

**HEARING BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER-
DESIGNATE**

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Competition

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Check against Delivery

Chairman Gualtieri,
Honourable Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen
Kære alle

Det er mit håb at bidrage til at skabe en verden i balance. Et samfund, hvor mennesker kan forfølge deres drømme, forsørge sig selv og deres familier og lære alt hvad de kan. Et samfund, hvor mennesker, natur og klima er i balance. Et samfund, hvor økonomien er holdbar, så vi ikke skylder næste generation. Et samfund, der er åbent og venligt, hvor vi kan være frie og forskellige.

Derfor vil jeg som konkurrencekommissær arbejde for det jeg ret beset har brugt mit hidtidige politiske liv på: At bidrage til, at små såvel som store ikke bliver trådt på, holdt ude eller udnyttet af dem, der har viljen til at misbruge deres magt. Med fri og fair konkurrence kan vi se ideerne blomstre i hverdagen - og som forbrugere har vi mulighed for at vælge til rimelige priser. Det skaber arbejdspladser. Det skaber frihed.

Addressing this committee has a special meaning to me. I first walked into the European Parliament some 25 years ago - as a trainee. I never imagined that I would be standing before you today and I am honoured and humble to do so.

When I was 21, I joined the European Affairs Committee of my political party in Denmark. And we have campaigned under the slogan "We believe. In Europe". And I do.

Fast forward to three years ago – almost to the day, in fact. I had just become Minister for Economic Affairs and the Interior and I attended my first Ecofin Council meeting.

It was a time of great uncertainty and in the Council I saw and experienced how that trust in Europe was transformed into concrete solutions for the European Union.

We could only weather the storm by standing together, keeping the promises that we made to each other, and working for the common interest.

That was the spirit around the table and, thanks to the wise decisions taken by the Commission, the Council and the Parliament, the crisis was contained.

I started with these memories because I intend to bring that same spirit to the position for which I'm standing before you today.

I believe that the defence of the common interest is a hallmark of competition policy.

I am not used to grandiose words but they are in place when you look at the very significant executive powers exercised by the Commission in the competition field.

Neutrality, impartiality and rigour - to ensure the rule of law. Neutrality, impartiality and rigour: On the facts, on the economics and on the law - will be the basis for my action.

I will listen to everyone, from the largest multinationals to the representatives of small firms. From states to citizens. But the analyses of my staff and my own judgement will not be swayed by anyone.

The authoritativeness of EU competition enforcement rests in large measure on our independence, impartiality and respect of confidentiality in the handling of individual cases. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will defend this tirelessly.

Investigations will be conducted and decisions proposed to the College regardless of a company's nationality, prominence or size. And, in State aid cases, regardless of the countries involved.

To me these are the values of enforcement of competition law. Among the many things I admire in the European Parliament is your commitment to these very values. If confirmed, I look forward to working together with you in ensuring that impartiality, neutrality and rigour are always the values in enforcing competition law.

The crisis was contained. Yes. But in the past few years Europe has seen recession, growing poverty and uncertain prospects for the future. Now the challenge is obvious: To get Europe back on her feet - to spur growth, create jobs, to innovate, to bring back dynamics and social cohesion.

Competition policy has a key role to play in support of the President-elect's call for a boost to jobs, growth and investment to address the global challenges for businesses, big and small alike. My overarching goal will be to tackle key obstacles to growth and innovation that create jobs.

Companies succeed when they compete on the merits. But in important markets like energy and the digital sectors, particular alertness is needed to ensure that dominant players respect the rules. This is all the more important to allow innovation from small and medium-sized companies to flourish.

In the field of State aid, I will build on the State aid modernisation agenda. This is a modernisation that will enable all Member States to take more and more active responsibility for State aid. And even more important: It will increase transparency and openness for the use of scarce public resources: Citizens will have much clearer picture of the use of taxpayers' money. It can be part of our democratic debate.

Sometimes enforcement of State aid, merger and anti-trust rules comes with a price in the short run. Fair competition and change in markets pay a real growth dividend. But they can also have a short term social cost. I will work with Member States and regions to ensure that their interventions do not hold back structural reforms. I will work with Member States and regions to ensure that measures accompanying the transition take full account of the social dimension.

Our European competition policy rests on well-established and healthy principles. They are laid down in the Treaty, and have stood the test of time. Keeping the Single Market open and ensuring a level playing field are competition policy's most immediate goals.

What we can achieve in doing so are the really important goals: Jobs and growth.

Much has happened since the competition rules were first formulated in the Treaty. This is an understatement :) For one thing our economy is now digital. This and other developments challenge us to constantly monitor the evolution in the markets to keep our tools sharp and to anticipate change in our economies.

Against this background, competition policy plays a crucial role to help us start growing again.

To me this is not only about firms and consumers. This is about citizens. This is about people. About us.

European firms, small and medium-sized enterprises as well as large multinationals compete in a globalised world. The discipline imposed by EU competition rules can help our businesses innovate and grow stronger.

Some seem to suggest that there is a contradiction between competition policy and industrial policy. I disagree. We need competition policy, just as we need research and development, investment and capital and a well-educated work force.

It is not sound industrial policy to protect companies from competition at the cost of the consumers

This is why I do not see the competition portfolio as a lonely portfolio. On the contrary:

Better regulation creates and supports the Single Market and foster competitive companies. Regulation shapes market realities. We see that in the telecoms sector where markets remain firmly national many years after liberalisation.

Some seem to suggest that we cannot afford effective competition enforcement at home when markets abroad are not policed as effectively. I disagree. The best way to prepare for competition abroad is to be competitive at home.

At the same time concerns in global markets must be taken up directly in our trade negotiations and in the World Trade Organisation. We need more competition abroad not less competition at home.

Competition policy is at the heart of President-elect Juncker's vision of a deeper and fairer Single Market. We need to develop an efficient, secure and sustainable energy market and to bring down prices for consumers and industry.

We have to make our European companies ready to compete in the digital economy at fair prices for consumers.

And we will still have to keep more than an eye on the financial sector.

This means that competition policy can make a significant contribution to other policy instruments. Therefore, I will work in close cooperation with my fellow Commissioners to ensure fair and open competition and contribute to the growth and jobs agenda.

This is one of the reasons why competition is not a lonely portfolio. There is another one: I do hope to work with you, Honourable Members - formally in the ECON Committee and other committees. But also informally - you know your constituencies better than anyone; you hear the worries and the hopes from citizens.

Honourable Members,

We need show that we can deliver solutions where solutions at European level are called for.

In doing so, we must be bigger and more ambitious on big things and smaller and more modest on small things. The recent State Aid Modernisation put us on the right track and will help us focus on issues that require our intervention, while relying on Member States to take their responsibility with regard to other aid - and with citizens to watch over it with new transparency.

In anti-trust, we need to focus on business practices in the key sectors. I am in favour of strong competition – I will not constrain large companies from competing on the merits. But I will not hesitate to challenge the behaviour of major players unduly squeezing out smaller competitors.

We need to fight against cartels that penalise consumers in our Single Market. We need to ensure that mergers do not worsen the competitive structure of key markets within the EU.

We have to show to all that the European Commission protects consumers' interests and we have to ensure that citizens benefit from competitive prices and increased choice.

Above all, if confirmed I will do my very best to ensure that the enforcement of EU competition law is even-handed and neutral.

This is neither bureaucracy nor technicalities. These are our values.

I hope that I will continue to find the support of the European Parliament on these and other important issues.

If confirmed, I commit to a frequent and respectful dialogue with the European Parliament and this Committee, not only where this is formally required but wherever possible.

Competition policy is in the interest of the citizens, the public and therefore also a matter for the European Parliament. I look forward to engaging with you if confirmed.

I do hope that this hearing will mark the beginning of an open, intense, and fruitful partnership.

Thank you.