# Taxation or Transformation? Re-evaluating the Role of Sugar Taxation in Europe's Health Strategy

**Date: 23 April 2026, 13:30 - 15:00**
**Location: European Parliament, SPINELLI 3H1**
**Hosted by: MEP Kristian Vigenin (S&D, ENVI & SANT)**

# High-level event

The European Commission's "Safe Hearts Plan" rightly identifies overweight and obesity as key risk factors for non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases. Obesity is a multifactorial condition shaped by diet, physical activity, socio-economic status, education, and mental health.

However, as the plan considers fiscal measures to influence consumer behaviour, it is essential to ensure a neutral, evidence-based discussion on the effectiveness of such tools. Sugar is often narrowly targeted, with sugar taxation proposed as a solution despite the absence of real-world evidence demonstrating a reduction in overweight and obesity rates. To date, demonstrable effects have been market distortions and a disproportionate impact on lower-income households, raising concerns about regressive outcomes and added pressure on small businesses.

In this context, reference to national sugar taxes underscore the importance of carefully assessing the role of fiscal instruments within the broader health strategy.

Against this evolving EU policy backdrop, this 90-minute European Parliament even, organised in partnership with SME Connect and moderated by Horst Heitz, Chair of the SME Connect Steering Committee, will bring together policymakers, experts, academics, and other stakeholders to examine the role of sugar taxation in Europe's health strategy and to explore a more holistic "Transformation" model focused on innovation, consumer education and balanced lifestyles.

# Agenda

## Opening remarks

**MEP Kristian Vigenin,** ENVI & SANT Committee

## Keynote speeches

**Prof. dr.ir. Frans Kok**
Chair of Scientific Advisory Board Cosun Nutrition Centre, Emeritus professor Human Nutrition and Health, Wageningen University and Research

## Panel discussion followed by Q&A

**Marie-Christine Ribera**
Director General at CEFS (European Association of Sugar Manufacturers)

**Pietro Paganini**
Co-Founder of Competere

**Bo Dohmen**
Senior Manager Nutrition and Health, at FoodDrinkEurope

**Annie Denny**
CEO WSRO (World Sugar Research Organisation)

Moderated by **Horst Heitz,** Chair of the Steering Committee SME Connect