

# **20TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER GALA OF THE GLOBAL TELECOM WOMEN'S NETWORK**

**Viviane Reding**

**Vice-President of the European Commission, EU Justice  
Commissioner**

**Barcelona, Monday 27/02/2012**

It is a privilege and a pleasure to join you at this very special Gala Dinner, a dinner which celebrates the power of female networking, a dinner which brings together so many examples and role models who have shown that – over the last two decades – women are very capable to lead in the still male-dominated world of technology.

Thank you for the inspiration, thank you for demonstrating – again and again – that for talented women with vision and the capacity for action, there is no top and that no glass-ceiling resists. Thank you for leading and being an example to follow.

This year, the Global Telecom Women's Network celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. 20 years ago the world was a bit different – Michael Jackson was singing "Remember the time". In 1992, Willy Brandt, one of the architects of the Federal Germany Republic reconciliation, had died at the age of 78.

The cold war was really has Presidents Bush and Yeltsin agreed to cut nuclear arsenals; South Africa proclaims the end of white minority rule; the Internal Market of the European Union is put in place and creating the foundations for what is today the biggest economy in the world; Madonna sang "this used to be my playground" and on their very special telco-playground, women pioneers put in place their global network!

In 1992 the telco-industry used to be a very regulated environment. It has, since then, shaped our freedom thanks to cloud computing, broadband and wireless logistics. It has allowed us not only to move in the 500 million citizens' European market, but to be part of the 2 billion internet users "global village".

A marvellous opportunity for mankind; you were part in creating this freedom. Thank you and congratulations.

20 years later, we have to preserve this freedom. To those who want to block the internet (for reasons of political powers, mainly), I tell you with force and dedication: Europe will not allow any blocking of the internet, for whatever reasons you may invoke.

I tell you with the same force and dedication: Europe will also ensure that the right of the individual to his own personal data is guaranteed.

In order to achieve this, I presented in January a legislative package to eliminate the remaining walls in the internal market, freeing-up a golden opportunity for fast-moving industries on our continent and at the same time increases consumer's trust in the way their personal data are handled. If it is good for consumers, it is good for business.

You, Telco Ladies, have been the ice-breakers 20 years ago. I have learnt so much from you. If you know what to do, just get it done! In order to get it done, count on me!

Tonight we celebrate the power of women networking. The Global Telecom Women's Network is a good example of what can be achieved when women network. You have proven that women and Telecoms can go hand in hand and that together women and men are a winning team to drive progress and growth. You have shown that having women on board really makes a difference.

You have shown that gender equality in decision-making makes good sense. First, the economy: women account for 60% of university graduates. They are the untapped potential that is needed to improve Europe's competitiveness. Second, there is a clear business case for more women on boards.

A number of studies show the link between a higher number of women in senior positions and companies' financial performance. Women in top management really mean

business. One year ago, this fact was challenged, it is not anymore. One year ago, many companies were saying that it was impossible to find women for top jobs, that is no longer the case today.

Both the mentality and the rhetoric seem to change but what about the facts and figures?

A year ago, I challenged publicly listed companies in the European Union to voluntarily increase the number of women on their boards. I asked CEOs to sign the "Women on the Board Pledge for Europe". Under the pledge, women's presence on corporate boards would rise to 30% in 2015 and 40% in 2020.

Next week, I will present new figures for the EU revealing what progress – or lack of progress – has been made. We will then, all together, decide what action a European level is needed to close the gender gap on Europe's boards.

Ladies and gentleman,

The Global Telecoms Women Network is the living proof that women can thrive at the very top of corporate life, in a globally vital and profitable industry.

You have proven that women and telecoms go hand in hand, and that together you can drive economic growth.

We must now help women to do the same in other areas of our economies. We must help others to overcoming the challenges and through the power of networking create a truly equal level playing field enabling more women to reach the top level of decision making.

The talent is available, let us help to flourish, thank you for your example and inspiration.

Happy anniversary!