

# HFMA Bulletin

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## EU Commission outlines new work plan at Athens meeting

In July, The European Federation of Associations of Health Product Manufacturers (EHPM) held its annual members meeting in Athens, with 43 delegates from ten nations discussing European issues relating to our specialist sector. The meeting is an opportunity for each member national association to raise relevant issues and help influence EHPM policy, and forms a platform for debate of issues that is then fed back into the EHPM board and the federation working groups.

The Athens meeting included a prominent guest speaker – Alexandra Nikolakopoulou, head of unit of the Food Information and Composition, Food Waste (DG Santé) of the European Commission (EC) – and was an ideal opportunity to hear first-hand the new Commission's position and to raise questions directly.

Nikolakopoulou spoke on several topics; on REFIT – a platform to make EU laws simpler and less costly – and on Botanicals Claims, where she clarified that the EU adheres to very high safety standards, but also noted a lack of expertise in EFSA on botanicals and suggested national authorities should propose relevant experts to help assist this process. Most importantly, she was open to exploring traditional use in the development of claims.

Article 8, which adopts a safety assessment of at-risk substances, is high on EHPM's agenda and recent correspondence with the Commission has raised concerns that the process may not be being used appropriately.

Nikolakopoulou clarified that referral of Article 8 substances can be from member states but also, in a surprising new development, that they can be raised on the Commission's own initiative. As expected, her political comments only touched on the topic and offered little to help address key EHPM concerns.

On VMS and maximum levels, Nikola-kopoulou suggested that this had not been adopted largely because of intense lobbying by the UK, and that this will be on the agenda for the new Commission working groups. She indicated that having set the regulatory position they are now obliged to fulfil on this and other outstanding matters. Regarding food additives, she referred to the recent EFSA opinion on phosphorus and indicated that levels are too high and the Commission would work to establish a maximum level. On titanium dioxide, where France has imposed a ban to take effect 1 January 2020, she said: "The Commission does not like it when a member state adopts its own rules." Since the Commission considers that safety data on this substance is robust, this may indicate possible pressure on the French authorities.

The Athens meeting was extremely positive and informative. Jonathan Griffith's presentation as chair of The Botanicals Group, on an alternative approach to setting health claims, was a highlight. The two days allowed much interaction and networking between different EU associations, and facilitated a positive step forward in the EU discussions.

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