Minister of State for European Affairs
Lucinda Creighton TD

Address to the Deutsche Bank’s 14th Annual Women in European Business Conference

“The Quest for Growth – Competition vs. Coalition”

Frankfurt, Germany

March 20, 2013

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you for your kind words of welcome. And of course to Deutsche Bank who have organised this conference today.

I am delighted and honoured to address you.

This is an important moment – a vital moment - as we work to encourage a debate about what it means to be part of the European Union and what we want the future of that Union to be.

If the EU can create the conditions for sustainable growth and jobs then European citizens will once again be able to say that Europe is working for them.

Unfortunately, since the onset of the crisis, it is just not clear to people who the EU is serving. Is it the markets? Is it the banks? Or is it the people? Of course there can only be one answer and we must ensure it is the people.
Bringing 27 Member States together to take common decisions on key issues such as economic policy, energy policy, foreign relations and so on is not easy. This is a reflection of the immense task of trying to broker agreement among so many countries.

Compromise is tough, however it bears fruit. In this increasingly globalised world, we need each other.

Alone we cannot hope to compete with emerging economies. Together we can realign and reshape our European economy, so that European citizens can continue to enjoy a decent standard of living and, most importantly, future generations can continue to prosper.

This is not just an aspiration of mine. I consider it to be the absolute moral duty of governments and our counterparts in positions of authority all over the European Union.

It is worth remembering the words of Winston Churchill speaking in Zurich in 1946 where he described the tragedy of a broken continent: “over wide areas a vast quivering mass of tormented, hungry, care-worn and bewildered human beings gape at the ruins of their cities and homes, and scan the dark horizons for the approach of some new peril, tyranny or terror.”
The dark horizon before us today is the possibility of a failed EU. We have come so far that it is imperative we use the current momentum of change to create a European Union we are all proud to be citizens of.

How do we reshape our European Union, and thereby our countries, to meet and measure up to the unstoppable force that is the emerging economies? How do we create a European Union and a currency union, that is robust, that can take decisions fast, that is competitive, that sets standards for the rest of the world and that caters to the economic and social needs of its citizens?

That is a burning question, and one which can only be partly answered by the creation of a Fiscal Union. We need a more ambitious and comprehensive solution than that. We need a competitive federal Europe.

What does federalism mean? Federalism is a very pure and transparent form of democracy. It means adhering to principles guided by a commitment to governing at the level closest to the people. It means decision making at the most appropriate level. It is based on a transparent social contract entered into by States.

If the economic crisis has taught us anything it is that the system we have, while improving, is too slow and too difficult to cope with the fast moving pace of our globalised world.
A European federation of nation states, one which is built on the basis of the diversity of its members, could provide a vehicle for Member States to assert their economic sovereignty in the global economy by being part of a dynamic, flexible economic and social entity.

It would enable the EU to efficiently address some of the shortcomings in the currency union and the single market. Crucially it would also equip us with the tools to prevent a looming social disaster which is currently fuelled by unacceptable levels of unemployment and, in some cases, utter disenchantment among citizens. Many of the changes we need are currently either impossible, or will take too long to achieve. Time is not on our side.

We complain that 'Europe' has failed to act swiftly to deal with the crisis. But we have to face the fact that we have not empowered Europe or our European Leaders to take action.

In Ireland we have seen how swift decision-making and strengthened governance can work.

Having a strategy for growth and job creation is central to our own progress, and we firmly believe that the same logic applies for Europe.
Ireland’s economy has returned to growth driven by rising exports and enhanced competitiveness. We are steadily reducing our public deficit, and are on track to meet our target deficit (of less than 3 percent) by 2015. We have recapitalised our banks on time and below the expected cost. We have become the first EU/IMF programme country in the eurozone to make a return to the sovereign bond markets, and we are working with our partners to make sure this difficult task is sustained.

This has been our path back to stability and recovery, and it is Europe's path too. By making decisions and implementing them, restoring our competitiveness, strengthening governance and investing in growth and job-creation we can revive Europe's economy.

As noted by Christine Lagarde during her visit to Ireland this month, what is required now is a comprehensive package which ensures that once the crisis is over Europe is solid and has the tools available to prosper.

Of course, the Irish economy does not operate in a vacuum – it is deeply embedded within the European Union, especially the Eurozone.

Europe’s destiny is Ireland’s destiny. We see our role throughout our EU Presidency as an opportunity to help bring member states together around common goals in order to establish the right conditions for a sustained recovery.
The first issue to tackle is to make the year 2013 a jobs and a growth year. That should help strengthen economic resilience and lay the groundwork for economic dynamism.

The Eurozone is ever-evolving towards greater integration. We have a single market and a single currency, however what is required more than ever is more comprehensive supervision of banks and greater fiscal integration.

This is now happening.

As stated by Commission Vice President Oli Rehn on the trilogue agreement on the Two-Pack, this month saw a breakthrough being reached that will allow a further significant strengthening of economic governance in the euro area.

Since the commencement of the Irish Presidency we have constructively cooperated with the European Parliament to successfully resolve the last outstanding issues. This agreement on the Two-Pack paves the way for the completion of the legislative process which should mean that these two key Regulations can enter into force in the next few weeks.

What does this mean for business in Europe? This will go towards establishing a genuine and ambitious EMU. The rebuilding and reinforcement of our economic and monetary union is underway.
Economic stability will provide the foundation for recovery and a return to growth. One of our key priorities is the effective implementation of the European Semester process to ensure that Member States take the necessary reforms and actions to meet the Europe 2020 targets for smart and sustainable economic growth. The Lisbon Strategy was a failure. The Europe 2020 strategy cannot be allowed to fail.

The need to support jobs and growth was also a major factor in the February European Council discussion of the Union’s Multiannual Financial Framework, the MFF. Furthermore, a new Employment initiative has been agreed, which includes a new dedicated youth unemployment line of €6 billion.

There is now a desire to move beyond simply reactively fighting the effects of the crisis, towards creating the conditions for economic stability, recovery and employment creation in Europe.

Rarely have Presidency priorities been so closely aligned with not just Irish, but many other Member State’s national priorities. That is, providing stability, recovery, skills and education and above all jobs.

Europe needs a new vision for growth, focused on achieving inclusive and sustainable prosperity. What is required is for the state to create a climate that is not only competitive but also conducive to fairness and inclusion. This means an active effort by the state, business and civil society to level the playing field for everyone, regardless of gender, age and race.
The under-utilisation of the skills of highly qualified women’s constitutes a loss of economic growth potential. Fully mobilising all available human resources will be a key element to addressing the EU's demographic challenges, competing successfully in a globalised economy and ensuring a comparative advantage vis-à-vis countries outside the EU.

The EU is in continuous dialogue with its member countries on how to achieve stability and growth. Women's labour force participation is one part of this equation -- all the more so at a time when many countries are struggling with the fiscal impact of aging populations and high public debts.

More women work in Europe than ever before: their employment rate has exceeded 60% and the EU is making more use of their talent and better use of their skills.

The proportion of women taking positions on corporate boards in the European Union is rising at the fastest pace in a decade as a push for laws on gender balance gains momentum.

Companies are finally starting to understand that if they want to remain competitive in an aging society they cannot afford to ignore female talent. The Irish Presidency is acutely aware that any holistic and meaningful approach to improving the growth of the EU’s economy requires the full mobilisation of
our workforce, including women. In this regard, an Expert Conference on the Economic Engagement of Women will be held in Dublin in April 2013.

What is really important I believe is that we never accept that there is a norm to the way business or politics is conducted. Progression and advancement will not fall into our laps. We have to seek it. I think each of you have clearly demonstrated that.

Let me end therefore on recognition. Let me publically recognise that you are being innovative in each part of your lives. You too should recognise what you have achieved, take pride in it and make sure other people understand how special your work is and what has been achieved.

Deutche Bank’s 14th Women in European Business Conference has been a truly inspiring event for me. National and European policy-makers do not make decisions alone, therefore I am happy to bring back some food for thought from this conference in order to progress our shared determination toward a shared destiny.

Thank you.

ENDS