Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Commission in June this year launched a new European strategy for Environment and Health, which focuses specially on children.

This “Environment and Health Strategy” was presented jointly by the Commissioner for Health, David Byrne, by the Commissioner for Research, Philippe Busquin, and by myself, in my capacity as Commissioner for Environment. 

The ultimate objectives of this strategy are to reduce the burden of disease caused by environmental factors in the EU - including the new member countries as of next year. We need to identify and to prevent new health threats caused by environmental factors and to strengthen the EU's capacity for policy-making in this area.

We refer to the strategy as the “SCALE Initiative”. We need to scale up our actions and efforts to protect our children and ourselves from environmental risk factors. But SCALE is also an acronym, and each letter stands for one of its elements:

- **S** for **Science**, indicates that the strategy will be science-based.
- **C** stands for **Children**, since we want to focus on this particularly vulnerable section of society. In Europe, there are 157 million children, most of them living in urban areas, where - to take just one example - air pollution is particularly bad.
- **A** stands for **Awareness**: We need to raise the awareness of citizens - they have the right to be informed about environmental risk factors that may affect their own health and the health of their own children. This is particularly important as we know that environmental dangers are a great worry to European citizens. In a recent Eurobarometer survey, some 89% of the respondents expressed concern about the potential impact of the environment on their health.
- **L** stands for **Legislation**, since full use will be made of the advantages that European legislation offers to complement national and international initiatives.

Finally, **E** stands for **Evaluation**, since all actions taken within this strategy will be evaluated continuously, with the twofold purpose of verifying their effectiveness in reducing environmental-related health problems and enabling us to address new ones as they emerge.

With SCALE we are taking a long-term view. It is ambitious, and it will take time before it starts producing results - but these results will be essential to help us achieve our aim of protecting the health of this and future generations.

The European Environment and Health Strategy will be implemented in cycles, initially focusing on four priority/diseases linked to environmental factors such as indoor and outdoor air quality, electromagnetic fields and the urban environment.

Immediately we shall be launching pilot actions to examine the effects of these environmental factors. We intend to establish indicators and bio-monitoring systems that will help us better understand where, how and why they affect humans and particularly children. For example, we
want to monitor the health of 100,000 children in different cities across Europe over an extended period of time and relate their health conditions to the environmental situation in these cities.

From the outset, the strategy will be developed for the enlarged EU, since there are many regional differences related to environmental health problems.

In Poland (and the other nine accession countries) accession to the EU will already help bring significant health improvements. EU environmental legislation has always been health-driven, and full implementation of the environmental "acquis" will result in cleaner air, purer water and better waste management.

For example, full implementation of the EU Directives on air quality will lead to at least 15,000 fewer premature deaths from exposure to air pollution and to between 43,000 and 180,000 fewer cases of chronic bronchitis.

So how will the strategy actually be developed? The Commission - together with stakeholders - will draft a detailed action plan for the period 2004-2010. This action plan will be presented next spring, and it will be our major input for the Fourth Pan-European Environment and Health Ministerial Conference in Budapest in June 2004.

To come up with a good action plan, we depend on the full participation of all the stakeholders in the field of environment and health: the medical and research communities, professional associations, business, NGOs, local and regional authorities, EU Member States, the Accession Countries, European Institutions and international organisations.

The conference here in Poland today is an excellent opportunity to closely involve stakeholders from the Baltic region. It will allow the Commission to discuss the complex issue of environment and health with local and regional networks and authorities in those countries, and to take their specific problems into account. It is the first regional conference of three that will take place in the coming ten days – the other two conferences will be held in Brussels and Rome.