

Address by Commissioner Phil Hogan to the European Affairs Committee of Dáil Eireann on the European Commission Work Programme for 2016

Leinster House, Dublin

26th November 2015

- Check Against Delivery –

- A Chathaoirligh agus a Theachtaí Dála,
- **On behalf of President Juncker, I am very pleased to be here to provide an overview of the European Commission work programme for 2016.**
- As a representative of the College of Commissioners, and as a proud former member of this house, I look forward to a thorough exchange with you today.

- The new Commission is now one year into its mandate, which provides a good milestone to reflect on our work to date.
- The motto of our Work Programme for 2016 is '**no time for business as usual**'. And I'm sure you will agree that this is no time for business as usual.
- The Commission is committed to making **bold yet pragmatic** proposals to tackle our common challenges and emerge stronger, in the spirit of European solidarity and cooperation.
- President Juncker's ten priorities remain the right ones, and we intend to deliver on them in a focused and strategic way.
- Last year President Juncker said **we would do different things and do things differently**. We are following through on our pledge to concentrate on the big things. We have set out our vision and outlined the steps required to achieve these goals.
- I will provide an overview of a number of priority policy areas, including the progress made up to the present day. This will not be an exhaustive list, so I will be happy to address any further areas in our dialogue following my intervention.

(1. A New Boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment)

- First and foremost, we are maintaining the drive to create jobs, growth and investment.
- The Investment Fund or "Juncker Fund" is now up and running, and is delivering high quality investments to turbo-charge the European economy, including in research.
- **As you know, the €70 million investment in 14 primary care centres in Ireland was among the first tranche of projects under the "Juncker Plan".** And Ireland was amongst the first four Member States to draw down finance from the European Investment Bank under the Plan.
- This was a positive and proactive engagement by the Irish government and I hope further opportunities will be explored.
- We have also frontloaded €1 billion to speed up the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative to help up to 650,000 young people find jobs, apprenticeships, traineeships or continued education across Europe.

- The Commission will now focus on improving the investment environment and deepening the Single Market so that it delivers better outcomes, removes barriers, and creates the right environment for innovation, particularly among SMEs and start-ups.
- As Agriculture Commissioner I also want to repeat the message that the European agri-food sector can be a vital driver of job creation and growth.
- I know I am preaching to the converted when I tell you this. The agri-food sector has arguably contributed more than any other to Irish economic recovery, with 61,000 new jobs created in agriculture, forestry and fisheries in 2013 alone.
- With the CAP now reformed and more market-oriented, the changing international context provides a wealth of opportunities for forward-thinking farmers and agri-businesses.
- I want ambitious and entrepreneurial Europeans, particularly younger citizens, to view the agri-food sector as an attractive career prospect.

- The reformed CAP provides many incentives encouraging young and new farmers to enter the sector, while our committed pursuit of new markets will open new opportunities to be grasped.
- More broadly, the Commission aim to improve the business environment by deepening the Single Market and removing internal barriers to investment and innovation, including a range of concrete proposals to implement the Digital Single Market Strategy.

(2. A Connected Digital Single Market)

- Here in Ireland, we are particularly aware that a thriving digital economy can expand markets and create new sources of employment. In December the Commission will present its vision for a more modern, more European approach on copyright to take account of the digital revolution.
- Further initiatives on geo-blocking, free flow of data, the cloud, and VAT for electronic commerce will follow in the course of 2016. **And in a true good news story for EU citizens and consumers, we foresee an end to roaming charges by 2017.**

(3. Energy Union)

- **Energy policy is also front and centre in our thinking. As you know, the EU is a central player in the upcoming Paris climate talks. To that end, we will deliver three important packages under the Energy Union.**
- We aim to deliver a circular economy package to maximise resource efficiency throughout the entire value chain. And we will set out a new blueprint to ensure economic, social and environmental sustainability, incorporating the Europe 2020 review and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

(4. A Deeper and Fairer Economic and Monetary Union)

- Closely linked to internal market reform is our commitment to building a more united, resilient and prosperous Economic and Monetary Union. **I know that you have discussed this in September with José Leandro, Director of Policy Strategy at the Commission's Economic and Financial unit.**
- This week the Commission presented a European bank deposit scheme to further reduce risk and ensure a level playing field in the banking sector.

- Enhanced dialogue between the Commission and the European Parliament is a key priority to improving the democratic accountability of our economic governance system.
- To prepare for the transition from stage 1 to stage 2 of EMU completion, the Commission therefore intends to launch a wide ranging debate across EU member states.
- The 2016 European Semester will also put a stronger focus on the economic and fiscal situation in the euro area as a whole, emphasising employment and social performance through the development of a European pillar of social rights.
- **I commend the Committee for the work you have done on this important area. And I would like to encourage you to continue this work. Such engagement is vital to its success.**
- For the EU and Member States to succeed in meeting our jobs and growth targets we need to achieve a broad consensus on the right policy direction and generate strong support for reform efforts.

- Earlier today the European Commission published the so-called Annual Growth Survey, which represents the launch of an annual cycle of economic governance. The focus remains on pursuing policies to boost investment; strengthen structural reforms and ensure a sound fiscal base.

(5. Toward a New Policy on Migration)

- While the economy remains our priority, addressing the refugee crisis and managing the migratory pressure on our external borders remains a most pressing priority.
- The instability, war and poverty in our neighbouring regions mean that this issue will remain at the top of the political agenda for some years to come.
- The European Agenda on Migration which we presented in May 2015 provides a comprehensive approach to migration management based on the principles of solidarity and responsibility.

- In addition, two emergency schemes to relocate 160,000 people in need of international protection from the Member States most affected are already operational. The Commission has welcomed Ireland's commitment to take 4,000 refugees.
- Every day the Frontex Joint Operations Poseidon and Triton are rescuing people shipwrecked in the Mediterranean Sea. **And I would like to pay tribute to the tremendous service of the Irish naval forces as part of the European humanitarian operations.**
- The EU has already mobilised €4 billion in humanitarian, development, economic and stabilisation assistance to Syrians in their country and in host communities in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.
- An additional €1.8 billion will be used to set up an 'Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa'.
- Stronger and deeper cooperation with third countries of origin and transit is key to managing migration better, including a concerted effort to provide support for the growing number of refugees and internally-displaced persons in third countries.

- The crisis has shown that beyond these immediate steps, we need to fundamentally rethink the way we manage our common external border and our European asylum framework.
- We will overhaul our common asylum system to correct the gaps and weaknesses exposed in the Dublin system and strengthen the role of the European Asylum Support Office.
- Today, this means stepping up existing efforts while pressing for an Action Plan on return to be fully and quickly put into operation, and for agreement on the pending proposals implementing the European Agenda on Migration.

(6. A Union of Democratic Change)

- To act effectively abroad the EU must live and grow as a Union of Democratic Change at home. On this front, the Commission will work in partnership with the European Parliament and the Council to ensure that the negotiations on a new Inter-institutional Agreement on Better Regulation can conclude by the end of the year.

- This is absolutely necessary to strengthen our common commitment to better regulation as a tool for better results, increase transparency about how European decisions are made, and equip the three institutions to better work together in the future.
- We will bring forward in 2016 our proposal for an Inter-institutional Agreement on a mandatory transparency register for interest representatives seeking to influence policy making in the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. **We want national parliaments to have a strong voice in European policy-making, which is why over 200 visits have been made by Commissioners since the Juncker Commission took over. This level of engagement is unprecedented. It is essential. And it will continue.**
- We will continue to expand our 'Citizens' Dialogues' which allow Members of the Commission to listen directly to citizens in their own regions and reply on the issues that matter most to them.

- **Finally, I would also like to briefly mention the ongoing debate in relation to the forthcoming UK referendum on EU membership.** Given this country's economic, geographic, historic and societal ties to the UK, it is entirely appropriate that a deepening discussion is taking place in Ireland on so-called "Brexit".
- This debate is happening on a variety of levels, including in this house. I commend the excellent report prepared by the committee. And I am sure Jonathan Faull's intervention to you yesterday was instructive and engaging.
- **It is right that Irish parliamentarians express their views in this debate, and that your reflections are heard in both London and Brussels.**

(Conclusion)

- Deputies, as you are well aware, in recent years both EU member states and institutions have faced a series of complex, and at times, truly daunting challenges.

- To respond to these challenges, it is essential to make the best use of all our resources. This Commission has pledged to do things differently, and we are delivering on that pledge.
- The EU budget must be geared to results and the mid-term review of the multi-annual financial framework will look at how to better target funding for key priorities, while also putting a stronger focus on achieving results.
- All our proposed actions are underpinned by our new Better Regulation Agenda. We want to make sure that when the EU takes action, it does so in a way that delivers results and makes a positive difference in the lives of citizens.
- Our Work Programme will review key areas of existing legislation – such as health and safety at the workplace – to ensure that they are fit for purpose and continue to deliver real results. We also propose to withdraw a number of initiatives which have become obsolete or watered down or have no chance of being adopted.
- It is imperative that we are honest about where we find ourselves today; the legacy of the economic crisis remains deep and lasting, the scale of the refugee crisis breath-taking, and the threat of disintegration and disunity in Europe deeply worrying.

- The work programme I have outlined today is about facing up to these challenges, and meeting them head on.
- When it comes to jobs, growth and investment; when it comes to climate change, trade and sustainability - Europe can and must provide solutions to the problems faced by our citizens.
- I believe the agenda outlined here today is a concrete step toward making this conviction a reality.
- Thank you for your attention and I am happy to take any further questions you may have.