

## SME Week Youth Essay Competition 2019

« Write the speech that you would give as the new Commissioner for SMEs and entrepreneurship to Europe's entrepreneurs »

### A new generation of sustainable entrepreneurs

Ms. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful being here to share with you my views few days after taking office.

I'm taking the floor for the ones in Europe who believe change is actually possible. Those who are the entrepreneurs of the future, those who believe in a better future, those who dare taking concrete steps to contain climate change in his or her daily life. I'm convinced they are the talents of Europe, that they are eager to have their voice be heard. When so many have to be blamed - including high officials - for turning a blind eye to the next major catastrophe of all times. This catastrophe due to humankind's unsustainable way of producing and consuming goods and services. They may be big companies but they know that they take the wrong way. This way of *Producing more To Earn more* taken by multinationals through the underlying concept of planned obsolescence may have brought better living conditions to our continent since early seventies but has also tremendously increased social inequalities and will lose by its own deed by keeping up pretending Earth is made of unlimited natural resources.

If some have decided better turning a blind eye rather than changing the system, the Commission 2019-2024 will do its outmost to stand alongside the new and already existing businesses by providing the necessary tools and fundings through a new programme we want to call « **Companies for a sustainable future** ».

For this program one of the top criterias that will be taken into account is whether or not the business plan includes sustainability and gender equality :

- It will have to include the concept of the circular economy, I want the **Circular Economy Action Plan** to be continued and finalised so that the EU could be more energetically independent and will waste less by adding value to obsolete goods ;
- If the business plan doesn't include the Circular economy then it should at least rely on the **functional economy**. This notion means that instead of properly selling a product and getting rid of it at the same moment, the company only transfers the use of it to its customers while is still being its owner. Then the company is accountable for the quality of its final product and cannot be into the approach of the planned obsolescence ;
- **I wish not only a better Europe for the planet but also for its citizens. A place where gender equality is genuinely effective.** It is unbearable to me that even though gender equality is one of the fundamental values of the European Union women are still stuck behind a glass ceiling. They don't have access to the companies' highest positions and are

still paid 16% less than her male counterparts. I want them having access to high positions and have equal pay for equal work.

You've understood, **the European Commission stands ready to kick-off a unique programme that will bring full support to the newly accredited « Sustainable entrepreneurs for a sustainable future » :**

- Firstly, we will provide **trainings in every member states**. Experts in all fields of activity will stand alongside them and will help the sustainable entrepreneurs during the first years of their activity or transition ;
- At the same time, we will also provide **the necessary facilities with free coworking spaces and fabrication laboratories (FabLabs) both co-funded with local authorities**. Why do the biggest FabLabs are not in Europe while they are one of the greatest tool to unleash disruptive innovation as entrepreneurs and researchers from different backgrounds could meet in a same place ;
- And then comes the third point : SMEs are without any doubt the backbone of our economy : they represent 99% of all businesses in the EU and they employ not less than 2/3 of the European active working population. They may currently be competing to each other but I want to believe it is actually possible to enhance dialogue between them. **Because they could sometimes be stronger together, we will provide opportunities for them to meet, to exchange their views on what is a sustainable growth and all the problems they may encounter to implement it on the market through conferences and trainings.**

This programme will only be possible thanks to the **European Climate Bank** that will put **€300bn** into the programme over the next decade together with the **European Sustainable Investment Plan** that will provide **€155bn** until the end 2020.

To enhance even more cross border sustainable entrepreneurs' cooperation through Europe I will launch **Erasmus for sustainable entrepreneurs**. As for *Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs*, it will also include the neighbouring countries of the European Union. This is, to us, another good way to cooperate by sharing the best practices.

Notwithstanding all of the measures are weak without proper legislative reforms :

- I want to see reformed - and I commit myself to do it as fast as possible - the **Emission trading scheme (ETS)**. We need and have to make it truly effective by substantially **reducing the number of quotas available** yearly on the market and by defining a **price corridor**. Because polluters have to pay and ETS is one of our tools to reduce CO2 emissions from 50% to 55% over the next decade ;
- Moreover, we will have to change the law to protect European entrepreneurs who strive for reducing their carbon footprint in the framework of the Green Deal pledged by the von der Leyen Commission. **Within the European Climate law, we will introduce the first**

**indicator on environmental performance for companies producing all kinds of goods.** Indeed, why as customers do we have a label going from A to G only for choosing our washing machine or our house ? Why don't we have it for all kinds of products ? ;

- I want more transparent accounting standards which would make it possible to quantify with proper figures the good or poor environmental performance of a company. In that respect, I will work closely with the European accounting association and national accounting entities to reach a common ground. **I want to see directly on the balance sheet of a company whether or not it has a negative impact on our environment.** In that way, the net result won't be anymore the single indicator of good performance of a business even for companies' managers.

I can't deny it might take some time. We will implement all these measures very carefully by paying a lot of attention to tackle any underlying environmental dumping outside of the European Union. For this, we will implement the first ever **carbon border tax** to ensure to European entrepreneurs the best business environment possible and, in the end, Europeans' carbon footprint will be reduced by a more locally-based consumption.

I want once again to mention the role of women within our companies. **I want to make our businesses more accountable by sharing publicly their own statistics.** In its last report of July 2016, the European Commission said that 23,3% of board members in companies based in the EU are women. This is not enough and I do want to raise it up to at least 40% by 2020. **I want also to improve the business environment of women by implementing the online European network *Women on board*.** An online network in which they could find all the necessary tools if they ever witness any sort of gender inequality within her company and a platform in which they could find free MOOCs to help them being the next generation of entrepreneurs. An annual conference will be held to promote their biggest achievements throughout the year. Because we still have to empower women by offering them the best conditions possible. Because they deserve it, we will help them cracking the glass ceiling.

**The clock is ticking, climate change urges us to take concrete actions. We can help current businesses changing their business model and start lowering their production level and reaching a better quality of their final products. We can help existing and new SMEs implementing sustainable business models and being at the same time more innovative. I commit myself to help them being the sustainable entrepreneurs of tomorrow, those who will make innovation possible, bridge the gender gap and make Europe a better place for future generations.**