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**Tibor NAVRACSICS**

**Education, Culture, Youth and Citizenship**

**1 October 2014**

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**Introductory Speech Tibor Navracsics**

Dear President, Mrs Costa,

Vice-Presidents,

Honourable Members,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel very honoured to be with you this evening.

Today, more than ever, it is you, the European Parliament and its Members, who are shaping the new European Commission.

Before I present my vision for our portfolio, I want to say a few words about why I am happy to be here today.

To be a Commissioner is to be a committed European. To be a Commissioner is to represent the European interest, and no other. To be a Commissioner is to serve the European citizen. I can think of no greater honour than to respond to this call.

You know and I know that relations between the European Union and Hungary have come through a very difficult period. We have disagreed on some important questions, and we have argued hard and loud for a long time.

But one of the great virtues of the European Union is that it gives us the space to confront our differences and resolve our disputes – openly, democratically and peacefully. Working through our disagreements,

however difficult they may be, only make us stronger, both as individual countries and as a Union.

Ultimately, we are united by the same European values.

Human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

These are values to which I am deeply and personally committed.

This evening I want to share with you my vision for education, culture, youth and citizenship. I want to talk about the work we need to do together.

If you read some of our newspapers, you might get the impression that this portfolio is not the most urgent.

Well, I disagree.

What challenge is more urgent than the future of our young people? What problem is more worrying than youth unemployment, which remains above 50 per cent in some countries? What task is more necessary than giving future generations the best start in life?

And what could be more precious to the European Union than its own culture and sense of identity? Which sectors deserve to be protected and nurtured more than our cultural and creative industries? What is Europe if it is not a shared heritage – a community of shared values?

Honourable Members,

I believe that our portfolio is just as vital as any other.

If we want to rebuild an economy that is fair and sustainable, we must begin with education. We must prepare our young people for a world that is multicultural and fast-moving.

If we want our artists and creators to find new audiences across Europe and the world, we must give them the tools to survive and thrive in a digital age.

All of us look to education, culture, sport and civic participation as a means to unlock our potential as human beings. We are not economic resources. We are not parts in a machine. As humans, we find meaning in our relationships with others. We only become whole when we contribute to something bigger than ourselves.

The policies in our portfolio are mostly delivered at national, regional and local level, as close as possible to citizens. This is as it should be.

But I stand firmly with those of you who believe the European Union can and must play a leading role. We must help our Member States and our stakeholders to address the urgent challenges which we all share.

I want to help modernise our education systems, from early childhood to post-graduate studies. I want to ensure we have motivated and well-trained teachers, whose work is recognised and valued across society. I want our schools and universities to embrace new technologies and new ways of teaching and learning.

And I want to make sure we reach our targets under the Europe 2020 strategy: more students completing higher education, and fewer pupils leaving school early. A young person who leaves school with no

qualifications already suffers a great social disadvantage before his or her life has really started.

Dear colleagues,

My priorities for the next five years are clear.

First, we must put education at the heart of the European Union's plans for growth and jobs. This is why Jean-Claude Juncker has asked me to support the investment package that he will present within three months of taking office.

Today I commit to you to pursue this goal not only now, at the start of our mandate, but every year, when the Commission proposes annual country-specific recommendations to Member States.

This means putting pressure on our governments to invest in their teachers and the new technologies of the classroom, and to modernise their teaching methods and curricula. Even when our Member States have to repair their public finances, it is vital that they protect their investment in education and training.

Second, I want to ensure that our cultural and creative industries can flourish in the digital world. Europe leads the world when it comes to creative content. We should be proud of this.

Today I commit to you that no trade negotiation anywhere in the world will undermine the role of culture and the crucial importance of public support. Let me quote Jean-Claude Juncker:

**We will not sacrifice Europe's cultural diversity on the altar of free trade.**

And I can assure you that any reform of our copyright regime will promote not only our artists and creators but also the cultural diversity that is the very core of Europe's identity. I will ensure that all European action respects the unique nature of culture, as our Treaty demands.

Third, I want our universities to become the best in the world. These are some of Europe's most precious institutions. They are pillars of our society. They are a vital source of innovation.

In central Europe, before 1989, they were bastions of freedom, keeping alive free thought.

Today, many of them have yet to open their gates to the world outside. Many have yet to adapt to social and economic change.

Let me assure you that the European Commission will use all of its tools to help our universities modernise and build a new relationship with wider society. I want to convert the knowledge triangle – between education, research and business – into a true partnership.

We will continue to invest in the European Institute of Innovation and Technology – the EIT – and our Marie Skłodowska Curie actions.

The EIT is a ground-breaking project that is already changing the way we think about innovation. I am very grateful for Parliament's support for the EIT. Now let us work together to make it an even greater success by spreading its activities across the whole of Europe.

I will put the Joint Research Centre at the heart of European policy-making. Good policy needs proper research and solid evidence. I will put the JRC at the service of all the policy areas we deal with. The JRC is a

wonderful brain at the centre of our thinking, and I want all of us to benefit from it.

Dear colleagues,

My fourth priority: I will work closely with my colleague, Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, so that together we do everything possible to fight youth unemployment.

I know that the European Union is only one part of the solution. Much of the hard work lies with our Member States. But I will strongly support those efforts by targeting the resources of my portfolio on this urgent challenge.

And I believe that, together, we can really make a difference.

With your support, and working alongside our Member States, we can help young people make the transition to the world of work. We will achieve this by modernising our education and training systems so that they support the labour market of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

By supporting the Youth Guarantee.

By funding new partnerships between universities, training colleges and businesses.

By improving the quality of apprenticeships.

And by giving young people all the benefits of non-formal learning, outside the classroom.

My fifth priority: I want to bring Europe's youth into our policy-making.

Europe's young people are facing an unprecedented challenge. The economic crisis has not only driven unemployment to chronic levels in several countries. It has also raised difficult questions about the place of young people in society.

Many young people are better informed and better connected than any previous generation, thanks to new social media. But they do not always have a strong political voice to shape the society of tomorrow. I want to change this.

Our Structured Dialogue with youth groups has already proven its value. But I believe we need to reach beyond our traditional, well-organised partners and embrace the disadvantaged.

I plan to develop new platforms that will allow us to reach one million young people over the next five years. This would signal a real change in participatory democracy, and a real support to the efforts of this Parliament to reach out to young people.

My sixth priority – I want to renew our sense of European citizenship.

European citizenship is more than words in a Treaty. European citizenship is more than a common passport. European citizenship is more than a complement to our national citizenship.

I want European citizenship to be something that we live and breathe. Something that enriches our daily lives. Something that helps to build a European identity that sits comfortably with all the other aspects of our self.

Our portfolio is the best place to start.

Education, youth, culture, and sport: all of our policies and programmes build a sense of citizenship and belonging.

Our programme, Europe for Citizens, will raise awareness of Europe's common history and our shared values. It will help people to understand what the European Union is doing for them.

You will not find the words sport and multilingualism in the title of my portfolio. But they are very much part of my job, and I am proud to have responsibility for them.

For the first time in the EU budget, European grassroots sport has 300 million euros to protect young athletes and children's rights; to combat violence and discrimination; to combat doping and match-fixing.

I want to thank this Parliament and this Committee for creating the European Week of Sport. You can count on my full support when we launch the first European Week of Sport next year.

To promote language-learning and linguistic diversity, I am proud to say that we have powerful tools.

Our great programme, Erasmus Plus, declares language learning and linguistic diversity to be one of its six major objectives.

I hope we can work together to make full use of this great opportunity to promote all of Europe's languages, no matter how many people speak them.

Our Charter of Fundamental Rights calls on us to respect our linguistic diversity, and I will work closely with Mr Timmermans to ensure that the Charter does justice to its ambitions.

Honourable Members,

I have set out some formidable challenges. To respond to them, I will need your support.

Even if we succeed, we will not see all the benefits today. Like the architects of medieval cathedrals, we may never see the final result of our work. But I am ready for that task, and I hope you will join me.

Let me finish on a note of optimism.

I believe we should all take encouragement and strength from the great tools at our disposal.

Erasmus has become one of the European Union's most precious inventions. Erasmus symbolises some of our most cherished values: openness, mobility and a desire to meet and understand our neighbour. More than any other programme, Erasmus helps us to build the European identity that our Union so urgently needs.

I am honoured to take responsibility for the new programme – Erasmus Plus. I want us to work together to make sure it gets the funding it deserves. You know and I know that it is not our two institutions who put its funding at risk.

Earlier this year, we launched the new programme. Our duty now is to ensure that it delivers to the four million people who will study, work and volunteer in another country.

Dear colleagues,

These are my priorities for the next five years.

We have a lot to do. And we have a duty to listen to our citizens, our young people above all.

It would be an honour for me to serve the European cause.

It would be an honour to serve this Committee and this Parliament as a European Commissioner – your Commissioner.

Together, we can achieve great things. So, let's start work.

Today.