

EP resolution on “Promoting healthy diets & physical activity”

February 1st 2007

Egta, the association of television and radio advertising, welcomes last February 1st plenary vote on a parliamentary resolution on the green paper “*Promoting healthy diets and physical activity*”.

The rising prevalence of obesity across Europe, notably among children, poses serious public health problems which necessitate a multi-faceted policy response. Egta agrees that the status quo is not good enough, and that the advertising and broadcast media industries have a role to play in promoting healthier diets and lifestyles. We are already investing in practical actions at EU and national level which include the development of media campaigns promoting healthy lifestyles; the development of new, dedicated codes of conduct and their implementation through reinforced advertising self-regulation.

egta is pleased that MEPs rejected the most disproportionate and ineffective measures that consisted of EU-wide bans on advertising of food that is high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS).

Nevertheless; egta would like to make the **following comments on some specific statements** of the parliamentary resolution.

1) Paragraph 21 on television advertising

- There is no justification for the claim, taken from a single US study, that there is ‘strong’ or ‘clear’ evidence that television advertising influences children’s consumption patterns in Europe. The most comprehensive European reviews of the impact of food advertising cite a ‘modest effect’ on children’s preferences and find only one study which measures any precise impact, being ‘at best around 2%’¹.
- The condemnation of the frequency and intensity of television advertising for food products to children is misleading. While children have watched less and less food commercials in many major European markets over recent years, overweight and obesity rates continue to climb (see Annex A).
- Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that there is no link between the number of commercials viewed and the incidence of overweight and obesity. Indeed, in markets where advertising to children has been heavily restricted or banned, (Norway, Sweden, Quebec), obesity rates are the same as or higher than those in neighbouring jurisdictions where no ad restrictions are in place (Annex B).

2) Paragraph 22 on the EU platform for action on diet, physical activity and health

- egta welcomes the recognition of the value of the Platform process. It has already led to tangible change in the nature and balance of foods promoted to children. Commissioner Markos Kyprianou recently highlighted that the results of the platform are ‘very encouraging’.
- As member of the EU platform, egta is however concerned by wordings that go against the spirit of this process. For instance, voluntary commitments must come from stakeholders and not be imposed by the European Commission. Further legislation should only be considered after commitments are given a chance to deliver results, rather than, as now, being introduced with too much haste.

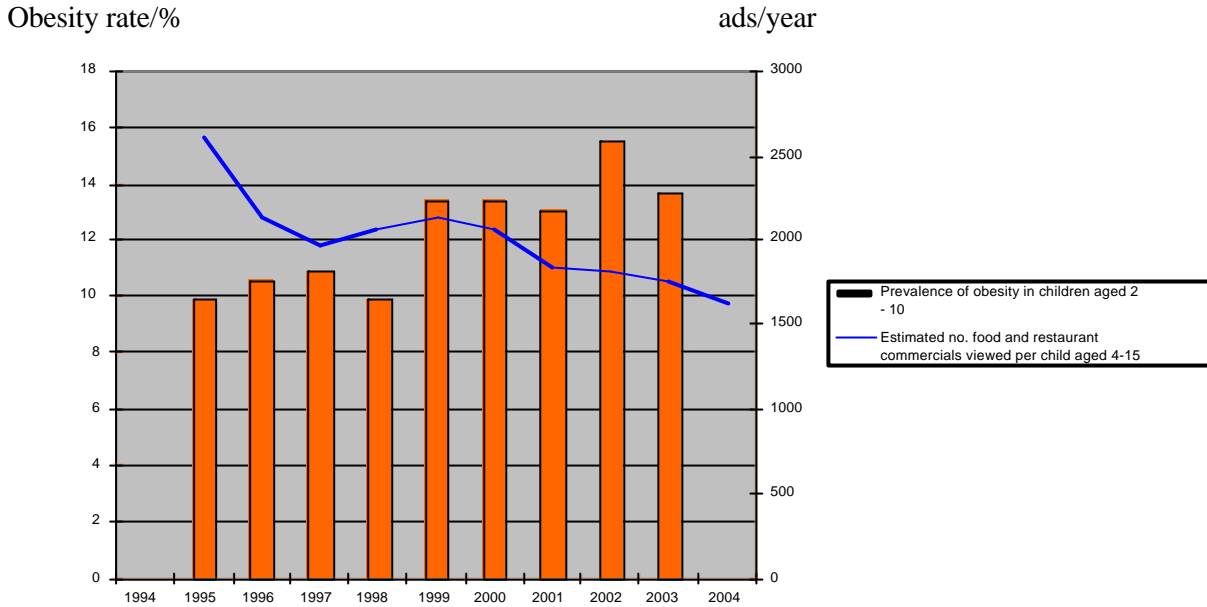
In conclusion, egta is highly concerned that such inaccurate and misleading statements form the basis of future EU discussions on the role of television advertising. Egta believes instead that **policy orientations should be based on sound scientific evidence** and hopes that advertising for food products can be discussed in a dispassionate and constructive way.

¹ Ofcom, *Childhood Obesity – Food Advertising in Context*, 2004; Hastings et al, *Review of research on the effects of food promotion to children*, 2003.

ANNEX

A) Childhood obesity & food advertising in the UK: An inversely proportional trend

Source: Nielsen Media Research, UK Office for National Statistics, 2004



B) No correlation between exposure to food advertising and overweight/obesity

Source: Based on IOTF obesity figures and Consumers International data on advertising

Country	Number of Ads per Hour	Minutes of Advertising per Hour	Percent of Ads That Are For Food	Average No. of Food Ads per Hour	% overweight or obese
Australia	29	13	39%	12	19 ¹
USA	24	11	49%	11	15 ²
Poland	N/A	N/A	N/A	11	19
UK	17	9	59%	10	22
France	16	6	49%	8	18
Greece	12	5	60%	7	31
Germany	14	5	41%	6	15
Finland	12	5	47%	6	13
Denmark	12	6	38%	5	18
Netherlands	5	2	84%	4	14
Norway	7	2	29%	2	21
Belgium	7	1.5-2	53%	2	18
Sweden	3	1	21%	<1	18