

John Dalli

Member of the European Commission, responsible for Health and Consumer Policy

Commissioner Dalli delivers speech on Nutrition and Physical Activity

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

John DALLI, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, attends a Joint Meeting of the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity and; the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

Brussels, Belgium, 29 November 2011

**JOINT MEETING:
HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY; AND
EU PLATFORM FOR ACTION ON DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH**

ALBERT BORSCHETTE CONFERENCE CENTRE - BRUSSELS

TUESDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 2011, 10:00HRS

SPEECH/SPEAKING NOTE

Members of the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity,

Members of the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health,

I am very pleased to be here today to address this joint meeting. We met last year at the EU High Level Conference we co-hosted with the Belgian Presidency. At that meeting, we took stock of progress we have all achieved since the adoption of the EU Strategy on Nutrition and Obesity-related issues.

I see today's meeting as an occasion to collectively examine how far we have gone since last year's meeting and to set out the path for the future. We had set ourselves some ambitious objectives when we renewed our commitment to help Europe tackle diseases linked to two of the four factors causing non-communicable diseases: unhealthy diets and physical inactivity.

Our timing is also very relevant within the overall international context. Only two months ago I represented the European Union at the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on non-communicable diseases. I confirmed the commitment of all EU Member States to contribute to reducing the heavy burden of non-communicable diseases across the world.

I underlined a fundamental conviction namely that the worrying trend of non-communicable diseases can be reversed through effective and coordinated action on the risk factors that influence these diseases. We are doing this together with you by tackling unhealthy diets and physical inactivity and I am working with other stakeholders and governments on harmful alcohol use while I continue our fight against tobacco.

At last year's conference, we agreed that it was time to step up action. So let's assess the progress made.

Let me start with what has just been announced: the scaling up of the EU Pledge on changing the way food is advertised to children: this is an important step in the right direction. The stricter audience definition and the increase for the market coverage is an important evolution. We look forward to the monitoring of results – these give credibility to the commitment and will allow us to measure also its impact.

There is also now an enhanced participation of the Physical Activity sector in the work of the Platform. Co-operation efforts such as the one between the European Cyclists' Federation and the European Association of Communications Agencies to promote cycling commuting for employees are particularly encouraging.

It is also very important that the medical community, together with the civil society, plays a more significant role in the Platform; this role needs to be reflected in corresponding commitments.

Food reformulation is an area where commitments and actions by both the High Level Group and the Platform can, in particular, achieve tangible results and we are obviously pressing ahead with the development of effective solutions.

Looking at the work of Member States, let me commend the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity for the ongoing work on reducing salt content by 16% in 4 years on the basis of the 2008 common framework for national initiatives.

This "salt framework" is one of a kind. I have experienced in my discussions with health policy makers and governments' representatives that it is considered an exemplary action.

Since last year, I know that efforts on reformulating other nutrients have also been pursued. This is really good news. I am fully aware of the complexity of benchmarking nutrients. Still, Member States have made significant progress by identifying reduction possibilities for saturated fat and discussions are underway also on setting thresholds for energy, other fats, and added sugars.

We must now seek ways on how to set specific goals in a specific time-frame. I am confident that we can.

We must continue to build up our ambition for the coming period and work further in areas where we can do more. On the basis of the UN Political Declaration of September, we have now the opportunity to make a major leap forward.

On responsible advertising and marketing, I call upon Platform members to pursue efforts with the scaling up of their actions and to encompass digital media in their commitments.

We also need to have proposals to better address non-compliance to the codes of conducts of advertising.

Last but not least, "physical activity" as one of the four risk factors for non-communicable diseases is becoming more and more relevant.

We all know that the European Union is in a process of significant population ageing. Europeans are living longer. More people are suffering from non-communicable diseases. From 2012, the European working-age population will start to shrink, while the population aged over 60 years will continue to increase by about 2 million people a year.

Against that backdrop, 2012 was declared the "European Year of Active Ageing". I hope that together with Member States and through commitments in the Platform, we can demonstrate concrete actions that address this issue: we need to create opportunities for physical activity in the ageing population. 2012 will be a year of momentum. Let's seize the opportunity.

I want to emphasise that improving population health is key not only for individual, but also for societal well-being. Improving population health does not only contribute to individual quality of life, it is also critical for economic growth and prosperity in Europe.

We have the power to diminish the strain on health and social care systems if we are successful in enabling people to remain active in society for longer. Therefore innovative proposals for our aging population can show how our work can contribute to and shape the global context.

That said, education and health promotion for children and adolescents remain a key priority as lifestyle habits are forged at very young age.

In the European Commission, we are looking at how to promote further synergies of our work in the context of the Nutrition Strategy together with the promotion of our School Fruit Scheme bringing fresh products to our school children and the forces of our education tools to be used in this direction.

We want to make sure that our policies in the area of health, agriculture and education are coherent and consistent, and instrumental to improving the health of Europeans. I am currently seeking synergies with my colleagues in the European Commission to enhance our work together in this respect.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I intend to return to a further joint meeting of this High Level Group and the Platform once we are close to the finalisation of the evaluation of the strategy, which we envisage for 2013.

Further positive actions and firm commitments are needed now – they are needed from society, from governments and from industry. This is and has to be a joint effort.

For the Platform members, I am encouraging you to continue scaling up and targeting your efforts in support of the objectives of the Strategy and ensuring you also focus on your core business to bring in substantive change and measure its impact against what we are trying to achieve.

For the members of the High Level Group, I call upon the Member States to work with the European Commission so that we can help their strategies and efforts at national level to tackle unhealthy diets and physical inactivity.

The alarming trends and their impact on our lives and societies call for immediate and concrete action.

We have one more year in the framework of the Strategy we built together – let's make it one marked by impact and results. I now look forward to hearing what we can do to help you in this regard.

Thank you.

End