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NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations

Subject: Plenary Session of the European Parliament, 16 January 2013, Strasbourg
Programme of activities of the Irish Presidency
Council and Commission statements

The Taoiseach said that Ireland was determined to exit the EU-IMF programme before the end of the year and went on to outline the Presidency's priorities (stability, jobs and growth), which he stressed would be developed in close cooperation with the EP¹.

Mr BARROSO gave the speech attached in Annex II.

Mr SWOBODA (S&D, AT) concurred that an agreement was necessary on the 'Two Pack', but stressed the need to set up a redemption fund. On banking union, he felt that disproportionate bonuses could not be accepted. Mr SWOBODA agreed that the EU needed to act on youth unemployment and, on Schengen, warned that the Council wanted to limit the freedom of movement, which was unacceptable for the EP.

¹ See speech attached in Annex I.

Mr VERHOFSTADT (ALDE, BE) urged the Presidency to avoid complacency and stressed the need for a more integrated EU. On the 'Two Pack', he said that the EP awaited an answer from the Commission on its proposals. He felt that the Single Supervisory Mechanism should be a genuinely European mechanism, and added that a resolution mechanism was necessary.

Mr COHN-BENDIT (Greens/EFA, FR) called for a credible agreement on the MFF, and said that the proposal currently discussed by the European Council neglected growth. Mr COHN-BENDIT further stressed that a European FTT would represent more than half of the EU budget.

Mr CALLANAN (ECR, UK) welcomed the emphasis put by the Presidency on deepening the single market and invited it to set up a Council formation dedicated to the single market. He welcomed Ireland's position on the FTT and said that there was a distinct possibility of concluding a FTA with the USA.

Mr FARAGE (EFD, UK) said that the EU's situation had not improved, with the unemployment soaring, the manufacturing eroding, and pensions being cut back. He looked forward to a referendum on the United Kingdom's relations with the EU.

Ms ZIMMER (GUE/NGL, DE) regretted that the Presidency's priorities did not include support for sustainable jobs and felt that the current MFF proposal would lead to a widening of the north-south divide. She felt that the youth guarantee should be funded by abolishing rebates to the EU budget.

Ms DODDS (NI, UK) concurred with the Taoiseach condemnation of violence in Northern Ireland.

Many MEPs stressed in their individual interventions the importance of the MFF dossier. Mr MITCHELL (EPP, IE) urged the Presidency to defend a strong budget for humanitarian aid and development, whilst Mr GALLAGHER (ALDE, IE) insisted on the need for a strong budget for agriculture and fisheries and Mr DE GRANDES PASCUAL (EPP, ES) laid emphasis on the funds for agriculture and transport. Mr PROTASIEWICZ (EPP, PL) opposed cuts in the education and social areas. Mr FÄRM (S&D, SE) stressed that the EP had a right of veto, and called for the introduction of own resources and a binding mid-term review.

Mr HARKIN (ALDE, IE) stressed the need for a European solution on bank debt. Ms FERREIRA (S&D, PT) asked for the issue of sovereign debt to be tackled in the framework of the negotiations on the Two Pack and opposed differentiation between banks for the purposes of the banking union.

Mr LAMBSDORFF (ALDE, DE) criticised the British Prime Minister for refusing to debate the EU's future with the EP. He also called for the abolition of the rotating Presidencies - which Mr BOKROS (ECR, HU) and Mr VAN DER STOEP (NI, NL) felt were obsolete - and of budget rebates, as well as for a smaller Commission.

Mr BÜTIKOFER (Greens/EFA, DE), echoed by Ms COSTELLO (S&D, IE) and Ms TURUNEN (Greens/EFA, DK), welcomed the emphasis put by the Presidency on youth unemployment, but regretted that re-industrialisation was not among its priorities.

Mr OBERMAYR (NI, AT) called on the Presidency not to rush the discussions on Romania and Bulgaria's accession to Schengen, whilst Mr IVAN (S&D, RO) regretted that some Member States opposed that accession. Mr AUDY (EPP, FR) asked whether Ireland could envisage joining the Schengen area. Mr LOPEZ DE AGUILAR (S&D, ES) urged the Presidency to clear the way for an agreement on Schengen following the Council's decision to change the legal basis.

Mr BOKROS (ECR, HU) felt that austerity was not enough, and that competitiveness should be restored. Mr AUDY (EPP, FR) asked if the Taoiseach could not attend on a regular basis EP meetings. Mr GIEGOLD (Greens/EFA, DE) pleaded in favour of a fair system for sharing tax revenues across the EU, even though this would affect Ireland's interests. Mr VAN DER STOEP (NI, NL) called on the Commission to communicate to the EP all the relevant information on the DALLI case. Mr ZAHRADIL (ECR, CZ) and Ms TZAVELA (EFD, EL) praised the Presidency for prioritising the trans-Atlantic relations.

In his concluding remarks, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ said that the EU would continue to support the peace process in Northern Ireland. He stressed that the agreement on the Single Supervisory Mechanism was a success, and that legislation should be agreed on the remaining banking union pillars. He warned against further cuts on MFF, including on administrative costs, which he said would cause long-term structural damage to the EU. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ indicated that the Commission had already provided information on the DALLI case to CONT and to the Conference of Presidents and would continue to ensure full transparency in line with the applicable legal provisions.

At the end of the debate, Mr KENNY stressed his strong respect for the EP. He insisted that a successful Presidency was very much in Ireland's interest and urged the EU to realise that it could do much more by working together. He hoped that an agreement would be found on the Schengen governance and on asylum, and said that progress regarding Bulgaria and Romania's accession to Schengen would be contingent upon the finding of a unanimous position among Member States. On the MFF, he welcomed the application for the first time of the "codecision" procedure, and said that the agreed budget should be adequately resourced. The Taoiseach assured that Ireland would not stand in the way of enhanced cooperation on the FTT, which would be the first item on the agenda of the next Eurogroup. He insisted on the need to act at the EU level in order to offer opportunities to the youth and made in this respect reference to the youth guarantee.

The Taoiseach agreed that complacency should be avoided and called for progress to be achieved on the 'Two Pack'. He stressed the leading role historically played by Ireland in the development area. Mr KENNY said it was important for Ireland to get the EU support to exit the EU-IMF programme, and welcomed the decision to break the link between sovereign and bank debts. He also stressed the close relations between Ireland and the United Kingdom, adding that it was not possible to have 27 different statutes for each Member State and that the United Kingdom stood to benefit from the trade agreements to be concluded between the EU and third countries. The Taoiseach hoped that the EU could play its part in Mali and Syria, and, condemning violence, thanked the EU for its support on the peace progress in Northern Ireland.

**Speech by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD to the European Parliament
Wednesday 16th January 2013²**

President of the European Parliament, President of the European Commission, Distinguished leaders of the political groups, Members of the European Parliament. Today as Taoiseach I'm honoured to attend the European Parliament and present the priorities of the Irish Presidency.

This is Ireland's Seventh Presidency, begun on the 40th anniversary of our joining what was then the European Community.

The Irish people made a good decision - in those 40 years we have travelled well and far, we have never looked back. But our Atlantic island has long been at the 'heart' of Europe.

In the sixth and seventh Centuries our monks, Columbanus and Killian among their number, left in their small boats to bring the light of learning to the European mind.

Today Ireland keeps that faith with our continent, with our Union of peoples.

We keep faith because of our particular idea of Europe. An idea that says despite our national differences as a people we dwell best and deepest always in the shelter, never in the shadow of the other.

We must work hard and together to renovate, to restore and to renew our Union.

It is in that spirit of doing - that spirit of renewing - that Ireland assumes and with some pride and honour this its seventh Presidency.

Ireland and Europe

In those 40 years just as our Union has been transformed so too membership of the EU transformed Ireland.

In 1973 our exports primarily agricultural went primarily to Britain.

Today Irish companies export high-tech goods and services across Europe and around the world. We also host over 1,000 foreign companies critical to our capacity to recover and to strengthen our economy.

It was in November 2010 that Ireland entered an EU-IMF support-programme.

Our proud people continue to labour under the weight of bank-related debt. Austerity has brought pain and suffering to many families, many homes. But the Irish people have borne that weight, that pain with remarkable courage and patience and quiet dignity.

And it is that story, those qualities and the deeper authentic elements of Ireland such as respect, vision, compassion, loyalty I bring here today. And because of our people, their qualities I am happy to say that Ireland is taking steps on the road to recovery.

² Check against delivery.

We've honoured all our EU-IMF commitments through eight Troika analyses.

Last year our economy started to grow again our exports climbed to record-levels. We're bringing government spending under control.

Internationally investors are showing new confidence in Ireland. The result seen in lower yields on Irish government bonds. Recent bond sales show the market confidence that once ebbed is now returning.

As a nation we are determined to exit the EU-IMF Programme before the end of this year.

We face many challenges up ahead and our economy is still fragile, but I firmly believe that 2013 can be the year in which Ireland will exit its Programme and show leadership to Europe.

But Europe too needs to steady itself after this crisis driven period, and return to stability. That is why Ireland's Presidency will be all about Stability, Jobs, Growth.

The Irish Way

In our previous Presidencies we focused on results. Now we will do so again. We will work very closely with you, the elected members of the peoples of Europe here in the Parliament, whose increased importance and growing influence puts you at the very heart of the Union's business.

We have worked hard in preparing for this Presidency. We have re-invested in our European relationships. And because we have, the depth of our relationship the breadth of our understanding have never been deeper or greater.

We are taking those better relations to our people. Our citizens need to know and they need to see that we are working to restore their confidence and trust not alone in the national parliaments but equally and critically in the democratic ideal of the European Union itself. It is important that people understand and feel that returning confidence.

Europe is Complex

Certainly 'Europe' can be a difficult concept. Some wish that 'Europe' were simpler, less complex, less institutionalised. But as someone who is passionate about Europe I am convinced that our European people can be both inspired and motivated about what we actually do in Europe and indeed in what can achieve.

All across our Union, our people need jobs.

They look to us - to 'Europe' for support. From the Atlantic to the Urals our people want and need security. The security that will allow them to live better, safer, richer lives.

Our Union is unique in its success in responding to these issues. It inspires others in their capacity to do likewise. Our ability to work together and commit to achieving results is what matters to our citizens.

In this Year of the Citizen, we must be ready to argue the very "Why?" of Europe.

And yes, I agree with those who might say that our response is sometimes not sufficiently clear.

But what we have done well together has been outstanding. From the wreckage of war we created a peaceful, united, democratic Union of peoples and we did all of this within a heartbeat ‘of the possibility..... of there being no Europe at all’.

Peace

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Europe last year recognised that achievement.

Ireland knows in its own way the pain and suffering of violence.

We have also been lucky enough to see what dialogue and understanding between communities can yield: the historic reconciliation of two communities and the peace agreement on our island.

The last weeks have seen attempts by some to threaten the very hard-won peace. But be assured small groups of disparate, unrepresentative, trouble-makers will never succeed in bringing Northern Ireland and its peoples back to that dark place.

Today I pay tribute to the EU for its long and unswerving support for the peace process over the years. I pay tribute especially to this Parliament for the faith you kept with all who wanted and worked for peace on our island.

That support fortifies our resolve to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland can look forward to an end to this disruption of their much-valued peaceful stability.

Stability, Jobs and Growth

Mr. President, as we know, as we see the current economic crisis is impacting deeply on our people.

In some countries, including Ireland, that impact is even more severe.

The deepest hurt is that of unemployment. Facing a day with no work to go to. Particularly for our young people. Their confidence corroded. But worse their hopes eroded.

No unemployment figure is acceptable. However, we cannot and will not as democrats allow a generation to grow up believing that their political leaders have failed to give them a reasonable chance in life. Because it is they who are democracy’s future, our future, Europe’s future.

Mr. President, what matters most to our young people leaving school and university?
The chance of work. The dignity of a job. This is the challenge of our generation.

There is no simple solution to this problem, but it is a challenge we must meet head on. We will prioritise the Youth Employment Package including the Youth Guarantee.

Completing the Single Market, removing barriers to business, increasing trading opportunities and improving competitiveness are all critical in improving the environment for jobs.

The next phase of Europe’s recovery will involve untapping the full potential of the Single Market. We will be ambitious for progress on the Professional Qualifications Directive, on the Posting of Workers Directive and on pensions portability.

The Public Procurement package also has the potential to contribute significantly to the marketplace for our SMEs.

We also must reflect the way we live now thanks to technology in a Digital Single Market. So we will want to see and will prioritise progress on e-signatures, high speed broadband, collective rights management, and data protection.

MFF

The Union needs a stable basis for its challenging work. We need adequate multi-annual financing. The MFF is a priority which I have discussed with both President Schulz and the Conference of Presidents.

The European Council has made considerable progress in narrowing the very large differences between Member States. But more work and negotiation is needed, and soon.

I will spare no effort in working with President Van Rompuy with the aim of securing agreement on the MFF at the European Council. As Presidency, we will discuss it with you in the Parliament. You are critical partners on this. We cannot do this without you. That authority was enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty.

I believe it is very much in our, and in Europe's interests, that we reach early agreement. After that, we will work with Parliament to advance across the range of instruments so that there can be a stable basis for the Union's programmes by the end of 2013.

Important work on CAP and CFP reform, Horizon 2020 and on structural funds need early attention. We owe that to our citizens.

Difficult times require difficult choices of us all. A fair agreement, even if imperfect, will allow us to move forward.

Stability: economic governance and banking

Stability is needed, above all in the financial sector and the area of economic governance. Parliament and Council must agree the Two-pack very soon.

The European Semester Process is a real step forward in how we govern our economies. But you have pointed to shortcomings in terms of democratic accountability of the system; we are ready to contribute to such a discussion in the coming months.

In June, the Euro area Heads of State and Government determined to sever the toxic link between banking and sovereign debt as well as improving the sustainability of Ireland's adjustment programme. We are determined to see these decisions implemented. We will work to achieve a real Banking Union. This must be among the Union's top priorities, including early adoption of the Single Supervisory Mechanism and the other elements of Banking Union.

We look forward to agreement with Parliament on CRD IV also, where we have made good progress.

Foreign Policy

Mr. President, our world is now smaller than ever, making Europe's role and Europe's responsibility more important than ever before.

The Irish people's commitment to human rights and international aid is exemplary. At almost any field clinic, any food depot in the sometimes-forgotten parts of our world you will hear an Irish voice - get the Irish view.

We will use the Presidency to strengthen the Union's approach to fighting global poverty and hunger.

We will work closely in support of the efforts of the High Representative / Vice President Ashton to strengthen the role of the European Union in bringing peace to troubled regions such as Syria, Iran, Mali and Somalia.

Trade

We see real potential to increase Europe's trade with strategic partners. We have high hopes for the opening of Free Trade Agreement negotiations with the US. We believe the time is right to do so. Important negotiations where we will work for progress in the coming period include Japan, India, Canada and the countries of ASEAN region.

We are under no illusions that this will be easy: many sensitive issues arise. But because we know the benefits of what we have forged among ourselves in our Single Market, we must try to seize the potential benefits of increasing trade with other global players. The prize of success here is enormous in the scale of jobs that can be created.

Enlargement

Mr. President, one of the most important days in the EU's long and proud history was May 1st 2004 when Ireland's Presidency welcomed ten new Member States of the European Union.

This Presidency will also prioritise a credible enlargement policy.

We look forward to greeting the Croatian people as Members on 1 July.

For those countries in negotiations, each at a different stage, we will work to advance the process with Iceland, Turkey, and Montenegro. Important decisions may also be possible on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, and Kosovo during Ireland's term.

Mr. President, the crisis of jobs and the European economy so preoccupies us that there is a risk we lose sight of what we hold, what we have achieved.

Europe remains among the best places to live not just economically, but culturally and socially. Above all because we have peace, a precious peace, we committed to and made together. No wonder so many countries aspire to join us to become part of our European family.

I believe that in 2012 we saw the passing of possibly the worst of the economic crisis – the fear that the euro itself might not survive was confronted and dispelled emphatically and we now move onto the challenges of the recovery of Europe.

I know this does not console our citizens, our families who have lost jobs, who don't need to read about the Crisis - they live it every day.

They and their experience strengthen our resolve. And it is for their sake that we push on and harder with actions to bring stability, new jobs, new growth to the Union and re-install hope and confidence in our people's lives.

Mr President, our European Union is not some exclusive distant pavilion. Our Union is a family - at times boisterous, anxious, fretful, joyful, always compassionate, always faithful.

So Ireland's Presidency will be about our European family.

Today and for the next six months for Ireland's part we will give all our heart to solving some of Europe's challenges.

I believe we can do no less. For this is the outstanding task of our generation, the ultimate challenge of politics for those entrusted with the democratic responsibility of leadership.

Let us together resolve that in this task we will not fail.

ENDS

Speech by President Barroso at the EP plenary debate on the Irish Presidency of the Council³

Dear President,

Dear Taoiseach,

Honourable Members,

Every Presidency is a landmark, but this time it is particularly true. This is the 7th time Ireland holds the Presidency. It is also 40th anniversary of Ireland's accession to the European Union.

As such it is a reminder of the past achievements of our Union, the current challenges and the future work ahead of us, as we seek not to replicate the past but to build a better future.

Indeed, I am convinced that having Ireland at the helm of the rotating Presidency of the Council at this juncture will be good for Ireland and good for Europe.

Last week the Commission met in Dublin with the Taoiseach and the Irish government to discuss our shared priorities. Together, we stressed the need to lay the foundations for lasting growth and job creation. Stability, growth and jobs: these are the priorities Ireland has set for the Presidency programme, priorities which I very much welcome and which have been at the heart of the Commission's actions since the start of the crisis.

As I said to this House yesterday during the debate on the Cyprus Presidency we have by the end of 2012 achieved much in the way of stability. The forecasts of the doomsayers who predicted the implosion of the Euro have been proved wrong. European countries have shown through their actions that we will stand together, the Union as a whole, to face the challenges ahead.

We all know there is very important and difficult work to do to achieve the goal of sustainable growth and I underline "sustainable", because we have seen in the past that artificial growth fuelled by irresponsible public or private debt is simply not viable. While going on with further steps to a deeper economic and monetary union -and in this context the approval of the so-called two pack comes to mind as an urgent priority - we must pursue fiscal consolidation, enact economic reforms for competitiveness and also make targeted investments for growth. And above all we need to tackle the very serious social situation that we have in too many of our Member States.

Let me start with the short term steps to put in place banking union.

It is good that the Member States were able to find consensus on the Single Supervisory Mechanism just three months after the Commission proposal. I now hope that Parliament and Council will be able to finalise the agreement as quickly as possible in the next weeks. This is a key test to demonstrate that the European Union has the political will and capacity to act quickly on the big issues.

An agreement on the Single Supervisory Mechanism also shows that we can reach agreement, within the EU as a whole, on deepening the Euro Area. And as you know we are clearly attached to the principles of the integrity, not only of the Single Market, but the integrity of our Union, while accepting and promoting the deepening of the EMU.

³ Check against delivery.

Reaching political agreement on the proposal in time for discussion at your plenary session in early February is not impossible with political will. [Parliament has worked on this very efficiently and the Thyssen and Giegold reports are constructive and supportive, and in very many points rather similar to the approach taken by the Council.] The Commission will do everything it can to facilitate and assist the intensive trilogue discussions to deliver final agreement on this important piece of legislation.

I know the importance this House attaches to the next stage of banking union – the single resolution mechanism. Proposals are already before you which would allow for the harmonisation of national bank resolution tools.

But to completely break the vicious link between bank failure and sovereign debt, we need to go further and provide for a single resolution mechanism to match the single supervision we are putting in place for the euro area and other Member States who wish to participate. This raises some very complex legal and technical issues, but we are determined to work through these quickly and aim to present a proposal before the summer. I consider this a matter of utmost political priority.

Honourable members,

Stability means more than financial stability. We must increase our efforts to ensure economic and social stability.

Of course, economic growth is the best means to generate employment and to improve the social situation.

The Single Market is the Union's largest engine for growth. To release the full benefits of the single market we are pushing forward with the two Single Market Acts.

I welcome the Irish Presidency's commitment to securing the adoption of the proposals already on the table. The Commission will present the remaining Single Market Act 2 legislative proposals this spring.

In all of this we look forward to continuing the very good co-operation with this House to ensure that legislation is not only put on the statute books but is implemented as soon as possible to the benefit of all our citizens.

Of course creating opportunities within the single market is one thing, taking advantage of the opportunities is another. This is why we will work to implement the action plan for entrepreneurship and place a particular focus on SMEs to ensure that these opportunities are translated into increased economic activity and more jobs.

We have all committed to growth through our Europe 2020 Strategy and the Compact on growth and jobs. But the time has come to make good on this commitment. This will be driving Europe's work over the Irish Presidency and beyond as made clear in the Commission's annual work programme.

As leverage for growth and investment, we must have an agreement on the multi-annual financial framework. It is a new year but the message remains the same, and it remains equally valid: the European budget is the budget for investment growth and jobs at the European level.

Now is the time for governments to match actions to their rhetoric: if you state that growth in Europe is vital for your national economy then you need to support European measures to promote that growth. I hope that the European Council will agree on the MFF very soon, probably in the beginning of February, but governments should not forget that while their agreement is necessary, it is not sufficient. The European Parliament's approval is also indispensable.

The Commission has and will continue to focus on supporting employment. Last April we presented the "Employment Package" with a set of key measures to support job creation, to restore the dynamics of the labour market and to enhance the EU governance.

In December, the Commission has presented a proposal to combat youth unemployment: the "youth guarantee" scheme is a concrete measure with renowned potential to enhance school-to-work transitions and ensure every young person gets into further education, training, an apprenticeship or a job within 4 months. The Commission has also called for urgent action in "re-thinking education", maximising the investments in skills is essential to achieve better socio-economic outcomes. In our discussions with Taoiseach Kenny and the Irish government I have been heartened by the importance that the Irish Presidency will place on these issues, in particular its commitment to reach agreement on the Youth Guarantee already next month.

The solution to our social crisis is not to abandon the European Social Model. The solution is to recognise the immense challenges that globalisation poses for European competitiveness and to reform our social market economy addressing the important issues of competitiveness. The Commission is preparing a Social Investment Package with a set of focused and concrete actions on how these reforms can take shape in our Member States and what the EU can do to support them.

Honourable Members,

Ultimately, European stability is also provided by confidence and confidence comes out of a clear, realistic and achievable vision of the future, and that means for Europe's future architecture. Plans for deeper economic and monetary union help generate stability by showing investors that there is a clear vision for the future. Over the course of this year the Commission will, building on the blueprint we presented last year, set out in a more detailed manner the steps needed to deepen economic and monetary union, including a social dimension in the EMU and the necessary accompanying steps towards political Union.

President,

Honourable Members,

I am confident that during the Irish Presidency we will look beyond our European borders. The world economy is changing beyond recognition, with new centres of growth appearing and the pace of globalisation increasing.

Europe needs to be an active global player to benefit from worldwide economic potential and to promote our values. Europe has lots of advantages. Despite the current difficulties, Europe's average debt-to GDP ratio is 82.5%, compared to the United States' rate of 103% and Japan's nearly 230%. And, and this fact is less known, unlike other major industrialised economies that have been losing their share of the world market, the European Union has preserved its share of the world market. But of course there are very important differences among Member States of the European Union.

We will continue to deepen economic ties with both our well established strategic partners and the dynamic emerging economies. We look forward to the approval, now that the negotiations are concluded, of the Singapore FTA, we look forward to completing FTA negotiations with Canada and to start negotiations with Japan. We will pursue with vigour our negotiations with India, Malaysia and Vietnam. We will also set out a clear vision on deepening economic ties with the United States which remains our single most important economic partner. And in spite of everything that we hear these days, the reality is that the European Union and the United States is by far the most important economic relationship in the world.

Nor must we neglect our neighbours to the south and to the east. Our relations with these countries are a reminder that our trade policy, indeed all our external economic policy from assistance to energy, transport to research are not just vital for our economic interests but for Europe's capacity to play a significant, constructive role at the global level.

President, Taoiseach,

Honourable Members,

Allow me to conclude with a remark on Ireland, which has shown an impressive commitment to implementing the economic adjustment programme.

The Irish people have had to make great sacrifices to ensure the recovery of the country. And so have the people of Greece, Portugal, Spain, but also other countries which carry out difficult but indispensable reforms.

The Irish case shows that provided there is the political will to accompany the sacrifices, programmes can and do work and reform can go hand-in-hand with social cohesion. Economic growth in Ireland was stronger than expected at the end of last year, the deficit is lower than predicted and Ireland has already made a first successful return to financial markets.

Of course, important challenges remain; especially tackling unemployment and the reducing further the very high deficit. The European Commission will stand by Ireland as we will stand with the other programme countries in particular. The Commission supports all measures that will improve market confidence and increase public support for the reform process. In parallel, I have always made and will always make the case for the need for solidarity and for the need for fairness in the European Union.

As I mentioned in my introduction, Ireland has been an active and valued member of the European Union for 40 years, it has greatly benefited from its membership in the past, and through its Presidency of the EU will have an important role in shaping the new European Union for the future to the benefit of this generation and generations to come.

The great poet William Butler Yeats commenced his collection "Responsibilities" with the sentence:

"In dreams begins responsibility"

I would add "In responsibility begins action" and over the next 6 months there will be plenty of action, from the Presidency, from the Commission and I am certain too from this Parliament.

And I'm sure that the six months of the Irish Presidency of the Council will be an Irish and a European success story.

Thank you for your attention.