

PRESIDENTIAL TROIKA OF COSAC, DUBLIN 24 JUNE 2013

VICE-PRESIDENT VIVIANE REDING VIDEO RECORDING

Mr Chairman,

Honourable Members of the Parliaments,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very sorry for not being able to attend the meeting and convey to you personally my greetings and the greetings of the European Commission. I am however grateful to Chairman Dominic Hannigan for hosting COSAC in Dublin and for the debate with national Parliaments on the Future of Europe.

Europe is at a defining moment. The European Union has taken concrete steps to firmly reinforce the Single Market. The European Union is also building a structure to secure the stability of the common currency of the European Union – the Euro – which is a strong currency and the world's second most important currency making up 25% of the world's foreign exchange reserves. We have also taken bold steps to improve the joint governance of our economies – as economic decisions taken in one Member State affect its neighbours and the whole Union. The simple truth is that our economies are not islands.

We must remain firm in our efforts. Within the next months and years further decisions must be taken. In my view these changes are impossible without a European debate about democracy, legitimacy and the future of Europe.

Integration and legitimacy must advance in parallel. More democracy is the corollary of greater institutional integration – which the European Union needs to stand up to current global challenges and provide the best outlook to its more than 500 million citizens.

To that end we need to be convincing in explaining this to the citizens of Europe. And to we need to make sure that their voice is heard and truly counts.

Business as usual is simply not an option.

It is also not an option because we operate in a new environment. The Lisbon Treaty has given a clear and concrete role to national Parliaments as well as enhanced the role of the European Parliament as political actors. The national Parliaments play specific roles in reviewing the compliance of Commission proposals with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The European Council meetings and the European Semester of economic coordination also have the effect of confronting national Parliaments with decisions taken at the EU level, forcing them to be involved early on in the policy-making cycle.

As for the European Parliament it now decides on the vast majority of EU legislation and has power over the entire EU budget on an equal footing with the Council of Ministers (representing the governments of the Member States). The Treaty also gives additional responsibility to the European Parliament as representatives of the Union's citizens: it elects the President of the Commission on the basis of a proposal by the European Council taking into account the results of the European elections. In short: the next Commission has to reflect the outcome of the 2014 European Parliament elections as it will be the first under the new Lisbon rules.

The 2014 elections should therefore be about European issues – about European choices and programmes – and not a referendum on local or national matters.

Excellencies, Colleagues,

Europe is at a defining moment. We are moving from crisis management to democratic, transparent and efficient decision-making. If we want to preserve and strengthen Europe's position as the biggest economy of the world and the most convincing peace project, I am absolutely convinced that we need to further build our Union based on a strong vision.

Upon mature reflection I think that the term 'United States of Europe' would best reflect the ultimate destination of the European Union. United States of Europe – the plural is a clear expression of the fact that we are not aiming at a unitary state or a super state, but at a federal entity, in which individual states agree to a new kind of association and where the diversity and individuality of each state is consciously preserved.

But also "United States of Europe" – which makes it clear that although we are aiming for a federal constitution similar to the one of the United States of America, we intend to do so in the specific context of European history, of our values, and of the unique diversity of our continent. Yes, one day, perhaps, we should have a directly elected President of the European Commission, in order to ensure that powers and competences at European level go hand in hand with stronger democratic legitimacy and accountability.

The European Year of Citizens 2013 is a unique opportunity to have a debate with citizens on the different possible visions for the future of

Europe, the one which I personally stand for, and other possible developments. It would be good if you – the Chairs of the European Affairs Committees of the national Parliaments – could hold debates on European matters with the citizens in your countries. I have done this in many countries across the Union. It is important to listen to the citizens, to respond to their concerns, their fears and their dreams. It is essential to make them understand that their voice counts and that their elected representatives care.

I hope you accept the challenge and I look forward to hearing from you about your experiences with the citizens in your constituencies.

I wish you a very productive discussion on the future of Europe and I hope that, together, we can show the way for a common shared space where more than 500 million citizens feel at home.

Thank you.