could be different if consumers would be informed that a branded product is of significantly lower quality than products sold with the same brand and packing in other parts of the EU.

To increase transparency and consumer trust, representatives of producers and retailers confirmed their continued commitment with other stakeholders to treat all consumers equally and, if possible, to establish in near future, based on evidence and dialogues, code of fair principles on the marketing of branded products in the Single Market.

### **Summit for Equal Quality of Products for All, Bratislava, 13 October 2017**

Consumer Summit focusing on double quality standards of products and unfair trading practices with the participation of V4 Prime Ministers, Commissioners Jourova and Andriukaitis, Hungarian, Czech and Slovenian Agriculture Minister, some State Secretaries and representatives of Consumers and Business Associations took place in Bratislava on 13 October.

The Summit can be characterised on one side by unison voices of V4 Prime Ministers declaring that dual quality of products in the EU is unacceptable and denouncing unfair practices of producers. On the other hand, a very varied representation of other MSs, often only at the level of accredited Ambassadors, shows that the issue is still of only a limited importance for some MS.

**PM Fico** highlighted the importance of the issue on EU level. He stressed that it is necessary to solve it in order to remove the feelings of being second class citizens and to renew the trust of the people. He pointed out that a Summit and search for the solution of the problem of double quality of products is the huge diplomatic success of the V4 countries. According to him, there is a need to ensure that international companies respect rules. As a positive sign some companies have started doing it, but latest tests still show many differences in food composition. **PM Fico and other Visegrad Group PMs** praised the efforts of the Commission and welcomed that President Juncker included the issue in the SOTEU speech. Nevertheless, they asked the Commission to take further steps and implement efficient actions to tackle unfair practices. They also mentioned that the issue has been neglected for several years. **V4 PMs** also emphasized the importance of the strong and open single market.

**Czech Prime Minister Sobotka** stressed that the issue cannot be solved at the national level. He asked explicitly for a robust legislative solution at the EU level to face unfair practices (revision of Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, preferably before the end of current legislative period). BG representative supported his position. **Polish PM Szydło** mentioned that there should be neither dual quality of products nor dual speed in the EU.

**Commissioner Jourová** highlighted that President Juncker gave clear direction that EU law prohibits dual standards in the Single Market and that they cannot be tolerated in a Union of equals, there must be no second-class consumers. She underlined the Commission is giving the national governments tools to tackle the problem: provided a legal analysis; set up work on impartial scientific evidence based on a robust testing methodology; facilitated coordinated work of national authorities and engaged with industry.

**Slovak Agriculture Minister Matečná** welcomed the plan presented by Commissioner Jourová, based on the existing legislation and common and unified testing methodology. **Commissioner Andriukaitis** stressed that we need to make Europe a place where each and every person has access to good, healthy food at affordable prices. According to him, even the best system of food legislation will not work if it fails to win trust and confidence of citizens and consumers. The representative of the Consumer association delivered a rather balanced speech pointing several aspect of the issue, underlining that it should not be treated as a West-East difference. Producers' representatives stressed that food quality is a complex issue and argued with local flavours and locally sourced raw materials.

**Both SK and CZ Prime Ministers** put the issue in a wider context of the Future of the EU debate and trust of EU citizens in the EU. Furthermore they emphasized the need for social and economic conversion in the EU. In this regard, **PM Fico** presented the common key principles supported by V4 countries: preserving the results EU achieved so far; remaining united and respecting individual specificities at the same time; discussing the EU's future within all 27 MSs; striving for competitive EU and preserving the balance between the EU institutions and national parliaments.