

To
Jose-Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission

BRU BERL 13/057
B-1049 Brussels

Copy:
Dacian Ciolos, Commissioner for Agriculture & Rural Development
Tonio Borg, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy
Janez Potocnik, Commissioner for Environment

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Open Letter on the Ban of Olive Oil cans in restaurants

Dear Mr. President,

We are contacting you referring to the decision that has been taken during the meeting of the Management Committee for the Common Organisation of Agricultural Markets concerning the Draft Commission implementing Regulation amending the implementing Regulation (EU) No 29/2012 on marketing standards for olive oil.

Although no decision has been taken by the Committee in this examination procedure, there was an important opposition against this decision. As a result, no opinion has been delivered to the Commission which leaves the decision up to the Commission whether she deems it necessary to implement this particular act.

As we have understood during the last week, you are planning to implement this decision on 1st January 2014. With regard to the Action Plan for the EU Olive Oil Sector that has been drawn up by DG Agri, this decision aims at abolishing packages that can be re-used in hotel and catering industries.

As to our understanding, this provision seems to aim exclusively at improving the marketing standards of the olive oil sector and not at protecting consumers. We believe that this decision would not take into consideration important consequences from other, more far reaching, fields such as environmental considerations, bureaucratic overload and, most importantly, the public perception of the European Union.

As Members of the European Parliament, we are in constant exchange with our citizens not only in our constituencies but also across the EU. One major observation during the last years, which were mainly marked through serious crisis, is that our citizens voice considerable doubts whether the European Union is able to tackle the most pressing issues of their daily lives, by flooding its citizens with barely necessary and highly bureaucratic provisions. With all

due respect, we believe that abolishing re-usable olive oil packaging from restaurants is to become a prime example of this critique. This has been reflected by intense media coverage during the last week.

Thus, we urge you to consider not only the public perception of this decision but also the environmental consequences. By banning re-usable packaging, the Commission would force the consumers to buy small and probably plastic-made packaging which suits the individual use on e.g. a restaurants table. The consequence would not only be a multiplication of the waste produced, but also the waste of olive oil itself would be significantly higher than right now. Further to this, an increased burden on the transport sector through inefficient packaging would be the consequence.

Without doubt, this decision would strengthen the olive oil sector, it would however hit hard on the sector of hotels and restaurants, which often count to the sector of small and medium enterprises by obliging them to buy small and not re-usable packaging which is obviously more expensive.

Finally, the fact that this decision only applies to olive oil but not to other types of oil such as sunflower oil or pumpkin seed oil which are used in the same extend nor it will apply to vinegar, salt or pepper. This underlines the negative perception of our citizens towards the European Commission as a "bureaucratic monster". Furthermore, to tackle possible adulteration of olive oil in the hotel and catering sector, we believe that the equivalent inspectorates should be addressing this issue.

Taking into consideration the far-reaching consequences to the environment, the hotel and catering services and, most notably, the negative public perception of this issue, we ask you to closely examine the Commissions position to this particular issue. Having in mind the famous cases of bent bananas and curved cucumbers; you surely agree that we should be proactive to avoid a further case like this.

Referring to the Regulation No 182/2011 and in particular Art 5 sec. 4 thereof it lies within the discretion of the Commission to decide whether to adopt the implementing act or not. In this regard, we would like to underline the importance involved with this decision and hence urge you to consider the arguments mentioned.

We kindly ask you to re-consider the Commission's position in the case and to develop other ways to deal with the problem of inferior olive oil. We, the undersigned, think that this step is not appropriate to improve the situation of EU consumers or of the EU olive oil sector.

With kind regards

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Chris Davies
Albert Dess

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