



## **Keynote speech of Mr Vitenys Andriukaitis European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety**

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to join you for the official opening of the Brussels office of the European Food Banks Federation.

I must admit, I am somewhat in awe of your organisation. To provide over 4 million meals, each day, to over 8 million people in need is impressive. It is a gift. All thanks to the commitment, professionalism, motivation and sheer hard work of your members – the majority of which are volunteers.

It is also a stark reminder – of the challenges we face, the scale of the problem, the need to make a difference.

The European Food Banks Federation is an important partner to the European Commission. Your work makes a direct difference to individual lives. You also help us to shape, promote and implement EU policies on food waste prevention, public health and social inclusion. You are a key player in the EU's team to support the global Sustainable Development Agenda, transforming into reality our “Zero Hunger Goal” and helping a portion of the 55 million Europeans who still go to bed without a proper meal every day. We count on your cooperation and support in:

- The EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste;
- The network of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived;
- Your work with public authorities in Member States; and
- Your active cooperation with food business operators.

With a base here in Brussels, I look forward to even closer cooperation in future.

Let me remind you of some of the progress we have made so far.

Since 2016, we have made significant strides in implementing food waste prevention actions in the Circular Economy Action Plan.

Last May, we adopted revised EU waste legislation. It marks an important milestone for food waste prevention in the EU, introducing, for the first time, specific measures to prevent and reduce food waste, as part of EU waste policy.

The new rules require Member States to take action at each stage of the supply chain, in line with Sustainable Development Goals, and monitor and report on food waste levels. In short, we have defined a clear obligation to reduce - monitor - report.

These new data will provide us with a clear evidence base to develop effective prevention strategies and monitor our progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

They also introduce a definition for food waste. Based on this, the Commission is developing, with Member States, common EU measurement methodology, to be adopted by March 2019.



Food donation is also encouraged, for example, through fiscal incentives. Surplus food that is safe should, as a priority, be made available to people in need.

As members of the European Food Banks Federation know very well, it is often easier to waste food than give it away. This is simply unacceptable. Indeed, it was your organisation which first drew the Commission's attention to the need for guidance – at EU level – to facilitate food donation in Member States. You made an important contribution to the guidelines we subsequently adopted on World Food Day last year. They clarify how relevant EU measures apply to food donation - for donors and receivers - and promote their common interpretation by different authorities.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the important and ground-breaking work done by the European Food Banks Federation network in Member States.

In particular, the dialogue with Member State authorities which has allowed barriers to food donation to be identified and addressed at EU and national levels, for instance certain VAT rules.

You have also helped Member States to share and learn from their experiences in promoting food donation.

Another very important and active network is the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste. This platform is a unique forum. It brings together all key actors from the public and private sectors – from farm to fork – to catalyse change at EU level and help us achieve the UN target of halving food waste by 2030.

Later this year, the Platform will prepare its first deliverable, a document on how Member States implement the relevant legal provisions to enable safe donation of surplus food. Going forward, we have a 3-year pilot project to support spread and uptake of the EU food donation guidelines, in close cooperation with Platform members. This project benefits from the advice and involvement of the European Food Banks Federation.

The Commission is also actively examining ways to improve use and understanding of date marking in the food chain.

"Best before" and "use by" dates guide consumers' choice and use of foods. More generally, they are a crucial part of supply chain management, including food redistribution.

The EU guidelines on food donation remind all players that foods past their "best before" date can be placed on the market provided they are safe and their presentation is not misleading.

And I would like you to remind you that 'former foodstuffs' - when no longer edible - is still a valuable resource which can be used to produce feed thus reducing the pressure on fertile lands for the production of feed. Last April, the Commission adopted, in this respect, EU guidelines on the re-use of so-called "former foodstuffs"

In all of this work – our work, your work – on food waste and redistribution, collaboration is key.



Members of the EU Platform are eager to share experience and business cases, replicate successful models and consider scaling-up initiatives which can make a significant contribution to food waste prevention.

We are implementing digital technology and networks to ensure that what we learn from food waste initiatives — what works, what doesn't, and the results achieved — can be shared quickly.

The Commission's Joint Research Centre will help Platform members to assess the effectiveness of their interventions. This will help to identify best practices and recommendations for action at each stage in the supply chain.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, I want to reflect on something a food bank volunteer told me.

"What shocks me," she said, "is not that people need food banks per se, but the number of people who depend on them, and the diversity of backgrounds they come from. People assume there is a 'type'. There isn't. I've seen old people, young people, people with children, people who have fallen off the rails, people who have been unlucky, people without jobs, people with jobs who still struggle to make ends meet."

Continuing to lose and waste food – especially at the rate we do today - whilst others go hungry is immoral.

Continuing to squander precious food resources and place this unnecessary burden on our planet is immoral.

Healthy and sustainable diets for everyone should be our goal for the future.

Sustainable solutions to the root causes of food poverty must be found if we are to meet the global "zero hunger" challenge.

Of course, we would all prefer an ideal world where food banks were not necessary. But it is not yet the case and it won't be the case for many years to come. For this reason, your work is so important.

I am convinced that organisations like yours can help to pave the way forward. I am immensely grateful for the perseverance of your volunteers who show us, each day, that by working together, we can make an important difference.

It does not mean that food banks have to replace social policies, we should not delegate to you the obligations of each public authorities to ensure decent living conditions for everyone, but you are and I hope you'll be even more in the future a powerful instrument for the implementation of our policies.

The EU will remain a committed and driving force in the global fight against food losses and food waste and in achieving the SDGs, particularly the "Zero Hunger Goal".

I look forward to continuing our collaboration and wish you all the best in your new office in Brussels.

Vytenis Andriukaitis  
European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety