

SPEECH OF COMMISSIONER MARKOS KYPRIANOU - CIAA DINNER - 26 OCTOBER 2006

- It is a pleasure to be here at the 5th Congress of the CIAA.
- Your theme of "Food for life – meeting consumers' needs" is highly topical – and of central concern for the society, as well as a real challenge for the food industry.
- I congratulate the CIAA on the consumer orientated nature of its congress programme. This certainly strikes the right note in a timely manner.
- We knew for long that a number of serious health conditions are directly linked to poor diet or lack of physical activity.
- Moreover, obesity is now universally recognised as a multi-faceted problem – one which has been on the increase over the past three decades.
- Obesity increases the risk of a number of severe medical conditions – including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some forms of cancer.
- We cannot ignore the serious implications for our economies and societies of such a preventable burden.
- We must act. I will continue to ensure that tackling the factors behind the obesity epidemic remains one of the top priorities on the European Union's health agenda.
- Prevention
 - It is a preventable cause of serious and chronic illnesses.
 - We must act before it's out of control.
- I always said that no single actor has the power or the influence to engineer a permanent and efficient solution to the obesity problem.
- Taking a comprehensive approach is the most effective means to achieve our objectives.
- Controlling / regulating excessive consumption is more difficult than ban. Indeed there is no issue of a ban or legislation (unless we are forced).
- We must educate that all is in moderation (children: candies, chocolates, ice creams).
- Addressing obesity requires effective contributions from many actors across society. From government sectors such as transport, education, agriculture to civil society.
- We see the food industry as a crucial part of the solution to the current obesity issue (products bought).

- We educate consumers, they will decide but they need healthy options / alternatives.
- Industry challenge :
 - To not bombard children with messages;
 - Products should be healthy, tasty and affordable.
- One area where major players in the food industry have been able to make important and visible contributions is the Platform for Diet, Physical Activity and Health.
- I welcome and appreciate the encouraging progress that the Platform has made to date. Members have actively engaged with the process and firm commitments have been made.
- I am very pleased to see the initiatives brought forward by the CIAA and its members in areas of key concern – such as advertising and marketing, nutrition labelling and reformulation.
- I have decided to inform the European press of some of the efforts and most promising initiatives that have emerged from the Platform. The press event will take place on 9 November.
- Naming in such a way provides incentives for them and others. They should make the first step then others will follow.
- This will be an opportunity to highlight some of the best examples of commitments made so far and to draw attention to the good work being done in a range of important areas – including initiatives by CIAA member companies.
- I hope this publicity will also serve to encourage and inspire others to continue the good work and to widen their ambitions.
- The issue of effective monitoring of commitments is of vital importance for the overall credibility of the Platform process.
- In September, Platform members adopted a framework for the monitoring of their commitments and I appreciate the extensive efforts made by the CIAA in this regard.
- The Platform is of course just one element of the required multi-faceted approach to which I referred earlier.
- But to gain maximum efficiency and to ensure sound co-ordination we need to bring various initiatives together. We also need to galvanise action at national and even local level.

- Same problem, same solution, but it will be applied according to local customs, culture and realities.
- These necessities underpinned the Commission's decision to start to work on a European strategy on nutrition.
- We launched a public consultation in December 2005 through a Commission Green Paper to give stakeholders across Europe the opportunity to express their views on the strategy that Europe should adopt for combating overweight, obesity and then for preventing all related diseases.
- I am delighted to say that the response level was very good – nearly 300 contributions were received from national and local governments, civil society, industry, academia and individual citizens.
- The responses have now been analysed and the results have been published on our website.
- In particular, respondents strongly supported an integrated multi-sectoral approach and identified the networking of all concerned stakeholders as a key tool in achieving the objectives.
- The consultation is one of the many sources of information we will draw on, as we start to put together the elements of a E.U. Strategy to be adopted in the course of 2007.
- In defining this strategy, we also want to consider what is done or underway outside the E.U.
- The forthcoming WHO ministerial conference on Counteracting Obesity, to be held in Istanbul, is thus fully aligned with our agenda in relation to nutrition issues.
- The conference will provide an excellent opportunity to assimilate further ideas for the development of our Strategy.
- I am pleased that the Platform will have a delegation at the event, which will include CIAA representatives.
- I would now like to turn to the issue of food labelling – or more specifically nutrition labelling – a subject of great interest to the CIAA.
- This is a difficult area – one where the Commission has been considering, for a number of years, how the current legislation might be changed.
- At present, nutrition labelling only becomes compulsory when a nutrition claim is made in the labelling, presentation or advertising of a foodstuff.

- But many stakeholders believe that labelling of nutrition should become mandatory, in view of helping to combat obesity.
- However, such views need to be considered alongside research which indicates that whilst most consumers are keen to have nutrition labels, the majority of consumers do not actually make full use of them.
- Also industry does not want much – but then they add more and more.
- The situation has become more complex in recent years with the development, by Governments and industry, of front of pack schemes.
- My view is that such schemes – such as "signposting" – will happen anyway and complicate the situation if divergent. They should though be in conformity with existing labelling legislation, and should not contradict or undermine efforts to improve current EU rules.
- Responses to a recent consultation on this theme – which closed at the end of June – will be used towards developing proposals for revising the general food and nutrition labelling legislation.
- This new legislation will be not only an update but also a "user friendly recast" and I hope "Industry friendly" of the current texts. We aim to adopt proposals in 2007.
- Allow me to conclude with a few final words on your participation in the Platform.
- First, I would like to thank you for both the interest and the commitment that CIAA members have shown towards the Platform process.
- Second, the future and the success of the Platform depend, of course, on the effectiveness of its actions. Your contributions will be critical in that respect. Commitments must be fulfilled.
- But there is also a test case: how we will deal with other sectors of the industry.
- If the Platform succeeds by proving that it can meet its objectives, it should become an integral part of the European strategy on nutrition.
- Thank you.