

## EUROPEAN LEADERS URGED TO BE BOLD

Brigid Laffan, Director of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies has called on Europe's leaders not be "complacent" as they seek to re-establish trust with Europe's citizenry after the Eurozone crisis.

According to Laffan the EU is in a state of transition. The Lisbon Treaty changed the relationship between the EU's institutions, and there is a re-emergence of "hard power" at the Union's border with the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

Following May's election Europe's new parliamentarians will need to accept this new reality and "Focus on big questions and the global," according to Laffan. The challenges faced by the EU have a "global dimension" and leaders must be prepared to discuss and debate the big issues; the search for sustainable growth, research and education, welfare, poverty and changing dynamics.

"The Union must move beyond the politics of 'There is No Alternative' because there cannot be democratic politics without voice and choice."

Despite the expected increase in representation of Euro-sceptic parties at the next election Europe must press ahead and "bite the bullet on limited fiscal federalism."

Admitting that "Co-responsibility within the euro area comes at the price of responsiveness at domestic level" Laffan said more needs to be done to give the euro zone adequate capacity to deal with economic shocks.

Despite this Laffan said now was the time to "recognise the trials and tribulations of reform" of institutions and practices rather than "be tempted by big bang treaty change." This could prove burdensome to domestic politics increasing the appeal of populist Eurosceptic parties said Laffan.

"At issue is the question of whether the euro area will offer a return to prosperity for all, or just serve to contain governments."

Brigid Laffan was speaking at the State of the Union, an annual conference for high-level reflection on the European Union organised by the European University Institute and held at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence.

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