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**Address by Richard Bruton, Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and
Innovation to the European Parliament's Committee on
Employment and Social Affairs**

Wednesday 23rd January 2013

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Madame Chair, Vice-Chairs and Members of the EMPL Parliamentary
Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for affording Ireland's Presidency team of
Ministers the opportunity to outline to your Committee the priorities
and actions of the Irish Presidency in the field of employment and social
affairs.

We are very pleased to be here today and we very much look forward to
a good working relationship with the European Parliament.

Since the Lisbon Treaty came into force, the competences of the
European Parliament have been broadened to where it now co-decides
on the vast majority of EU legislation. The European Parliament now has
a very important role in the whole EU co-decision process and plays a

vital role in the democratic process at EU level representing citizens. Indeed its role has now developed towards building constructive partnership with the National Parliaments.

I see, Madame Chair that your Committee will engage in a timely dialogue with delegates from national parliaments on youth employment and on the social impact of economic adjustment programmes in the Member States experiencing financial difficulties at an Inter-Parliamentary Committee meeting later this month. These are areas on which we look forward to a further exchange of views with you when your Committee's delegation will visit Dublin next month.

I would like to thank colleagues from the Cypriot, Danish and Polish Presidencies for advancing some of the key measures under discussion here today.

Members of this Committee have voiced their concern that the economic policies being advocated for the Union rely too heavily on austerity.

My Government welcomed the *Compact for Jobs and Growth* precisely because it represents a welcome shift in focus from fiscal consolidation towards economic recovery, growth and job creation. The Presidency will prioritise those measures best able to support sustainable economic recovery and growth and to create jobs.

The Single Market has made the EU more competitive and has delivered benefits for employers, workers and consumers. Europe's workers need to be ready for a changing economy. During the Year of Citizens, the Presidency will also work to remove obstacles to ensure that workers can choose to live and work anywhere in the EU without fear of losing pension or labour rights.

Particular importance will be attached to tackling youth unemployment and the causes of youth joblessness – and my colleague, Joan Burton, Minister for Social Protection, will address this priority area as well as social inclusion themes.

The Europe 2020 Strategy is a blueprint for sustainable economic growth and job creation in Europe. The European Semester process provides a means for Member States to work together to achieve common economic and employment goals. But your Committee, Madam, has rightly emphasised that budgetary, growth and employment measures need to be taken together as they are all interdependent and jointly constitute prerequisites for recovery. The Irish Presidency will work to strengthen the contribution of the Employment and Social Policy Council and its preparatory bodies to the European Semester and the macro-economic governance structures of the European Union.

Within the Council Working Group we are seeking to clarify certain technical issues on the Programme for Social Change and Innovation in preparation for trilogues with Parliament in February. I am aware that there is some disagreement between the Council and Parliament on

several aspects of the proposal. This funding instrument has a crucial role to play across different fields. I would urge you to work with us in negotiating an agreed position in a spirit of dialogue and mutual understanding.

The Presidency will seek to make progress on negotiations on employment-related instruments, such as the European Social Fund, that fall under the Multiannual Financial Framework. Ireland attaches strong importance to focusing resources on training and re-skilling workers who have recently lost their jobs through support on the model of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund - and my colleague, Minister Ciaran Cannon, will address this priority area.

In this time of economic crisis and high unemployment for many parts of the EU, we will endeavour to advance legislative measures and initiatives that seek to encourage job creation while protecting the sustainability of existing jobs and protecting the freedom of workers in the Union to travel between Member States in pursuit of work. The Irish Presidency will promote a range of measures concerning employment protection, health & safety and equal opportunity that will ensure that the creation of the Single Market does not lead to a lowering of labour standards or to distortions in competition.

The Irish Presidency has signalled its intention to actively progress the legislative proposal for the enforcement of the Directive concerning the Posting of Workers in view of the important contribution it can make in preventing the exploitation of this category of vulnerable workers. The

proposal is a major outstanding priority under the Single Market Act. It seeks to establish a level playing field for the provision of cross-border services for business operations in a functioning Single Market and to guarantee respect for minimum standards for posted workers.

Significant progress has been made in Council on some of the technical aspects of the dossier, concerning for example the cross-border enforcement of administrative fines and penalties. You will of course be aware that two Articles in particular have proven challenging for Council, and, I understand, for yourselves as co-legislators. These are Article 12 on Joint and Several Liability, and Article 9, on National Control Measures. I would encourage the earliest possible publication of your Committee's opinion, which will serve as guidance for us all. As you know, Ireland's ambition is to have reached a General Approach by the end of our Presidency. We will work closely with your Committee, including, as appropriate, consulting and engaging with your Rapporteur and Shadow Rapporteurs, to secure significant agreement between the Council and the Parliament on this dossier in the period of our Presidency.

Free movement of workers is one of the four freedoms on which the Single Market is based. Workers who do choose to move continue, however, to encounter difficulties which relate to the exercise of rights conferred by EU law. As many mobile workers are still unaware of their rights and obligations, we will commence work on a new legislative proposal from the Commission strengthening the supports and protections against discrimination available to mobile EU workers. We

will also commence work on new proposals from the Commission on the employment rights of seafarers.

The Presidency, I am glad to report, has already been engaged on the task of seeking to progress to an agreed outcome the current negotiations with

Parliament on the Proposal concerning health and safety requirements for workers exposed to risk from electromagnetic fields. I know that Parliament's Employment Committee has already considered the Proposal and that both Parliament and the Council have moved considerable closer to an agreed Proposal building on the work of our predecessor Presidencies. The formal trilogue will be in mid-February and I believe that we will be able to agree on outstanding issues and bring this important proposal to agreement during the Irish Presidency, to the benefit of workers across the Union.

We also look forward to commencing work on new proposals from the Commission on the protection for workers using hazardous chemicals. The Proposals in this area are important as they will ensure that a number of existing health & safety worker protection Directives do not fall into disrepute by becoming technically obsolete. With a fair wind we may be able to ready the Proposal in this area for trilogue. Madam, I endorse your Committee's concern that the economic effects of the crisis and the severe economic downturn in some Member States should not serve as a pretext for the defective application of legislation on health and safety at work, or undermine occupational risk prevention policies.

Ireland will also continue to work on the proposed Directive on the principle of equal treatment for persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, as well as commencing work on a new proposal on the accessibility of goods and services especially for the disabled and elderly.

The Irish Presidency will work to strengthen the EU's engagement with the International Labour Organisation and with the G20 process in the employment field. We welcome the interest that your Committee has taken in developing relations with the ILO. The Presidency will be engaged in consultations with Member States and with international social partners in advance of the ILO European regional meeting on Jobs, Growth and Social Justice in Oslo in April and also the the International Labour Conference in Geneva in June.

I propose now to hand over to my colleague, Joan Burton, and will be happy to respond to any questions in due course.

ENDS