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Food labelling: Member States' position threatens the use of fresh food in hotels and restaurants

Brussels, 22 February 2011 – The trade association of hotels, restaurants and cafés in the European Union (HOTREC) welcomes yesterday's adoption by the Council of its first-reading position on the Food Labelling Regulation¹ as a step forward towards better food labelling and consumer protection. However, the Council Common Position falls short by not excluding “non-prepacked food”, including meals served by restaurants, from the scope of the Regulation as the European Parliament in its first-reading had demanded. Ms. Anna Torres, CEO of HOTREC, commented: “Compliance with the Regulation as proposed by the Commission would impose heavy burdens and costs on the sector and it would simply be unworkable for the vast majority of hospitality establishments. Staying in business could only be possible by reducing the menu offer and by using ready-made and pre-labelled food instead of fresh products!”

The proposed Regulation on food labelling is of major concern to the European hospitality sector. If adopted as drafted by the European Commission, it would require restaurants and cafés serving “non-prepacked food” to provide, for each item on their menus, the same information that has to be displayed on the labels of packaged foods.

HOTREC also expressed concern on the issue of allergens information. Ms. Torres explained: “*The position of the Council is a step forward because it reverses completely the approach by the Commission, keeping “only” the obligation of allergens information, but worries remain. Even the solution to limit mandatory information to allergens would be de facto unworkable for restaurants*”. The list of allergens is very long and includes basic ingredients that are used in most recipes. As acknowledged by the European Parliament, the risk of cross-contamination is unfortunately unavoidable in restaurants, where chefs have to prepare at the same time, in the same kitchen, with limited working areas, various dishes containing commonly used ingredients, which may be potential allergens.

HOTREC is of the opinion that the provision of information in relation to meals prepared and served locally should not be regulated at EU level, as it has no impact on the functioning of the EU internal market. Ms. Torres announced: “*We will keep on fighting for a full exclusion of “non-prepacked food from the scope of the Regulation and we hope to count on the crucial support of the European Parliament in second-reading*”.

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HOTREC* represents the hotel, restaurant and café industry at European level. The sector counts 1,7 million businesses, with almost 92% of them being micro enterprises employing less than 10 people. The industry provides some 9,5 million jobs in the EU alone. HOTREC brings together 39 National Associations representing the sector in 23 different European countries. For further information:

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¹Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on the provision of food information to consumers (COM (2008) 40 final)