

Programme of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

1 January - 30 June 2013



FOR STABILITY, JOBS AND GROWTH

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For Stability, Jobs and Growth

This year, 2013, ushers in a new phase in the European Union's drive for recovery. The Irish Presidency of the Council is about securing stability and ensuring that it leads to jobs and growth.

This programme sets out the real and tangible decisions we will push for as Ireland chairs negotiations across nine different Council formations from January until June. Working together with our fellow Member States, the EU institutions and other stakeholders, the Irish Presidency will be that of a recovery country driving recovery in Europe.

At its heart, the crisis since 2008 has revealed the weaknesses in the monetary and fiscal framework of the European Union. It also revealed significant differences in competitiveness between Member States. The economic and social effects of the crisis have led to unacceptably high levels of unemployment and hardship for many across the EU, not least in Ireland.

The crisis has also revealed how closely linked our economies are. The EU must work more to respond to the common problems that we face. Member States must ensure that the Union's architecture matches the realities of increasingly interconnected economies within and outside our borders. Overall, we in the Union must implement what we have agreed, strengthen our governance, invest in growth and job-creation, develop a Single Market for the future and renew our engagement with our external partners. No time can be lost.

As we enter the next phase of recovery, now is the time to draw from Europe's values and strengths to the full and prove that the European method of decision-making can produce the necessary changes. The European Union has just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its success in establishing peace that endures. Its principal project for 2013 and beyond is to restore prosperity in a fair and sustainable way over the longer term.

Core principles for the Irish Presidency

In choosing our priorities from the current agenda of EU legislation and initiatives, the same question was always asked – “does this make a difference?”

This policy programme sets out in detail those proposals and initiatives we will focus on across the various policy areas and Council formations. The key areas where we aim to make a difference are:

People-centered recovery, designed to last

The pressing priority for the Union is economic growth leading to employment for those affected by the crisis after the recent years of devastating job losses. Therefore, we need to first ensure lasting stability, starting with the necessary renewal of economic governance in Europe. Key areas for progress will be Banking Union and financial services reform, coupled with improved economic coordination through the European Semester process.

In tandem with this, the Irish Presidency will place a spotlight on youth unemployment throughout our six months in office. We intend to ensure momentum behind the Youth Employment and Social Investment Packages and secure agreement on decisions in the areas of health, mobility and education.

Investment in job-friendly growth and in Europe's resources

The Single Market has been a great European success story. In particular, we will push ahead with legislation to promote Europe's Digital Economy. We will also pursue a number of measures aimed at the highest-potential growth and employment source in Europe – our SMEs. These will include improved access to credit, public procurement opportunities and research funding.

We will play our full part in securing agreement on the EU's budget 2014-2020. This will lead on to sector-specific work on key areas such as the reform of CAP, Cohesion and the Horizon 2020 research framework programme. We will place particular focus on the potential of Europe's natural resources on land as well as at sea ("Blue Growth"), putting the Green Economy agenda back on track as an engine for smart, sustainable growth.

Europe and the world: a win-win engagement with our partners

Of course, Europe's recovery cannot happen in isolation and Europe must be an effective partner on the world stage. We will prioritise trade, and work towards opening new markets, creating new opportunities for enterprise, leading to more jobs and growth.

Ireland will pursue the enlargement agenda as Presidency and support the work of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in strengthening relations with our neighbours. We will place particular focus on development, humanitarian policy - especially on the continuing global hunger crisis, and climate change. Also, as Presidency we will work for stronger EU-UN relations, especially in the area of crisis management and peace support operations.

Ireland's approach

It is important how a Presidency conducts business and deals with fellow Member States and partners in the EU institutions. The European Commission and the European Parliament are indispensable to delivery on our agenda. We will bring to our six months in office our national experience in securing fiscal and economic stability aimed at restoring jobs and strengthening social cohesion. We are doing this at home, and as Presidency, we will play our part in driving a pro-growth and pro-employment agenda across Europe. Our work as Presidency also forms part of the 18-month programme we have agreed with our Trio Presidency partners (Lithuania and Greece).

Ireland celebrates forty years in the European Union in 2013. This will be our seventh Presidency. Since we joined in 1973, the Union has moved from nine to twenty-seven Member States; ten new Member States joined the Union during Ireland's last Presidency in 2004. The institutions have evolved and so has the Presidency of the Council. Our essential approach will reflect the best of our previous Presidencies - always an honest broker, open and transparent, striving for efficiency and with a firm focus on results.

As well as the business we will conduct as Presidency in Brussels, Strasbourg, and Luxembourg, we look forward to welcoming some 15,000 people to 180 Presidency-related events in Ireland from January to June 2013.

We look forward to launching the European Year of Citizens in Dublin in early January, and to the presentation of a diverse programme of Irish culture in Ireland, in Brussels and in other European centres.

PART 1:

Overview

1. Securing stability

The economic and financial crisis revealed the weaknesses in Europe's economic and monetary architecture. We will deal with the immediate, shorter-term issues but equally important to the Irish Presidency is the establishment of more durable foundations for stability. These foundations are those set out by successive European Councils, in particular Banking Union, the European Semester process and the next phase of reforms to Economic and Monetary Union as set out by the December 2012 European Council.

To secure the lasting confidence necessary to move to the next phase of Europe's recovery – jobs and growth – the stability we have been building needs to be anchored in a manner which endures.

Banking Union

The imperative to break the link between banks and sovereigns was unanimously agreed by European leaders on 29 June 2012. This link, between the sovereign and financial institutions, has not only created difficulties for the sovereign with the cost of bank rescues, but it also has implications for the supply of affordable credit to businesses and households. The EU economy simply cannot grow meaningfully unless investors and consumers have confidence in the Union's banking system and the regulatory architecture underpinning it.

This is why the Presidency will push for agreement on the Banking Union proposals. The wide-ranging proposals aim for more effective supervision, resolution of failing financial institutions, and greater protection for tax-payers and consumers. The proposals also contribute to the development of early warning mechanisms to avoid future banking crises. The Presidency will work in other areas to tighten financial regulation where appropriate, to better protect the interests of consumers and investors, and to avoid a recurrence of past mistakes.

European Semester

The European Semester process aims to secure lasting stability through a new system of economic policy coordination between Member States. It is designed to ensure that Member States align their budgetary and economic policies with their obligations. The Semester's ultimate purpose is sustainable economic growth which enables job creation and renewed social cohesion across Europe, in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Ireland has prepared a roadmap for its management of the 2013 European Semester process across all relevant Council formations and their preparatory bodies. The Irish Presidency will work in a coordinated and consistent manner leading up to the March and June European Councils, so that our work together will add real value to the process of securing European recovery.

Enhanced Parliamentary involvement in the European Semester process is essential. We will work with the European Parliament and with national parliaments to deliver this.

Economic and Monetary Union – the next steps

On 14 December, 2012, the European Council published its conclusions on the future of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and set a number of deadlines. The Irish Presidency will prioritise the proposals and priorities agreed by the European Council, including in relation to the Single Supervisory Mechanism and a common resolution mechanism, and seek to progress them, where possible. These proposals are informed by the report “Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union” prepared by the President of the Council, in collaboration with the Presidents of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the Eurogroup, as well as a European Commission “blueprint” on the EMU put forward on 28 November. We also note the intention of the President of the European Council to produce further proposals and a time-bound roadmap for further economic and fiscal governance reforms by June 2013 and we intend to contribute constructively to this process. The objective of such measures is to create a stronger and more effective EMU that can aid confidence and support economic recovery and employment growth across Europe.

2. Investing in sustainable jobs and growth

The EU must do everything it can to enable jobs to be created and to ensure sustainable growth. The Irish Presidency will devote itself to agreement on proposals that make a real difference to citizens and to job-creators. For Ireland as Presidency, the next phase of Europe's recovery must involve a Single Market of the future – notably a Digital Single Market – and must place a spotlight on the next generation by tackling youth unemployment.

Agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 (MFF) should be reached as soon as possible. The Irish Presidency will work intensively with partners, particularly the European Parliament, on the inter-institutional agreement of various instruments which will allow funding to be rolled out promptly to stimulate jobs and growth. These instruments will boost the EU's research and innovation capabilities, promote cohesion and boost smart investment in our natural resources on land and sea.

A Single Market of the future

The Single Market has been one of the Union's greatest success stories. Over the past twenty years it has made the EU more competitive and has delivered countless benefits to job-creators and consumers alike. But the legislation supporting the Single Market must keep up with new market trends and the way our citizens now live their lives.

Digital Single Market

Growth in the digital economy will promote cross-border commerce and improve competitiveness, delivering long-term advantages for business and consumers alike. The Presidency will work to ensure that the EU is equipped to support and stimulate growth in the digital economy by progressing legislation on issues including cyber security, e-signatures/e-identification, data protection, high-speed broadband rollout and web accessibility. Ireland will host the Digital Agenda Assembly in June 2013, the first time this event has taken place outside Brussels.

Labour and Education Mobility

To create a more open Single Market and to allow citizens to take advantage of new employment opportunities, the Presidency will work to remove obstacles that discourage the free movement of people within the Union. This will include important new steps forward in areas including posted workers, pensions portability, the enforcement of the rights of migrant workers and the mutual recognition of professional qualifications. In addition, agreement on the Erasmus for All proposal will facilitate the continuation of student mobility across the European Union.

The next generation: tackling youth unemployment

Europe must provide opportunities for young people to avoid the creation of a 'lost generation'. As part of implementing the Compact for Growth and Jobs, we will work to agree a Youth Guarantee aimed at providing training, further study or employment to young people. Youth unemployment will also be the main focus of an informal Ministerial meeting in Dublin in February.

Channeling the EU's future financing for jobs and growth

The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is intended to provide the framework for the annual EU Budget process (2014-2020). The EU Budget helps provide the EU funding to re-launch growth, investment and employment as well as making Europe more competitive.

Securing agreement on the MFF which sets out proposals for the EU's future financing from 2014-2020 is therefore essential to underpin Europe's economic recovery, future growth and social cohesion. The Presidency will work with the President of the European Council and the European Parliament in securing agreement on and mobilisation of the MFF.

Cohesion

Cohesion funding supports the development of economic and social cohesion across the EU, particularly in poorer regions. It has made a difference, improving the quality of life for millions of Europeans and supporting job creation and economic development. The Presidency will prioritise agreement on the overall Cohesion package to deliver benefits for citizens and EU business over the coming decades.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Maritime policy

The Irish Presidency will drive reform of Europe's agriculture and fisheries sectors to ensure the continued quality, security and sustainability of Europe's food supply, to enhance the global competitiveness of these sectors, and to support Europe's rural communities and economies.

Reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) will better define the role that they play in sustainable growth and job creation. Proposals for the greening of CAP will be important engines for boosting the EU green economy, while the Irish Presidency will also focus on Blue Growth, harnessing the opportunities presented by the resource off Europe's 89,000km of coastline.

Research and Innovation

The Horizon 2020 programme will contribute to making Europe a world-class research and innovation centre and boost high-potential sectors of the knowledge economy. Well-targeted support for research and innovation can contribute to delivering this potential; the Irish Presidency will work to ensure that researchers have ready access to EU research and innovation funding in a simplified application process that cuts away much of the red tape.

As part of the Irish Presidency's focus on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), we will also work to facilitate SME access to research funding. The Competitiveness for SMEs Programme (COSME) will also form part of our work to support the competitiveness of this high-potential, job-creating sector.

Smart and sustainable growth

Growth can and should be sustainable and in this context the EU continues to lead the way in fighting the effects of climate change. Across all policy areas, the Irish Presidency's policy programme contains specific measures on sustainable growth, while also ensuring that the sustainability dimension forms part of many other measures.

Greening the economy involves building more sustainable employment across the entire economy: in manufacturing, financial services and tourism, as well as in those areas traditionally associated with "green jobs" such as energy.

In strategic terms, Ireland will promote sustainable green growth and innovation in Europe by pushing for agreement on the 7th Environment Action Programme. Specific areas promoting greater sustainability include the development of the Integrated Maritime Policy, development aid, energy taxation, Horizon 2020, Trans-European Networks and reforms in agriculture and fisheries. All of this work will be in tandem with the significant legislative and international programme of the Environment Council during our term in office, while we will highlight the link between energy and environment policy through a joint informal meeting of the responsible ministers.

A better-connected Europe adds to the EU's future growth potential and for this reason the Irish Presidency will prioritise the implementation of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).

3. Europe and the world

Europe must look outside its borders and engage with its global partners.

Ireland, as Presidency will provide active support for the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European External Action Service in the task of strengthening the EU's external policy effectiveness and coherence, and responding to major foreign policy and security challenges. We will use our Presidency in this way to enhance our contribution to the pursuit of peace, democracy and prosperity.

Ireland also looks forward to representing the EU in addressing global challenges including hunger, poverty and climate change.

As part of the drive for stability, jobs and growth, the Irish Presidency will prioritise bilateral trade agreements with key partners including the United States of America. Such agreements should deliver positive benefits for all involved and provide newer and greater opportunities.

Sustaining and supporting peace, security and democracy

The awarding of the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union has served to remind the international community of the values on which the Union was built.

These values, foremost among them a deep commitment to peace, democracy and human rights, are central to Ireland's foreign policy. They inform the contributions we make to the development of the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy and its Common Security and Defence Policy. They will be at the heart of the support we provide during our Presidency for the work of the High Representative and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Issues which have particular resonance for Ireland include the protection and advancement of human rights, the pursuit of global disarmament and non-proliferation goals and the contribution which the Union can make to crisis management and to conflict prevention and resolution around the world. As Presidency, we will work to promote implementation of the EU's human rights strategy; we will help to shape EU positions in key disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations; and we will assist in the work of strengthening the EU's capacities in the areas of conflict prevention and resolution. Ireland's recent election to the UN Human Rights Council for a three-year term, beginning on 1 January 2013, will enhance the contribution we can make in the area of human rights policy. In turn, our ability to contribute in the areas of conflict prevention and resolution is strengthened both by our experience of the Northern Ireland peace process and by our role as Chairman-in-Office of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2012.

The Presidency will also work with renewed purpose on further enlargement of the Union and will encourage the development of democratic and peaceful societies in the Union's eastern and southern neighbourhood.

Fighting global poverty and hunger

The EU and its Member States invest considerable financial and human resources in the fight to end poverty in the developing world and to empower people to transform their communities and countries. The EU must ensure that its development assistance is as effective as possible in delivering positive change, that its support is sustained, that it underpins the Union's values, and that it evolves to address new crises and challenges.

During its Presidency Ireland will work with partners to help shape and strengthen the EU's future approach to development policy. We look forward to welcoming Ministers and experts to conferences in Dublin to address the challenges facing the world's poorest peoples, and in particular the vital connections between efforts to address, hunger, nutrition and climate justice.

New markets for European exporters

The Presidency intends to build momentum in trade negotiations between the EU and third countries so that our exporters have expanded access and greater opportunities in these markets. The completion of trade agreements with Canada and Singapore will be important milestones. The Presidency will also seek to advance Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations with Japan, India and other strategic partners, and to advance the EU-China relationship with a focus on investment protection and market access.

The Irish Presidency will place a special focus on the EU-US trade relationship, with the aim of working towards a formal Council mandate for the start of negotiations on a new comprehensive EU-US Free Trade and Investment Agreement.

Renewed leadership on climate change

In addition to its work within its borders, the EU must continue to lead the way on advancing solutions to the global threat of climate change. The Irish Presidency faces a demanding international environment agenda during its term in office, but looks forward to coordinating and representing EU positions on a range of pressing issues, including the effort to fight the effects of climate change and protect the planet for future generations.

PART 2:

Council

Configurations

General Affairs

The General Affairs Council (GAC) prepares the way for key decisions by the European Council. It also handles several cross-cutting policy areas covering enlargement, cohesion policy and relationship/management issues around the EU Institutions.

Ireland, as Presidency, will support the European Council to bring a successful conclusion to negotiations on the Union's future financing. At the same time, we will manage sector-by-sector, Council-by-Council negotiations on the instruments necessary for growth, jobs and social cohesion.

Future financing: Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

Decisions on the EU's future financing (MFF) will determine the EU's strategic policy orientation for the period 2014-2020. The MFF is explicitly aligned with the Europe 2020 Strategy. Funding for key policies and programmes such as the Common Agriculture Policy, Horizon 2020, Cohesion and the Connecting Europe Facility will have a critical impact on the EU's future. It will also help to shape the Union's social and economic development as well as its global competitiveness over the coming decades.

In line with its main objective of promoting stability, jobs and growth, the Presidency will work to ensure that the EU's financing programmes support:

- » sustainable growth
- » Europe's innovation capacity
- » the development of key infrastructure
- » the promotion of employment and social inclusion.
- » Once Council agreement is secured on the overall MFF, the Presidency will seek the consent of the European Parliament. In parallel with this, we will lead negotiations within Council and with the European Parliament on each of the legislative measures which will allow the agreed budget to be deployed to where it can make a difference.

Economic Governance

The global economic and fiscal crisis demonstrated the weaknesses in certain European economies and the deficiencies in the EU's economic and monetary architecture. Europe's economies are closely linked and problems in one state can severely, and rapidly, affect other states. One of the responses to the crisis has been the development of enhanced economic governance.

The European Semester seeks to improve oversight and coordination of different strands of Member States' economies including macro-economic, budgetary and structural policies on an annual basis. The objective is to ensure healthier public finances and to promote stability and restore confidence in EU economies, both at home and globally, as well as to stimulate economic growth and renewed investment.

The Irish Presidency will endeavour to ensure a streamlined and inclusive process, drawing on the lessons learnt from previous European Semesters. As detailed in its roadmap, the Presidency will ensure that the findings of the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) are extensively discussed across several Councils including Ecofin, EPSCO and the Competitiveness Councils during January and February 2013. Working in cooperation with the Council Secretariat, the Presidency will prepare a detailed synthesis report of Ministerial discussions at sectoral Councils on the AGS for review at the Spring European Council. This report will provide an opportunity to focus attention on key actions that need to be taken by the EU and Member States across a broad range of policy areas that can support economic recovery and employment creation in Europe.

The response of the European Council, combined with the AGS, will feed into decisions on national economic and budgetary planning, which Member States will set out in Stability and Convergence Programmes and National Reform Programmes in April 2013. These programmes in turn form the basis for the European Commission's proposals for Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) in May 2013. The Presidency will ensure that the CSRs are completed in good time for review and endorsement at the June European Council.

Dialogue with the social partners at European level is also important for achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and will be developed through the macroeconomic dialogue, the process of reflection on the AGS and the Tripartite Social Summit.

Regional Policy/Cohesion Policy

Cohesion policy has proved to be one the EU's most effective instruments in addressing the economic, social and territorial disparities that exist between regions across the Union. Further support is essential to reduce regional disparities within the EU: one in four of Europe's 271 regions have a GDP per capita less than 75% of the EU average.

Cohesion funding forms an important part of the MFF. The European Commission's package of legislative proposals for 2014-2020 on how funding should be applied reinforces the long-term strategic dimension of cohesion policy and proposes greater coherence with other EU initiatives such as rural development, maritime and fisheries policies to ensure that EU investment is targeted on Europe's long-term goals for jobs and growth.

On behalf of the Council, the Irish Presidency will work intensively with the European Parliament to reach agreement on the six Regulations that make up the cohesion package.

Enlargement

The European Union has created a level of cooperation between countries that is without parallel. Following more than fifty years of cooperation, the EU has emerged as one of the most successful forces for peace, prosperity, democratisation and the protection of human rights in the world today.

In 2013 Ireland will celebrate the fortieth anniversary of its accession to the EU in what was the first enlargement of the Union. During its last Presidency in 2004, Ireland welcomed ten new Member States into the EU during the 'Day of Welcomes'. In 2013 the Irish Presidency will continue to prioritise a credible enlargement policy based on the principle of conditionality. While the Presidency will work intensively to advance enlargement and support states as they prepare for membership, much will depend on the progress made by the states themselves.

Firstly, the Presidency will oversee consideration of the final monitoring report on Croatia and looks forward to Croatia's accession to the EU on 1 July 2013. The Presidency will also work further to advance the ongoing accession negotiations with Iceland. It will seek to restore momentum in the accession process with Turkey. The Presidency will work to move forward the recently launched negotiations with Montenegro.

The EU, under the Irish Presidency will also discuss and possibly agree on the next steps to be taken in fulfilling the European aspirations of Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Albania.

Integrated Maritime Policy

Europe has 89,000km of coastline and economic activity associated with the sea creates employment for approximately 5.4 million citizens across the EU. The European Commission estimates that by 2020 this could increase to 7 million. Moreover, 75% of Europe's external trade and 37% of trade within the EU is seaborne, which demonstrates the importance of a coordinated maritime policy that is aligned with the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

As an island nation, Ireland attaches strong importance to maritime issues and the potential for growth in a diverse range of areas including sustainable fisheries, marine transport, renewable energy, biotechnology, mineral seabed exploration, tourism and regional development. The agreement reached in Limassol by the Cyprus Presidency in October 2012 for a marine-focused jobs and growth policy is a positive step for the future development of an EU integrated Maritime Policy (IMP). The Irish Presidency will build on this.

The Presidency will work to advance the proposal on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) which aims to balance the interests of different sectors to ensure efficient and sustainable use of Member States' precious marine resources. It will work to advance the implementation of the "Blue Growth" initiative.

Ireland, as Presidency, also looks forward to making progress on the endorsement of an action plan for the Atlantic Strategy to further consolidate and develop work in this area and to ensure that coastal communities benefit from sustainable exploitation of the Atlantic's rich resources. The GAC as the Council for cross-cutting policy initiatives will be in charge of this strategy.

Cyber Security

As part of its prioritisation of the Digital Single Market and the Digital Agenda, the Presidency looks forward to the anticipated joint statement by the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on a European Strategy for cyber security in early 2013. The aim of the strategy is to achieve a safe, secure and resilient digital environment for all EU citizens, businesses and public bodies and to strengthen the EU's contribution to international cooperation on cyber security and combating cyber crime. During the Presidency, Ireland will work to advance the development of an integrated and coherent approach to cyber security at EU level to promote business and consumer trust and confidence which will drive online growth.

Foreign Affairs

The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), charged with determining the Union's foreign policy, is chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Ireland, as Presidency, will actively support the High Representative's work and that of the European External Action Service (EEAS). It will help them in the task of strengthening the EU's external effectiveness and coherence, and articulating the EU's response to the foreign policy and security challenges of the day. It will in the process enhance its own contribution to the pursuit of global peace, democracy and human rights. Ireland believes strongly in the role of development cooperation and will work during its Presidency to focus attention on the fight against hunger, poverty and new challenges such as the impact of climate change on the poorest regions and peoples of the world.

International trade and giving impetus to trade agreements with partners around the globe, including the United States, will also be a key priority for the Irish Presidency. The Irish Presidency will also encourage closer cooperation and engagement with the EU's Asian partners.

As Presidency, Ireland will work with the High Representative and the EEAS to promote greater effectiveness and coherence in EU external policies, including at the UN and in other multilateral fora. This will include helping to ensure that the EU speaks with one voice in international negotiations.

Through its support for the High Representative and for the EEAS, and in the contributions it makes to the development and articulation of the Union's external policies, Ireland will help to ensure that these policies remain grounded in the EU's core values of peace, democracy and respect for human rights. The protection and promotion of human rights, including support for the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and for the implementation of the EU's human rights strategy will be an area of particular interest. Ireland will also help to develop EU policies and positions in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. And it will contribute to the task of strengthening the EU's capacities in the areas of conflict prevention and resolution.

International trade and investment

Global trading patterns are changing and the EU must seize the opportunities offered by rapidly growing markets in third countries. The decision to hold an informal meeting of Trade Ministers signals the high priority that Ireland attaches to this objective.

Canada

The Irish Presidency will work to help to achieve the finalisation of free trade negotiations between the EU and Canada.

Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood

The EU has important economic and commercial relationships with many countries in our Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. Strengthening these relationships to improve the flow of trade and investment and support their economic and social development will also be an important aspect of our Presidency.

China, Japan, India and the countries of ASEAN

Achieving progress in negotiations on Free Trade Agreements (FTA) and Investment Protection agreements with other third countries including Japan, India and the countries of ASEAN is also a priority. Trade liberalisation through FTAs lowers trade barriers and provides greater market access for EU exporters in third countries. The EU's relationship with China will also receive particular attention with a focus on investment protection and market access. We will also support enhanced cooperation between Asia and Europe in the ASEM process on regional and international issues of concern.

United States

The EU and the US, two of the world's largest trading blocs, already have very strong trading and investment ties. The successful future conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement with the US would have a significant and positive impact on trade, resulting in new markets for European exporters with consequential positive effects on job creation and competitiveness. The Presidency will work intensively to advance the recommendations of the High Level Group on Jobs and Growth. This will include working towards agreement for a new generation Trade and Investment Agreement between the EU and the US.

Supporting the work of the WTO

The Irish Presidency will work to support the WTO and the multilateral trading system in a year when a new Director General will take office and a key Ministerial Conference will take place in Bali to establish the future direction of the WTO and the Doha Round of negotiations.

Foreign Direct Investment

The Presidency will work with Member States and the European Parliament on a proposal to establish a framework for managing financial responsibility linked to investor-state dispute settlement tribunals. This proposal is a key element in building the EU's policy on Foreign Direct Investment.

Development and Humanitarian Policy

Ireland's contribution to international development is central to its foreign policy, with a strong focus on the fight against poverty and hunger, and the promotion of peace, respect for human rights and justice. These are also the values on which the European Union was built and they underpin the EU's role as a global actor.

The EU and its Member States provide more than half of global development assistance. While this support saves lives, empowers people and communities in developing countries, and helps build the institutions of democratic societies, the constant challenge to be addressed by the Union is to ensure that its financial assistance is as effective as possible in transforming the lives of poor people in developing countries.

The Presidency comes at a critical time in the international development agenda in advance of the 2013 UN Special Event on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and as work begins to shape the framework after 2015 - the target date for the MDGs.

The Presidency, will work with the High Representative, the European Commission and Member States to make progress in three related areas:

Addressing the linkages between hunger, nutrition and the impact of climate change on the poorest countries in the world, and seeking solutions. This issue will also be the subject of a high-level international conference during the Presidency in Dublin in April 2013

- » improving the links between work on humanitarian relief, recovery and longer-term development
- » working with partners to reach agreement on an EU position for the 2013 UN Special Event on the Millennium Development Goals and the future shape of development policy after 2015

Defence Policy

The EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) aims to strengthen the EU's external ability to act through the development of civilian and military capabilities for Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management.

As Presidency, Ireland will work closely with the EEAS in further developing deployable military capabilities in support of the Common Security and Defence Policy. Ireland will continue to support current and new EU crisis management operations and the development of EU battlegroups.

Ireland will seek to strengthen relations between regional organisations and the UN, in particular, through EU engagement and participation in UN Peacekeeping operations. A seminar on "Regional Organisations' Co-operation with the UN in the area of Crisis Management and Peace Support Operations" will take place in Dublin in February 2013.

The Irish Presidency will also seek to improve cooperation in the area of Maritime Security and Surveillance.

Ireland will work closely with the European Defence Agency (EDA), supporting greater collaboration among Member States in the provision of defence capabilities under the EDA's "Pooling and Sharing" initiatives, building on the December 2012 European Council conclusions.

The Irish Presidency, in close coordination with the EEAS, will assist in initial preparatory discussions in the lead up to a planned discussion on defence issues at the European Council in December 2013.

European Neighbourhood Policy

The Presidency will work closely with the EEAS to support the implementation of the incentive-based approach of the European Neighbourhood Policy with the aim of promoting democratic reforms and strengthening economic development in the neighbouring countries to the east and south of the Union.

Economic and Financial Affairs

In its role chairing the European and Financial Affairs Council (Ecofin) during the Presidency, Ireland will work to confront the effects of the economic crisis, implementing initiatives to promote greater stability and recovery. This can help to stimulate confidence in the European economy, strongly complementing the legislative initiatives that the Presidency has identified in many other Councils to boost economic recovery and job creation in Europe.

Ireland will work to secure a satisfactory outcome on the ongoing “Two-Pack” negotiations as soon as possible under its Presidency. In addition to implementing the Union’s economic governance measures and in particular the European Semester, the Presidency will work with its European partners to secure agreement on conditions for the restoration of a stable financial system. Ireland will do so by prioritising actions that dispel uncertainties in the banking sector, stabilise fiscal outlooks and boost recovery. Achieving these aims will also help promote trust and confidence in the European economy for consumers, business and investors.

The Presidency will work with its European partners to advance discussions on decisions taken at the December European Council on Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) with a view to creating a stronger and more effective EMU that can aid confidence and support economic recovery and employment growth across Europe.

The Presidency, alongside the European Commission and European Central Bank (ECB), will represent the EU at meetings of the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governments and their Deputies.

The effects of the economic and financial crisis are still being felt across Europe. However, the decisions taken in recent months by Heads of State and Government -enhanced economic and fiscal governance, Banking Union, Compact for Jobs and Growth, the Europe 2020 strategy- provide the EU with a strong framework to support necessary fiscal consolidation, in addition to sustainable growth and recovery.

Banking Union: Supporting stability and building confidence

A healthy financial services sector is key to any economy. Through the provision of credit and other supports, the banking sector is necessary to underpin economic recovery and confidence in Europe. Improving financial integration in the EU is critical for the future of the EMU and the Single Market. Stability in the Union’s banking system will promote trust, credibility and confidence both within the EU and beyond, and will contribute to a return to investment and growth and will promote trust, credibility and confidence both within the EU and beyond. The successful implementation of the Banking Union measures should facilitate the breaking of the link between the financial sector and the sovereign. For these reasons, the Presidency will prioritise agreement on a Banking Union for the EU which includes:

The Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) is an important foundation to ensure confidence in supervision across Europe. Agreement was reached on SSM in December 2012 Ecofin and subsequently endorsed by the European Council. This agreement provides the mandate for the Presidency to enter into discussions with the European Parliament. Under the Irish Presidency we will prioritise reaching an early agreement with the co-legislators in our consultations with the European Parliament.

The SSM provides the first element of the package of Banking Union measures. We look forward to speedy progress towards agreement on the other elements – Bank Recovery and Resolution and Deposit Guarantee Schemes, and to agreement on Capital Requirements Directive IV.

Strengthening Financial Regulation

The Presidency will also manage the agenda in other areas of financial services to strengthen supervision and better protect the interests of investors and consumers. This is vital to restoring stability and confidence in the financial system.

The Irish Presidency's objective is to promote confidence by making financial markets more efficient, resilient and transparent as well as strengthening the protection afforded to investors.

The Markets in Financial Instruments Directive and Regulation (MiFID/MiFIR) seeks to harmonise national provisions concerning access to the activity of investment firms and related service providers, the modalities for their governance and their supervisory framework. New trading venues and products and technological developments such as high-frequency trading have altered the landscape of the markets. The proposals respond to the need to improve the transparency and oversight of less-regulated markets, including derivatives markets, and to address the issue of excessive price volatility in commodity derivatives markets. The new framework will also increase the supervisory powers of regulators and provide clear operating rules for all trading activities. The Presidency aims to conclude an agreement with Council as soon as possible and conduct a number of Trilogues with the Parliament in the markets and securities area. It will also make progress on other dossiers in the consumer area, including the Mortgage Credit Directive.

EU Annual Budget

The Irish Presidency will seek to efficiently implement the annual budget for 2013. The budgetary discharge procedure and the preparation of the budget guidelines for 2014 will be priorities.

Taxation

The Irish Presidency will seek to make progress on the Financial Transaction Tax (FTT), including working towards an agreement to advance the enhanced cooperation procedure. The Irish Presidency will also carry forward the discussions on the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB). The Ecofin Council will continue work on proposals facilitating fast and effective responses to VAT fraud in the form of the reverse charge and quick reaction mechanisms, as well as proposals on the VAT treatment of vouchers and the Fiscalis action programme for taxation in the EU for the period 2014 to 2020. The Presidency also intends progressing the recently adopted proposal for an implementing Regulation governing VAT rules for cross-border services.

The Presidency will also make progress on the revision of the Energy Tax Directive which forms part of the Single Market Act I package.

The Commission's Action Plan to strengthen the fight against Tax Fraud and Tax Evasion, including its Recommendations on Tax Havens and Aggressive Tax Planning, will be taken forward by the Presidency.

The Presidency will also work towards agreement of the revised Savings Directive and the negotiating mandates with third countries, in line with the direction of the European Council.

European Semester

The European Semester has been in place since January 2011 and represents a new approach to economic surveillance. It was devised with the aim of ensuring that all economic policies are analysed and assessed together and that policy areas which previously were not systematically covered by economic surveillance – such as macroeconomic imbalances and financial sector issues – are included. Effective management of the third European Semester cycle will be an important focus of the Irish Presidency.

“Six-Pack” and “Two-Pack” of Economic Governance Legislation

The “Two-Pack” is designed to enhance economic convergence and integration among euro area Member States. It complements the “Six-Pack” legislative package for EU economic governance that came into force in November 2011. The two draft regulations aim to further enhance the coordination and surveillance of the budgetary processes for all euro area Member States. Ireland will work to secure a satisfactory outcome on the negotiations, as soon as possible under its Presidency.

Roadmap for the Completion of the EMU

On 14 December, 2012, the European Council published its conclusions on the future of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The Irish Presidency will prioritise the proposals and priorities agreed by the European Council, including in relation to the Single Supervisory Mechanism and a common resolution mechanism, and seek to progress them, where possible. These proposals are informed by the report “Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union” prepared by the President of the Council, in collaboration with the Presidents of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the Eurogroup, as well as a European Commission “blueprint” on the EMU put forward on 28 November. We also note the intention of the President of the European Council to produce further proposals and a time-bound roadmap for further economic and fiscal governance reforms by June 2013 and we intend to contribute constructively to this process. The objective of such measures is to create a stronger and more effective EMU that can aid confidence and support economic recovery and employment growth across Europe.

G20 Finance Ministers, Central Bank Governors and Deputies’ Meetings

In December 2012, Russia assumed the Presidency of the G20, the informal grouping of the world’s largest economies. The main priority of the Russian Presidency is to focus the work of the G20 on developing measures to stimulate economic growth and create jobs. The Irish Presidency, alongside the European Commission and European Central Bank (ECB), will represent the EU at meetings of G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors and their Deputies. The Presidency will assist in the co-ordination and presentation of the EU position on developments in the global economy, investment and growth, financial regulation and reform of the International Monetary System and seek to progress issues conducive to renewed growth at EU level. Through effective engagement at G20 level, the Presidency will also aim to promote confidence amongst its international partners in the European recovery process.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council plays a key role in protecting citizens and the rights of citizens. The Council also supports economic growth in Europe by laying the foundations for the rule of law and promoting safety and security. The Presidency is fully supportive of the concept of Justice for Growth and will actively contribute to the progress of measures and initiatives in this area. During the European Year of Citizens, the Presidency is committed to making progress on data protection and measures to freeze and confiscate the assets obtained through criminal activity.

The Stockholm Programme sets out the Union's priorities in the area of freedom, security and justice for the period 2010 to 2014. It also aims to meet future challenges with actions focusing on the interests and needs of citizens. The Programme provides a roadmap for progress in these areas and the Presidency will work to ensure the continuity of the implementation of the Stockholm Programme.

Justice for Growth: strengthening trust in the Single Market

Increased internet usage, social media, globalisation of data transfers and other technological advances have made life easier for millions, but also increase the collection, use and processing of personal data globally. The Lisbon Treaty contains a new legal base for EU data protection rules and the Charter of Fundamental Rights also enshrines protection of personal data as a fundamental right. As part of its focus on the Digital Agenda, the Presidency will work to reach agreement in the Council on key aspects of the Data Protection package. This is aimed at ensuring that citizens have more control over their personal data. Progress made by the Presidency in this area will strengthen confidence in the digital economy and support the growth of the Digital Single Market.

The Presidency will work intensively to advance the European Account Preservation Order to facilitate cross border debt recovery in civil and commercial matters. The proposal will improve the efficiency of enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters concerning cross-border disputes. An important aim of the proposal is to encourage more cross-border business activity within the EU by reducing the risks associated with such activity. As such, the Presidency considers that the proposal will be of particular importance to the SME sector. The Presidency will also commence work on the Commission proposal for a Regulation on insolvency which is intended to support small businesses and aid economic recovery.

The proposed Directive on the fight against fraud to the Union's financial interests by means of criminal law will be advanced with the aim of agreeing a General Approach.

The establishment of the Justice Programme will promote effective, comprehensive and consistent application of EU legislation in the areas of judicial co-operation in civil and criminal matters. The proposal will also support consumers, business and the development of the Single Market by facilitating greater access to justice for citizens and businesses in cross-border legal cases. Ireland will continue negotiations on the Regulation establishing the Programme.

Drawing from its own experience at national level, Ireland is making the Directive on the freezing and confiscation of proceeds of crime in the EU a priority. The proposal is intended to make it easier for authorities to confiscate and recover profits from cross-border organised crime. Ireland expects to make significant progress on negotiations with the European Parliament during its Presidency with a view to possible adoption of the Directive.

Crime: stronger law enforcement cooperation and support

The Presidency will also focus on proposals designed to tackle terrorism and organised crime which will contribute to protecting a Europe of freedom, security and justice for all citizens. A key proposal in this area will be the use of Passenger Name Records data to prevent terrorism and serious crime. The aim is to require air carriers to provide this data to relevant national authorities for the purpose of preventing and combating terrorism and organised crime. The Presidency will work closely with the Parliament to make progress towards agreement on the proposal.

The Stockholm Programme proposed the creation of a fund to support the implementation of the Internal Security Strategy and a more coherent and comprehensive approach to law enforcement cooperation, including the management of the Union's external borders. The proposal for an instrument for Financial Support for Police Cooperation aims to provide greater financial support for police cooperation to prevent and combat crime and to strengthen crisis management. Ireland aims to complete discussions with the European Parliament on the fund during the Presidency.

Asylum and Migration

The Irish Presidency intends finalising agreement with the European Parliament on the outstanding elements of the common European Asylum System. In relation to legal migration, the Presidency will work closely with the Parliament to secure agreement on the Seasonal Workers Directive and the Intra-Corporate Transfers Directive. It will also commence work on the Students and Researchers Directive due to be published in the first quarter of 2013. In line with the practice under recent Presidencies, Ireland will ensure that the situation regarding illegal migration in Europe is fully debated within the Council.

The establishment of the Asylum and Migration Fund Regulation will contribute to the effective management of migration flows in the EU in accordance with the common policies on immigration and asylum. Ireland aims to complete discussions on the proposal during the Presidency.

The Presidency will also prioritise the Regulation establishing the instrument for financial support for external borders and visas during the Presidency. This is part of an overall framework for EU financial support in the field of internal security of which management of external borders is one of the key pillars. Its objective is to contribute to the operational costs at national and EU level of border control and the visa system. The Presidency aims to conclude negotiations on this Regulation.

Schengen Convention

The Presidency will aim to complete any outstanding work on the legislative package for reform of the Schengen Governance system. It will also continue negotiations to advance agreement on the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen Convention.

Strengthening the rights of citizens

The EU was founded on respect for the rule of law, individual rights and the role of citizens in democratic processes. In parallel with the development of the Single Market and Schengen, citizens across the EU enjoy the right to live, work, travel, and study in other Member States. But many obstacles remain in the way of citizens in taking full advantage of their rights when they leave their country and travel to other Member States. For this reason the Presidency will work intensively during the European Year of Citizens to further the Rights and Citizenship Programme. This broad-ranging proposal contains programme

elements which aim to combat violence against women and children and promote citizenship rights, the rights of the child, non-discrimination, gender equality, data protection and consumer protection in the single market. The Presidency will work to secure adoption of the Programme.

Agriculture and Fisheries

A modern and competitive agriculture and fisheries sector is important not only for jobs and growth, but also for sustainable, long-term global food security. The Agriculture and Fisheries Council deals with the European Union's policies on agricultural issues, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), food safety, and the harmonisation of rules on issues such as veterinary matters, animal health and plant health. The Council also manages the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and maritime affairs.

Within the Agriculture and Fisheries configuration, the Irish Presidency has identified three priority areas – (1) Reform of the Common Agriculture Policy, (2) the five-part legislative package reviewing Animal and Plant Health policies; Marketing and Production of Seeds and Plant Propagating Material; Official Controls in the Food and Feed sectors; and a Financial Framework, and (3) reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

Agriculture

A sustainable future for Europe's agriculture sector

The agriculture and food sector is vital to the European economy, with an EU agriculture trade surplus of €7 billion in 2011. Europe needs to continue to ensure that the food that it produces is safe and that agricultural methods are environmentally sustainable. But it is also necessary to ensure that the Union's agriculture sector is competitive particularly given the importance of the sector as a major exporter and the strong links between the sector and rural development in Europe.

The CAP provides the framework within which the sustainable development of a competitive and efficient agriculture sector is pursued, as well as the resources to assist in its achievement. In providing this framework the CAP has underpinned the modernisation of the European agriculture sector, making a vital contribution not only to economic growth in the EU, but also to sustainable, long-term global food security. The CAP also focuses on sustainable use of natural resources and supporting the socio-economic development of rural areas.

The proposed reform of the Common Agriculture Policy, which will set the policy framework for the period up to 2020, will be of central importance in shaping the future development of the sector. CAP reform will also make an important contribution to the Europe 2020 process which aims to deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for Europe.

The reform package is comprised of four main legislative proposals covering all the elements of the current CAP including direct payments to farmers, market supports, rural development policy and new rules on financing and controls.

The agriculture sector is of critical importance to the EU and the Presidency will place a very strong emphasis on securing agreement on CAP reform during its term in office.

Phyto-sanitary, veterinary and food safety measures

The Commission is due to publish a package of five proposals relating to phyto-sanitary, veterinary and food safety measures; the Irish Presidency will start discussions on these immediately with a view to maximum progress being made.

The package will contain proposals on:

- » Animal Health Law
- » Plant Health Law
- » Official Controls in the Food and Feed Chain
- » Marketing and Production of Seeds and Propagating Material
- » Financial Framework

The new Animal Health Law will give effect to the provisions of the Animal Health Strategy (2007-2013) with a view to ensuring a high level of protection in the public health and animal health sectors. It will put greater focus on preventative measures, disease surveillance, controls and research in order to reduce the incidence of animal diseases and minimise the impact of outbreaks when they do occur.

The Plant Health Package will repeal existing Plant Health legislation, replacing it with a slimmed-down Regulation that will address such areas as increased risks in the sector and include measures related to movement of plants. One key aim is to strengthen systems to avoid the introduction of harmful pests and diseases into the EU.

The Official Controls of the Food and Feed chain proposal aims to simplify and harmonise official controls carried out by Member States at all stages of production of food of animal and plant origin and feed and in all sectors thereby ensuring that there is complete confidence in the food system from farm to fork.

The aim of the Marketing and Production of Seeds and Propagating Material proposal is to consolidate and update twelve legislative instruments into one Act taking into account recent technical developments.

The fifth element of the package provides for a single Financial Framework to be put in place which will restructure and clarify existing measures in the animal health, plant health and official controls sectors. The Presidency is committed to prioritising discussions on this dossier.

Fisheries

Ireland attaches great importance to a sustainable fisheries policy for Europe. A reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) can contribute greatly to sustainability through better management of fish stocks, ensuring that the EU's waters are protected for future generations. The reform will also ensure more efficient decision-making processes, greater integration of fisheries into wider maritime policy and greater compliance to avoid overfishing.

Reaching agreement on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), which oversees the ongoing funding for restructuring and modernisation of the EU's fishing fleet, can lead to greater fishing opportunities and job creation in the sector. The CFP reform issue will also feed into the Presidency objective on the Integrated Maritime Policy and the Atlantic Strategy. The Presidency will work to reach agreement with the European Parliament on the reform package.

Forestry

Preserving Europe's woodlands and forests for future generations

The European forestry sector plays an important role in sectors of the EU economy and can contribute to promoting jobs and growth in rural regions (e.g. supply of materials, manufacturing and tourism). Forests and woodlands are also an important part of Europe's ecosystem and can play an important role in fighting the effects of climate change.

The Presidency's focus in the forestry policy area will be on the UN Forestry Forum, the proposed legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe and an EU Forestry Strategy. The Presidency will also prepare the EU statement at the Forestry Forum which will take place in Istanbul in 2013. The Commission is expected to publish a Forestry Strategy in the first quarter of 2013 and the Presidency will work to secure agreement with Member States on the Strategy.

Competitiveness

Improving competitiveness is a core element in the European Semester process. The Competitiveness Council's work is at the heart of creating a Single Market for the future. The Irish Presidency will focus on Single Market Act measures, advancing the Digital Single Market and boosting Europe's capabilities in the research and innovation area.

Enabling SMEs to achieve their potential is a centerpiece of the Irish Presidency as a whole, not least because of their proven potential to create jobs. Competitiveness Ministers will work on improved access to procurement and research funding opportunities, as well as other supports, smarter regulation and enhanced intellectual property law.

Single Market for the future

The Single Market has been one of the EU's greatest success stories and has generated very considerable benefits for European consumers and business over the past twenty years. But it needs to respond to, and support, a changing market, and in particular, the growth of online commerce.

As Presidency, Ireland will work to complete the dossiers that remain open under the Single Market Act I, and to make progress on the priority actions in the Single Market Act II. The Presidency looks forward to the publication by the Commission of detailed legislative proposals on these actions during 2013 which will place a strong emphasis on transport, energy and telecommunications networks and the Digital Single Market, including electronic payments and invoicing, and on proposals aimed at strengthening social entrepreneurship, cohesion and consumer confidence.

Digital Single Market

The Digital Single Market facilitates the free flow of online services and entertainment across national borders. We must keep up with new market trends have an increasing impact on the way we now live our lives. The implications for citizens and businesses are broad and include the music download business, protecting EU consumers in cyberspace, the establishment of a single area for online payments and e-Invoicing. The benefits of making progress are enormous and include cost reduction and increased competitiveness and growth.

This is why the Irish Presidency will attach priority to measures aimed at realising the full potential of the Digital Single Market in Europe. During its Presidency, Ireland will work across Council formations to make progress on the following issues:

- » cyber security
- » e-Signatures/e-Identification
- » Data Protection
- » high-speed broadband rollout
- » web accessibility

Single Market Governance

The Presidency looks forward to working with the European Commission and European Parliament to bring about improvements in the transposition and implementation of all Single Market legislation and the governance of the Single Market, as called for in the Commission Communication of June 2012.

The inclusion of enhanced structured surveillance of the Single Market in the European Semester process will increase the momentum for finalising important Single Market legislative proposals. This approach will form part of a regular stock-take of progress on commitments given in the context of the Compact for Growth and Jobs, and will also enhance the Competitiveness Council's role in monitoring and providing political guidance on growth-enhancing measures.

Recognition of Professional Qualifications

The Proposal on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications aims to improve the current system of qualifications recognition to facilitate greater labour mobility for skilled workers. It is also one of the twelve priorities to boost growth set out in the Single Market Act I. The Presidency will work with the European Parliament, the Commission and Member States to achieve agreement on the proposal during the Irish Presidency.

Public Procurement Reforms

Public authorities across the European Union spend approximately €2 trillion per annum on the procurement of goods, services and works. Revised public procurement proposals are an important element of the Europe 2020 strategy and are also one of the key actions outlined in the Single Market Act I. The proposals consist of three measures which aim to increase the efficiency of public spending to ensure the best procurement outcomes in terms of value for money, by making the existing rules more simple, flexible and user-friendly.

These proposed reforms will be of particular benefit to SMEs, while the increased use of e-procurement will also encourage greater cross-border competition. On behalf of the Council, the Presidency will work towards securing agreement with the European Parliament on the three proposals.

Intellectual Property

Intellectual property is the cornerstone of any competitive modern economy, especially in today's global market. The Irish Presidency will seek maximum progress on copyright, trademarks and patents.

Copyright

The Presidency will act on the European Council's call for a modernisation of EU copyright regime to facilitate access to content while upholding intellectual property rights and encouraging creativity and cultural diversity. The Presidency will seek good progress on the Collective Rights Management Directive which also covers the issue of multi-territorial licensing of rights for the online distribution of musical works. The existence of strong, transparent and accountable collective management regimes is seen as vital for the Digital Single Market, where solutions to many copyright issues may centre around licensing.

In parallel with legislative work, Ministers will have an in-depth debate in May 2013 on the expected Commission Communication on licensing in Europe, as well as on the opportunities and challenges for moving towards a Digital Single Market.

Trademarks

The Presidency will take work forward at technical level on the expected Commission proposals to revise both the Community Trade Mark Regulation and the Trade Mark Directive. The revised proposals aim to modernise the Trade Mark system both at EU and national levels.

Patents

The creation of a Unitary Patent and Unified Patent Court will make it less expensive for innovators to protect their inventions and enforce patents throughout Europe. SMEs, in particular, stand to benefit from the reduced costs and enhanced patent coverage and protection in most Member State markets. The reform of the patents package includes two Regulations which provide for a Unitary Patent regime (and associated translation arrangements) under EU law, and the Unified Patent Court, an international agreement between Member States, providing the enforcement mechanism. The formal adoption of the Unitary Patent Regulations by Council was achieved under the Cyprus Presidency. The Irish Presidency will make the necessary preparations to enable participating Member States to formally sign the agreement on the Unified Patent Court in the first half of 2013. The Presidency will also take forward preparations for the full implementation of the patents package.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

SMEs are at the heart of 98% of EU business activity. As we move to the next phase of recovery, they will be a key factor in renewed growth and jobs. The Presidency will host an informal meeting of Competitiveness Ministers in May on the theme of "SMEs as a driver of European Growth". The agenda for the meeting will focus on topics including access to finance for SMEs, promoting entrepreneurship in Europe (with a particular focus on regional entrepreneurship), and global opportunities for SMEs.

Proposal for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs (COSME)

The Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) aims to promote more dynamic and internationally-competitive SMEs by providing targeted support to the sector. The European Commission will place a strong emphasis on facilitating SME access to supports to boost their research and innovation capacities, strengthening EU competitiveness. The Presidency will aim to secure agreement on the COSME proposal as a priority.

Smart Regulation

The Presidency will promote the Smart Regulation agenda, particularly for SMEs and micro-enterprises in the EU. The Commission adopted a Communication in December 2012 as a follow-on to its 2010 Smart Regulation Communication. A second Communication/Report is expected in time for the Spring European Council in 2013. This will address progress on better Regulation for micro-enterprises and SMEs, including the Annual Scoreboard of SME Actions. The Commission is also expected to present the results of its consultation on the Top Ten most burdensome legislative acts for SMEs. The Irish Presidency will secure agreed follow-up actions through Council Conclusions at the May 2013 Competitiveness Council.

Consumer law

In the context of overall agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the Presidency is aiming for agreement on the Consumer Programme which will provide a basis for funding of consumer protection and enforcement measures in the period 2014-2020. Additionally, in the area of consumer protection and the Single Market, a package of measures will be brought forward by the Commission in mid-February 2013 which will include both legislative and non-legislative elements. This will include a measure to improve the safety of products circulating in the EU through a revised General Product Safety Directive, as well as a new Regulation on Market Surveillance which is aimed at strengthening market surveillance provisions in respect of products entering the EU. The Presidency will attach importance to progressing both proposals to allow for agreement by Spring 2014.

State Aid Modernisation

The aim of the State Aid Modernisation (SAM) initiative is to ensure that State Aid policy contributes to the Europe 2020 strategy as well as to budget consolidation through a more efficient and targeted use of taxpayers' money for jobs and growth. State aid control must target sustainable growth-enhancing policies more effectively while encouraging budgetary consolidation. The Presidency's objective will be to seek agreement on the procedural and enabling Regulations that govern the State Aid Controls.

Customs

Union Customs Code (UCC)

The Union Customs Code (UCC) is designed to simplify and modernise customs procedures in support of the jobs and growth agenda. Once agreed, the modernisation of customs procedures and the increased use of IT systems will facilitate business while ensuring safe and secure trade of goods in the EU. The modified UCC will also make it easier for exporters to trade and invest internationally and will help reinforce the EU as a competitive global economy. The Presidency aims to reach an agreement on the Code with the European Parliament and to secure adoption of the proposal.

Company law

The rules relating to company law and good corporate governance, as well as harmonisation of accounting and auditing, are essential for the creation and management of a single market for financial services and products and for the effective functioning of dynamic economies.

The Company Law (Accounting) Directives aim to reduce the heavy administrative burden for SMEs and to introduce a simplified set of accounting rules, in addition to increasing clarity and comparability of financial statements and enhancing the transparency of country-by-country payments. The Presidency plans to conclude an agreement on the proposal.

The key focus of the draft Auditing Directive and Regulation is on audit quality and auditor independence. The draft Regulation which addresses the audit of "Public Interest Entities" is particularly significant and includes systemically important companies and undertakings. The Presidency intends to achieve a General Approach on this dossier at the May Competitiveness Council.

Research and Innovation

Horizon 2020

In the context of overall agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the Presidency is aiming for agreement on Horizon 2020, the EU programme for research and innovation. Horizon 2020 can play a decisive role for jobs and growth and help create the European economy of the future. The programme also supports the Innovation Union which is a Europe 2020 flagship initiative aimed at boosting Europe's global competitiveness.

One of key objectives of Horizon 2020 is to simplify all research and innovation funding that the EU currently provides through one single set of rules. This will make it easier for applicants to seek funding, but the approach will also ensure that funds invested in the programme will be used more effectively. Horizon 2020 also seeks to secure major investment in key technologies, bridging the gap between

research and the market and promoting real commercial partnerships between Member States and the private sector. Linking in with other EU programmes, Horizon 2020 aims to increase programme participation by SMEs from 15% to 20%.

European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)

The EIT proposal forms part of the Horizon 2020 process. EIT works to promote the EU's sustainable growth and competitiveness through strengthening its innovation capacity. By linking the higher education, research and commercial sectors, a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs will continue to work on priority topics with a high societal impact such as climate change, sustainable energies and information and communication technologies. The Presidency will seek agreement on the two dossiers that make up the EIT proposal.

European Research Area (ERA)

The aim of the ERA is to create a unified research area within the single market in which researchers, technology and innovation can circulate freely. The ERA proposals also aim to boost the Union's capabilities in cutting-edge areas such as molecular biology, biotechnology and genetics. The Presidency will attach strong importance to this initiative, which, if implemented, can lead to a significant improvement in Europe's research performance and output, and also avoid wasteful duplication of activities.

Boosting the Union's innovation capacities

Reflecting the priority attached to boosting the Union's innovation capacities, the Presidency will host a number of conferences in Dublin during 2013 aimed at supporting this objective. This work will include consideration of Key Enabling Technologies (KETs), the development of which can have a profound impact on how we live our lives in the years to come. Advances in green technology and areas including biotechnology can help the EU move to a knowledge-based economy and create more and smarter jobs by feeding European innovation into multiple businesses and products. The Presidency will also make innovation one of the main topics of the informal Competitiveness Council.

Space

The Presidency will seek progress on the funding and operation of the European Earth Monitoring Programme -Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) - should the European Commission publish a proposal for the funding and operation of the programme.

The Presidency will also seek a General Approach at the May Council on a decision establishing a European Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST) support programme.

The Presidency also plans Council Conclusions on the European Commission's Communication on EU Space Industrial Policy – "Releasing the potential for economic growth in the space sector". In addition, Council Conclusions are planned on the Commission Communication on establishing appropriate relations between the EU and the European Space Agency.

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) covers a broad range of policy areas vital to stability, jobs and growth. Ireland as Presidency intends to strengthen social cohesion through its focus on a number of key issues. In doing so, our priorities will closely reflect the Europe 2020 Strategy and will form an important part of the European Semester process.

A key issue for the Irish Presidency is tackling the causes of youth unemployment, including through education, training and up-skilling. Also, during the European Year of Citizens, the Presidency will work to protect the rights of workers and to remove obstacles that obstruct or deter citizens from living and working where they wish.

In the area of health policy, the Irish Presidency will promote legislative proposals to improve public health. It will support innovation and research for the benefit of the health and industry sectors, and in the interests of progressing health policy for EU citizens.

For jobs

Jobs are at the core of the Irish Presidency's priorities. The EPSCO Council will seek to deploy the Union's instruments in full to encourage employment and social cohesion as Europe moves to its next phase of recovery. As part of this, the Presidency will push negotiations on employment-related legislation that falls under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), including the European Social Fund (ESF), the Programme for Social Change and Innovation (PSCI) and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF).

The European Social Fund (ESF) is the EU's primary financial instrument for improving employment opportunities across the Union. The fund provides targeted support for education and training initiatives based on the priorities set out in National Action Plans for employment drawn up by Member States. The ESF is also an important element of regional economic development and Cohesion funding. The Presidency will work to achieve agreement on the proposal.

The aim of the Europe 2020-linked Programme for Social Change and Innovation (PSCI) is to provide financial support for the EU's objectives in terms of (a) promoting a high level of employment, (b) guaranteeing adequate social protection, (c) combating social exclusion and poverty, and (d) improving working conditions. The proposal also supports cross-border employee mobility and facilitates job creation by offering recruitment/placement services which benefit job-seekers and employers. The Presidency will aim to adopt the Programme for Social Change and Innovation Regulation.

Ireland attaches importance to concentrating resources on training and re-skilling workers who have recently lost their jobs. This can be pursued through efficient and effective maximisation of EU co-financing programmes such as the EGF. The scope of the EGF encompasses career advice and guidance, education and training programmes, and enterprise supports. In the context of the MFF, the Presidency will work for an agreement with the European Parliament on this funding proposal.

Focus on opportunities for Europe's youth

For Europe's future it is imperative that Europe's young people are given positive employment prospects and that young Europeans are given the fullest opportunities to study, learn and train for both personal fulfillment and future employment. This is also essential to ensure that the EU has a skilled labour force to underpin its return to economic recovery and growth. The effects of the financial crisis have been particularly marked for younger Europeans and the level of unemployment among young people across the EU is too high. We must avoid a 'lost generation' of Europeans with the negative personal and social consequences that this would entail across the Union.

The Presidency will work to advance the proposals to turn the tide on youth joblessness. The Youth Employment Package includes a "Youth Guarantee" aimed at ensuring that young people who are not working or studying receive an offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship. The Presidency aims to make significant progress on the Youth Guarantee with a view to adopting a Council Recommendation at the February EPSCO Council meeting. The issue of youth unemployment will be the main focus at the Informal Ministerial meeting of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in Dublin in February 2013.

Labour mobility, for jobs and growth

Free movement of workers is one of the four freedoms on which the Single Market is based, and is a key lever for growth. The Presidency will work to remove obstacles in the way of citizen mobility.

As part of its work in this area, the Presidency has prioritised the new Enforcement Directive to improve the implementation in practice of the 1996 rules for the posting of workers. This would provide clarity for services providers as well as protection for workers posted across EU borders. The proposal is one of the twelve priority actions of the Single Market Act aimed at boosting the European economy and creating jobs. Working closely with partners, the Irish Presidency will set a high level of ambition for this dossier by working to reach a First Reading Agreement on the proposal.

The Supplementary Pensions Rights Directive aims to promote freedom of movement and to facilitate workers' occupational mobility, by reducing the obstacles created by certain rules concerning supplementary pension schemes. The Irish Presidency will work to reach a General Approach on this proposal at the June EPSCO Council meeting.

The Presidency will also work to progress the legislative proposal to be presented by the Commission to strengthen the supports to mobile workers and to protect against discrimination.

Workers' rights, health and safety

The Irish Presidency will seek progress in the EPSCO Council on the following:

- » the proposal laying down health and safety requirements for workers in relation to the risks of exposure to physical agents (electromagnetic fields);
- » proposals expected from the European Commission to update Directives in relation to workplace health and safety protections for employers and workers in the EU who use hazardous chemicals in the workplace;
- » proposals which the European Commission will bring forward to provide seafarers with the same or equivalent level of employment rights as onshore workers, while taking into account the particular circumstances and the economic environment of this sector.

Social Investment Package

The Presidency looks forward to the Commission's proposal for a Social Investment Package, expected in early 2013. This proposal is expected to deal with critically important key issues including the effects of the economic crisis on citizens and issues including child well-being, social inclusion and social protection. The Irish Presidency will ensure close examination of the package with a view to Council Conclusions. Together with the European Commission, the Presidency will also hold a high-level conference on the Social Investment package in Brussels.

Also in the social policy area, the Presidency will progress work on the proposed funding programme designed to support Member State schemes that provide food and other essential goods to Europe's poorest citizens.

A significant challenges identified by Europe 2020 is to provide decent housing for everyone. It also recognises that homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of poverty and social exclusion. The Presidency will hold a roundtable of Ministers with responsibility for homelessness to discuss issues of common interest and possible future cooperation.

Equality

The Presidency will continue work on the proposed Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The Presidency will also deal with a Commission initiative aimed at improving the accessibility of goods and services in the Internal Market, with a specific focus on responding to the needs of persons with disabilities and of older persons.

Equality between women and men is a fundamental and core value of the EU, but there is also a strong economic case for advancing gender equality.

Ireland will hold a conference in Dublin during the Presidency on the theme of "Women's Economic Engagement and the Europe 2020 Agenda", linking to the employment target of 75% for women and men to be achieved in most Member States.

The Irish Presidency will also take forward work on the proposed Directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges.

Council Conclusions on "Women as decision-makers in the media" are envisaged for the EPSCO Council meeting in June 2013. These Conclusions will link with ongoing work at EU level both for women in decision-making roles, and on the implementation of the UN Beijing Platform for Action.

Health policy

Recognising the importance of health policy for EU citizens, the Presidency will prioritise the progression of a number of important legislative proposals in the areas of public health, pharmaceuticals and medical devices.

Public Health: cross-border health threats

Member States are responsible for the effective functioning of their own health systems. However, threats to health do not respect borders and cooperation between Member States in some areas can make a positive impact in protecting public health across Europe. The European Commission has

adopted a legislative proposal which seeks to protect citizens from a wide range of serious cross-border health threats including communicable diseases and threats of a biological, chemical or environmental nature; the Presidency will work to reach agreement with the European Parliament on this proposal.

Health for Growth

The Irish Presidency will continue negotiations on the Health for Growth programme and aims to finalise an agreement with European Parliament on this dossier. The proposal is the legal instrument for implementation of the European Public Health programme for 2014 to 2020. The programme aims to support Member States to develop innovative and sustainable health systems; increase access to better and sustainable health systems for citizens; promote health and prevent disease, and protect citizens from cross-border health threats.

Tobacco

Ireland was one of the first countries in the world to protect individual worker health rights by banning smoking in the workplace. Such bans are now commonplace across Europe and have saved lives and will reduce pressures on healthcare systems over the long-term. But more needs to be done to protect citizens, particularly children and young people, from the consequences of smoking and nicotine addiction, and to tackle the longer-term costs of smoking to Europe's health-care systems and its economy.

The Irish Presidency will commence negotiations on a new Tobacco Products Directive which will update the current legislation. The proposal will seek to regulate tobacco products in a way that reflects their specific characteristics and the negative consequences of their consumption. Ireland will aim to make substantial progress on this proposal.

Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices

The Presidency aims to make progress on the proposal for a Regulation concerning clinical trials on medicinal products for human use. This proposal is designed to address the fall in clinical trial applications in Europe, which are essential to providing new innovative medicines for patients and maintain a strong pharmaceutical industry, by reducing the administrative burden and costs on sponsors, while at the same time ensuring that subjects are fully protected.

The Presidency is committed to making progress on proposals on medical devices and in-vitro diagnostic medical devices which were published in late 2012. The aim of the two proposals is to provide a legislative framework for the manufacture and placing on the market of medical devices and in-vitro diagnostic devices to ensure a high level of protection for patients and healthcare professionals. The role of medical devices in healthcare is essential to save lives and improve the quality of life for citizens. Improvements in medical technology can also boost the EU's global competitiveness and create jobs, while reducing healthcare costs and enhancing the quality and efficiency of healthcare.

There is a substantial and well-established medical devices industry in the EU which has a strong growth and jobs potential. Ireland looks forward to advancing policy and legislation during its Presidency to support the growth and development of this sector.

Reflecting the importance attached to health sector innovation and research, Ireland will host two high-level conferences in Dublin during the Presidency. The first will run in parallel with the World of Health IT Conference and Exhibition. The second is a high-level expert conference co-hosted with DG Research and Innovation on the future of brain research.

Environment

While considerable advances have been made in protecting Europe's environment, formidable challenges remain. The pressures on resources – particularly raw materials, water, air and biodiversity – continue to increase. The Presidency's main focus will be the 7th Environment Action Programme, as well as a range of legislation aimed at protecting Europe's natural resources and environment for future generations. The Presidency will also promote measures to support sustainable and green growth across the entire policy and legislative agenda.

At international level, the Environment Council seeks to reach common EU approaches to solving global environmental challenges, including climate change. The Presidency faces a very busy international environment agenda for the first half of 2013 and is looking forward to actively managing this programme of work, ensuring that the EU's international leadership in environmental protection and sustainability is maintained.

7th Environment Action Programme

Environment Action Programmes have guided the development of EU environment policy over the last four decades. The proposed 7th Environment Action Programme (EAP) sets out the priority objectives for EU environment policy for the next ten years, grounded in an ambitious vision for an inclusive, green and competitive European economy that safeguards the environment.

The 7th EAP is also an important component of the Europe 2020 strategy and is linked to the Resource Efficiency Flagship Initiative which aims to promote sustainable development within the EU, particularly in relation to resource efficiency and low carbon-generating economic development.

The Presidency considers the 7th EAP to be of critical importance for Europe's future, and will work to finalise agreement with the European Parliament. The Presidency realises that this ambitious goal can only be achieved through the full cooperation and support of all EU partners.

Climate Change

Climate change is an immediate and increasing threat to humanity. Mobilising a comprehensive global response is one of the highest policy priorities for the European Union both internally and internationally through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Ireland has consistently supported EU leadership in this area and the Presidency will therefore prioritise progress in a number of climate policy areas, in particular mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation (responding to the inevitable impact of current and historic greenhouse gas emissions).

Climate Adaptation

In March 2013 the European Commission is expected to publish a new EU Climate Adaptation Strategy building on the 2009 White Paper "Adapting to climate change: Towards a European Framework for action". Although adaptation will have costs, the long-term benefits are considerable, including

the reduction of damage and the costs associated with extreme weather events, and opening up opportunities for growth in some sectors, including agriculture and tourism. The Presidency will aim for Council Conclusions in June 2013 to lay the groundwork for EU-wide climate adaptation.

As part of our efforts to highlight the effects of climate change on the world's poorest regions, the Presidency will also host a high-level conference on Climate Justice in April 2013.

Amendments of the Emissions Trading Directive

This first of two proposals in this area seek to amend an existing Directive which underpins the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. The aim of the proposed amendment is to clarify the timing of auctions within the 2013-2020 trading period in order to support the orderly functioning of the carbon market. This is why the Presidency will seek an early agreement with the European Parliament on this proposal.

Based on encouraging results at the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Council meeting in November 2012 on addressing emissions from international aviation and to provide scope for the further development of this work, the European Commission has brought forward a legislative proposal to provide a temporary derogation from certain reporting and compliance obligations under the EU Emissions Trading Scheme Directive in the case of flights to or from non-European countries. The legislative proposal will be given priority by the Presidency, with a view to reaching an early agreement with the European Parliament.

CO2 from Cars and Vans

In July 2012, the European Commission presented separate proposals to confirm 2020 carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions targets from new passenger cars and new light commercial vehicles (vans). The Presidency will seek early agreements with the European Parliament on both of these proposals.

Fluorinated greenhouse gases (F-Gases)

In November 2012, the European Commission published its proposals to review the application, effects and adequacy of the regulation of fluorinated greenhouse gases (F-gases), with a view to strengthening efforts to reduce F-gas emissions, particularly as the use of alternatives is becoming increasingly feasible for some industrial sectors. Reducing emissions of F-gases is also important given the extent to which such emissions can have significant adverse climate impacts. The Presidency intends to make substantial progress on this file.

Indirect Land Use Change (ILUC)

The European Commission proposal for a Directive seeks amendments to existing legislation on the quality of petrol and diesel fuels, and on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources. The objective is to initiate a transition to biofuels that delivers substantial greenhouse gas savings while also limiting as much as possible the use of land that would be better used for food crops. The proposal also aims to enhance the reporting of emissions from indirect land-use change. The Presidency, in its Environment and Energy formations, intends to make significant progress on this file.

Environmental legislation

Priority Substances

In January 2012 the European Commission published a proposal to amend the Water Framework Directive and the Environmental Quality Standards Directive. The Presidency will work to reach agreement with the European Parliament on the amending Directive, securing a further step forward in protecting the European environment and safeguarding the health of European citizens.

Ship Recycling

Ship recycling can pose significant risks to the environment and to the health of the workers involved. The proposal aims to ensure that European ships will only be recycled in facilities that are both environmentally sound and safe for workers. The Presidency will seek to reach agreement with the European Parliament on this proposal.

Batteries Directive

In 2006 the EU adopted legislation which sought to make batteries and accumulators (e.g. rechargeable batteries) less harmful to the environment. The Batteries Directive includes a specific ban on batteries and accumulators containing mercury and cadmium because of their potential detrimental effects on human health and the environment. The proposed Directive seeks to bring more items under the ban and the Presidency will seek agreement with the European Parliament on this dossier.

Programme for Environment and Climate Action (LIFE)

The EU LIFE Programme is one of the main mechanisms for funding projects in the area of the environment. The Commission has presented a proposal for a new LIFE Programme with a significantly increased budget to cover the period 2014-2020. The Irish Presidency will seek an early agreement on the programme.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive

Ireland will aim to advance work on the draft EIA Directive which aims to strengthen existing provisions in order to improve the way in which the environmental impacts of proposed development are assessed. The Presidency intends to make significant progress on this file.

Access to Genetic Resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization

The proposal on Access to Genetic Resources and the sharing of benefits arising from their utilization has been published by the European Commission with a view to meeting the requirements of the Nagoya Protocol. The Protocol is aimed at ensuring that there is a reward to countries that are the source of biological materials which may be collected for use in other countries in new and profitable products, such as foods, medicines, or biotech agents. It would protect developing countries from so-called "biopiracy" and is also a key step in meeting 2020 Global Targets on Biodiversity. The proposal sets out obligations for users of genetic resources in the European Union. The Presidency aims to make significant progress within the Council with regard to the overall objective of EU ratification in early 2014.

International climate and environment agenda

The Presidency will play a lead coordinating role in representing the EU in the international arena. This is increasingly important given the trans-border and global nature of environmental issues and the extent to which many of the major global environmental challenges are addressed at the United Nations (UN) level.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The latest in a series of ongoing negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held in Qatar in December 2012. The Qatar meeting built on the agreement reached in Durban in 2011 and delivered a clear pathway for working towards a multilateral, legally-binding global deal by 2015. This will include emission reduction targets for all parties within a definite timeframe and outline climate finance commitments to assist developing countries in climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Presidency intends to lead the EU effort to build on the firm decisions and timeframes agreed to in Doha, particularly in terms of the EU's involvement in the inter-sessional UNFCCC meeting in Bonn in June 2013. It is also intended that the international climate agenda will be among the topic for discussion at the Informal Council of Environment Ministers to be held in Dublin in April 2013.

Rio+20

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012 reached an agreement – The Future We Want – which, crucially, recognises the role of an inclusive green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Ireland will coordinate the development of the EU's positions in follow-up work at EU and UN levels.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

A key responsibility in terms of the international environment agenda during the Presidency will involve leading the EU input to the 27th Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) of the United Nations Environment Programme, which will take place in Nairobi from 18 to 22 February.

Mercury

In January, the Presidency will coordinate the EU's participation at the fifth and final Intergovernmental Negotiation Committee to agree a legally binding instrument on Mercury. Securing a successful outcome to these negotiations is of critical importance given that mercury is recognised as a chemical element with a significant adverse effect on human health and the environment.

UN Chemicals, Waste and Aarhus Conventions

Finally, the United Nations will also hold back-to-back meetings of the Conferences of the Parties of the three UN Chemicals and Waste Conventions (the Stockholm, Rotterdam and Basel Conventions) in April-May 2013, while a working group of the parties of the Aarhus Convention will take place in June 2013. The Presidency will ensure effective EU input into the various decisions to be adopted under each Convention.

Transport, Telecommunications and Energy

One of the fundamental drivers for EU economic growth and improved competitiveness now and into the future is a strong, secure, environmentally sustainable and cost-effective transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructure. The Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (TTE) aims to develop coordinated networks and infrastructure which will benefit the internal market and the EU economy as a whole.

Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)

Sustainable and interconnected transport, energy and digital networks are priorities for Europe's social and economic development. The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), which forms part of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), will determine how the Union's resources will be invested across transport, energy and telecommunications/digital infrastructures.

Access to a Digital Single Market is also of critical importance for both consumers and business.

The development of a joined-up energy market in the EU will be of immense benefit to consumers. It will also be of particular importance in ensuring longer-term energy security and the promotion of alternative energy sources.

Quality, integrated transport links are vital to Europe's competitiveness. Targeted investment to address bottlenecks and missing links will support Europe's economic recovery in the longer term.

The Presidency will prioritise the Connecting Europe Facility and also a number of the individual proposals which will make connecting Europe a reality.

Transport

Trans-European Networks – Transport (TEN-T)

TEN-T comprises a set of guidelines and requirements for the development of the European Transport network over the next four decades to 2050. TEN-T's vision for a comprehensive transport network will support the functioning of the internal market and underpin Europe's competitiveness. It will do so in a sustainable way, taking into account the EU's energy efficiency needs and climate change challenges. Discussions on the TEN-T are already at an advanced stage and the Presidency hopes to conclude agreement with the European Parliament.

Fourth Rail Package

The Rail Package is one of three transport dossiers which feature in the Single Market Act II to promote a more competitive and modern public transport infrastructure across the EU. This will offer consumers and business greater choice and more cost-effective options. The Presidency will work to make progress on the dossier.

Airports Package

Ireland's island status means that commercial aviation is a major priority for both consumers and exporters. Air passenger numbers across the EU have also continued to grow in recent decades, placing increasing pressure on supporting infrastructure. Currently 70% of all delays to flights are caused by problems on the ground and not in the air.

The Airports Package aims to address these issues of efficiency, quality and capacity across European airports. There is a particular focus on ground-handling services, slot allocation and noise reduction. An anticipated Air Passenger Rights proposal will also aim to clarify the rights of passengers, particularly in cases of flight cancellations, delays and denied boarding.

The Presidency hopes to bring negotiations on the Airports Package to a satisfactory conclusion. It will launch the negotiation on Passenger Rights when the proposal is published.

Other Transport Council legislation

The Presidency is also aiming to secure agreement on proposals to enforce the Maritime Labour Convention and a new Tachograph Regulation (a device used to record movement of hauliers across the EU), and to make good progress on other important dossiers impacting on the transport sector, including a new Clean Power for Transport package to promote greater use of renewable fuels; and a number of safety related proposals including the Road Worthiness Package and Passenger Ship Safety. Two other transport-related dossiers which feature in the Single Market Act II – the next phase of the Single European Sky initiative and a Blue Belt Initiative aimed at reducing administrative burdens for short sea shipping within the EU – are expected to be published and presented during Ireland's Presidency.

Telecommunications

One of the Presidency's main objectives across all policy areas is to further the Digital Agenda for jobs and growth. Europe must keep up with market trends and the way people live their lives. In the telecoms area, technologies and the internet must be maximised to drive sustainable growth and to deliver new services for citizens. The Mid-Term Review published just before Ireland's Presidency signaled the need for a renewed focus on priority areas including, high-speed broadband rollout, cloud computing, trust and security, skills, online services and content, and research and innovation. It also highlights to the Irish Presidency and Member States how key challenges to making progress on the Digital Agenda can be overcome.

Early during its Presidency, Ireland hopes to reach agreement on the proposal for a Directive to allow the re-use of public sector information by the private sector at marginal or no cost, to generate new and innovative products, thereby stimulating job growth and development.

Digital Single Market

Digital infrastructure will provide the foundations on which the Digital Single Market will be built and run. The proposed telecommunications guidelines pertaining to the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) aim to accelerate the delivery of next generation broadband and to stimulate the rollout of digital services by complementing private investment, particularly in areas where the economic case for investment is less certain. The Presidency aims to reach agreement between the European Council and Parliament on this file.

Citizens and businesses must also be able to trust online and virtual commerce in order for it to become a success. This is why the Presidency attaches high priority to the Regulation on electronic identification and trust services. The aim of the Regulation is to provide a pan-European framework for electronic

identification, authentication and recognition of e- signatures. The mutual recognition and acceptance of electronic Identification (e-ID) has the potential to ease access for citizens to public services across EU borders in areas such as health, social welfare, taxation, employment and education. The proposal can open the way to greater use by all Europeans of online services, which in turn will result in growth and jobs. The Presidency will accelerate work on this complex file, which is a proposal outstanding from the first Single Market Act. The Presidency will also work on proposals in other Councils including data protection aimed at supporting growth in the digital economy.

The European Commission's Digital Agenda Assembly will be held in Dublin in June 2013. The event brings together industry and civil society experts with representatives from the EU institutions and Member States with a view to strengthening cooperation and collaboration around the Digital Agenda.

Web accessibility

The Presidency intends to make progress on the Commission's proposed Directive on web accessibility, published in December 2012. The proposal aims to ensure that websites are accessible to all users, in particular those with disabilities. The Presidency will work to progress this proposal as part of its focus on the Digital Agenda and the European Year of Citizens.

Network and Information Security

A legislative proposal on measures to enable improved levels of network and information security, to accompany the anticipated statement on Cyber Security, is expected to be published early during Ireland's Presidency. The main aim of the proposal is to provide for improved network and information security across the EU. The Presidency looks forward to the publication of this proposal by the European Commission and will work to make strong progress on this legislation during the Presidency.

Reducing the costs of high speed broadband

In 2012 the Heads of State and Government identified providing better broadband coverage, including reducing the cost of high-speed broadband infrastructure, as critical to completing the Digital Single Market.

The proposal will be published towards the end of the first quarter of 2013 and will set out the principles to be followed by Member States as they prepare to roll out high-speed fixed and mobile broadband. Recent work in Ireland on developing the National Broadband Plan has provided a unique insight into the challenges of reducing barriers to broadband deployment, including in particular challenges in relation to planning and access to infrastructure. The Presidency awaits the Commission's proposal with interest given Ireland's experience in the area, and will work closely with all partners in advancing the proposal so as to facilitate the delivery of high-quality, secure and cost-effective broadband across the entire EU.

Energy

Issues such as safeguarding energy supply through an integrated internal energy market, environmental impact and market deregulation will determine the future of energy provision in Europe. In managing energy negotiations, the Irish Presidency will be mindful of the benefits for jobs, growth and consumers. Increased coordination at EU level can benefit Europe as Member States move away from traditional carbon-based energy sources to alternative sources, especially renewables.

Internal Energy Market

In November 2012 the European Commission issued a Communication on the Internal Energy Market. The Communication recognised the progress made by Member States on meeting the objective of completing the internal energy market. However, it also highlighted a number of issues which need to be tackled urgently so that consumers can realise the full benefits of the internal energy as well as to remove barriers to competition and to enhance security and sustainability of European energy. The Presidency aims to adopt Council Conclusions on the Communication.

Sustainability Criteria for Biomass

The Commission is expected to publish a proposed Directive early during the Irish Presidency on sustainability requirements for the use of biomass in electricity, heating and cooling. Ireland will work to advance the proposal and will draft a report on its progress at the June 2013 Energy Council.

Notification of Investment in Energy Infrastructure Projects

It is expected that the Irish Presidency will deal with a proposal for annulment of the Council act on notification of investment in energy infrastructure and its replacement with a new legal act based on the Council and Parliament co-decision process.

Directive on Safety of Offshore Oil and Gas Activities

This proposal is aimed at promoting offshore safety following recent disasters and includes provisions to strengthen preparedness and response capacity to deal with emergencies. The Presidency will work to secure an early agreement with the European Parliament on the proposal.

Indirect Land Use Change (ILUC)

The proposal for a Directive on Indirect Land Use Change (ILUC) seeks amendments to existing legislation on the quality of petrol and diesel fuels and on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources. The objective is to initiate a transition to biofuels that deliver substantial greenhouse gas savings while also limiting as much as possible the use of land that would be better used for food crops. The proposal also aims to enhance the reporting of emissions from indirect land-use change. The Presidency, in its Environment and Energy formations, intends to make significant progress on this file.

Radiation Protection

High standards of radiation protection are of great importance to the EU. The Presidency will work to reach agreement on the revision of the Directive setting out Basic Safety Standards for ionizing radiation in order to protect patients, workers, and the public who are subject to exposure. Work will also be carried forward on the proposal to establish a Community system for the registration of carriers of radioactive materials.

Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

The importance of education and training for economic recovery is recognised in the Europe 2020 Strategy. Education and training – key drivers to promoting social cohesion and reducing poverty – have a key contribution to make to tackling the current jobs crisis, especially that among younger Europeans. The Presidency will ensure that the Council supports initiatives that underpin the development of a knowledge-based and innovation-led economy.

Europe's cultural heritage and diversity are among its greatest strengths. The Presidency will work to advance the Creative Europe project to support the next generation of European artists and cultural professionals.

Education

The Irish Presidency will prioritise reducing unemployment across the EU by extending access to education and ensuring the quality of education and training. Emphasis will also be placed on integrating the education agenda further into the European Semester process to support jobs and growth. The principles of quality and equity will underpin the Irish Presidency approach to education and training.

Rethinking Education

In addition, the upcoming Commission communication on Rethinking Education will inform consideration of wider education reforms. The adoption of Council conclusions responding to both the Communication and the 2012 Annual Growth Survey will be proposed for the February 2013 Education Council.

Erasmus for All

Erasmus for All is the programme which brings together current EU schemes for education, training, youth and sport. Reaching agreement with Parliament on the Erasmus for All Regulation will be a key task on the education and training agenda.

Other policy areas

The Irish Presidency will place a focus on providing support for the important role that teacher educators play in education systems. Higher Education will also be a priority, with an emphasis on participation by under-represented groups, the regional engagement role of Higher Education Institutions, and the EU University Multiranking project.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) aims to bring a common European reference to the national qualifications of different countries to enable individuals and employers to better understand and compare academic levels in different education and training systems. It is important that education and training leading to qualifications that are referenced to the EQF are supported by robust quality assurance arrangements. A conference on the theme of quality assurance in qualification frameworks will be organised during the Irish Presidency.

Youth

The focus of the Youth Council will be on non-formal education and learning. Ireland, along with its trio partners has made Social Inclusion the main policy theme for the 18 months from January 2013 to end June 2014. This theme encompasses accessibility to youth services and inclusiveness, and underscores the importance of quality in the design and delivery of youth policy and provision.

The Irish Presidency will focus particularly on the contribution of quality youth work to enhancing the social inclusion of all young people, their development and well-being and on maximising the potential of youth policy in achieving the goals of Europe 2020, in particular in addressing the youth employment challenge.

The Irish Presidency will host a major EU Youth Conference in Dublin in March which will be the culmination of an EU-Wide structured dialogue process with young people.

Culture

Creative Europe

Creative Europe is the new EU programme supporting the cultural and creative sectors. EU funding will help artists and cultural professionals to reach new audiences. Creative Europe will also support the European film industry by incorporating existing initiatives such as the successful MEDIA programme. The Irish Presidency will work to advance agreement on the Regulation.

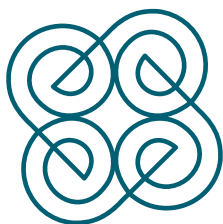
Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020

The programme has been created to bring Europe closer to its citizens and encourage them to participate more fully in the future development of the European Union. The programme consists of two strands, one focusing on remembrance and the other on civic participation. The initiative will support projects run by civil society, local authorities, NGOs, think-tanks, trade unions and universities at the local and regional level. The Citizens for Europe programme is specifically designed to promote participative democracy and will therefore be a priority for the Presidency during the European Year of Citizens.

Sport

The key Presidency objective on the sport agenda will be to make progress on a number of issues highlighted in the EU's Work Plan on Sport. These include the issue of dual careers for sportspeople. The Council will consider how to ensure that sportspeople are equipped and educated for life beyond what is typically a short sporting career.

A second priority will be to consider the contribution of sport to the economy, and identifying critical challenges in financing sport – particularly grassroots sport - in a more sustainable way. Ireland will also represent the EU at the World Anti-Doping Agency over the next 18 months.



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