

Ref.: BEUC-X-2017-147/MGO/CPE/cm

Brussels, 5 December 2017

Subject: Plenary vote on the phosphates in meat objection

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

Ahead of the vote next week, BEUC, the European Consumer Organisation, calls on you to **support the motion for a resolution objecting to allowing the use of phosphates** in frozen vertical meat spits (e.g. doner kebab, gyros).

Contrary to recent headlines, **no one wants to ban kebabs**. The point of the objection is just to ensure consumers can enjoy them free from unnecessary phosphates.

The objection you will be voting upon next week only concerns phosphate food additives (E 338–341; E 343; E 450–452) and whether these should be allowed in frozen vertical meat spits or not. The goal is merely to guarantee – as required by EU law – that the use of food additives is safe, technologically justified, and does not mislead consumers.

Phosphates are currently **not permitted** in kebabs and gyros. Frozen vertical meat spits belong to 'meat preparations', where the use of phosphates is generally not allowed by EU law¹. A few derogations have been granted to a limited number of meat preparations² and only on a case-by-case basis. The question now is whether it is justified to add 'frozen vertical meat spits' to the list of meat preparations covered by these derogations.

BEUC, for its part, has always disapproved of the use of phosphates in any meat preparation owing to their potential adverse health effects and their water-binding properties that could be abused to sell water for the price of meat. We denounced this practice in our report [Close-up on the meat we eat](#).

Indeed, there are concerns over the **health effects**³ of phosphate food additives. While evidence is disputed, it is expected EFSA's on-going re-evaluation of their safety will shed some light on this issue. Until EFSA's opinion becomes available by the end of 2018, the EU should consider with caution any new usage of phosphates in Europeans' food.

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¹ See [consolidated version of EU Regulation \(EC\) 1333/2008](#) on food additives published by the Irish food safety agency.

² Phosphates have been approved for use in the following meat preparations: *breakfast sausages*; Finnish grey salted Christmas ham, *burger meat* with a minimum vegetable and/or cereal content of 4 % mixed within the meat, *Kasseler, Bräte, Surfleisch, toorvorst, Šašlókk, ahjupraad, Bílá klobása, Vinná klobása, Sváteční klobása, Syrová klobása*.

³ Ritz et al. (2012). [Phosphate additives in food: a health risk](#).

In addition, we see **no convincing technological need** for using phosphates in frozen vertical meat spits. Suppliers of tumbling mixes for vertical meat spits offer phosphate-free solutions.

More fundamentally, Member States must better **enforce** EU rules on food additives in the meat sector. A recent European Commission's report⁴ found **national authorities poorly control the use of additives** in meat preparations and products.

Manufacturers in some countries have reportedly used phosphates (unlawfully) in kebabs for several years. This is *per se* **no valid reason for legalising their use**. In 2013, as some interpretation issues with EU legislation on food additives in the meat sector were brought to light by the meat industry, the European Commission clarified that some Member States had been tolerating additive uses that were in fact not permitted under EU law⁵. This is the case with phosphates in kebabs and gyros.

Against this background, **we call on you to vote in favour of the phosphates in meat objection next week.**

We remain at your disposal for any question you may have on the above.

Yours faithfully,

Monique Goyens
Director General

⁴ [Overview report on the official control systems in place for food additives and smoke flavourings](#).

⁵ See summary record of a plenary meeting (November 2013) of the Advisory Group on the Food Chain and especially the language: "CLITRAVI expressed its disagreement with BEUC about the legalising of non-authorised additives in meat preparations underlining that there is no request for a new authorisation of additives; it is only a transfer of the existing users which has not been carried out properly when COM took over the Codex categorisation. [...] COM underlined that although as mentioned when taking over the Codex categorisation there were existing users, however there were not existing authorised users. COM interpretation as well as opinion of the MS was that the additives in group 1 were not authorised according to Directive 95/2/EC".