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

Commissioner Dalli visits the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

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

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It is a pleasure to visit EFSA and to meet you all so early in my mandate. This is an ideal opportunity to get to know you and learn more about the work that EFSA does.

I must say, my first impressions here have been favourable. I have met knowledgeable, professional staff, committed to our common goal of ensuring the food we eat is safe.

I appreciate the work you have done so far. EFSA has delivered over 2000 scientific opinions since its creation in 2002 – opinions on which the Commission relies to underpin its proposals for legislation. Many of these opinions relate to highly complex and sensitive issues – such as health claims, pesticides or GMOs.

Over the past 8 years, EFSA has established itself as a well-respected authority – recognised at European and international levels for the quality of its scientific work.

And now we find ourselves at a challenging, yet exciting point in time, with a new Commission and a new Treaty in place.

I am pleased that agencies are now explicitly mentioned in the Treaty. This confirms the important role they play within the framework of European governance.

EFSA is of course a key partner of the European Commission, and in particular the Commission Services for which I am responsible. And EFSA is, of course, a central scientific component of the European food safety system.

You should now have reached a phase of stabilisation regarding staffing and budget. We all face difficult budgetary constraints (less staff, less money), and we are all subject to demands to do at least the same and usually more with the same budgetary resources.

I strongly encourage you to focus on your core mission – the delivery of scientific opinions and cooperation with Member States – whilst keeping abreast of scientific developments.

EFSA and Commission have complementary, but distinct, responsibilities. That said, the partnership between us is crucial. Success for EFSA means success for the Commission, and vice-versa.

Continuous and constructive dialogue on claims, pesticides, the review of "old" additives – to give just a few examples – has proved to be essential. Our close cooperation is even more important in sensitive areas of new technologies, such as GMOs, cloning and nanotechnology.

At the same time, I fully recognise the need to ensure and respect EFSA's scientific independence, which I am aware has been the subject of criticism from some in relation to GMOs and health claims.

Even though the results of scientific assessments will not always satisfy certain interest groups – whether NGOs or businesses – EFSA must never allow its independence to be jeopardised or undermined.

Cooperation is also highly important between EFSA and Member States to promote synergies; avoid duplication of efforts; and ensure that messages to consumers are consistent and coherent.

Coherence also relies on maintaining good working partnerships with your sister agencies, such as the European Centre for Disease Control, the European Chemicals Agency and the European Medicines Agency.

Another issue I would like to raise is innovation: Europe has huge potential for innovation. It holds the key to the development of the cutting edge products and services of tomorrow.

In areas such as food technologies, agriculture and veterinary science, opportunities have to be considered and balanced against any risks they may present.

Take nanotechnology, for example, which will affect many aspects of our lives. In the food sector, it will affect a wide range of areas – from food and feed additives, to packaging materials, to pesticides. It is therefore essential that most rigorous risk assessments are carried out in the interest of the consumer and the results communicated effectively and responsibly to the public.

Good science, to which you all contribute, is essential to establish the future role of these technologies in the food sector.

Before I close, let me repeat that I am fully aware of the fact that we face the common challenge of a heavy workload despite notable constraints on resources.

I am confident, however, that you can overcome these constraints and meet the challenges that lie ahead with a spirit of professionalism and commitment.

I hope that next time I visit EFSA, you will be in the new building. I very much hope this will be finished next year and that you will enjoy working in this new environment.

So – to conclude, thank you for the work you have achieved so far, and for the support you give to the Commission. I hope and expect we can count on your continued support, commitment and professionalism.

I look forward to working with you in the years ahead towards the constant and shared objective of protecting and promoting the health of European consumers.

Thank you.