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Věra JOUROVÁ

Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality

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Introductory Speech Věra Jourová

Chairs of Committees, Honourable Members,

It is a great privilege to appear before you today.

I am fully aware that the portfolio I will be in charge of if I am confirmed as Commissioner, has a real impact on every person sitting in this room, and every one of the 500 million people that are part of this great joint project which is the European Union. It is therefore with immense enthusiasm but also with a strong sense of responsibility that I seek your approval to be Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality.

I said enthusiasm, because together, I believe we can make a real difference. Like each one of you, I came into politics because I want to make a contribution to society.

I want to leave my mark on making things better for people. And to do it through the European Union.

A rather more famous Czech politician than myself stood before this House in the year 2000 and said the following "*The main European values, as shaped by the turbulent spiritual and political history of Europe, and as adopted by other parts of the world are obvious. Respect for the individual and for his freedoms, his rights and his dignity, the principle of solidarity, equality before the law and the rule of law, protection of all ethnic minorities, democratic institutions, separation of the legislative, executive and judicial estates, political pluralism, respect for private property and free enterprise, a market economy and the development of civil society.*"

Like so often, Václav Havel was well ahead of his time when he made that speech, and our duty and my commitment to you is to seek to deliver on those European values and fundamental rights he so well described and to make sure they are fully respected and upheld. These are the values that I fully believe in.

The new portfolio of Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality should help to preserve and strengthen these values by building bridges between national legal systems. It will help to build economic growth because a sound and predictable

justice system is a prerequisite for economic growth and a business friendly environment in which cross-border trade can flourish.

But above all, it is about building a fairer single market.

So my new portfolio puts people at the centre. Across the wide ranging of current, pending and future action, it is about giving people choice, about protecting their rights and about building trust. When you strip away the complexity and legal concepts, every proposal made by the European Union in these three areas seeks to do one of those three things: more choice; more protection and more trust. In my mandate, I intend to be the voice of people's interests. This is a unique opportunity to bring the different parts of the portfolio together.

Honourable Members,

In the next five years I want to make a difference in these three areas:

Firstly, by making sure that people have more choice.

What does that mean in practice?

It means having the right to choose where you want to live and work in the European Union, with full respect for freedom of movement. Yes we need to tackle abuse where it exists, but the fundamental right to free movement must not be put into question.

It also means people having the right to be what they want – to live their sexuality or religion without discrimination; to live in peace without fear of harassment and violence. Where the Union has the power to improve the exercise of these rights, the Union should do so.

It means breaking the glass ceiling so that women can choose to be doctors, head teachers, CEOs or politicians on the same basis as men and earn equal pay. I will defend the Women on Boards proposal.

It means giving consumers informed choice and rights whether online or offline. And the same choice whether you are part of the digital revolution or continue to buy in the small shop in your local community.

It means having the choice of where they enter a partnership, get married, start a family, buy a house or spend their retirement with effective mutual recognition of public documents, judicial decisions and property rights.

Secondly, I intend to protect people's rights.

I will help Vice-President Timmermans and provide him my full support in upholding the rule of law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, in seeking to ensure that the necessary checks and balances that are built into our democracies are fully respected and in ensuring that the European Union's Accession to the European Convention on Human Rights will take place as quickly as possible.

I want to ensure that the rights of the individual are protected through the swift adoption of a modern data protection reform. And that Europeans have equivalent protection in the United States.

I want to ensure that ethnic minorities like the Roma are protected from exclusion and discrimination and further integrate them into society.

I want to protect the most vulnerable members of our society. That means safeguarding the rights of the child, especially on the internet, and making sure that they have proper fair trial rights when they are suspects in criminal proceedings.

I want to put in place a strong, independent and efficient European Public Prosecutors Office to protect taxpayer's money against fraud to the EU budget.

I want to see sustainable and responsible behaviour in all sectors, including the financial sector. Corporate responsibility is linked to consumer information and protection. I will work with the European Banking Authority to make sure that the rules on banker's bonuses are fully implemented.

Protection also means being sure that the products we use are safe. I want to see swift adoption of the consumer product safety and market surveillance regulation package.

Finally, when I think of protection, I think of the plight of women who suffer violence, be it domestic violence or the inhumane practice of female genital mutilation. These

are incompatible with everything the European Union stands for. The victims of such violence need our voice.

Thirdly, I want to build trust across the judicial systems in the EU.

We should be united in our diversity, but we also need to make sure that our different cultural and legal traditions are not an obstacle to freedom, justice or the Single Market.

Citizens need to have trust in judicial systems. And judicial systems need to trust each other. Mutual recognition, like in the case of the European Arrest Warrant or the enforcement of judgements from courts of another Member State can only work if there is the necessary trust.

Where necessary we need further coordination or minimum standards throughout the European Union, both in civil and criminal law.

But we also need to increase the knowledge of each other's legal system. I intend to build trust through a renewed push on training of legal practitioners which is indispensable for the instruments we adopt to be used, to be put into practise, to serve their purpose.

I also believe e-Justice is an excellent tool that enhances access to justice for citizens, businesses and legal practitioners. I intend to upgrade this into a more interactive tool.

I also intend to make sure that consumers can trust in the purchases they make, without fear that they will have no legal recourse in another Member State. I want to step up enforcement so we can pool together small claims to make a difference. I want to further develop mediation and alternative dispute resolution. I want to see if further steps on collective redress are needed.

In the same way, I intend to place a much stronger emphasis on enforcement powers so that people are not ripped off. I want to see more sweeps of specific sectors and a strengthening of our cooperation with member states to defend consumer's interests.

Honourable Members,

Eight years ago I was in a prison cell in the Czech Republic: a victim of injustice. In the year 2006 I was falsely and unlawfully accused and held in pre-trial detention for a month by the instruments of alleged justice. I questioned whether I lived in a civilised country. I became the case of judicial error. I went through all the emotions possible: from being a so called "corrupted person" who people would not look in the eye. I became a victim caught in the system, something I refused to accept; and then I began the fight for justice.

Thankfully I was declared innocent by the Courts in every respect but my children and I will never forget that experience. That is why I decided to study law. Based on my personal experience, I want to build trust in our Justice systems. That is why I want a fairer society where people have choice, protection and trust. We should never lose faith that in the end Justice shall prevail.

Honourable Members,

I am fortunate to inherit a body of work that my predecessors are rightly proud of. I want to pay a special tribute to Viviane Reding, Martine Reicherts and Neven Mimica who have put many proposals on the table.

I come from the world of projects, deadlines and delivery. As Minister of Regional Development, I delivered a strategy and concrete projects in the Czech Republic for the ten years ahead. The new Commission will work in a new way. I fully share and will support the new approach proposed by the President-elect and his Political Guidelines. That is exactly the approach I will take in this new role. I intend to break down the silos by trying to look across the portfolio using the principles I've outlined. I will start from the perspective of how best to get the job done. I'm pragmatic. I will always start with the question of whether we are best placed to act, while being prepared to legislate where that is needed.

I'm an elected Member of the Czech Parliament. I'm a politician not a civil servant. I have strong convictions and I will fight to make those a reality. We will not always agree, but I will give you my sincere commitment that my door will always be open. This is just the beginning of our cooperation. I want your input and I intend to be fully available to work with you.

Honourable Members,

I cannot mention every issue that will get my attention in this exciting portfolio. But we have common targets, and we will deliver and reach them together. Let's start, first of all, by achieving together important results that EU citizens are waiting for on four key files:

- reform of our data protection rules;
- the European Public Prosecutors Office;
- the Women on Boards proposal;
- the Consumer Product Safety Regulation.

At the same time, I intend to work with you to develop a new agenda for the five years ahead bringing the three parts of the portfolio together. If we achieve that, we will create a fairer single market that is good for consumers and businesses alike.

Let me repeat once again, I want people to have more choice; more protection and more trust. Thank you for your attention.