

To
Permanent Representation of the Federal
Republic of Germany to the European Union
c/o Michael Clauss
Rue Jacques de Lalaing 8-14
1040 Brussels

Berlin, 21. April 2020

German Council Presidency 2020, Sponsorship of the Council Presidency / Food Labelling

Dear Mr Clauss,

Germany will take over the rotating EU Council Presidency on July the 1st 2020.

In this context, as foodwatch, the politically and financially independent consumer rights organisation¹ present in several EU Member States, we would like to take the liberty to contact you on two issues.

Firstly, the question of sponsorship of the six-monthly presidency of the Council by private companies. Secondly, the introduction of harmonised nutritional labelling on all packaged and processed foods in the EU.

Sponsorship of the EU Council Presidency:

According to information provided to the German Bundestag², the Federal Government will waive "in principle the acceptance of sponsorship for measures within the framework of the EU Council Presidency (...). Exceptions can be made to a small extent for regional products or in small-scale regional services".

We very much welcome this statement.

At the same time, however, the question arises as to why the Federal Government has made exceptions to the renunciation of sponsoring services and why they do not have the necessary food, drinks and services needed purchased through the normal procurement procedure.

The same paper by the Bundestag also states: "The decision of future Presidencies for the area of sponsoring remain the responsibility of the respective Member States."³

¹ <https://www.foodwatch.org/en/foodwatch-international/>

² See answer 14 in: <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/162/1916296.pdf>

³ See answer 18 in: <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/162/1916296.pdf>

We therefore take the liberty of referring you to a recommendation issued earlier this year by the European Ombudsmen in response to a complaint filed by foodwatch in June 2019.⁴

"The Ombudsman considers that the Council's attitude that it bears no responsibility when it comes to the commercial sponsorship of a Council Presidency, and its resulting inaction constitutes an instance of maladministration.

[...]

The Council of the EU should provide Member States with guidelines on the issue of sponsorship of the Presidency to reduce reputational risks for the EU."

At the same time, the Ombudsman calls on the Council of the European Union to provide a detailed opinion by 6 May 2020.

In the light of this recommendation, we consider it urgent and necessary for the German Presidency of the EU and the responsibility for political credibility of the EU institutions with the citizens of the European Union, to resolve this issue of controversial and reputation-damaging sponsorship of the EU institutions by private companies and obtain a corresponding binding regulation.

Harmonised nutritional labelling of processed food:

After France introduced the "Nutri-Score" nutritional labelling in 2017, this model has also been adopted in Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands and Luxembourg as a voluntary scheme. Germany has also recently introduced the notification procedure to the Commission to introduce the Nutri-Score on a voluntary basis.

The EU Commission's "Farm to Fork" strategy (so far only available in draft form) even includes the introduction of mandatory EU-wide harmonised nutritional labelling. In this context, the question arises whether Germany intends during its Council Presidency to push forward an EU-wide harmonised and mandatory nutritional labelling scheme.

We would very much appreciate an opportunity to speak to you and discuss these questions.. Taking into account current restrictions, this can also be done via videoconference.

Kind regards.

Thilo Bode

⁴ <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/recommendation/en/123134>