



FAREWELL TO MRS MÁIRE GEORGEHAN-QUINN, FORMER MEMBER OF THE ECA AND NEWLY DESIGNATED COMMISSIONER FOR RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

By Rosmarie Carotti

Mrs Máire GEORGEHAN-QUINN was a Member of the European Court of Auditors from March 2000. She was then nominated for the Commission where she took office on February 10, 2010.



R.C.: Commissioner, how did your nomination materialize? We all know that you had to pass a hearing in the European Parliament, but how did things go at national level?

Commissioner Máire GEORGEHAN-QUINN: An Taoiseach (the Irish Prime Minister) nominated me for the Commission in the light of my experience at national and European levels. I did not participate in any selection process. The fact that I was offered the important portfolio of Research, Innovation and Science by President Barroso was considered, nationally, to be a significant achievement.

R.C.: You have always stood up for your convictions and for the role of women in professional life. What initiatives do you intend to put forward to improve European Research, Innovation and Science in general, but also the part women play in it?

Commissioner Máire GEORGEHAN-QUINN: My task is to move research, innovation and science to the heart of European policy. That is the only way to achieve sustainable, green economic growth. EU research funding makes a massive contribution to quality of life in Europe and to economic competitiveness, in medicine, energy and nanotechnology to name just a few fields. I want to make that better known – communication is a big part of the task. In policy terms, building on the excellent work of my predecessors, I want to make improvements in three specific areas, so that Europe punches its weight globally: completing the European Research Area, in other words a true single market in research; simplifying the way we fund research; and making a closer connection between laboratory science and bringing new products and services to market.

We cannot afford to waste talent. I will make a major effort to increase women's role in technological progress. We need a campaign, using positive female role models, but nice adverts are not enough. Women are well represented in scientific education but not in the profession – they tend to drop out when they have family commitments. We need to make science careers - and entrepreneurship - more attractive and more family friendly. I also want to look at whether EU research funding programmes give a fair chance to women and if not, to put that right.

R.C.: *Since March 2000, you have been a Member of the European Court of Auditors. In what respect this experience with auditing and budgeting will be useful in your new portfolio?*

Commissioner Máire GEORGHEGAN-QUINN: From the Court, I bring to my new role the following:

- An awareness of the usefulness of the Court's work for the Commission in aiming to eliminate systems failings and weakness and assure value for money.
- The conviction that adequate and effective internal control systems are necessary to avoid budgetary loss and waste.
- An understanding of the importance of open and honest dialogue between the Court and the Commission.
- A strong respect for the work of the Court.

I'll be responsible for a funding programme worth over € 50 billion! I aim to simplify funding procedures while at the same time reinforcing financial control - once an auditor always an auditor! There is no contradiction between simplification and control – as the Court knows very well, it is not by multiplying layers of bureaucracy that you best protect public money. I think my experience as a Court Member will enhance my credibility both politically and with the beneficiaries. I look forward to working together on important issues such as Tolerable Risk of Error in modernising the sound financial management of our instruments.

R.C.: *Politicians have to compromise but never lose sight of their ultimate goal. Can you describe your ideal picture of a European Research Area? Do you believe in clusters and who would decide on their location and composition?*

Commissioner Máire GEORGHEGAN-QUINN: A European Research Area is a place in which researchers, knowledge and new technology can circulate and grow across Europe as readily as goods can today. To achieve a European Research Area we need improvements in five areas. First, making it easier for researchers to build careers across borders. Second, avoiding duplication of funding and work through better joint programming. Third, improving Europe's research and scientific infrastructure to world class levels. Fourth, efficient knowledge transfer so that the results of research are used to maximum effect across Europe. And last but not least, international cooperation. Climate change, for example, is a global problem and we can only tackle it by working internationally.

It is also a question of culture. Science must belong in society, not be seen as some kind of strange and slightly frightening world apart, as is too often the case. In the end all of this will serve to ensure that good ideas improve society, nurture employment and help us to develop our way of life.

On clusters, yes, they have often proved successful. For the Commission and governments it is a case of making it easier for clusters to grow up where that makes sense, with infrastructure and strategic help. Not a question of top down decisions second guessing the private sector.

R.C.: *Concerning Research, Innovation and Science, how can the Commission improve the international cooperation and the cooperation between private and public sector?*

Commissioner Máire GEORGHEGAN-QUINN: The Commission is ideally placed to do these things and is already doing them. I want to build on that. For example, we can integrate scientific cooperation more into international trade discussions. We can negotiate on international research initiatives such as the ITER nuclear fusion project on behalf of all 27 Member States, achieving the same critical mass in terms of economic and scientific capacity as, say, the US or China.

We need to get the policy framework right to encourage private investment in research and get closer to the target of 3% of GDP invested in research overall. That will be a key part of the Europe 2020 Strategy the EU will implement to move our economy out of the crisis and towards consistent sustainable growth. The Commission has also set up several very promising public private partnerships in areas such as innovative medicines and clean cars. Feedback we have is that those could work better if we adapted the framework better to private sector needs, and that will be a priority – while fully defending the public interest, of course.

R.C.: *The European Commission policy paper on innovation will be defined in 2010. What ideas do you intend to bring forward?*

Commissioner Máire GEORGHEGAN-QUINN: I intend to work with my colleagues in the college to identify targeted political priorities that will need to be addressed to create a new innovation-friendly regulatory, market and policy environment. Innovation means putting new ideas into practice and generating better jobs, new knowledge and a more competitive long-term perspective for Europe in a global economy. This will mean identifying the bottlenecks, simplifying the instruments, communicating the benefits and improving the science base to enable a new knowledge based economy and society to take shape.

R.C.: *And the last question, on what occasions will we see you back in the Court again?*

Commissioner Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN: I hope that I will continue to have regular contact with my ex-colleagues at the Court and they will certainly be most welcome to see me whenever they are in Brussels. I would like to take the opportunity to convey to both the Members and all the staff of the Court how much I valued my time at the Court and appreciated the support and friendship that I received. It is my intention to build on the strong personal and professional relationships which have been built up over the past 10 years. I leave the Court with a certain sadness but with many happy memories. Finally, I would like to thank all those, Members and Staff, who have advised, assisted and supported me in my various areas of responsibility since I took up duty as a Member of the Court on 1 March 2000.



Mrs Máire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN and her Cabinet in the ECA

CURRICULUM VITAE

Máire GEORGHEGAN-QUINN

Personal details

- Irish.
- Born September 5, 1950 in Galway, Ireland.
- Married.
- 2 children.

Current duties

- Since March 2000: Member of the European Court of Auditors.

Political career

- 1994 -1997: Member of Dáil Éireann and Opposition Spokesperson on Health.
- 1993 -1994: Minister for Justice. Member of the Irish Government team which negotiated the Joint Declaration of December 1993, by the British and Irish Governments, on Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland.
- 1992: Minister for Tourism, Transport and Communications.
- 1991 -1992: Member of Dáil Éireann.
- 1987 - 1991: Minister for European Affairs. Chaired inter-departmental cttee. on EU policy with responsibility for co-ordinating Ireland's EU Presidency in 1990. During the Presidency chaired the Budget, Telecommunications, Culture and Development Councils.
- 1982 - 1987: Member of Dáil Éireann. Chairwoman of 1st Joint Parliamentary Cttee. on Women's Rights and Member of Parliamentary Cttee. on Marital Breakdown.
- 1982: Minister of State for Education.
- 1981 - 1982: Member of Dáil Éireann.
- 1979 - 1981: Minister for the Gaeltacht (1st woman Cabinet Minister since the foundation of the State).
- 1977 - 1979: Minister of State for Commerce.
- 1975 - 1977: Member of Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament).

Professional career

- 1970 -1975: Teacher
- 1997 - 2000: Columnist with "The Irish Times" newspaper; TV presenter; Part-time business consultant; Non executive director Aer Lingus; Non-executive director Ryan Hotels.

Other activities

- Former Member of the Governing authority of the National University of Ireland Galway.
- 1996: Publication "The Green Diamond".

Education

- 1970: Graduated in teaching.
- 1968: Graduated from secondary school.

Languages

- Irish: mother tongue.
- English: fluent.
- French: basic knowledge.