

## **COMMISSIONER BIEŃKOWSKA'S INTERVIEW FOR EUROSKOP WRITTEN ANSWERS**

- 1. Dear Commissioner Bieńkowska, in 2014, you were assigned a broad portfolio covering internal market, industry, entrepreneurship and SMEs. What do you consider as the greatest achievements in these respective areas and what persisting challenges will have to be dealt with by your successor?**

Indeed. Five years ago, I was entrusted a very important portfolio, which already then combined the Internal Market and Industry as two important and inherently interlinked areas of the Commission's work. During the past five years, we worked hard on strengthening the rules of the internal market in a way that really makes it easier for companies to do business across Europe and sell their products across borders. I think we achieved a lot during this time. Most importantly, I think we made important steps in making sure our internal market rules apply online; and at the same time help our industry become cleaner and more sustainable. I'm thinking for example about the follow-up of the Dieselgate affair. In the past years, we worked very closely with the national regulators and the car industry not only to make sure that we have and implement stricter emissions rules, but more generally, to prepare everyone for a transition to cleaner cars but also to more connected mobility of the future. Issues like digitisation and climate change are of course challenges that will only become more and more relevant in the years to come. But I believe we started important work in this area that set the direction of where we need to go.

I also have to mention of the groundbreaking achievements we made in the area of European Defence and Space Policy. I say groundbreaking because it's the first time in European history, that the EU is able to help Member States develop common defence equipment. To be clear – the EU is not actually buying anything, but what we have started to do is to help Member States pull their money together and with this, avoid duplications and inefficiencies in defence spending. And in the area of space, we've proposed to create an EU space programme for the first time, bring all EU activities in the area of space under one umbrella. These are really historic achievements, and I am very proud to have been a part of these efforts.

- 2. At the moment of its creation, Juncker commission declared to be "political" with reference to the changes of the working processes and structure of the college of commissioners. How this shift facilitated the work of the Commission and can it pave the way to even greater political actorness of the EC?**

The idea behind the more political commission is really to improve and show the Commission's political responsibility. Many people speak about the grey bureaucrats in Brussels, and the lack of the Commission's accountability. Making this Commission more political has been a way to assert that the Commission is an active political player, with own ideas and proposals which we, as its representatives, need to defend before the other EU institutions - the European Parliament and Member States in the Council, but importantly, also before the European citizens. So it's about improving the Commission's accountability for the decisions we take on an everyday basis.

In practice, it was important that we organised our work around 10 clear political priorities, which helped to provide clarity about our key objectives. Working in project teams also helped in ensuring that in the end, all Commissioners took responsibility for the decisions taken and helped to explain and defend these decisions to the broader public.

I could give you many examples where this Commission has shown its courage in presenting proposals that were not always popular, including with Member States. But we presented what we believed was right, for Europe, its citizens and our common future.

**3. Space research and industry is an area where one can observe particularly dynamic progress. What innovative, EU-wide projects have been launched and developed during your term in office and what are the future ambitions of the Commission in this area?**

As mentioned earlier, space is really one of the areas where we have made very important progress in the last years, and that holds even more potential for the future. For example, in 2016, we made it possible for Galileo, the EU's own satellite navigation system, to become operational and to start providing initial services. Today, Galileo is already the most accurate global satellite navigation system available, and we will improve its services even more once the full satellite constellation is completed. Just recently in September, we celebrated another important achievement – the fact that we now have over 1 billion Galileo users worldwide, and probably more. This is a huge achievement for Europe, especially given it was achieved in less than 3 years since the start of Galileo operations!

And space will become more and more important for the future. Europe already has a large, world-class space industry, and space-related services already support almost 9% of our total economy. It's crucial for Europe to maintain and promote our leadership in space. To help us do that, we have in this mandate proposed to set up, for the first time, a new dedicated EU Space Programme for the next budget period. This will bring all existing space activities under one umbrella and increase funding for space-related actions to help us pursue our strategic interests and ensure Europe's autonomy in space.

**4. An issue that also partially concerns your portfolio is an European defence industry that has to face the strong national defence industry lobby, leading to insufficient levels of joint military procurement and acquisitions. What improvements have been achieved in overcoming this gridlock and can the new European defence and security initiatives (EDF, PESCO) make a real difference?**

Yes, it's true that the lack of cooperation between Member States in the field of security and defence is estimated to cost between €25 billion and €100 billion every year. Around 80% of defence procurement is run on a purely national basis, leading to a costly duplication of military capabilities. That is why in the last years we made a huge effort to improve this situation. The European Union cannot substitute Member States' efforts in defence, but it can encourage their collaboration in developing and acquiring the technologies and equipment needed to address common security and defence challenges. And this is exactly what we did.

In 2016 we presented a vision for the development of common defence actions in Europe through the European Defence Action Plan. We also launched the first pilot programmes for defence research and capability development for 2017-19, which are already yielding results. This is the first time in European history that the EU is started supporting European defence cooperation with €590 million in European funding.

We also proposed to set up of a fully-fledged €13 billion European Defence Fund for the years 2021-2027 to finance defence research and industrial development in Europe under the new budget. The European Parliament and Council reached a political agreement on its set up in April 2019 and we are now waiting for its formal adoption.

- 5. European internal market creates a playing field not only for large companies, but also for start-ups and SMEs. You have been also serving as an “EU SME Envoy”. How the dialogue between EU, national administrations and SME business community has been working and has it already yielded tangible outcomes?**

SMEs are a key part of our economy – they represent 99% of all European businesses. So that’s why a key part of our work is to create conditions to help them thrive, innovate and expand across borders. During my time as Commissioner, we have done a lot to support SMEs in Europe, by creating a supportive regulatory environment, especially through our Start-up and Scale-up initiative. At the same time, we have done much to facilitate SME’s access to finance through the COSME programme, and put SMEs at the heart of the VentureEU and Single Market Programme, which will provide increased funding opportunities in the next budgetary period.

The SME Envoy network has been an important part of these efforts, offering a forum where we regularly meet with national policy makers and business organisations to make sure that SMEs related topics receive due attention. The forum gives unique insight into the needs of entrepreneurs across the Single Market, beyond national or particular interests. We exchange good practices and formulate new initiatives, which are important in view of future EU policies. For instance, the network adopted a comprehensive action plan with concrete measures to support SMEs in 2017 and recently called for a new comprehensive and forward looking SME policy for the coming mandate. So, there is no doubt that SMEs will remain a key focus area under the new Commission and in the years to come.