

Speech by the Taoiseach Mr. Enda Kenny T.D. to COSAC
“Taking Stock and Looking to the Future”
Dublin Castle, 24 June 2013”

Ceann Comhairle,
COSAC Chair,
Chairmen and members of European Affairs Committees,

Distinguished parliamentary colleagues,

I would like to welcome COSAC back to Ireland for the fourth time since your foundation, at a time when Ireland is celebrating 40 years of EU membership and during our seventh EU Presidency.

The first COSAC meeting to take place in Ireland was in 1990 in the city of Cork, hosted there by our distinguished former foreign minister, Peter Barry. That was the second ever meeting in almost 25 years of COSAC’s important engagement with the European project.

The agenda of that meeting focused on the perceived democratic deficit and on the question of subsidiarity – issues which remain at the heart of our debate. COSAC has always played a central role in the important issues on the EU agenda.

In 1996 in Tipperary and Dublin, COSAC made its contribution to what would become the Treaty of Amsterdam. In 2004 during Ireland’s last Presidency, COSAC provided valuable impetus to negotiations which would eventually lead to the Treaty of Lisbon.

Each of these key institutional steps brought progress in terms of democratic legitimacy and accountability, including enhanced roles for national parliaments. Each of those steps brought the European Project to a new stage in its development.

I believe that the issue of democratic legitimacy must always be centre-stage. It is a key pillar of President van Rompuy's current work on the next steps for

Economic and Monetary Union, and one which the Irish Presidency has worked hard to advance.

Our Presidency takes place in the European Year of Citizens and we must focus on the real needs of our citizens.

We must ensure that citizens are aware of the many rights they enjoy from their membership of the EU – from the Four Freedoms to more specific rights such as those for consumers.

But I see this Year in broader terms – our citizens have a right to know that the Union, its institutions, its member state governments and its national parliaments are working day and night for recovery and jobs through concrete actions and decisions.

That is the agenda of my government as we work for recovery in Ireland. It has also been at the heart of the Irish agenda as we work for recovery for Europe as a whole.

I know that you share these goals. Your discussions today and tomorrow reflect the same priorities, with a welcome focus on building a future for our young people. When we consider the Future of Europe we must focus on their needs.

What we all have in common as parliamentarians is that we are elected by our people and are answerable to them.

That is why your work on accountability is so important. Sharing best practice approaches to parliamentary scrutiny helps ensure that EU decision-making is kept close to the citizen and their needs. We know that the people we have the honour to represent must see evidence of what is being done on their behalf for jobs and growth.

I would like this morning to share with you the real progress made by our Presidency.

So, when you return to your home countries and are asked what Europe has been doing for its people over the last few months, you could point to many concrete actions taken under the Irish Presidency that will make a real difference for citizens.

Amongst our key achievements we are pleased to have made our contribution to **stability** which is being secured through Banking Union decisions – better supervision and stronger capital requirements – with limits on bankers bonuses.

Through our work we have ensured that banks are better regulated and do what they're supposed to do. Acting as agents for sustainable investment and growth and jobs.

That **stability** is also being secured through better co-ordination of our budgets so that they too are sustainable and targeted at growth and jobs.

For delivery on jobs and growth, the EU's biggest investment tool by far, the 2014-2020 Budget on MFF was agreed by EU Heads of State and Government. We are working with the European Parliament to ensure that €960 billion can be released to fund investment and growth across areas from cohesion to research to education to our food producers.

Jobs and growth for our young people will be given a major boost with a special fund to combat youth unemployment.

This is a €6 billion fund dedicated to fighting unemployment, particularly in those regions which have been hardest hit by the crisis.

This fund will underpin the Youth Guarantee agreed under the Irish Presidency in February, and we have to work to ensure that it can be released quickly – frontloaded to the early years of the EU budget.

Our policy agenda has also been geared to help get young people back into work. We have advanced a range of measures to support our SMEs and to boost Europe's digital sector, both employers of young people.

To jump-start growth and jobs, there have been historic steps forward in a number of bilateral trade negotiations which together could seriously boost growth and add jobs here in Europe.

EU-Japan negotiations have been launched – I discussed them with Prime Minister Abe last week here in Dublin. EU-Canada negotiations continue – and I also discussed these with Prime Minister Harper in recent weeks.

And of course, the Irish Presidency secured a negotiating mandate for the EU-US Trade and Investment partnership, a mandate which allowed the launch of the negotiations at the G8 summit in Co. Fermanagh a week ago.

Such trade agreements mean more export and investment opportunities, which in turn become jobs. For Europe, an EU-US agreement alone could mean annual benefits of up to €150 billion for the EU and US economies.

Add to these the new generation of EU programmes supported by the EU Budget, from the Horizon 2020 Research programme to the Common Agricultural Policy and Erasmus for All. Add to these also a range of agreed measures in justice and home affairs, in consumer policy and in employee safety and there is much to tell our people about.

Beyond the Union's borders, work has continued in terms of enlargement and our neighbours, which I know you will discuss tomorrow. Further afield, we have recorded great progress on a post-2015 global development framework, while direct action has been taken on a number of fronts including a resumption of aid to Mali.

So there is progress in Europe, and progress here in Ireland too.

My government took office in March 2011 with a mandate to take the decisions needed to secure recovery, including an end to our EU-IMF programme which we intend to achieve this year.

We engaged constructively with our European and global partners from the outset, working together for arrangements which make our debt more sustainable.

At home, we have made tough decisions, coupled with positive initiatives for growth and jobs. Having first secured stability, we are now making progress, recording the first increases in employment levels in five years and starting to record economic growth.

Challenges remain, as they do for all of us here, and occasions like this give us a chance to share ideas as legislators and public representatives.

I have outlined our progress both as Presidency and nationally in terms of practical results which have a tangible impact on the lives of our citizens.

But we must also have the right architecture to both prevent future crises and to plan for growth.

In what he calls 'the four keys to unlock recovery' President Van Rompuy has stressed the urgent need to progress EMU on a number of fronts.

On financial stability, the important steps taken by the ECB under President Draghi and the commitments made at the European Council last June mean a period of relative calm continues.

We are very clear on the need to break the link between banking and sovereign debt. Banking union is absolutely crucial.

Economic resilience must be improved through sound public finances and improved competitiveness.

Economic and Monetary Union must be strengthened. This includes delivering on banking union but, of course, strengthening EMU is about more than banking.

In our Presidency, we have supported President Van Rompuy in his consultations on economic-policy coordination, competitiveness and solidarity and of course on the social dimension. All of this needs more work and more time. It is an ambitious agenda, we need to be clear about our direction.

Of course, there is the fundamental question of democratic legitimacy and accountability, which is where COSAC has an important contribution to make. The European Council has recognised that stronger economic governance arrangements need to be supported by stronger democratic legitimacy and clearer public accountability.

Early in our Presidency, Ministers for European Affairs discussed this very issue here in Dublin. Ministers strongly supported greater efforts to strengthen the link between citizens and decisions taken at European level. They also clearly recognised the need to respect the role of national parliaments.

On this, I think we can all agree. What is needed now are concrete steps to deliver this outcome.

Your discussions this week are a valuable input to this important debate and to President Van Rompuy's ongoing work.

Dear friends, in summing up, I would like to finish with a positive message.

I am optimistic about the future of Europe. We still have much to do and growth in the immediate term remains elusive for most, but the last year and the many important measures agreed by the EU since January add up to major building blocks for securing stability and generating the growth and jobs we all need.

I'd like to take this opportunity to record my thanks to the representatives of member states and the EU Institutions here for the excellent legislative partnership we have enjoyed as Presidency.

I look forward to your contributions and I wish you the best for what I hope will be a productive meeting and an enjoyable stay here in Ireland.

ENDS