

## [Any plans for this decade?](#) [1]

Written by [Jan Boucek](#) [2] | Wednesday 8 February 2012



I'm sure the folks in Brussels-land mean well with every intention of making the world a better place but you do wonder what planet they live on. Maybe it's the dull weather or the flat vistas of the Belgian plain that give us Viviane Reding, vice president of the European Commission and EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, and her plan for the rest of this decade.

In an [opinion piece in Wednesday's Wall Street Journal Europe](#) [3], Ms Reding notes the 20-years since the Maastricht Treaty and lays out a five-point plan of action for 2020, ending with European political union. As the continent struggles with a debt crisis, lagging competitiveness and anaemic economic growth, Ms Reding is confident that "Our European House now stands ready to weather further storms" but that "we still need to win the hearts and minds of European citizens."

Maybe we're too simplistic in the belief that the only cure for most of the real and perceived woes of Europe "and indeed the world" is sustained and robust economic growth. Nothing else will deliver the means to deal with ballooning health and pension costs, unemployment, social unrest, failing education, immigration, welfare reform, national security and climate change. Without that economic growth, you have, well, Greece.

But Ms Reding proposes yet more fussing with EU institutions for the next nine years and makes it all sound so reasonable and easy. In the real world, though, it would unleash a process that would sap the energy of our political leaders and divert them from their most urgent task "definitive and comprehensive completion of the Single European Market. Until that bit of "Europe" is done, nothing else really matters.

Ms Reding first proposes that, in 2013, European governments "should begin an open debate" about the Europe they would like to have by 2020. "Why in 2013? Because it's the "European Year of Citizens" and that's as good a reason as any.

Point 2 says the European Parliament elections in 2014 could be the occasion for "a broad debate: Should we complete the European House and move toward full-fledged political union?" Well, full marks for honesty of intent but does she really expect a clear cut answer from an electorate more worried about job prospects, pensions and health care?

Onto point 3 which proposes that, prior to the elections in 2014, European leaders should agree that the next Commission president would also become president of the European Council. Sounds like a significant change, right? Well, Ms Reding points out that current treaties have been "deliberately worded

in a way that allows for this.?

Then comes point 4, the big one ? a convention to draft a treaty on European political union so that the European Parliament becomes a true European legislature ? followed by point 5 which notes that 2016-19 will be devoted to ratification of the new treaty.

Now, if you're a business, big or small, local or global, and Europe's political elite have just told you they'll expend their limited political capital for the next decade on yet more EU constitutional rearrangements rather than completing previous commitments on open markets, where would you invest?

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