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Brussels, 10 July 2019

OPEN LETTER TO MR OETTINGER

COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RESOURCES AND BUDGET

Subject: The next catering contract for Brussels — an opportunity for a healthier food offer at the Commission canteens

The Commission services are preparing the new contract for catering in the Commission's Brussels restaurants, canteens and cafeterias that will take effect at the start of 2021.

The current contract has not been a success, as the ever-diminishing number of colleagues using the restaurants and canteens shows. Less than one-third of Commission staff now eat there daily.

The new contract is an important opportunity to make improvements that can benefit Commission staff and, potentially, reverse the drop-off in use of the restaurants and canteens.

The new catering contract will be the first since the Commission introduced the 'fit@work' programme. We applaud the programme's aim of promoting a healthy working environment and greater well-being in general. **TAO-AFI** had at the time advocated very actively in favour of including the quality of the food in our canteens as a specific goal of the fit@work programme.

As such, the new contract needs to give particular attention to providing healthy food that will contribute to

the fitness and well-being of staff. As Socrates reputedly said, '*Let thy food be thy medicine*'.

The new contract also needs to address the widespread concern over climate change and the destruction of the natural world on which we all depend. Much of the food currently served in the Commission is produced by intensive, industrialised agriculture which is contributing to this crisis.

Already around 9,000 members of the Commission staff have signed the EUstaff4climate petition calling on EU leaders to act on the climate and ecological emergency, including by making the Commission's operations, among them catering, carbon-neutral by 2030. Over 1,700 colleagues have signed **TAO-AFI's** petition for more climate friendly and healthy food in Commission canteens and cafeterias. The massive participation of the personnel in these initiatives is a clear message to our administration to lead by example.

For **TAO-AFI**, the new catering contract should include the following four goals, and clear requirements to ensure they are met.

1. BETTER QUALITY

There is little doubt that overall quality has fallen under the current contract. The prices set by DG HR for several dishes (dish of the day, soup) have made it difficult to guarantee acceptable quality because the catering companies cannot make a decent profit.

TAO-AFI's 2017 staff survey on food quality in the canteens — in which more than 3,000 members of staff participated — showed that a strong majority of colleagues would be willing to pay more for better-quality food. But raising quality will also require a financial contribution from the Commission, as is the case for the Parliament and Council, to help those on lower salaries.

2. GREATER HEALTHFULNESS

What we eat has implications for our health, well-being and job performance.

As the World Health Organization states, poor diet is one of the main risk factors for a range of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and diseases linked to obesity.

For a healthy diet, it is recommended that we eat more plant-based foods — fresh fruit and vegetables, but also dried fruit, nuts, whole grains and pulses. Avoiding processed meats and reducing consumption of salt, sugar, red meat and fat, especially saturated fat and fatty acids, is also recommended.

In line with the objectives of fit@work, the Commission should make it easier for staff to meet these recommendations through the food it provides.

Our 2017 survey also found high demand for organic food. Currently the offer of organic produce is limited to a very small number of products (e.g. coffee, chocolate, sandwich bread). Under the new contract, the offer should be considerably broadened to include organic fruit, vegetables, whole grains, pulses, meat, dairy products and fish from aquaculture.

3. WIDER CHOICE

When it comes to food and drink, not everyone has the same tastes or needs, and some people suffer from allergies or intolerances to particular ingredients.

Our 2017 survey showed a desire for gluten-free and lactose-free foods and drinks to be made available. Respondents also wanted vegetarian and vegan diets to be much better catered for. In this regard, **TAO-AFI's**

highly successful petition for more climate friendly and healthy food at the Commission specifically calls for a minimum level of nutritionally balanced, fully plant-based dishes and food and drink products to be made available in canteens and cafeterias daily.

The new contract should broaden the choices available to staff so that those who need to follow gluten-free or lactose-free diets, or who wish to replace meat, fish or dairy products by fully plant-based meals with a lower climate and ecological impact, can do so. Since, at the moment, Commission staff are largely obliged to go elsewhere for such products, catering for these choices could also increase the sales of the future contractor(s).

4. REDUCED CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL IMPACT

The climate and ecological crisis can no longer be ignored. As evidenced by the two petitions mentioned above, significant numbers of Commission staff want to see the new catering contract contribute to reducing the Commission's climate and ecological footprint. This would also be consistent with the aims of EMAS, the Commission's programme to reduce the environmental impacts of its own operations.

Several of the recommendations mentioned above — more organic food, a greater focus on healthful ingredients, increased provision of fully plant-based options — will be important for reducing the Commission's footprint as a step towards making catering climate-neutral.

In addition, priority should be given wherever possible to using local and seasonal fruit and vegetables, and all fish should be either from certified sustainable fisheries or from organic aquaculture.

It will also be important to find effective ways to reduce food waste, which would also reduce costs.

Lastly, the Commission's laudable efforts to eliminate single-use plastics must be extended by putting an end to the sale of drinks in plastic bottles, including in vending machines.

Commissioner Oettinger, we request that you, in the time remaining until the end of your mandate, ensure that the Commission services preparing the new catering contract take full account of the considerations set out above.

We are looking to the Commission to act responsibly by providing healthy food that reduces our climate and ecological footprint.



Executive committee

TAO-AFI

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