

MEP in bid to outlaw ‘free from’ labels

By Sara Lewis

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Italian Christian Democrat MEP, Fulvio Martusciello, is seeking for the EU to outlaw ‘free from’ labels on food through an amendment to a draft European Parliament position on the Commission’s annual report on competition policy.

Amendment 278, which Parliament’s Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, adopted on 21 February in a vote on a report from Spanish Liberal Ramon Tremosa i Balcells, adds a new paragraph 33a on “protection of consumers against misleading or suggestive advertising.”

The amendment “Calls on the Commission to oblige advertisers to declare or list only the characteristics of the ingredients actually present in the product and exclude those that are not contained therein unless the presence or absence of certain ingredients is related to congenital diseases.”

The wording would allow allergen labelling as this could be considered a ‘congenital disease’ but not labels such as ‘palm oil free’ or ‘free from artificial colours and preservatives.’

When it comes to allergens, at EU level only the term ‘gluten free’ is regulated and defined under a 2014 Commission implementing regulation (828/2014) to the food information to consumers regulation (FIC – 1169/2011).

However, the nutrition and health claims regulation (NHCR – 1924/2006) lays down conditions for using a certain number of nutrition-related free-from claims, namely ‘energy free’, ‘fat free’, ‘saturated fat free’, ‘sugars free’, ‘sodium free’ or ‘salt free’.

Parliament’s plenary still has to vote on the report and amendment 278, probably at its 12-15 March session in Strasbourg. Even if Parliament adopts the amendment, it would not be binding on the Commission to draw up proposals to outlaw ‘free from’ claims and labels, but nevertheless the amendment has caused raised eyebrows in Brussels.

Notably it prompted an angry tweet from Safe Food Advocacy Europe (SAFE), which asked: “How can providing LESS information to consumers help inform them better? #LessInfoLessChoice #EUFoodLabelling #FreeFromFood.”