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## FOOD TAXES – OVERALL APPROACH

A few EU national governments have recently introduced discriminatory fiscal measures (hereafter, “food taxes”) affecting certain food categories. Officially, these measures have been taken on public health grounds, considering the taxed foods as ‘unhealthy’. However, no scientific evidence exists to demonstrate that such discriminatory measures represent an effective means of changing consumer behaviour and of tackling a complex diet and lifestyle-related issue such as obesity.

What “food taxes” are, instead, certainly going to cause is an overall negative economic impact on the competitiveness of Europe’s food and drink industry, which generates 8% of European GDP and is a key driver of economic growth and employment.

In fact, such taxes:

- are economically regressive, since they hit low-income populations the hardest, when lower socio-economic groups are known to spend a larger share of their income on food;
- discourage current and future investments, damaging the competitiveness of EU food industries and generating distortive effects on the functioning of the internal market, such as trade conflicts, cross-border shopping and unfair competition, amongst others;
- are not proven to be effective in positively changing consumer behaviour.

Obesity and non-communicable diseases are complex and multi-factoral societal issues, requiring solutions based on a “whole-of-society” approach, centered particularly on increasing consumer information and education about product composition, encouraging balanced diets and healthy lifestyles; - certainly not on the grounds of unjustified discriminations against individual foods as part of a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle and which ultimately limits consumers’ freedom of choice.

The European food and drink industry takes its responsibility seriously in contributing to finding solutions to the broad issue of tackling obesity and non-communicable diseases.

Two key examples of its ongoing collaborative efforts are:

1. The “**EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health**”, chaired by DG SANCO of the European Commission, where FoodDrinkEurope and its members have contributed by putting forward a significant number of voluntary commitments on relevant issues such as increased consumer information (including labelling), education, promotion of physical activity, responsible marketing and advertising, interventions on food composition and portion sizes; the implementation of such commitments is monitored externally and the outcomes are discussed in open dialogue with key stakeholders, including consumer associations and NGOs;
2. **Public-Private Partnerships** such as for example those active in France, Spain, Belgium and Greece under the “**EPODE**” (*Ensemble Prévenons l’Obésité des Enfants*) methodology, which are showing promising results, namely a decrease of 10-15% of the prevalence of overweight children in the French towns involved.

The necessity of a varied diet is universally recognised. Individual foods are not “good” or “bad”, “healthy” or “unhealthy” in themselves. The combination and integration of individual foods in the daily and weekly diets and eating habits of consumers play, amongst others, a crucial role.

Therefore, the EU food and drink industry remains opposed, as a matter of principle, to discriminatory taxes affecting ANY individual food or food category.