

Speech for Mr Neven Mimica, EU Commissioner for Consumer Policy
“Croatia – Baden-Wuerttemberg” reception

10 July 2013

Sehr geehrter Herr Minister Friedrich,

Excellences,

Distinguished guests and friends of Croatia and Baden-Wuerttemberg,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address this respected audience tonight, less than two weeks after Croatia joined the European Union.

I would like to thank you, Minister Friedrich, for having dedicated tonight's event to the alliance between Baden-Württemberg and Croatia, and for having invited me to share some thoughts with you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Baden-Württemberg and Croatia belong together. Over the last century, our two regions have gone through very different political, societal and economic developments. But we share the same fundamental values and have so many common interests, such as economic growth, agriculture, development of green technologies and environmental protection, and dedicated support to SMEs. We have worked together on many joint projects concerning the Danube region and we have fruitfully cooperated within the Joint Commission Croatia-Baden-Wuerttemberg.

With Croatia's accession to the Union, our two regions now finally come together under a single roof. This is a major historical success which we should celebrate tonight.

During the long preparation for accession, Croatia had to undergo fundamental reforms of its political, legal, economic and societal structures. It was not always an easy process, but I believe Croatia emerged as a better country from the transformation.

This process and Croatia's accession would not have been possible without strong support from many friends in other Member States, including in Baden-Württemberg. So allow me to thank you all for your clear and continuous support during Croatia's path to accession.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With Croatia's accession, the process of transformation is not over of course. Many efforts lie ahead of us. We must regenerate innovation and growth and address the high youth unemployment, just to name two of the burning issues in Croatia.

But I am convinced that as member of the Union we have more effective tools available and can cooperate even better, including in particular with Baden-Württemberg. We now can strengthen our cooperation even further and join the forces to promote our mutual interests in common areas to the benefit of all.

One of these areas should be that of consumer protection. Consumer expenditure accounts for 56% of the European GDP. Consumers can move markets, they can promote innovation and growth and should be at the heart of our economic policies. But let me be very clear: Markets must work for consumers, not the other way round. The Single Market is one of Europe's key achievements, and it still offers significant potential for cross-border economic cooperation, including between Croatia and Baden-Württemberg. But consumers need to be satisfied and trust in the quality of our products and services, if we want to tap this potential.

So I am very honoured to have been nominated as Commissioner for consumer policy. European consumer policy can improve the daily life of our citizens. It can give them reassurance about the safety and the quality of the products they buy, and it can help them to get better deals from their banks, their energy or telecom providers. At the same time, it can stimulate competition and thus contribute to growth and innovation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude with one very personal comment.

At a time when many European citizens find themselves in difficult economic circumstances, some are questioning the merits of enlargement or even of the Union as such.

I am convinced of the contrary. The Union offers the right framework for regions and Member States alike to jointly address today's economic challenges. And it offers peace and stability, which is the indispensable precondition for economic well-being and prosperity. In Croatia, which emerged from communism and war only a few years ago, this fundamental aspect of the Union is very much felt.

Thank you very much for your attention!