

To:

Renew Europe Members
Committee on the Environment, Public Health and
Food Safety (SANT)
European Parliament

Cc:

Ms. Valérie Hayer, President of Renew Europe Group
European Parliament

Date: 9 April 2026

Subject: Reflection on public health policy and liberal principles – a contribution for reflection

Dear Members of Renew Europe,

We greatly value **Renew Europe’s long-standing commitment to individual freedom, rooted in the tradition of ALDE and, before that, ELDR**, alongside its dedication to evidence-based policymaking and open, competitive markets. These principles have consistently positioned your group as a key voice in shaping balanced and forward-looking European policies.

The growing burden of cardiovascular diseases and obesity, given their significant impact on individuals, societies, and economies, **rightly calls for serious and effective policy responses**. At the same time, this is a **complex and multifactorial challenge**, one that arguably requires not only action, but also careful reflection and a truly open debate.

In this context, we have been closely following the discussions within the European Parliament on **“An EU Cardiovascular Diseases Strategy”** and the amendments currently under consideration. We were interested to observe the evolving positions on proposals such as fiscal measures, simplified front-of-pack classifications, and the use of broad categories such as “ultra-processed foods” as policy triggers.

This naturally raises a question: to what extent are key liberal considerations, historically central to the promotion of individual freedoms, diversity, and open markets, fully reflected in the current debate?

From a liberal perspective, public policy has traditionally sought to empower citizens by promoting freedom of choice. This leads to a broader reflection: **should policy primarily inform and enable individual decision-making, or should it move further towards shaping choices and market outcomes through prescriptive approaches?**

While measures such as taxation, restrictive classifications, or simplified labelling are often introduced with the intention of improving public health, one may ask whether they risk acting as political shortcuts, addressing symptoms rather than the underlying complexity of behaviours, lifestyles, and socio-economic factors.

It is also worth considering that many of the approaches currently under discussion, such as taxation, classification, or reformulation policies, which appear to be gaining support, are presented as being



grounded in scientific evidence. Yet, how should policymakers approach scientific findings that are evolving, debated, or potentially influenced by prevailing narratives or policy agendas?

Liberal traditions have long been rooted not in the passive acceptance of scientific claims, but in the continuous testing, questioning, and falsification of theories. If this is the case, how can policymaking best reflect this experimental mindset, adapting over time, responding to change, and ultimately expanding individual freedoms and societal prosperity?

Consistent with this approach, one might ask whether a **liberal policy framework** should prioritise:

- Safeguarding freedom and diversity of choice;
- Informing rather than stigmatizing, avoiding simplistic binary distinctions between foods and beverages;
- Focusing on behaviours and contexts, rather than broad and often ill-defined categories;
- Promoting balanced lifestyles and moderation, rather than prescriptive or restrictive approaches;
- Preserving open and competitive markets, avoiding distortive or discriminatory interventions;
- Recognising that individuals, even when well-informed, may make suboptimal choices - as freedom inherently includes the right to choose;
- Acknowledging that sustainable improvements in public health require time, consistency, and cultural change, rather than immediate top-down corrections.

A further question may also be worth reflecting upon. When policy moves in a more **paternalistic direction**, does it risk gradually evolving into forms of **social engineering** in which science and policy shape preferences, define acceptable behaviours, and influence market outcomes? And if so, what implications might this have for **innovation, competition, and consumer trust**?

In this context, some past and ongoing debates, such as those surrounding front-of-pack labelling systems like Nutri-Score or warning labels, fiscal measures targeting specific food and beverage categories, or reformulation-driven approaches, highlight a broader challenge: how to address complex public health issues without reducing them to simplified or static classifications.

This leads to a central question: **how can public health objectives be pursued effectively while fully preserving individual freedom of choice and the proper functioning of open markets?**

More fundamentally, it invites a choice: whether to rely on prescriptive, one-size-fits-all frameworks, or to pursue the **more demanding but ultimately more consistent path of strengthening citizens' capacity to make informed decisions**, expanding their freedom of choice, and allowing markets to respond accordingly.

We believe **Renew Europe is uniquely positioned to play a decisive role in this direction**, helping ensure that the policy response remains effective and aligned with **fundamental liberal principles**.

Looking ahead, this also offers an opportunity to reframe the policy approach: moving beyond simplified or overly prescriptive regulatory tools, towards methods that better reflect the complexity of human behaviour and contemporary lifestyles.

Advances in genetics, data, artificial intelligence, and wearable technologies offer new possibilities to support more personalised, evidence-based approaches to prevention, enabling a more personalised and balanced lifestyle.

Such an approach is fully consistent with liberal principles: strengthening knowledge rather than restricting choice and enabling innovation rather than prescribing outcomes.



We would welcome the opportunity to explore these perspectives with you and to contribute to the development of policy solutions that are both effective and aligned with the values of freedom, responsibility, and open markets.

Yours sincerely,

Pietro Paganini

About Competere

We are an independent advocacy group working to advance innovation, free trade, and individual freedom through evidence-based public policies, grounded in the liberal tradition of critical thinking, open markets, and personal responsibility.

We combine scientific evidence with an experimental, liberal approach to support effective and forward-looking solutions to today's policy challenges.