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Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh
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Address by Minister Pat Rabbitte to the European Parliament ITRE Committee

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Outlining Ireland's Presidency Programme to the ITRE Committee of the European Parliament

Madame Chairperson, distinguished members, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honour for me to outline Ireland's Presidency Programme to the ITRE Committee of the European Parliament. Over the years I have advocated an enhanced role for the EU Parliament and, as a Government Minister and an elected member of Ireland's legislature, I am fully aware and appreciative of the key role played by Parliament in the democratic process. The continued development of a more democratic and transparent European Union for the benefit of citizens is particularly significant during this Year of the Citizen and is of particular relevance in the context of Energy and Communications.

The Irish Presidency looks forward to a positive and constructive relationship with the Parliament. At all times, we will endeavour to be an open and transparent Presidency, striving for efficiency with a firm focus on results.

I greatly value the experience, knowledge and reputation of this Committee. Building on our good working relationship, we are keen to work closely with you on proposals within your remit. This relationship has been forged from our previous contacts and meetings, including with Mrs Sartori as well as the very productive ITRE Committee visit to Dublin last October.

The overarching themes of our Presidency are the three priorities of stability, jobs and growth. Ireland will work to ensure that EU efforts are focussed on

the steps necessary to restore economic stability, promote jobs and foster growth. Specifically, we will prioritise legislative and policy initiatives which will increase confidence in Europe including the Single Market and the Digital Agenda for Europe.

The Single Market has delivered many benefits to EU businesses and consumers. The Irish Presidency will work to make progress on the proposals that remain outstanding under the first Single Market Act, including the completion of the Digital Single Market. In addition, we look forward to the challenge of advancing work on the new Single Market Act II measures.

A competitive European economy needs a robust infrastructure and therefore the Irish Presidency considers the Connecting Europe Facility to be a key driver of private and public sector investment in transport, energy and communications networks.

The latter two areas fall within my own Ministry. The Cyprus Presidency achieved agreement with the European Parliament on the Energy guidelines for which great credit is owed to the Rapporteur, Mr Correa de Campos. Reaching agreement at Council on the telecommunications guidelines will be one of the Irish Presidency's immediate priorities. Although this instrument ultimately depends on agreement on the overall multiannual financial framework, as Presidency we believe that its logic and structure does not depend on the exact amount of money that will be allocated to it.

The Cyprus Presidency achieved significant progress on this file. Nevertheless further work is needed on a number of areas.

The Irish Presidency will seek to finalise the Council's views which Member States can broadly endorse and thereby pave the way for negotiation with the European Parliament.

I read with interest Mr. Tosenovsky's draft report and noted that the issues raised by Parliament are similar to those discussed in Council. The Irish Presidency will seek to finalise the Council's position and thereby pave the way for negotiation with the European Parliament I look forward to meeting with Mr. Tosenovsky later today, and to exploring with him, the most effective way to conclude this file in first-reading negotiations.

There are two other Telecommunications files on which we aim to reach agreement following commencement of the trialogue process under the Cyprus Presidency. The first file, a proposal on the Re-use of Public Sector Information has the capacity to stimulate job growth by allowing private sector access to public sector information at marginal or no cost. This will help generate new and innovative products for citizens and business and it therefore has a significant contribution to make towards completion of the Digital Agenda.

Following the first very constructive trialogue held under the Cyprus Presidency, I noted that the Parliament led by Rapporteur Kalfin agreed with Council that an early first reading agreement should be possible. The Irish Presidency is committed to achieving this.

The second file relates to ENISA, the European Network and Information Security Agency, and the proposal to strengthen and modernise the agency with a new expanded mandate for the security of cyberspace. As we are all aware, ENISA's current mandate will expire in just a few months' time. Ireland, as Presidency, believes that it is incumbent on both the Council and Parliament to reach a conclusion on this file, thereby creating the clarity needed regarding ENISA's future.

Both Council and Parliament are agreed that network and information security and the increase in cyber-incidents and cyber-threats and their potential impact on European critical infrastructure are issues requiring urgent consideration.

I therefore welcome the fact that a trialogue has been arranged for the coming days. I look forward to discussing this file in more detail with Mr. Chichester later today.

Secure, trustworthy and easy online transactions are an important element of the European digital single market. The proposed Regulation on Electronic Identification and Trust Services is therefore vitally important. Ireland is conscious of the importance of this regulation but we also recognise its complexity. I recently attended the Telecoms Council where Ministers outlined some of their issues of concern.

It was apparent to me that much detailed work is required on some key issues but I took encouragement from the broad support given to the proposal. I assured Ministers that the Presidency will work to make the Regulation as practical and effective as possible. We hope to produce a meaningful progress report at the June Council, with a view to entering negotiations later this year. In this context, I welcome the recent exchange of views by the Committee and note that similar issues of concern arose. By your July vote it is my ambition that the Council position on these and other important issues will be further advanced.

The importance of network and information security as a pre-requisite for a flourishing digital market is also expected to be the focus of the forthcoming Strategy on Cyber Security for the EU. We expect the European Commission to publish this Strategy shortly, together with a legislative proposal addressing baseline network and information security requirements.

The Presidency will be working to make significant progress on this legislation. We place a particular emphasis on promoting business and consumer trust and confidence in order to drive online growth with resulting economic benefits.

Digital services can of course only be delivered once adequate infrastructure is in place. The rapid roll-out of high speed broadband networks is therefore an essential requirement. We understand that a Commission proposal on reducing the cost of this rollout will be published towards the end of the first quarter 2013.

Ireland published its National Broadband Plan in August 2012. The development of the Plan has given us a unique insight into the challenges of reducing barriers to broadband deployment. We await the Commission's proposal with interest and we intend to guide an informed debate in this crucial area.

We will also begin examining the recently published proposal on Web Accessibility. The Presidency will work to progress the proposal which is especially important in 2013, the European Year of the Citizen.

The Irish Presidency's work on these important legislative files is timely given the publication last month by the Commission of the mid-term Review of the

Digital Agenda Strategy. The Review acknowledged that Europe needs to be continuously ambitious in order to keep pace internationally. I have assured Commissioner Kroes that we will support a continued strong momentum on implementation of the conclusions of the Review.

The Review will also form the backdrop for the Digital Agenda Assembly being held in Dublin next June. The Irish Presidency is working closely with the Commission in shaping that event.

I note that the mid-term Review also highlighted research and development. As Minister responsible for both Energy and ICT, I am particularly interested in the possible synergies between the two areas.

We look forward to publication in April of the Commission's Communication on Energy Technologies in a Future European Energy Policy. This Communication will identify the role for energy technologies in line with the Horizon 2020 priorities, the decarbonisation ambitions of the Energy 2050 Roadmap, and the technology roadmaps of the SET Plan. Ministers will have an opportunity to discuss the Communication at the June Energy Council in Luxembourg.

The progression of the Internal Market for Energy is key to achieving Europe's energy objectives and will deliver real benefits for EU energy consumers, both households and business.

We will give the Commission's Communication on the Internal Energy Market maximum political visibility by scheduling an in-depth policy debate at the February Energy Council, which will feed into the May European Council devoted to the topic of energy. Thereafter, we will present concrete and operational Council conclusions at the June Energy Council for adoption by Ministers.

The Internal Energy Market can fulfil its considerable potential I am very interested to hear about this Committee's views on the Communication, and in particular Professor Buzek's plans to develop a report on the proposal.

Following good progress under the Cyprus Presidency, our objective for the Proposal on the Safety of Offshore Oil and Gas Activities is to reach agreement quickly with the European Parliament – possibly before the first Energy Council

on 22 February. I met with the Rapporteur, Mr. Ivo Belet, last May and we both were of the opinion that we could come to an agreed position.

A key European energy objective is to create a low carbon economy to deliver benefits in terms of growth, innovation, competitiveness, job creation, energy security and environmental quality. Renewable energy will play a key role in shaping our combined energy future - decarbonising our electricity generation over the coming years.

The recently published draft Directive on Indirect Land Use Change (ILUC) and the use of biofuels and bioliquids is a complex proposal involving many policy areas. It addresses a key EU energy policy concern regarding the long term sustainable development and use of biofuels and potential negative impacts on global food production.

As the draft Directive spans the work of Energy and Environment Councils, following orientation debates at the February Energy Council and March Environment Council, our objective is to produce a Progress Report for both Councils in June.. This should provide the Lithuanian Presidency with a good basis for discussions with the European Parliament.

Allied to the sustainability concerns relating to liquid biofuels, is the need to address sustainability of biomass generally. During this Presidency, the Commission is expected to propose a Directive on Sustainability Criteria for Biomass. We will actively progress the discussions on it.

The Commission is expected to present Guidance Papers on Renewable Energy Support Schemes, and on Cooperation Mechanisms as provided for in the 2009 Renewables Directive, in the second half of our Presidency. I note with interest Mr. Reul's Draft Report on the Current Challenges and Opportunities for Renewable Energy, which specifically mentions these two issues. I look forward to all three Institutions of the European Union working towards the development of renewable energy as a key objective of the European Energy Market.

A major priority of the Irish Presidency will be the potential of technology changes to enable the Union meet its challenging 2020 energy efficiency targets. I must congratulate Mr. Turmes for the work done on reaching

agreement on the Energy Efficiency Directive under the Danish Presidency. In follow-up, there needs to be a major increase in the pace, scale and depth of investment in upgrading existing facilities to assist Member States in meeting their energy efficiency targets. We will actively promote this need for investment.

The potential of 'smart' energy systems, particularly smart grids and smart meters to support our energy future, will feature prominently in discussions at the April Informal Energy Ministerial meeting in Dublin.

This Presidency attaches great importance to EU external energy relations. In shaping policy and responding to the challenges we face in energy and in climate change, we need stable and transparent global energy markets to ensure energy security. The EU must work with others to address the long-term challenge of laying a foundation for efficient and sustainable use of energy.

In the first instance, however, we must work together as a unit and in solidarity so as to maximise our advantage internationally. In this regard, I welcome Mrs Edit Herczog's report on External Energy Cooperation.

Our focus will be on exploring key areas of mutual interest such as using clean energy to create economic growth and jobs and to address the challenge of climate change, diversification of energy supply and export routes. We look forward to comprehensive discussion on the various strands of international collaboration on energy matters at the June Energy Council.

While neither my portfolio as Irish Energy Minister nor the TTE Council formation includes Nuclear issues, the June Energy Council will provide an opportunity for Commissioner Oettinger to update Energy Ministers on developments in this sector. The reports from Mr. Chichester on Nuclear decommissioning and Mr. Kraemer on Nuclear safety are very interesting in this regard.

The European Heads of State and Government intend to discuss Energy during a special sectoral European Council on May 22. This underlines the central importance of energy policy to the sustainable growth and jobs agenda. The agenda for this Council is the responsibility of Presidency Van Rompuy, but I

am sure that completion of the Internal Energy Market will feature prominently. The Presidency in its Energy Council chair capacity will work to carry forward the outcome of the European Council deliberations on energy in setting out a clear path for European energy policy in the future. We look forward to proactive engagement in this regard.

Before I conclude let me remind you of the Presidency events in Dublin this year:-

- The Informal Energy Ministerial in April;
- The SET Plan Conference in May;
- The Digital Agenda Assembly in June.

I would welcome the participation of members of this Committee at these events.

In conclusion, we will pursue a busy and challenging agenda during the Irish Presidency. It is my hope that we will make a significant and lasting contribution to our shared objective of a digitally enabled society. On the Energy side, we will continue the work towards developing a fully integrated and interconnected Internal Energy Market to deliver security of supply, contribute to the creation of sustainable jobs and growth and competitiveness and protect the environment – and not just to 2020 but beyond that to 2030 and towards the 2050 goal of a decarbonised economy. We look forward to working with the ITRE Committee and your colleagues in the Parliament in furthering our shared objectives in these areas.

Thank you.