

## **Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 3 July, 2013**

### **Achievements of the Irish Presidency January – June 2013**

It is a great pleasure to welcome Croatia as the 28<sup>th</sup> member of the European Union. Croatia's presence among us makes our Union stronger.

Ireland's seventh Presidency of the Council concluded on Sunday. Through the support and partnership of the European Institutions, Ireland's Presidency achieved significant results.

In the 181 days of our Presidency, we achieved an estimated 13,914 policy commitments, including more than 80 in legislative form. 2,477 meetings were chaired by the Presidency across Europe. 374 Trilogues were held with the Commission and the European Parliament and 54 Councils were chaired by Irish government ministers.

Those are the bare figures. These are the facts.

Six months ago, we set out our objectives, based on the three pillars of Stability, Jobs and Growth. We set out to make good on our commitments, in particular, those made at the highest political level.

At that difficult time, it was imperative that our citizens and the markets see clear evidence that our Union could and would, follow through on commitments made. Such follow-through has been the hallmark of the Irish Presidency. I believe what we have achieved in that regard has bolstered the credibility of our Union its role and work in the eyes of our people.

Since we assumed the Presidency after a particularly difficult period, achieving and sustaining stability was an obvious and key goal.

Banking union was of critical importance. We needed to repair and renovate our banks to do two vital things. Firstly, generate sustainable economic growth. Secondly, to prove to our citizens they could depend on us to do what we said we would do at the meeting of Heads of State and Government, which was to sever the link between banks and sovereigns. The follow-through achieved in the Irish Presidency was seen in three further developments. The new, single supervisor, stronger capital rules for banks and, just last week, in agreeing new rules for bank wind downs. These new bank resolution rules will protect taxpayers from having to bail out the banks again.

Equally in our Presidency, we also worked to put in place positive drivers for growth and job creation across Europe.

When it comes to those all-important jobs, trade is crucial. So we concentrated on securing agreement on the mandate for EU-US talks. Such agreement is essential to what should be a game-changing Transatlantic Partnership – one based on an equal and open relationship. This will allow us to turn the enormous potential for jobs and growth into reality.

Small and Medium-size Enterprises (SMEs) are the lifeblood of job creation. So we made Europe's small businesses a priority, every step of the way. For example, we managed to achieve the political agreement that will make it easier for our SMEs to access the EU's two trillion euro public procurement market through a simpler and cheaper bid process. With this everybody wins.

More bids, governments can get better value for money; our small businesses can really compete and expand.

€2 billion has also been agreed to help boost the competitiveness of Europe's 20 million SMEs.

Research and Development is a crucial policy area.. The 70-billion euro Horizon 2020 programme agreed in principle last week is crucial in terms of R&D. The proportion of such funds taken up by SMEs should go up by one-third.

But we could have done little or none of this without the close co-operation of the institutions.

Securing agreement with the European Parliament on the EU's Common Agricultural Policy for the next seven years has been one of our Presidency's most important achievements. It will greatly enhance our efforts to transform our agriculture and fisheries industries into sustainable, 'green' sectors for growth. €360 billion has been budgeted for the reformed CAP.

We welcome the European Parliament's strong support for the 16-billion euro Erasmus-Plus programme.

We believe significant work has been done on the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund. This will provide real support for an important section of our society - our redundant workers. We can never underestimate the layers or depth of trauma of a hard worker being made redundant.

Throughout our Presidency, we maintained a strong focus on those all-important high-potential sectors, such as digital. Equally, we made major progress on data protection and legislation on e-identification.

We made headway too on issues such as the European Protection Order, Access to Lawyers in Criminal Proceedings, and Insolvency.

We concluded, successfully, the historic negotiations that will allow the Union to accede to the European Convention of Human Rights, extending the same

standards of protection to our citizens in their dealings with the EU institutions as when dealing with their own governments.

We have also shown significant leadership in the area of CSDP (Capability Development, Maritime Surveillance and Cyber Security).

In addition we have laid the initial groundwork for the thematic discussion on Defence at the December European Council.

But there has been one, flagship issue for Ireland's Presidency.

That is our absolute commitment to ending the horror of youth unemployment. Too many young people have reached working age, but have yet to know and feel what it is like to get up and have a job to go to. Our Union must be 100 per cent sure that we will not allow youth unemployment to lock our young men and women out of their futures, out of the happy and successful lives they could and should and with this initiative can now be living.

We are proud that in just the second month of our Presidency we managed to secure the commitment of all member states to the Youth Guarantee. It will give young people under the age of 25 the chance of training or a new job within four months of their becoming unemployed.

It is clear to all of us that to tackle youth unemployment we must press ahead with adapting our education and training systems to 21st century norms including partnerships with employers.

To boost employment and employability we have taken important decisions on cross-border mobility, including a stronger EURES, the European job-search facility. Presidency agreements on the expanded Erasmus-Plus programme and on professional qualifications will make an important contribution to this area.

As will agreement with the Parliament on the proposal on portability of pension rights.

There was another urgent issue: the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

Our work on the MFF has underpinned so much of our Presidency endeavours and achievements. It was just last Thursday in Brussels that President Schulz and the Presidency, along with President Barroso, reached a long and eagerly-awaited agreement on the MFF.

The Parliament votes on this agreement today. It votes on a complex series of texts dealing with important technical and financial matters. The negotiations to this point were long and difficult and highly sensitive for both Council and Parliament. The result identifies the best way to ensure that the almost 1trillion Euros for MFF is released as soon as possible into the real economy.

But there were times when the Council and Parliament differed sharply; times when it was very difficult to make progress in the negotiations

The signal that we now send is that Europe is capable, competent and deserving of our confidence. It can and does deliver.

Today, 500 million members of the European family face what are, for all of us, unprecedented challenges in our economy our society. The MFF is the single, biggest investment tool we have at our disposal. We need to come together and use it forthwith.

As you know, managing a Presidency places considerable demands on any administration. This is particularly so in the case of smaller Member State such as Ireland.

We believed a country making the journey to recovery would be well placed to lead a Union committed to the same destination.

Our Presidency has been good for Ireland; we hope it has been good for our Union, and very good for our urgent agenda of Stability, Jobs and Growth.