

"The Single Market is our joint project"

Speech by Commissioner Elżbieta Bieńkowska

**Presentation of the Single Market Strategy to the Internal Market and
Consumer Protection Committee of the European Parliament (IMCO)**

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Introduction

Madam Chair, honourable members,

Thank you very much for inviting me here today.

I promised to keep you informed of our work on a regular basis.

So it was important to me that we have an early exchange of views on the Single Market Strategy.

It will be the core of our work over the next few years.

I know your work has already started with your report led by Ms Comi (EPP/IT).

I look forward to fruitful discussions.

Let me begin by explaining what has driven our work.

Everyone in this room is committed to more jobs and more growth in Europe.

We are pursuing that goal through a series of initiatives:

- The European Investment Plan...
- The Digital Single Market strategy...
- The Capital Markets Union proposals...
- Well you know the full list!

So we have designed a Single Market Strategy that builds on these.

We began by listening to the expectations of Europeans about what the Single Market represents for them today, and what must be improved.

We listened to consumers, professionals, entrepreneurs, businesses of all sizes.

They told us that in many ways they are already benefiting from a Single Market.

Many of the rules are working and serving their purpose.

Europe has already succeeded in abolishing or reducing many obstacles.

But they asked for us to do more.

To create more opportunities.

To reduce the large number of obstacles that still remain.

To put in place a framework that supports them as they innovate, modernise and grow.

And to make sure that the Single Market works on the ground.

That it really delivers.

The message sent by Europeans in last year's elections was that EU action needs to be bold, but better targeted.

This has been repeated many times by President Juncker and First Vice-President Timmermans.

So we have designed a Single Market Strategy that is an upgrade, not a total rethink.

We want to upgrade the situation of people and businesses in all Member States.

And it is targeted.

In the Commission we are applying what I could call a "necessity test".

I know that this Committee shares that approach.

This does not mean a large number of new pieces of legislation.

It means recognising existing successes and making targeted and proportionate improvements.

And doing so promptly.

That is our starting point.

So the Single Market Strategy consists of a set of 22 targeted actions, to be delivered between now and 2018.

Those actions are aimed at:

- Creating those new opportunities;
- Putting in place a modern framework;
- And above all, at delivery. That is my top priority.

I - Creating more opportunities

Let me start with the opportunities.

Opportunities for consumers who want to buy services and products wherever they want in the EU.

Consumers who cannot accept that their choice should be limited by online or offline restrictions, when they live in a supposedly integrated economic area.

And who can no longer tolerate that companies segment the markets and charge higher prices in different Member States.

I am one of those consumers!

I have a simple message for businesses who do this.

You cannot have a Single Market when it suits you, and a Segmented Market when it doesn't.

And don't waste your time arguing for it!

So in the coming months, we will continue to identify and ban specific forms of residence-based discrimination.

As I indicated to you in plenary last month, this will lead to a legislative proposal by the middle of next year to clarify the provisions of Article 20 of the Services Directive.

Our proposal will also make it easier for consumers to spot and report discrimination, and it will improve enforcement by national authorities.

We also want more opportunities for professionals, who want easier requirements and procedures to operate in another Member State.

Where there are Member States or professions with outdated regulations, we are going to issue public guidance on how they should reform.

And we will provide Member States with a framework to help them review existing regulations and decide whether they need new ones.

All this will be developed on the basis of the new provisions of the Professional Qualifications Directive, and the ongoing Mutual Evaluation exercise on regulated professions.

And we want businesses of all sizes to have more opportunities.

We made real progress with the Services Directive.

But we can do more to remove regulations and simplify life for business.

This is why next year I will propose a new electronic 'services passport'.

Businesses will be able to go online and submit all the information needed to allow them to operate in other Member States.

We also want to address the retail sector, worth over thirteen percent of European employment.

Retailers still face too many limits on where they can set up their business and too many restrictions on how they operate.

That is bad for consumers. It means higher prices, less choice, less convenience.

So we will set out best practices.

And we will monitor closely how Member States implement them.

And we can make it easier for our start-ups and innovators.

That is why I will launch a European Initiative for start-ups, to help them deal with the whole range of requirements to set up such a business.

I will also table a legislative proposal next year on business insolvency, to address the issue of failure and give entrepreneurs a second chance.

This will build on all the existing programmes to facilitate access to finance for SMEs, including the COSME programme and the European Funds for Structural Investments.

As part of our work on innovation, we are going to develop a European agenda for the collaborative economy.

We will provide clear guidance on how existing EU law applies, before seeing whether we need to adopt legislation.

II - Modernisation and innovation

Next, we need to put in place a modern framework for standards, procurement procedures and intellectual property.

First, we need an upgraded standards system that delivers quality, timely and market-driven standards.

So we will propose a joint initiative on standardisation to ensure the most effective partnership possible between the Commission, standard setters, and the industry.

We should lead the world in this area, not follow.

And we will tap the potential of service standards.

This will help our service providers and those offering services with their products.

I know that you want to be sure that standards will only be developed where they are needed and where there is real demand.

So to ensure that, next year we will release clear guidance on their prioritisation, development and use.

Second, we need to make sure that the provisions of the new Public Procurement directives are clear enough and work.

We will continue working on faster and more transparent procurement procedures based on better data.

We will launch a number of initiatives between 2017 and 2018.

Third, a few words on the Intellectual Property framework.

As we support innovation, we need a system that makes it easier for our SMEs to protect their creativity.

So we will come forward with a range of initiatives to make this happen, and enforce the existing rules.

III - Delivery

But it is not enough to come forward with new initiatives: we need to ensure delivery.

And that will be my real focus.

First, we need to make sure that existing rules work.

I very much welcome the Scrutiny exercise that is now taking place on a regular basis in your committee.

This allows for frank and direct exchanges with my services on specific pieces of legislation.

And we need to do more to create a culture of compliance in Member States.

We all know the political and sometimes technical challenges to enforcement and application by national authorities.

So we have to work with them from the start to the finish.

And we have to take a smart approach to enforcement, taking a targeted approach.

You can help with that by keeping enforcement high on the agenda of Member States.

But we also need to be able to access specific information from companies to help us enforce and spot weaknesses.

So we are proposing a new Market Information Tool.

And we need to make the Services Directive and goods Directives work in practice.

That means improving the Services Directive notification procedure.

It means making mutual recognition really work and making sure that companies know their rights.

And it means improving our market surveillance against non-compliant products.

We have recently been clearly reminded of how important this is.

And we need to continue to use the European Semester exercise.

Conclusion

Madam Chair, Honourable Members,

It is stating the obvious to say that these are difficult times for the EU.

There are many who are questioning the European project, including some in this Assembly.

There are those who want to walk away from the principles of the Single Market.

To give preferential treatment to particular companies or particular customers.

And there are those who question whether the Single Market delivers at all.

I don't agree with them.

I am passionate for the Single Market.

It is one of Europe's great achievements.

And my passion has become stronger over the last year because I have heard from so many businesses, professionals, entrepreneurs and consumers who benefit.

The Single Market can do more for those people.

And with the Strategy that I have outlined, it will.

But the only way that it will is if we have collective support, from you, from the Member States and from other stakeholders.

That is why alongside the Single Market Strategy, I want to continue the dialogue with all interested parties inside the Single Market Forum which you know well.

After the success of the last few years, a new series of 20 events will be organised across the EU, between now and June next year.

The aim is to engage stakeholders on the ground to inform and reflect on improvements to existing rules.

The final concluding conference is planned next year on June 13th in the Netherlands, during the Dutch Presidency.

I look forward to you actively taking part, as you have in the past.

Thank you.