

Dear Madam Commissioner,  
Dear Madam Minister,  
Honourable members of the Parliament,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear colleagues,

Today is a good day for food safety in the EU. I am very glad to celebrate together with you the entry into application of the new Transparency Regulation, which was the first targeted revision of the General Food Law in almost 20 years.

The fact that this is the first revision in such a long time shows how relevant the risk assessment principles of the General Food Law still are.

But now, thanks to the measures of the new regulation, EFSA will bring citizens and stakeholders closer to our work. We will benefit from greater scrutiny of our scientific processes.

This is an important milestone for EFSA on its journey from “truth to trust”, which started with its creation in 2002.

EFSA was born out of a crisis of trust – BSE – and therefore transparency, together with independence, have always been guiding principles for the organisation.

However, the expectations of society have evolved over time. EFSA reacted where it had leeway to do so: by strengthening its policy on independence in several steps, for example. Still, civil society asked for more transparency of data and processes.

And this did not always happen in a pleasant way.

On 16 December 2013, I received a phone call that I will never forget. Only six days earlier, EFSA had published a scientific opinion on aspartame, an artificial sweetener, having conducted a rigorous review of all data. Despite that, a furious MEP accused EFSA of hiding facts and questioned the soundness of our scientific work. It was an unpleasant 45 minutes for me, but at the same time an insightful experience, as it triggered a very important initiative: we started “open EFSA” in 2014.

Over the last six years, the transformation of EFSA to an open science organisation has made much progress – but also suffered from the restraints of the regulatory framework

and limited means. With the new regulation we can overcome those limitations and make our scientific risk assessment more transparent and more inclusive.

It is therefore with great joy that EFSA welcomes the new regulation. We are extremely grateful to the legislators for this initiative and for their continuous support throughout its implementation.

Over the past two years we have invested substantial resources in new tools and platforms for transparency and interaction. I would like to thank my colleagues at EFSA and our partners in DG SANTE for their relentless dedication. We are aware of the challenges that still lie ahead of us, and we are working hard to ensuring a smooth transition to the new systems for our stakeholders.

In addition to transparency, the new regulation also covers a second very important aspect: the sustainability of the EU food safety risk assessment system.

I strongly believe that in the long term, the EU model of having small, decentralised agencies like EFSA can only succeed with full integration of the capacities of the Member States. Without this, EFSA will not be able to master the complexity of the future in a responsive manner.

And also here the Transparency Regulation brings us a big step forward. We will be able to entrust more work to Member State organisations, and we can redress them for their efforts. This will deepen our cooperation with them, by enabling long-term partnerships.

As a result, the expertise base of our science will increase and this will strengthen and speed up the production of our advice. Public health will definitely benefit from all that.

It is crucial that EU consumers have trust in the food safety system. To achieve that, they need to have trust in the way the risk assessment process is performed.

Trust is not something we can ask for, it is a potential gift for behaving in a trustworthy manner, by showing competence and character. EFSA's values of independence, transparency, cooperation and accountability will guide us along the way.

The new tools and platforms will allow citizens to see how we work and will empower them to hold us accountable to the highest standards of scientific excellence and integrity.

However, as important as this step is, it is not enough to anchor science within society. For that, we need to further engage with our stakeholders, letting them participate in the scientific processes, wherever possible.

So, all in all, we are on a journey of continuous improvement: to produce state of the art science in a transparent way, to communicate about it by focusing on our audiences'

needs, and to increase our engagement with civil society: let people participate in our scientific endeavour.

Today marks the beginning of a new era for EFSA. The legislators have given us the means to embark on the next stretch of our journey, now it is up to us: let's co-create public health for the benefit of EU citizens.

Thank you very much once again for making this new era of transparency in risk assessment possible. We are ready and full of energy to make this a success, together with our partners.

Bernhard Url