

WIL Breakfast Debate with Margrethe Vestager, EU Commissioner for Competition

European Parliament

December 5th, 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Margrethe Vestager, the **European Commissioner for Competition** and one of the **most influential female leaders** in Europe, was the special guest of WIL Europe's **EU Breakfast Debate** on Tuesday, 5 December at the European Parliament. A crowd of happy few members and guests were privileged to meet and discuss with the Commissioner, on both the EU Competition policies and her experience of leadership as a woman.



EU Commissioner Margrethe Vestager



Margrethe Vestager, Thaima Samman Laura Batchelor

The event began with warm welcome delivered by **Thaima Samman**, WIL's President and was followed by introductory words of **Laura Batchelor**, Director of Fipra, sponsor of the event and by **Pervenche Berès**, MEP and the hostess of our debate.

Commissioner Vestager opened her **speech on "Women Leadership"** by complementing the participants on how diverse the room looks and called upon men to take the inspiration from women: "Just to allow ourselves to be different in our appearances is changing what power is about," she said.

According to Ms. Vestager, statistics are grim and are showing that women are not equally represented on Boards and as CEOs. In Commissioner's view, we need to change the system to build the path in leadership for the next generations, rather than for individual successful women only. She stressed that she has been reluctant to support quotas but that "we have had very high informal quotas for men, for almost thousand years, which worked very well," therefore, she highlighted, "we should not just dismiss this idea."

"I am not powerful, I exercise power." Margrethe Vestager

The Commissioner called upon changing the perception and reflect it in our language. For example, when we talk about "breaking" the glass ceiling or "taking down barriers", we are using words which describe invading something which is not meant for us. She continued using the example of her relationship with power: "I am not powerful, I exercise power. It is not the power that defines me."



Our members asking questions to the European Commissioner for Competition, Margrethe Vestager

Ms. Vestager also informed the participants about her recent role as the Head of the Jury of Women of Europe Awards, which highlights the contribution of women in promoting and advancing European issues. She said that when people ask her where all the inspiring women are and that they cannot find them, she simply replies: "get better glasses!"

The Commissioner then began the second part of **her speech on the "Competition Law Enforcement,"** and spoke about the themes such as digitalization of our economy, protection of personal data, Google and enforcement of competition law.

According to the Commissioner Vestager, companies need to make sure they don't use data in a way that stops others competing. However, they should not be discouraged from putting in the effort to collect that data: "One of the dynamics of the digitalization should be the incentive to innovate." She stressed that competition enforcement sends a message of fairness and that everyone, however rich or powerful, has to play by the rules.

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Margrethe Vestager

Offering more insights into competition issues, she disagreed that EU does not have innovative companies and gave an example of European company Deepmind, which has recently been bought by Google. As a way to encourage innovation, she called upon customers to stay curious and admitted that the lack of funding for innovative companies is an issue, which the European Commission is trying to address by building the Capital Union.

Ms. Vestager also spoke about European democracy, noting that it is the respect for the very fundamental principles, such as division of powers and the independence of lawmakers, legislators, and enforcers, that contributes to European peace and prosperity. The Commissioner also reminded the audience, mainly composed of leading professionals working in international environments, that “we can export our values by the way we work”.

The Commissioner ended her speech suggesting a winter reading to the participants, by Mary Beard, *Women & Power: A Manifesto*, in which author calls upon redefining the power rather than women.

Before finishing the debate, Ms **Lora Borissova**, the Head of Cabinet of the Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya Gabriel, shared with the audience the statistics on the untapped potential of women in the digital world in particular and revealed that her Commissioner refuses to attend men-only panels. She proved that more work needs to be done and this is why the WIL is already busy working on new projects.

The participants left the event inspired and ready to “exercise power” at all levels !

The WIL celebrates the success of the EU breakfast debate and would like to thank MEP **Pervenche Berès** for hosting us and **Fipra** for sponsoring the event. Especially, we would like to thank all the amazing women who attended! We can't wait to see you again at our next event.

For more photos from our EU Breakfast Debate with Commissioner Vestager, please click [here](#).

About Margrethe Vestager

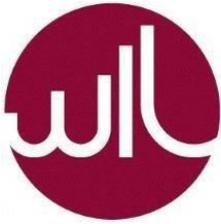


Margrethe Vestager

A Danish politician considered to be the **inspiration for the protagonist in the political drama *Borgen***, the Danish equivalent of *House of Cards*, Margrethe Vestager has been the European Commissioner for Competition since 2014.

She became **Denmark's Education Minister by age 30** and **Social Liberal party leader** a decade later. She also served as **Minister of Economic Affairs and the Interior** from 2011 to 2014 and was the **first woman to hold the title as Deputy Prime Minister of Denmark**.

WIL EUROPE



Since 2010, WIL Europe has been acting as a platform where senior level women can **meet and exchange, network, enlarge their horizons, and identify opportunities and ideas** that are not readily available in their current social and professional environments. We achieve our mission through **international and local events**, peer **networking**, core social and economic **debates with key political and business leaders**, and via our **online website and newsletter**.

Since 2012, WIL Europe has launched its **Women Talent Pool program**, an 18-months cycle program which aims to **support high potential women to become tier 1 leaders** by offering them a range of online and offline learning and networking opportunities. www.wileurope.org

FIPRA



Founded in 2000, FIPRA International Ltd is a **leading European and international public affairs consultancy** advising clients on a range of government relations and regulatory policy issues. FIPRA International has relationships with a range of other consultancies across Europe and globally: the wider FIPRA network extends to **over 50 countries** both in Europe and internationally.

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