Viviane Reding on her action in the field of the information society and media (2004-2010)
Interview by Elena Danescu

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ABSTRACT
The following pages are taken from a long interview (more than eight hours of footage in total) that Viviane Reding granted us in 2015 in connection with the “Pierre Werner and Europe” research project. Drawing on more than 40 years’ experience in politics, Viviane Reding spoke about her career, the role of Luxembourg and Luxembourgers in the European integration process, and various key events in which she played a part. In these extracts, she discusses her role as a member of the first and second Barroso Commissions (2004-2009 and 2010-2014) and her efforts to help build an information and knowledge society in Europe, one that serves citizens and protects their rights and fundamental freedoms. Her achievements in this respect include capping mobile phone roaming charges (they were subsequently abolished in 2017), advocating for the introduction of a single emergency number (112) in all EU countries, launching the Europeana digital library, and spearheading a programme to use technological innovation for climate and energy solutions. She also describes the process of developing a Digital Agenda for Europe to improve the continent’s digital competitiveness compared with the United States, China and Japan – a complex and challenging task given the context of globalisation and the divergent interests of the various stakeholders (research, industry, consumers, etc.). Finally, she mentions the reform of personal data protection that she initiated (leading to the GDPR, adopted in April 2016).

“If we think small, we stay small”
Viviane Reding, Interview, 3rd session, Luxembourg, 4 December 2015

In the early 1950s, the historiography of European integration adopted the phrase “fathers of Europe” – most probably by analogy with the Founding Fathers of the United States, who signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776 (Bossuat, 2001). But what role have women played in the European project? In the decades from the
1950s to the 1970s, leadership in Europe was predominantly male, since women were involved only rarely in politics in the six Member States. Even if we can identify some women who contributed to the beginnings of the European project alongside the founders, they did not play a decisive role. The journalist, feminist and Europeanist Louise Weiss (1893-1983) was a leading light in her era, but she was not involved politically in the European integration process.

The situation changed at the dawn of the 1980s, when women began to take on leadership roles in European politics. In 1979, French politician Simone Veil (1927-2017) was elected as President of the first European Parliament formed following direct universal suffrage – many of whose members were also women. That same year, Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and played a prominent part in European integration. After Thatcher, Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany since 2005, is only the second woman with sufficient executive power to have a decisive influence in the process of building a united Europe. In 1989, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe appointed the French politician Catherine Lalumière as the organisation’s first female Secretary General. The European Commission, which had long remained a “men’s only club”, opened up to women, with France’s Christiane Scrivener becoming Commissioner for Taxation and Greece’s Vasso Papandreou Commissioner for Social Affairs in 1989. From 1993 to 1995, only one of the 17 European Commissioners was female; this progressed to 5 out of a total of 20 Commissioners from 1995 to 2004, and 10 out of 28 in the 2014 Juncker Commission. The election of Germany’s Ursula von der Leyen as the first female President of the European Commission in July 2019 clearly marks a paradigm shift.

In the line of women who have helped build Europe, Luxembourg’s Viviane Reding (born on 27 April 1951 in Esch-sur-Alzette) is a key figure. After her studies, including a PhD in Human Science at Paris Sorbonne University, she worked as a journalist at the Luxemburger Wort for more than 20 years and chaired the Luxembourg Union of Journalists. She joined the Christian Social People’s Party (CSV) and was elected to the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies (1979-1989 and since 2018), where she particularly focused on social affairs and international relations, before becoming a Member of the European Parliament for three terms (1981-1999 and 2014-2018) and turning her attention to social affairs, employment and the working environment, as well as civil liberties. In 1999, she became a Member of the European Commission, where she also served three terms. In the Prodi Commission (1999-2004), as Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth, Media and Sport, she opened up the Erasmus programme to the rest of the world, launched the eLearning programme as a key part of the eEurope initiative (highlighting the educational potential of the internet), initiated the reform of the “Television Without Frontiers” Directive (which in 2007 became the Audiovisual Media Services Directive) and introduced a system for funding independent audiovisual production, which not only boosted the European film industry but also promoted European creativity, culture and values throughout the world. In the first Barroso Commission (2004-2009), she was given a pioneering portfolio – Information Society and Media – which encompassed telecommunications, innovation, technological research and the digital economy. Her major achievements – which had a direct impact
on the daily lives of hundreds of millions of Europeans – include capping mobile phone roaming charges (they were subsequently abolished in 2017), advocating for the introduction of a single emergency number (112) in all EU countries, launching the Europeana digital library, and spearheading a programme to use technological innovation for climate and energy solutions. In the second Barroso Commission (2010-2014) she became the First Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship. She introduced a “Europe of Justice”, based on a package of 50 new laws, and took a stand – threatening sanctions – against Member States that tried to hinder the free movement of citizens (especially France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands) and against the dismantling of independent judicial systems (in Hungary and Romania). She is committed to promoting the role of women on the boards of directors of listed companies, and she initiated the reform of personal data protection, considered as a fundamental right (the resulting GDPR was adopted in April 2016).

The following pages are taken from a long interview (more than eight hours of footage in total) that Viviane Reding granted us in 2015 in connection with the “Pierre Werner and Europe” research project. Drawing on more than 40 years of experience in politics, Viviane Reding spoke about her career, the role of Luxembourg and Luxembourgers in the European integration process, various historical events in which she played a part, and especially her pioneering, decisive action in building an information and knowledge society in Europe.

I would like to thank Viviane Reding for her willingness to read through the interview from today’s perspective and update it as necessary. I am also grateful to Sarah Cooper for contributing her linguistic expertise to this paper.

Elena Danescu

Elena Danescu: Your first term ended in 2004, but you were reappointed in the new Commission headed by José Manuel Barroso, which took office on 22 November 2004. In this new Commission, you were responsible for the information society and media. Could you tell us about how this new Commission was formed and the fact that you were reappointed in virtually the same areas of responsibility as before?

Viviane Reding: No, the areas were completely different. The information society is all about the Internet, communication, cable, telephony, broadband, frequencies and such like. It also covers technological research, which accounts for one-third of European research expenses. So I entered an extremely technical and industrial field with a great deal of economic power – it had nothing to do with culture. I did hold on to areas such as television and cinema, and I tried to incorporate those into the digitisation of Europe. Concerning the task I was entrusted with, I had to learn a great deal, because I didn’t know much about the infrastructure aspects – which are vital if the content is to reach people –, about communication technology and research into all the new areas of state-of-the-art technology. To develop new technological fields, the Commission created technological research platforms. The technology we see in cars today was developed on those platforms – the eCall initiative, new materials, new communication technology systems, nanotechnology, etc. I organised all of those
areas on the basis of technological research platforms, my aim being to encourage high-tech industry, small start-ups and university researchers to work together. The technological platforms were a huge success and truly advanced technology in all the areas we know today.

ED
What did you find most difficult at the start of this term, in which you had so much to do and to discover?

VR
In a very short time, I had to learn about many new fields, such as the telecoms market, technology, frequencies, cable, new communication methods and satellites. All of that was new to me. Fortunately, I had developed effective learning methods throughout my life. I also adopted this learning approach when preparing for my hearing, when I was asked complicated questions on technology. Subsequently these areas became a passion of mine.

ED
You worked with President Barroso. How would you describe his personality and working methods in comparison with the previous President, Romano Prodi?

[...]

VR
He gave commissioners a great deal of freedom in their respective areas, but he also made the Commission work as a real college. By that I mean that decisions on all political subjects were taken by all the commissioners together. President Barroso made use of his presidential prerogatives in areas such as foreign affairs and for major international issues. But he granted a lot of freedom in the areas covered directly by the commissioners. If a commissioner took risks and he felt that those risks were worthwhile, he backed the commissioner. For example, when I decided to reduce roaming fees, going against the entire industry and most of the ministers, President Barroso supported me. He gave very strong support to his commissioners when he thought that their initiative was worthwhile.

ED
You mentioned roaming fees. Thanks to you, 500 million Europeans now benefit from these reduced fees. They also have you to thank for the common emergency number, 112. You masterminded these proposals. How did you come up with these ideas and turn them into reality?
VR
I always thought of the single market when developing my approach. We Europeans have an enormous asset in the form of a market of 500 million potential consumers. And we need this asset if we want to invest in the development of our economy and have the jobs and employment that go with it. Taking advantage of this single market and breaking down the barriers that still exist within it have always been on my agenda. Concerning telephony, we quite simply needed to create an open telephony and internet market. So I carried out a major reform, opening the telecoms market to competition. I wanted to give a chance to small companies so that they could also enter the market. I was convinced that competition generates new ideas, technological progress, better offers for citizens and price cuts. And for me, as a Luxembourger, roaming charges were a complete non-sense. When you live in a small country surrounded by other countries, you need to take advantage of your freedom of movement. But each time you cross a border (which doesn’t actually exist anymore), you come across a telephony border linked to high costs. It makes absolutely no sense. So I had analyses carried out to establish whether there were any objective reasons why roaming was so expensive. All the evidence showed that there weren’t. It was simply a question of higher net earnings for the major operators, whereas their costs were extremely low. I said, “That won’t do. We have to cut these punitive fees,” and so I started the process of cutting the fees, step by step.

It was David against Goliath. The telecom ministers were against me, and so were the finance ministers and, of course, all the major telecom operators. Most of the commissioners were not happy either. The political battles were never-ending. The European Parliament, however, was on my side. It understood the need to open up the market and enable the free movement of communication in the interest of consumers. The media were also on my side, because journalists were furious about the fees they had to pay when reporting from abroad. So I drew strength from Parliament and the media to win this fierce battle.

ED
What are your thoughts on the claims that the first Barroso Commission, and in fact the second Barroso Commission, were ultra-liberal, as often asserted by the press, whereas the…?

VR
That’s just nonsense. The Commission at that time comprised a large number of Christian Democrats, a large number of Socialists and a few Liberals. And no decision is taken by a single commissioner; the College always decides collectively. Since the majority of members of this Commission were Socialists and Christian Democrats, the decisions were rounded off, so to speak, to be more balanced. The Barroso Commission was certainly not ultra-liberal.
ED

I would like to ask you a question about your achievements as Media Commissioner. You have repeatedly stated that we need information, not propaganda. How does the diversity of the media and of information channels help to provide citizens with reliable information?

VR

That’s the big question, isn’t it? Because most media, those which are read or watched by the biggest audiences (television and the Internet), are short-message media. On top of that, most media in Europe, except public TV and radio, are privately owned. And journalists are certainly not eager to publish “propaganda”? But there are problems. Because media inform the public too rarely about the decision-making process in Council and in Parliament (the two co-legislators for all EU legislation). There is a lot of talk about the noise of politics, but very little about why and how political action is carried out. The European Parliament is a joint decision-maker on all laws adopted at European level, which are then implemented in the Member States. Parliament therefore carries out an enormous amount of legislative work and wields an enormous amount of power. And yet the media hardly mention this. But if someone shouts or makes a dramatic gesture in the plenary session at the European Parliament, this ends up in the news. As a result, people think that the European Parliament is there for shouting, for making dramatic gestures and impressive outbursts. They don’t realise that Parliament spends the vast majority of its time working, making laws, influencing political leaders and shaping the Europe of the future. Unfortunately, this gets overlooked because only a minority of citizens read serious newspapers, which sometimes report on the work being carried out by Parliament. The situation is getting worse and worse, because on technological platforms the news isn’t even squeezed into a few sentences any more, it’s squeezed into a few words. This naturally distorts the information delivered to citizens. People are ill-informed and therefore ready to believe the simplistic anti-European propaganda of populists.

ED

What image do the media convey of Europe’s institutions and citizens? Do you think that the immediacy of the media and the faster pace of people’s lives call for more education and explanations on this matter?

VR

Yes, but how can we do that? As a former journalist, interested in political communication, I have been analysing the major channels of information provided to European citizens for decades. In general, the media pounce on the latest news. These subjects have a life cycle of a few days. Then the media move on to something else. But it sometimes takes years for a decision to be taken, to be applied, for a law to come into effect and reach citizens. And yet citizens rarely have the opportunity to follow
this process. There’s also a whole host of private lobbying bodies that spout a load of rubbish and invest a great deal of money to ensure that their message is widely disseminated. People are puzzled, they are starting to believe anything and get worked up by lobbying propaganda based on commercial or ideological interests. If you add to this the fact that most information has a “local” character, you understand why it is so difficult to get a meaningful European message across.

[...]

ED
Would you agree that this media profusion, together with the technical nature of EU jargon, is making European citizens apathetic about getting involved?

VR
When we explain procedures and political developments to citizens, they are really interested and say, “Why didn’t anyone tell us that before?” We can explain complicated things using simple language. As great philosophers said from the outset, centuries ago, “Whatever is well conceived can be clearly said.” So we don’t need to hide behind acronyms and technocratic language, we can easily explain what is at stake. Each time I explained the reasons for and the progress of an issue, people were interested and happy that someone was taking them seriously. The problem is that when we explain the problems to each citizen on an individual basis, we only reach a minority of citizens.

[...]

ED
In the context of globalisation and the digital economy, the Internet economy, which you supported, is undeniably dominated by the interests of the United States. Google, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are just some examples. How does this situation affect European policy in this field as well as the sovereignty of the Member States?

VR
For the time being, we seem to have lost part of our digital sovereignty, and I’m choosing my words very carefully. We haven’t managed to consolidate enough strong proponents of digital technology in Europe. Why is this so? Because our market is divided. I meet talented young entrepreneurs who, instead of battling with 28 different regulations to gain access to the 500-million-strong European market, go to the US, where they have unimpeded access to a market of 300 million people. The second problem is that we haven’t managed to develop enough risk capital in Europe to invest in these new businesses. The third problem is that we can’t accept that an entrepreneur who went bankrupt could do better second time around. Anyone who doesn’t succeed at the first attempt here in Europe is considered a failure. That’s
foolish; we need to encourage creativity, entrepreneurship and risk-taking. We need to help young people develop their own business. The EU Commission has finally come up with the idea of turning Europe into a digital market. “Hallelujah!”, I say. It would have been better to do this 10 years ago, when I already wanted to move in this direction. But it’s better late than not at all. We have to make the most of our excellent research capabilities and give talent a real chance if we want to boost capacity-building. A strong capital market is also essential.

ED

This digital field is also a challenge in terms of regulation, particularly in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership – TTIP – between the EU and the US that you mentioned earlier. Do you think that Europe still has a chance with the United States?

VR

Yes, of course! We have the world’s biggest organised economy. We have the world’s biggest securities market. Europe makes the most external and internal investments worldwide. We will have full capacity if we can just manage to break down the artificial barriers that still prevent us from taking advantage of our single market. That is why I put forward a reform of the legislation on the protection of personal data. Today we have 28 different systems that contradict each other and prevent our industries from using the market as one. The General Data Protection Regulation, or GDPR, is built on the principle of one market and one law for everyone, including US companies who want to set up on our territory. I put this proposal forward in January 2012. It has been adopted and is now starting to be applied. These uniform rules for the entire territory will be the basis for a true digital single market.

At the time, I also put forward a reform of contract law. In e-commerce, we see that people buy within their own countries but not in others, because they fear that contract law is different in other countries and they are not sure which would be the competent court in the event of a problem. I suggested reforming our contract law so that people and companies can make purchases throughout Europe under a single contract with the same cross-border consumer protection regulations. This still hasn’t been accepted by the governments. You see, the governments are often a real obstacle to creating a true single market. Opening up the markets and granting access to start-ups and SMEs will help them grow into big businesses. I hope that the Juncker Plan, in collaboration with the European Investment Bank, will turn Europe into a unique area for digital development. We will only be able to regain our digital independence if this project succeeds.

[...]

ED

In this globalised landscape, what did you perceive to be the strengths of this digital economy in Europe, and what were the potential pitfalls for Europe?
VR

It was very clear for me. The pitfalls were that we wouldn’t embrace the digital economy fast enough and that we would end up lagging behind. This would be a lost opportunity, because we have excellent engineers, excellent researchers and excellent companies. But if they don’t manage to jump onto the digital bandwagon they will not survive. I was already thinking of our strong automotive industry and the need for electric cars. I realised that if we didn’t manage to integrate digital technology into our automotive sector, our global flagship industry would fall behind.

We had seen this happen to our mobile phone industry. Europe had invented mobiles and was the world leader at the time, but as mobile technology developed further into high-tech instruments, US iPhones took the lead. As for the Internet, were we going to retain our leading position, or weren’t we? I wanted us to move fast so that Europe wouldn’t end up lagging behind the US today and Asian countries in future.

ED

The private sector undeniably plays a pioneering role in the digital domain, and your initiatives were immediately followed by consumers but less so by the Member States, which failed to offer top-quality public services that kept pace with the digital age. What were the main problems that you encountered in this regard vis-à-vis the public authorities, and how did you overcome them?

VR

It was in the public authorities’ interests to take action in three areas. The first was e-government: digitising public administration in order to have archives, to speed up response times for citizens and to do away with red tape. Paper files were obsolete; it was time to create electronic files. But of course the opposition came from the administrations themselves. They simply didn’t have officials who were trained in new technologies. The administrative bodies themselves slowed things down. The second area was e-learning – learning beyond physical books by using e-books, by training trainers and teachers electronically and enabling them to give their pupils and students information via effective online channels. Educators could pack a huge amount of knowledge into their classes, but they needed to know where to find it and how to pass it on, and they knew little about that. At the time I set up information networks for teachers which they could use for support, where they could download lessons, but the use made of these tools was minimal. The third area that I saw as an element of the future was e-health, quite simply because hospitals need to be connected. Instead of doing a blood test or an X-ray five or six times, the tests need to be networked, also between physicians and hospitals. Doctors need to be able to look at the results on a screen rather than on paper and compare them easily with other tests to avoid mistakes and reach a diagnosis more quickly. Hospitals need to be interconnected not just internally but also with other hospitals in the same town or region. But there are still huge obstacles to accomplishing this feat today, at a time when the population is
ageing and we need efficiency more than ever. Without efficient digitisation, our expenses are at risk of going through the roof.

That’s also why I’ve always insisted that we should roll out broadband not only in town and city centres, but also beyond. If we want to keep people in their villages, especially disabled or elderly people, if we want to maintain village life, there needs to be this link between villages and towns: educational links, health links, transport links. When I look at the figures, I am saddened to see the huge delay in providing broadband coverage without “white spots”, mostly in rural areas. With 5G implemented and 6G in the research stages, our 4G coverage is still deficient, not to mention our high-speed Internet…

**ED**

What progress has been made with regard to the European Commission initiatives that you instigated in favour of pan-European public services such as e-identity and e-signatures?

**VR**

It’s quite technical. The e-signature worked. What didn’t work so fast was e-govern-ment in national and regional administrations. We should have carried out large-scale professional training, lifelong learning, but then who would have done it? Because we were also lacking the teachers … Only large companies had the capacity to move forward. Only researchers had the capacity to move forward. But in terms of our capacity as a society – local administrations, government administrations, hospitals, schools – we were still in the pre-Internet age.

**ED**

You stressed the importance of public-private partnerships to drive these matters forward. In which areas do these partnerships play the most prominent role and what are the areas of divergence between the public and private sectors?

**VR**

The public sector always tries to maintain a certain amount of control. But when the public sector works with the private sector – and the private sector tends to be more oriented towards technologies – it feels as though it is losing its power, so it has a tendency to resist innovation in general. Public-private partnerships worked well, however, in the field of technological research. In order to move forward in research – and we are excellent in this field – we had to boost cooperation and partnerships. But universities weren’t used to working with companies. That is why I created technology platforms, which enabled universities, large companies, small companies and start-ups to work together in a given area (for instance nanotechnologies). This enabled the best minds to join forces until their joint efforts reached market stage. I created a
dozen technology platforms between 2004 and 2006, bringing together intelligence and resources… I allocated solid resources to these platforms. The result was extraordinary. The project took off very quickly indeed. Engineers and researchers, whether from universities or companies, quickly understood the value of working together.

The collaborative approach was a driving force: the researchers progressed much more quickly than if they hadn’t worked together. And today we are seeing results in the automotive industry, in new materials incorporated into our aeroplanes and helicopters, to name but a few. It’s a real success story!

ED

You also accompanied this process with a major information campaign whereby society and consumers were constantly kept abreast of all these developments and therefore subscribed to these innovative initiatives. But we also mentioned the public authorities earlier. In the context of the digital environment, the Member States are not all equal, and competitiveness gaps widen further when the pace is faster than in the normal economy. What did you do to reduce the digital divide between the Member States?

VR

I mentioned this digital divide earlier when talking about broadband, because rural areas often had no Internet connection or a slow connection which made it impossible to use the Internet in an efficient way. I also saw that there were huge differences between the Member States. For example, Italy, Greece, Hungary, even France at the time, were incredibly far behind. France decided to move forward, propelled by its companies. So it made a giant leap forward. Others continued to lag behind; even Germany had many “white spots” with no coverage.

Benelux in general was very good indeed, as were the Scandinavian countries and the UK. So I had my champions and my stragglers. And some stragglers failed to understand that the only way to develop their economy was to invest in high-speed networks. That is why I travelled around Europe with my maps featuring “white zones” that showed the regions lagging behind. The dawdlers didn’t really appreciate the fact that I was travelling around with these maps. Few of them wanted to move forward, fewer still wanted cross-border investments to be made. I always said, “To have high-speed broadband we mustn’t stop at borders, we have to cross borders.” But we were faced with the problem of frequency auctions, since the frequencies belonged to the governments, which thought more about how much they could raise at auction than about technological development. Within governments, the responsibility for frequencies was often in the hands not of telecommunications ministers but of finance ministers. And finance ministers were primarily interested in selling these frequencies in order to fill the state coffers. They weren’t interested in whether the sale was effective in creating the networks we needed. This problem still persists today. The reforms put forward by the Commission to date have not succeeded in creating a pan-European approach to ensure full coverage of the European market and enable the most
efficient technology to be used (whether telecoms, cable or satellites), according to
density (towns/cities or rural areas) and geography (flat or mountainous regions). On
islands or mountains, working via satellites could be an alternative. Unfortunately, this
overview of how to develop very high-speed broadband has still not sunk in among
governments, which often think on a small national scale rather than striving to
develop the European area together.

ED

This is also a matter of digital sovereignty, a concept that you have worked on a great
deal recently. Isn’t there a contradiction between Europe’s digital sovereignty com-
pared to the rest of the world and the digital sovereignty of each Member State,
which thinks – as you say – on a “national” scale?

VR

If we only think on a “national” scale, we lose sovereignty, we give ground to the digital
giants, which unfortunately are not European. We are now starting to build strong
European digital companies. They are finding it difficult to achieve a global dimension
from the outset, because they are hampered by contradictory laws on European terri-
tory. We need uniform pan-European legislation. We have the world’s biggest organised
economy, but we can only be competitive if we stop this Balkanisation and create a sin-
gle law for the entire continent. How many times have I seen this scenario repeat itself
in Europe? We help young entrepreneurs with brilliant ideas to create their own start-
ups. We support them with seed money, but when they want to get their “baby” off
the ground, they don’t have the geographical scale needed. So they head to the US
where they have immediate access to the entire US market and the risk capital that
goes with it. Europe is reluctant to take risks. But fortune favours the bold. And if we
don’t move beyond our small national sovereignties, they will be defeated by their own
making, so it’s a lose-lose situation. We are unfortunately lagging behind because of
this small-minded conservatism and this ethos of “I will create my little territory and
build a big wall around it”. We need to think on a larger, pan-European scale and try to
actually remove barriers. We are also too slow in creating appropriate legal instruments
under the “one continent, one rule” principle. Take for example our data protection
legislation, which forms the basis of our digital market. It has taken four years to be
approved and will take three more years to be implemented. I put this proposal forward
in January 2012, and yet it won’t be implemented until 2018. We lose time, although it
makes good sense to have one rule for all companies throughout the continent. But,
my goodness, it’s hard to get this message across! We always tend to think small, but
we can’t grow if we carry on thinking small.

[…]

ED

In July 2009, you launched the Digital Agenda for Europe, together with a series of
legislative measures. Could you elaborate further on the content of this strategy and
its contribution to digital competitiveness, and give us an assessment of its implementation?

**VR**

The Digital Agenda was a nudge in the right direction to help governments realise that they were lagging behind. It was made up of several levels, the aim being to encourage investment in high-speed networks. It took the year 2015 and Juncker's initiatives, in collaboration with the European Investment Bank, to put this item strongly on the agenda and generate investment. I am sure a future Commission will invest even more funds to encourage the growth of the "digital market". Fortunately, as regards the technology platforms that I mentioned earlier, we were able to set them up because they operated under a public-private partnership. Concerning investment in risk capital, I tried to encourage the involvement of business angels (individuals who invest in risk capital). But Europe was difficult, because “risk” capital does not have a good reputation. I tried to overcome the hurdles.

Mentalities are only starting to change now because everybody realises that the major players are no longer European. The fact that these major players are also attacking our automotive industry gave Germany a wake-up call. Driverless cars, autonomous cars, electric cars, etc. have been developed in Silicon Valley. That gave us food for thought: we realised that if we don't make rapid progress now, we will not manage to catch up. And in the long term, this will mean that our flagship industry, the automotive industry, will suffer. Fortunately, we are still at the cutting edge of progress when it comes to research and innovation.

**ED**

When it comes to globalisation and the digital economy, the Internet economy is clearly dominated by US economic interests, as you pointed out earlier. What impact does this situation have on Europe’s policy in this field and on rules under international agreements, particularly TTIP?

**VR**

Before negotiations began on TTIP, we had had bilateral negotiations with the US for many years to ensure that the US and its companies would apply European law when they were in Europe. What a horrendous thing to say! We were negotiating so that the Americans would apply European rules in Europe. Can you imagine what would happen if we, Europeans, didn’t apply American rules in the US? It would be unthinkable!

In Europe, personal data is protected by law, and this legislation is developed on the basis of the European Treaties. The Charter of Fundamental Rights also protects these rights. US companies were acting as though there were no rules in Europe. That’s why the European Court condemned several US companies for failing to comply with European law. This prompted me to review the European data protection
regulations and come up with one law for the whole continent, which applies to all companies operating in the EU, whether they are European, Chinese or American. That’s one thing. The second point is linked to security: whenever there is a danger to society, the police forces and secret services should naturally be able to have the information they need. In Europe, there are laws governing access to this information. But the US administration forces US companies based on European territory to give out all the personal data that they have collected, without judicial decision. We have been negotiating for years to resolve this issue. You may have heard of “Safe Harbour”, an agreement put on the table by the Commission so that US companies could send personal data between the US and Europe and vice versa, so that trading could work between a parent company and a subsidiary. The handling of this matter was also called into question by the Court of Justice, which said, “In practice, the Americans are not sticking to the law.” The agreement was eliminated.

We had to renegotiate an agreement between the US and Europe on how to treat personal data and how companies operating in Europe should comply with European rules. The same applies to TTIP. It’s not a new negotiation; it’s a situation we’ve been dealing with for a very long time. Of course, we will have to reinforce European standards in TTIP. We have major disagreements with the US on many issues. All these problems have to be regulated in the TTIP agreement, and it should all be dealt with in such a way that it does not contradict our fundamental rights.

Note
1. See Denéchère, 2007 (especially the accounts by Simone Veil, Yvette Roudy and Marie-Claude Vayssade).

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