

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **from the conference “Healthy Future for Europe: Healthy Nutrition for Children“, a part of the calendar within the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU (6 February 2018, Sofia)**

On February 6, 2018 a conference under the title “Healthy Future for Europe: Healthy Nutrition in Children“, a part of the calendar within the Bulgarian Presidency was held in the National Palace of Culture, Sofia. The conference was attended by experts from European Union Member States involved in the field of health and agriculture, representatives of the European Commission and the World Health Organization, scientists from universities in Europe, etc.

Discussions highlighted the importance of the topic for all European countries. Attendees united on the understanding that healthy children and young people are at the heart of the well-being of every nation and the whole of the European Union, respectively, and that in the context of the development of chronic diseases, prevention through healthy nutrition for children is a priority that deserves all Member States united efforts.

Focus was placed on the necessity to address the problem of unhealthy eating patterns by developing and educating healthy eating habits from the earliest childhood. In parallel, consumption and improvement of healthy foods supply should be encouraged. Delegates are firmly convinced that this is only possible if all stakeholders - legislators, producers, families, educational institutions, etc. – join hands in this direction. It has been suggested that children, being the most vulnerable group of consumers, need guidance and personal example to learn to make healthy choices, as healthy habits developed at an early age remain for life.

The conference outlined the relationship between food, nutrition and health. UNICEF, WHO and the academic community have given undisputed examples of the impact of food on hormone development, looking at nutrition during pregnancy, benefits of breastfeeding, healthy eating during early childhood and adolescence.

Experts agree on the need of:

- ✓ production of healthy, not only safe foods;
- ✓ elaboration of age-appropriate nutrition programs to meet the Global Non-Disease Prevention and Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations;
- ✓ conducting of researches on effect and impact of food composition on health;
- ✓ creating policies and specific programs focused on preventing the risk factors for health
- ✓ activities focuses on identifying people at risk..

Some of the discussions focused on child-directed marketing and possible mechanisms to regulate it. In this regard, experts consider that:

- ✓ marketing and advertising of foods for children should be supranational and in line with the rights of the child;
- ✓ it is necessary to increase commitment and responsibility of the industry, including towards self-regulation, voluntary codes of actions and exchange of good practices;
- ✓ creating a regulatory framework is one of the options to solve challenges of unhealthy nutrition. At European Union level, a draft of the Audio-visual Media Services

Directive is under discussion, which will lay down the foundations for harmonizing Member States' activities in this area.

The focus of the debate during the Conference Healthy Nutrition for Children was also traditional patterns of nutrition and importance of the Common Agricultural Policy. Participants in the forum shared a common view that:

- ✓ Europe is unique with its diversity of food patterns and products with typical regional specifics - Mediterranean, Scandinavian, Balkan, etc.
- ✓ Traditional eating patterns have some benefits that should be considered and used in healthy eating recommendations.

Experts and speakers at the conference also presented some good examples of national, European and world practice on school nutrition, food reform, tax measures, subsidies to ensure healthy food through European structural and investment funds. Difficulties faced by the economies of the Member States - a consequence of chronic diseases and resources allocated to diagnosis and treatment of citizens - were also discussed.

**The conclusions of the conference outlined the following:**

- The necessity for a strengthened role of healthcare at both national and European level, insofar as health is a value related to population welfare, quality of life, productivity and personal competitiveness;
- Investing in prevention policies focused on healthy eating and building consumer choice from early childhood;
- Support for distribution of healthy food through all possible instruments at EU and national level by joint actions of health and agriculture sectors;
- Necessity for conducting researches on effect and impact of food composition on children's health;
- Regulation of the requirements for marketing of foods for children in protection of their rights;
- Increasing availability of healthy foods on the market by improving food composition (reformulation) and strict monitoring of the process;
- Expanding and building on the debate for a common agricultural policy with a view to healthy eating, i.e. incorporating the "Health in All Policies" approach.