I am delighted to present to the Committee today on the Irish Presidency programme in respect of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the European Social Fund.

Both of these dossiers are strongly relevant to the achievement of the objectives of the Union set out in EU2020 and to the Irish Presidency theme of Stability, Jobs and Growth.

Agreement on the technical Regulations at sectoral level and on the budgets in the framework of the EU Multi Annual Financial Framework is essential to ensuring that crucial funding will be available up to 2020 to deliver on EU objectives. Both of these Funds are also key instruments in the delivery of EU strategies such as “New Skills for New Jobs”, “Youth on the Move” and the “Youth Opportunities Initiative” including the proposed Youth Guarantee.

On the ESF, I would point out firstly that the ESF is being dealt with in Council as part of the overall Cohesion Policy package. A partial general approach has been reached in the Council on blocks of the Cohesion Regulations including the ESF. My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, is today presenting on the Cohesion package to the REGI Committee of Parliament.

The partial general approach in Council has enabled blocks of work to be agreed that are common to the Cohesion Regulations including the ESF. This has enabled the Council to commence engagement with the Parliament at the Trilogue stage on issues concerning the ESF Regulation.

I would like to congratulate the Parliament on the constructive spirit in which they have engaged in the negotiations on the ESF Regulation to date
and on the progress achieved on the Programming and Thematic Concentration blocks to date.

Some of the central points that have presented themselves to date concern the scope of the ESF and the investment priorities through which the ESF will be invested during 2014 to 2020.

Compromises on key issues are being worked out and, while the process is challenging, I am confident that grounds do exist for significant further progress during the Irish Presidency.

While some key issues are being considered at the level of the MFF, I can assure the Parliament that the ordinary legislative procedure will be fully respected.

Turning to the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, I would point out that, of course, the future of the EGF is closely tied to the decisions that emerge from the MFF process. It is important that the EGF is still on the table in those discussions.

The Council has discussed this file for over a year now. The specific proposals for compromise tabled during the Cyprus Presidency show that all of the concerns emerging in the Parliament are shared and are being considered by the Council.

Some of those issues concern the scope of the EGF and the types of workers that might benefit from a future Fund. We have seen the Report of this Committee on the EGF and are positively looking forward to progressing these matters under our Presidency.

We are confident that the situation for the EGF will become clearer once the European Council takes decisions on the MFF. Subject to that, we will continue to press ahead in the Council to seek agreement on outstanding issues with a view to engaging with Parliament as soon as possible in the process of moving this file forward towards agreement.