

FOUNDATION EURACTIV ANNUAL CONFERENCE

8 NOVEMBER 2007

European Parliament, PHS 3C 050 room

OPENING SPEECH

Dear Members of the European Parliament, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to open the Annual conference of EurActiv this morning and have the opportunity to speak about communicating and interacting with European capitals. This is a topic close to my heart as I have certain experience in the journalistic field. And I truly believe that transparency in politics is a prerequisite for gaining wide support and realizing the objectives of our policy efforts. I will never be tired of discussing and convincing the citizens of Europe that the strongest driver of our actions is their welfare, confidence and security.

As you know, in May 2006 the Commission adopted a Communication to the Council, entitled “A Citizens’ Agenda”. This document outlines the achievements of the European Union in its 50 years of existence, while at the same time acknowledges the need for further debate and dialogue.

I cannot agree more with the statement in the Citizens’ agenda that “Effective institutions are essential for the functioning of the EU, but they themselves cannot reinvigorate Europe on their own. Common ownership is essential.” A continued dialogue with the capitals is a crucial element for achieving this common ownership and moving forward our plans for institutional stability and people’s prosperity.

We are not living in a bubble and we will always need the check on the ground to be sure that we are on the right track.

The interaction with European capitals is a core activity for this College of Commissioners. We are a full representation of all different Member states but acting in the interest of all Europeans. As such we are well placed to explain EU policies to our national societies and seek support and comprehension by all EU actors. The richness of differences and the common interest are the main values for the European union.

Alongside with the traditional means of communication, the College is employing all modern means for exchange of views and ideas. The frank and clear comments and constructive criticism are highly appreciated and are becoming more and more an indispensable part of the decision making process. We are placing citizens in the heart of all EU policies and this has been even more strengthened by the appointment of a Commissioner specifically in charge of consumer policy. Because, you may be a businessman, a civil servant, an employee, a worker or a student but the common for all is that you are all consumers. And this makes my responsibility even greater.

In March this year the Commission adopted a Strategy for consumer protection for the period 2007-2013 where we have formulated three main objectives:

- to empower the consumers by adoption of the needed legal framework
 - clear and simple set of rules, provision of easily accessible and ample information, education about consumer rights and obligations and effective mechanisms of redress when things go wrong.
- to enhance the welfare of consumers through the further integration of the internal market and the creation of a “seamless” European single market; ensure more choice for price, quality and safety.
- To protect consumers from serious risks and threats.
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Three priority areas for action have been identified and they refer to better regulation, better enforcement of the legislation and strengthened role of consumer organizations.

The full and efficient achievement of the objectives of the Strategy is impossible without the support of all stakeholders. On consumer policy issues we are interacting with a number of EU wide networks. As a consultative body for DG SANCO we have created a Consumer protection network which links all national policy making authorities. This gives us a high political level involvement in the Member states for the development and simplification of our policy.

In parallel, the national enforcement bodies have formed the Consumer protection cooperation network (CPC network). This is the level of direct market surveillance and our most important "critical control point".

To address and solve cross border consumer complaints we have created European consumer centres (ECC), whose activities are co-sponsored by the European budget. We have regular meetings with all networks, in order to discuss the policy and legislation, to examine and exchange experience on the pace of implementation and to analyse the most common failures of consumer markets. I have personally visited more than half of the Member states and I am planning to have full coverage by the middle of next year. We are launching information campaigns in all Member states which acceded to the EU after 1 May 2004.

A strong tool for communicating our consumer policy is the publication of Europa Diary as a tool for students and teachers to learn more about the European union, its structure, policies, endeavors and future. Our online

educational tool for adults named Dolcetta is widely used by citizens to raise their awareness about their rights as consumers in the Common market. Next spring we will launch the Master's programme for consumer policy, which will be implemented in few Member states by a consortium of Universities.

I have always accepted media as a key partner in communicating our ideas and policies and I would like to congratulate Mr Leclercq as the founder of this network and for his persistence in expanding European knowledge and awareness for so long.

For me personally, [it](#) will be very useful to hear any new ideas about stronger involvement of stakeholders in communicating Europe in the capitals and learn more about how our efforts are evaluated by the Europeans across the continent.

Thank you for your attention!

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