

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome in Brussels! Much to my regret, I am unable to be with you today. A rescheduling of the Environment Council means I have to be in Luxembourg.

This conference is very timely. Indeed the Commission is preparing to review its existing strategy on endocrine disruptors, and to develop proposals for identifying substances that are endocrine disruptors. The European Parliament has also announced its intention to adopt an own initiative report within the coming months.

Finding the right approach to dealing with endocrine disruptors is a challenge. That is why your reflections over the next two days will contribute significantly to find answers and to the shaping of future EU policy.

You must all be impatient to get into discussions. I have no wish to detain you for more than a few minutes from these debates. But I would like to share with you my own thoughts concerning:

- First the political, economic and scientific context in which your discussions are taking place;

- Second, the role of the European Institutions;
- Third, the scientific challenges - the nature of the risks and the identification of endocrine disrupting substances.
- and, of course, the nature of future EU policy.

Endocrine disruptors are increasingly recognised as a major challenge for human health and the environment. The book "Our stolen future" published in 1996 alerted the general public and politicians to their potential impacts.

Substances having endocrine disrupting properties are reported to be implicated in the dramatic drop in male fertility observed in some countries as well as with 21st century epidemics of obesity and diabetes.

Many countries in the world, including EU Member States, are taking action to restrict the use of Bisphenol A due to concerns about endocrine disruption. National measures have also been taken or proposed in relation to some phthalates or parabens for the same reason.

The OECD and the WHO are heavily engaged in promoting co-ordinated and coherent responses at a global level.

There are more and more articles in the press as well as television programmes dedicated to this subject.

And some companies have already taken the step of marketing their products as being free of certain chemicals.

Despite all this intensive activity, there is no general consensus and different opinions are expressed. Some point to the lack of conclusive evidence and argue that suspicion is not a sufficient basis for regulatory action. The financial crisis is also cited as is Industry's fatigue with regulatory activity. Some believe that now is not the time for the EU to launch a major initiative on endocrine disruptors.

My reflection on the current situation is that we have all the classical ingredients typical of an intensive and substantial debate: signals from science... increasing public and political concern and awareness... and doubts from some stakeholders.

The approach that the European Union should take dealing with endocrine disruptors is set out in some key principles in our Treaty:

- First, our policies must deliver a high level of protection for man and the environment;
- second these policies must be objective and science-based
- And third, the precautionary principle must be applied.

However one of the most urgent things to do is to get a clear understanding of the nature of the potential risks associated with endocrine disruptors. These reflections must also take account of controversial matters such as low-dose effects as well as emerging issues such as the role of endocrine disruptors in obesity, diabetes and behavioural changes.

Providing a more accurate and precise description of the nature of the risks will allow the policy makers to decide where to position this issue among competing demands for priority and resources.

It will also help the European Commission to decide where resources should be invested to address data and knowledge gaps.

Another great challenge is to identify substances that are endocrine disruptors. Many chemicals can act on the endocrine

system. But not all have a negative effect on the way the body works.

Therefore the language in European legislation should be clear and consistent. We should avoid that wordings in different pieces of legislation would lead to a situation where a substance would be identified as an endocrine disruptor under one piece of legislation but not under another.

I would argue very strongly in favour of an objective, science based approach for the identification of endocrine disruptors that could be applied across legislation.

In addition, approaches that we will develop in Europe should be consistent with the directions being taken at a global level and in particular at the OECD and WHO.

There is no doubt that we need an objective and efficient approach that helps us focus attention on how to deal with endocrine disruptors. In practice, for example, what to do with substances proven to be endocrine disruptors? I would assume that their use would need to be restricted. Do we need a dedicated programme of action focused on endocrine disruptors

or alternatively does our existing legislation already provide a satisfactory basis for action? Should the 7th Environmental Action Programme which is in preparation address it and how?

Ladies and gentlemen,

For the purposes of this conference we have pulled together high-level scientists from across the world together with national and international regulators, industry, environmental and health NGOs, representatives of consumers and the trade unions.

The conference has been designed to place the key issues on the table, to provide ample time for discussion and reflection and to provide insights into some of the key issues I have highlighted.

I am confident that the outcome of your deliberations will help the Commission to shape its future policy on Endocrine Disruptors.

I wish you much success over the next two days and I look forward to hearing about the results of your discussion very soon.