

**Tonio Borg**

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

**Commissioner Borg delivers speech on 'A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues'**

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

Tonio Borg, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, attends the 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, 20 June 2013**

**JOINT MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY AND THE EU PLATFORM FOR ACTION ON DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND  
HEALTH  
Thursday 20 June 2013, 11:00hrs  
Brussels, Albert Borchette Conference Centre**

**SPEECH**

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  
important joint meeting and to have the opportunity to  
meet you all.

For many years, you have been working together with the  
European Commission, to promote healthy nutrition and  
to address health issues linked to overweight and obesity.

It is now time to take stock of the progress we have  
made.

As we all know, obesity rates remain stubbornly high. We therefore need to look at what more can be done to reverse this worrying trend.

Let me recall first what we have achieved so far.

The European Union Strategy on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related Health Issues of 2007, is a good example of an integrated approach to promote good health.

We can take pride in the initiatives and actions by both the High-Level Group and the Platform.

For example, the Member States are doing impressive work on two fronts: since 2008, on reducing salt content; and since 2012, on reducing saturated fat by 5% in 4 years and by an additional 5% by 2020.

There is more to come – I know that you are also focusing on other key areas, such as portion sizes and consumption frequency of certain foods.

The Framework for National Initiatives on Selected Nutrients, under which you are carrying out this work, has been fruitful in stimulating action.

We have come far – but I am sure we can go further. We need to continue to set the right targets to reduce nutrients of concern.

Turning specifically to the Platform, I am impressed by how this platform has brought together stakeholders to generate concrete actions on diet and physical activity, and facilitate exchanges of good-practice with national governments.

Eight years after the launch of the Platform, the platform members have put forward close to 300 commitments – covering a wide range of activities.

One excellent example of a commitment emanating from the Platform is the EU Pledge, whereby 20 leading food and beverage companies have committed themselves not to advertise to target children below the age of 12.

The effectiveness of the Pledge is made evident by the latest monitoring report – which you saw yesterday - which showed a downward trend in children's exposure to food advertising.

I hope, however, that this is just the start and that the commitment will continue to be strengthened.

The Platform has clearly delivered results, but I am convinced that we can reinforce action – especially in the areas of reformulation and advertising to children.

In addition, I am persuaded that monitoring and reporting of commitments needs to be strengthened further.

Another example of successful action is the School Fruit Scheme – an EU-wide voluntary scheme which aims to encourage good eating habits in children by providing them with fresh fruit and vegetables at school.

The scheme has already reached 54 000 schools in the EU, and we are currently working to improve it further, so that children in the most deprived regions can benefit more from the scheme. This includes the implementation of several pilot projects, which we hope will inspire future initiatives.

To conclude on what we do, let me just mention that the EU Health Programme has also helped the spread of good practices in this area; and we are also promoting the European Physical Activity Guidelines to encourage greater physical activity amongst EU citizens.

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Moving on, allow me now to turn to the evaluation of the Strategy.

You have all been involved in the evaluation process and you all have a share in the outcome of the evaluation.

I am very pleased that the report on the evaluation of the strategy:

- Recognises the added-value of EU-level co-ordination of the Strategy;
- Highlights its effective implementation; and
- Supports its continuation.

The report recommends:

- Continued co-ordination at EU-level by the Commission to increase policy developments and actions both at EU and national levels;
- A greater focus on physical activity promotion.
- A careful consideration of the effects of actions on lower socio-economic groups.

The report also:

- Reaffirms the objectives and strategic direction of the High Level Group; and
- Underlines that the Platform should generate better evidence of the efficacy and impact of its commitments, to maintain momentum and keep members engaged.

I am looking forward to hearing your views on these recommendations that stem from the evaluation of the strategy.

Indeed, the Commission is keen to listen to what you have to say, and to make the necessary adjustments to concentrate on action and sharpen its focus.

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Finally, let me say a few words on the way forward.

I am pleased that there is political will; not just to keep up action on nutrition, obesity and physical activity at European level, but also to focus it further.

The Council has invited the Commission to take further steps on nutrition and physical activity.

Council Conclusions from December 2012 on Healthy Ageing across the Lifecycle, invited Member States and the Commission to promote strategies to fight the risk factors of chronic diseases.

We have yet to emerge from the economic crisis, which makes it more important than ever to counter health inequalities.

Impoverished people are more likely to become overweight or obese as, in turn, are their children.

Being overweight in childhood increases the risk of developing chronic diseases later in life, including type 2 diabetes.

The upward trend of childhood obesity threatens to overwhelm our healthcare systems in the decades to come.

That is why, at the Informal Health Council in Dublin in March, I supported the Irish Presidency proposal to mandate the High Level Group to draw up an Action Plan on obesity focused particularly on childhood obesity.



I know that, this afternoon, the High Level Group will discuss next steps towards a proposal for such an Action Plan, which could become an important new instrument to frame actions under the Strategy. I look forward to hearing the results of your discussions on this.

Finally, I know I am preaching to the converted if I say we must reduce the significant social and economic costs of obesity and physical inactivity in all Member States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all recognise that obesity is an issue which has proven difficult to fight.

I firmly believe, however, that the worrying trend of rising chronic diseases can be reversed; through effective and co-ordinated action on the risk factors that influence these diseases.

Let me assure you that the Commission remains committed to tackling nutrition, overweight and obesity.

The evaluation of the strategy gives us the evidence base to steer our future action towards our common goal of halting the increase in overweight and obesity across the European Union.

The goals of the current Strategy and its instruments, such as the High Level Group and the Platform, remain valid, and the evaluation results give us a renewed sense of purpose.

The reduction of obesity can only be achieved if we all continue working together. I warmly thank all members of the High Level Group and the Platform for the efforts you have made so far, and for your continued dedication and commitment.

Thank you

**End**