

Mr, Chairman  
Honourable Members

It is a great opportunity for me to be engaged in this exchange of views with Members of the European Parliament, an institution which through the Lisbon Treaty has assumed greater responsibility for the advancement of our European Vision and Values.

I have been a parliamentarian in my country for over two decades. For three quarters of that time I was a member of cabinet. This gives me a deep understanding of the interaction between Parliament and the executive and a respect of the views expressed by Parliament and its Committees.

I have served in the executive in my country for many years, mostly in the economic and financial fields pushing reforms and adherence to the acquis. But I have felt the most fulfilled in the last eighteen months when I was responsible for the social and health sectors. This has brought me closer to the people and in the front line to deliver the best possible service to the citizen across gender, vulnerability and generation gaps. This gave me the satisfaction of fulfilling my basic mission as a politician.

During the next three hours we will be touching on various topics and issues. We will be exchanging many views. However this is all encapsulated in one theme – The People.

Allow me now to address a number of issues in my mother tongue

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*Patients First, Consumers First.*

*This will be the underlying theme of my work if I am given the opportunity to serve.*

*I will be independent and objective in my assessments of the myriad of issues that I have been made aware of during my induction over the past few weeks. I will bring my consensus building experience and my operational expertise in various sectors to add value to the dossiers that are in progress and that will be initiated.*

*My vision is that of European Citizens living a longer, healthier life because they live a healthy lifestyle, enjoy safe, nutritious and high quality food and have access to high quality medical advice and care.*

*My vision is a well-informed Consumer who can take educated decisions on the goods and services they consume. A Consumer that would not only be in the driving seat of his own lifestyle, but who would also be able to influence policy through the consolidation of the micro decisions that are taken in the market. Consumers can move policies on climate change, animal welfare, action on health determinants, to mention a few.*

*My commitment is to ensure that our consumers can continue to enjoy the very high levels of food safety which I believe serve as the benchmark for world standards on safety.*

*Innovation is also an underlying priority for me as I face a number of sectors with huge potential – whether we speak of seeds and plant protection, human and animal health and*

*food technology, medical devices, health diagnostics and pharmaceuticals, we are speaking about the ability of innovation to serve our consumers and our citizens.*

Mr Chairman  
Hon Members

On Health Policy, shrinking national budgets coupled with increased demands by citizens for better services brings to the fore the issue of the sustainability of health systems.

To secure sustainability we must focus on prevention. Alarming, 97% of health spending across Europe goes on treatment as compared to only 3% on prevention. With your help and support I will strive to redress this imbalance by convincing all stakeholders that prevention is an investment offering very high future returns in health.

In the same vein, this focus on sustainable health outcomes will continue to drive our action regarding diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, mental health (including Alzheimer's), age-related diseases and youth health. We will also pursue vigorously our efforts against smoking, alcohol abuse, drugs and obesity, which have been scientifically proven as the forces which lead to the hospitalisation and death of millions of our citizens every year.

Key in this vision is the access of all our European Citizens irrespective of nationality and socioeconomic status to good and timely treatment and to affordable medicines. In this context we will be working with the Spanish Presidency, the Council and Parliament to hammer out a solution on patients' rights in cross border care. We will also be availing ourselves of the new synergies created by the inclusion of Pharma and Medical Devices in the Health Portfolio. For example, this can motivate patient-focussed research and innovation and bring new technology to the market at affordable cost to patients and/or health systems across Europe.

Our objective will be to close the gap in health inequality that we are currently experiencing in Europe. A Five-fold difference in deaths of babies under 1 year and a 14-year gap in life expectancy at birth for males (8 for females) is a challenge to the EU's fundamental objective of solidarity and cohesion. It is also a huge loss of human and economic potential apart from the fact that this should surely be a concrete objective to set ourselves in our work towards social cohesion.

Information to Patients is another issue that is currently at the forefront of discussion. We believe that Patients should have access to information on prescription drugs that are on the market. The inclusion of Pharma in the Health portfolio gives us the opportunity to reassess the proposal on the table and to inject a stronger patient perspective. We will be following with attention the discussions in Parliament on this issue.

We must ensure the highest possible safety, including action against counterfeit medicines sold over the Internet. I propose that we should move fast on the counterfeiting and pharmacovigilance segments of the Pharmaceutical Package.

On Consumer policy, I will endeavour to maintain the high profile of consumer issues which has been built-up over the past few years. Consumer issues cut across the various

competencies within the College and I see my primary role as bringing to the fore the consumer dimension in the discussions.

We have to ensure that the Single Market properly serves the consumer through better access to products and services, both in availability and price. We must keep a critical eye on how well markets serve consumers and on how the structures may need to change in order to do this better. I see an opportunity for an enhanced Consumer Scoreboard. I intend to continue to make regular enforcement sweeps to strengthen consumer rights within the EU.

We must continue to empower the consumer by backing him with clear, scientifically-based information. At the same time consumers must be able to exercise redress swiftly and effectively. In this regard we will continue the work of my predecessor on collective redress, ensuring coherence also with the work underway in DG Competition and other services.

Turning to food safety, I aim to ensure that our legislation gets the balance right in ensuring high levels of safety and consumer information in a cost effective, transparent and consensual manner.

The Food Industry is the largest manufacturer, biggest employer and a leading innovator in Europe. It is the bridge between the output of our farmers and what reaches our consumers plates.

Nobody, least of all our food industry, has anything to gain from poor safety standards. I want our high levels of safety to serve as a competitive advantage in both EU and international markets. Our current standards are a pre-requisite for the effective operation of the internal market. This in turn serves the interests of both our 500 million consumers and our food industry.

Experience has shown us that the setting of standards pushes our industries to further innovate and find solutions that satisfy health and safety requirements as demanded by our citizens whilst at the same time creating higher value added to products.

Animal Health and welfare is equally one of our core values which I fully share. I attach great importance to ensuring that all animals benefit from the effective implementation of the current rules. In addition, I intend to present a report on animal transport in a year's time which will direct future policy action on this sensitive issue. Our animal health framework must adapt to change.

I will complete the work begun in recent years on a new Animal Health Strategy for Europe. Parliament will now have co-decision on this politically sensitive issue. This puts a heavier responsibility on us to ensure high level animal health and welfare.

One of the burning issues that I have been exposed to is cloning. We must on the one hand keep insisting that all our decisions are based on scientific facts. However there is also an awareness of the grave ethical issues that are involved and the detriment to animal welfare. Here too, the framework in which I will operate will be safety first.

In the areas of nanotechnology and GMO's, science will continue to guide our actions. On the cultivation of GMO's I will move forward the concept set out in guidelines enunciated by President Barroso in his Political Guideline document.

In all the areas I have mentioned, I am aware of the important needs for enforcement which I will vigorously pursue. Stakeholders will be involved as much as possible in all areas of policy making.

Mr. Chairman,  
Honourable Members,

During my induction process over the past few weeks I have had the opportunity to meet with some of you. I was impressed by the depth of knowledge, the focused direction and the sense of purpose that I experienced. This is logical as you bring to the table the aspirations and the feedback of your constituents. Your views may be varied but you aim at a common goal – that of increasing the well-being of the people.

It is within this house that we can seek to build common solutions to shared problems. It is within this house that compromise is most naturally at home. For this reason, working together with you will be my committed goal.