



Future of Europe

Reding shares vision for "United States of Europe"

By Brian Beary in Washington | Monday 08 April 2013

"We must embark on the road to a United States of Europe," Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding urged, speaking at an event organised by European Institute in Washington, on 5 April. The European Commission vice-president outlined changes to the EU's institutional setup that she wanted to see to transform the Union into a federal state. The third-term commissioner said that from 2014, all EU commissioners should be elected to the European Parliament first before being appointed to the Commission. She said that the Commission president should be directly elected, although this should happen "not this time, but next time". Asked by *Europolitics* if she wanted to be the next Commission president (she has been touted as a potential successor to José Manuel Barroso), Reding replied "this is not on my agenda". Although inspired by the US constitutional model, Reding stressed that the federal Europe should differ in some areas, notably by banning the death penalty, having stronger data privacy protections, maintaining linguistic diversity ("we are not going to be a melting pot") and by being a "social market economy" and not a "liberal market economy".

Having taken part in various town hall meetings as part of the 'Year of the citizen' initiative, she claimed that "citizens want more Europe, citizens want more centralised decisions" but they also want "more say". Thus, the 2014 European Parliament elections "will be different". European political parties should say which candidate they supported for Commission president, national parties should say in advance which European party they will affiliate with, and the elections should take place the same day across the EU, she said. Asked by Bulgaria's Ambassador to the US, Elena Poptodorova, how a sense of common interest could be forged among Europeans, Reding said "if you have a federation, you have a national interest". She argued that smaller countries would retain a strong say under a federal system and would not be dominated by the bigger states. Referring to the United Kingdom's long-standing doubts about involving itself in EU integration, she said "the only error you can make in this system is to put yourself out of the system".

ACTION ON HUNGARY PROMISED

Turning to her fundamental rights portfolio, the commissioner said "I become very nervous when I see that in some of our member states, the independence of the judiciary is not guaranteed". Asked what the Commission would do in response to the recent changes that Hungary has made to its constitution - changes that have been heavily criticised by human rights and pro-democracy watchdogs - she said "it will probably be on the agenda" of the Commission in the coming week. The Commission had almost finished its analysis of Hungary's constitutional changes, she said. Reding also lamented that "we do not have an intermediate way to act" beyond deploying the "atomic weapon" of Article 7 of the EU Treaty, which would see Hungary's voting rights in the Council suspended. The treaty would need to be changed to let the Commission make more general reviews of the human rights and democracy implications of changes to national constitutions, she said.

EU-US data privacy pact talks

While in Washington, Reding held talks with US Attorney General Eric Holder on the draft umbrella EU-US agreement on data protection principles for data-sharing between law enforcement agencies. Asked if the US was genuinely interested in concluding this accord, talks on which have been going on since early 2011, Reding claimed "we have been negotiating really hard for two years". Only a few issues remained unresolved, she said, including EU citizens' right to judicial redress when they feel their personal data has been misused by the US. Concluding this agreement was essential, she argued, as otherwise the sectoral EU-US agreements on data-sharing will continue to "provoke huge debates," especially in the European Parliament.

<http://www.europolitics.info/europolitics/reding-shares-vision-for-united-states-of-europe-art350025-46.html>