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**SPEECH**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here with you today.

As Commissioner for Consumer Policy, I am naturally pleased to see that the theme for today’s Open Session is “Consumers at the Heart”.

I want to use this opportunity to:

- First, explain how the European Consumer Agenda puts consumers at the heart of EU policies; and
- Second, address the central role of consumers in the European Union’s policy on cosmetics.

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Let me start with the European Consumer Agenda – the Commission’s overarching strategy for consumers.

Adopted in 2012, the Consumer Agenda was designed to put consumers at the very heart of the Single Market – Consumers drive markets and ultimately fuel growth.

The Agenda is built on 4 pillars:

- First, to improve consumer safety as regards goods, and services. This includes strengthening the regulatory framework and making market surveillance more efficient;
- Second, to enhance consumers’ knowledge of their rights. We want to empower consumers to cope with the increasing complexity of markets:
- Third, to improve enforcement and to secure redress. Without strict enforcement, rights do not exist in practice; and
- Fourth, to align rights and key policies to societal change.

In March of this year, the Commission published its second Report on Consumer Policy, covering the last two years.

This report shows the success of the Consumer Agenda. Many actions have been launched. And tangible benefits have been achieved for the citizens.

First and foremost, we have further increased consumer safety.

Thanks to the RAPEX rapid alert system, dangerous products identified in one Member State are also removed from the market in other Member States. Last year RAPEX handled more than 2.000 notifications – including cosmetics. In 2013 cosmetic products accounted for 4% of all dangerous products notified through RAPEX, with more than 100 notifications. This makes cosmetic products the fifth most often notified category of products, placing it immediately after textile, toys, electrical appliances and motor vehicles.

In 2013 the Commission tabled proposals for two new Regulations on Consumer Product Safety and Market surveillance. This package aims to further improve product safety by enhancing product identification, traceability and safety at source. Certain provisions of those two acts will apply to cosmetics as well, especially where the Cosmetics Regulation does not establish more detailed rules.

Under the second pillar of the Agenda, we developed new interactive tools. We took measures to inform, educate and empower consumers so that they can fully participate in the Single Market. For example, in relation to cosmetic claims, the Commission adopted binding common criteria. They prohibit the use of text, names, trade marks, pictures or signs that would imply that cosmetic products have characteristics or functions which they do not have.

More citizens made use of the network of European Consumer Centres to obtain free professional consumer advice and assistance with problems related to cross-border purchases. In 2013, out of a total of 32,000 complaints, the ECC-Net received more than 500 complaints regarding the cross border sales of personal care goods, which among other products also included cosmetics.

Turning to the third pillar on enforcement the Commission has a key role to play within the network of consumer protection authorities.

We intensified cooperation by carrying out coordinated actions against breaches of EU consumer law in the form of website checks (so called sweeps) and development of joint positions regarding certain misleading practices.

The forthcoming review of the Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation is essential to ensure more effective enforcement. The results from the recently-closed public consultation are encouraging. The Commission intends to publish a Report on the functioning of the Regulation still before the summer.

Alongside enforcement, it is vital to provide consumers with effective means of redress. In 2013 the Union adopted new rules on Alternative Dispute Resolution and On-line Dispute Resolution. These will make it easier for consumers throughout Europe to enforce their rights by means of simple, fast and low-cost out-of-court procedures.

Finally, under the fourth pillar, our actions in relation to the continued technological and societal developments ensure a high level of consumer protection. But they also empower consumers to drive demand in support of growth and get better deals.

Consumer rights have been reinforced through a series of new sectoral legislation, from food and telecommunications, to financial services, energy and transport.

Another important question we addressed under this pillar is how to enable consumers to make more sustainable choices.

In this context, we launched a Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Environmental Claims. National authorities, consumer associations and business organisations are all sitting around the table. Cosmetics Europe is an active and constructive contributor to this Dialogue. Thank you for that.

In the framework of the Dialogue, we commissioned a dedicated study on EU consumer markets and environmental claims, which is nearly finalized. One particularly relevant finding is that words such as “organic”, “biological”, “ecological” and abbreviations such as “bio” and “eco” are often used for non-food products such as cosmetics.

The use of those expressions is very important for consumers. But it can be misleading, as they seem to imply that the rules for organic farming in the food sector are applicable to non-food products. This however is not the case.

For this reason I hope that the work going on at international level by ISO define valid organic claims for your sector delivers soon. It can ensure reliable consumer information and a level playing field for businesses. I count on your support for this process.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me now to turn more specifically to the Union's policies on cosmetics.

Although not specifically mentioned in the Consumer Agenda, the cosmetics sector has a potential to contribute towards its implementation. Indeed, all four pillars of the Consumer Agenda are addressed by the new Cosmetics Regulation. This shows that the interests of the consumer are truly at the heart of our cosmetics policy.

First of all, safety is central to what we do. And by "we" I refer to both public authorities and the cosmetics industry.

The Cosmetics Regulation further reinforced safety by introducing detailed requirements on the safety assessment of finished products. Moreover, the Commission provided guidance to enterprises to comply with the new rules.

Second, consumers now benefit from clearer and more reliable information about the cosmetic products they use every day.

As I already mentioned, in July 2013 the Commission adopted legally binding criteria for the justification of claims made in relation to cosmetic products. They include: legal compliance, truthfulness, evidential support, honesty, fairness and informed-decision making.

The overall objective of these criteria is to ensure a high level of protection for consumers of cosmetic products, in particular from misleading claims. It is therefore very important that they are correctly implemented and enforced in all Member States.

In this context, I welcome Cosmetics Europe's initiative to adopt the Charter and Guiding Principles on Responsible Advertising and Marketing Communications.

It is essential for the information provided through advertising to be useful, understandable and reliable. Furthermore, the special attention given to green claims and the protection of vulnerable consumers matches the Consumer Agenda priorities.



In addition to the rules on claims, better information for consumers is also achieved through the labelling of nanomaterials in the ingredients list. This enables consumers to make an informed choice as regards the use of innovative technologies in cosmetic products.

Third, consumers are at the heart of the work carried out on enforcement. Through the Cosmetics Regulation, post-market surveillance was strengthened. This gives competent authorities the tools they need to ensure the rules are correctly implemented.

In particular, Member States set up “cosmetovigilance” systems to monitor the incidence of undesirable effects suffered by individual consumers. In addition, they are required to share information with other Member States on serious undesirable effects.

Consumers, of course, are also at the centre of our activities at international level. Our priorities, as far as our contacts with international partners are concerned, are:

- Removing technical barriers to trade;
- Promoting regulatory convergence; and
- Promoting alternative methods to animal testing.

These activities increase trade and enhance competition which leads to greater choice and better prices on the market.

Promoting alternatives to animal testing worldwide translates at international level the value that European consumers attach to animal welfare. It also sets an example for other countries to follow. For example, India recently announced a ban on animal testing.

To achieve this we are active in multilateral forums like the International Cooperation on Cosmetics Regulation. This group includes Canada, the EU, Japan and the USA, with Brazil and China as observers.

We also benefit from strong bilateral cooperation with China, ASEAN countries and of course the USA, with which we are now negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

I am particularly sensitive to the difficulties your industry is facing in its exports to China, and I would like to take this occasion to announce that I am planning to go there soon to discuss the issues related to market access, and in particular registration of new cosmetic ingredients, at the highest level.

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Before I conclude, I would like to briefly outline the current and future challenges for EU policy on cosmetics.

We are continuing the necessary work on the implementation of the Cosmetics Regulation.

In particular, we are preparing the first Annual Status Report on the use on nanomaterials in cosmetics. We are also working on the possible first derogation on the ban of a Carcinogenic, Mutagenic or toxic to Reproduction substance (in relation to formaldehyde).

In addition, we are following closely the process leading to the adoption of criteria to identify endocrine disruptors as required by Cosmetics Regulation.

Lastly, as you know, the public consultation on fragrance allergens recently closed – we are now analysing numerous responses, before we proceed with any possible legislative initiative.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, I would like to briefly reflect on the new institutional outlook.

It brings new challenges. But it also brings new opportunities.

The European citizens have just elected the new European Parliament for the term of five years. The new Parliament will soon elect the future President of the European Commission, followed by the setting-up of the new College of Commissioners.

The next six months are therefore an ideal moment to reflect upon the key issues and expectations for the next years. The progress made in the implementation of the Consumer Agenda provides a strong platform on which we can build for the future – to determine policy initiatives in all areas that have a direct or indirect impact on the consumer.

Consumer policy is a cross-cutting policy. In order to succeed we need to ensure strong interaction and vision.

Thank you for your attention.

**End**

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