Good afternoon,

Today the European Commission organised a very impressive high-level conference to take stock of what we have achieved in making EU law lighter, simpler and less costly during the two mandates I had as Commission President. It was to some extent, also a bilan in terms of this area.

Today is also the moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr Edmund Stoiber. He and his High-Level Group on Administrative Burdens have been of great support in making smart regulation a reality in the European Union. Their final report presented today shows to which extent their work has been a success. It also contributes to the debate on our smart regulation policies.

Let me start with a more general remark: EU rules are not wrong or burdensome by definition as some tend to believe. On the contrary: when some people think that ideas like "one in – one out" would be a great achievement, we often do "one in – 28 out". This is something we have to explain: very often, a single European regulation replaces 28 different regulations, namely in the single market. It's extremely important and it should be appreciated. This in itself, provided a new European regulation adds real value, can facilitate lives for citizens and business. And what is it that adds real value? Well, first and foremost those measures which are geared to create growth and jobs in Europe, through a functioning single market and through a competitive, sustainable and inclusive economy.

As I said many times before: Not everything that is good has to be done at European level. There are issues that can dealt also at national and regional – or even local – level. This is the principle of subsidiarity. We only need European Union action on issues that can better tackled together than at national, regional or local level. "Being big on big things, and being smaller on small things", as I said some time ago in the State of the Union address, has been our motto.

I believe we have focussed on the right priorities. We see a more integrated, a more open and stronger European Union than back in 2004 when I started off as Commission President.

Why can I say that? Because in fact we were able to keep Europe united, responding to the biggest crisis ever we faced since the beginning of the European integration. But we haven't only kept Europe united. If you look at 2004, we were 15, now we are 28 countries. We almost doubled the European Union membership in the midst of all these crises and we have done it remaining open to the world, promoting global solutions like we have done in the G20. And also because of our reforms, the governance reforms, namely in the euro area, and the reforms that are going on in our member states, I
believe now Europe is stronger because it is better prepared to face the challenges of globalisation. This is why it's important to look at the big picture and to see the trends, and not only this or that event.

But what have we achieved concretely? The figures speak for themselves:

1. Firstly, we have exceeded the 25% reduction target for administrative burdens in thirteen policy areas. The initiatives proposed by the Commission since 2007, by the way often inspired by the Stoiber Group, and adopted by Council and Parliament amount to an estimated reduction of around 33.4 billion euros of savings per year for business. This is an impressive result.

2. Secondly, the Commission applies the 'think small first' principle, considering the impact of legislation on Small and Medium-sized enterprises. And micro-companies are often exempt from EU legislation unless overriding public policy objectives so demand. It's important to know this. Big companies, transnational companies always have the means to deal with complex legislation and regulation. They have the best lawyers. But for a small company in Europe, for a micro-company – by the way, those are really creating jobs in Europe – the complex legislation that we produce in Europe is sometimes a very big burden.

3. Thirdly, the Commission's REFIT programme for Regulatory Fitness and Performance has become the focal point of all our smart regulation efforts since 2012. About 200 individual actions are being implemented. Under REFIT we simplify EU law, we repeal existing legislation that is no longer necessary and we withdraw proposals that do not find agreement in Parliament or Council. We also evaluate entire policy areas in order to identify further opportunities for simplification and burden reduction. This is taking place without putting into doubt the EU's policy objectives in areas like the environment or health. Overall, since 2005, the Commission repealed over 6100 legal acts and withdrew almost 300 proposals. A yearly scoreboard identifies the progress made.

4. Finally, in preparing its proposals, the Commission has ensured that smart regulation principles are followed and our tools improved. Stakeholder consultations, impact assessments and evaluations are carried out systematically and contribute to evidence-based policy making. Over 680 impact assessments have been produced since 2007. And I can assure you that the Commission's impact assessments are independent.

To conclude: Making EU law lighter, simpler and less costly has become a Leitmotiv of the Commission and the positive results are clear for everybody. The new Commission can build on very solid ground to move the smart regulation agenda further. And I'm confident they will do it.

By the way, if you compare the debate ten years ago and now, the difference is very important. When we proposed the better regulation agenda, it met very strong opposition in many quarters of Europe. Today, I can say, in the last European Parliament elections, with the exception of the extreme right and the extreme left parties, all the other political forces, from the central left to the central right, were very strongly in favour of better regulation. That was not the case ten years ago. So some kind of cultural matters have been also changing in Europe. The idea that we are not more European just because we produce more legislation, that we have to look at the quality of legislation. I think from that point of view the situation is completely different now than it was before.

This is a very delicate issue and we always have to find the right balance. It's a mistake to be against all legislation of Europe – and sometimes some people present themselves
as very much in favour of this agenda but they in fact are putting in question the European Union acquis and that's a mistake. But it's also a mistake to think that you are more European just because you produce more legislation. So the issue is the quality of legislation. Smart regulation, this is the important point, based on the principle of subsidiarity.

And this is why I believe we have now the conditions to move forward in the agenda. Once again, thank you Dr Stoiber, dear Edmund, for your contribution, that is going now to be discussed by the European institutions - the Commission, the Parliament and the Council. One thing is clear for me: it's not only Brussels that can determine these issues. If we want to keep the support of the European citizens, if we want to be sure about the legitimacy of our project, we have to listen to people's concerns and we have to be sure that this agenda of better regulation is really owned, not only by Brussels but by the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, and by our Member States.

I thank you for your attention.