

Draft Speech

Enlargement Conference

Derry

October 11 2002

This has been a very difficult week for us in Northern Ireland. But for our fellow citizens in Europe, it has been an exhilarating and historic week.

On Wednesday, the European Commission gave the green light for ten more countries to join the European Union by the end of next year. The way has been opened for a historic overcoming of the divisions that have plagued our continent for centuries.

The Commission has taken a positive, far-reaching and farsighted decision. That we have come so far since the fall of the Berlin Wall is a tribute to the commitment and vision of everyone involved, both within the European Union and in the candidate countries.

It was very humbling to be in the European Parliament in Brussels on Wednesday afternoon when the enlargement decision was announced. For the first time in our history, Europeans from the four corners of our continent, with very different histories and traditions will be working together in common institutions in pursuit of our common interests of peace, democracy and prosperity. With all our cultural, linguistic, historical and political differences, Europeans can and will work together.

I continue to believe that the European Union is an inspiring model, for us in a region of conflict, for our fellow citizens in Eastern and Central Europe who lived under oppressive regimes for so long, and indeed throughout the world wherever divisions and violence persist.

Let's remember that the European Union is above all the world's best example of conflict resolution. It is about peace and reconciliation, in Europe, in Ireland, and in the world. The European Union is a healing process. Indeed it could be described as a long-term peace process. During its first decades, the EU helped to heal the divisions between France, Germany and Britain that made the first half of the 20th century the deadliest in history. Now we are working to heal the divisions of the Cold War by bringing the two halves of our continent together.

This enlargement is obviously a massive task. It involves changes within the European Union. It involves a massive transformation in the new member states. It involves a tremendous challenge for us all. But we have embarked on this challenge because it offers for the first time in history the prospect of a united, peaceful, prosperous and democratic Europe. Succeeding in this task is vital for Europe. It is essential for the world. If we overcome the obvious difficulties we will be demonstrating to people around the world, particularly in Africa and Asia, that peace and democracy are possible for them too.

Such a huge project will obviously involve problems and difficulties. Everyone is aware that there will be hard bargaining and decisions on the road ahead. We will be discussing these issues today. There are questions about the financing of the European Union as well as the future of the Common Agricultural Policy and regional policy. How the institutions of the EU function with a much larger number of member states will take up a lot of the time and ingenuity of some of the finest constitutional minds in Europe?

But the problems should not be used as an excuse to avoid taking up the challenge. The prize of peace and unity is simply too valuable to surrender to defeatism. It is not reasonable to use potential difficulties as arguments against enlargement. Rather we should be looking at new and possibly more radical solutions. For example, given the scope and extent of the enlarged European Union perhaps there is a need to modernise the financial basis of the European Union?

I support the enlargement of the European Union because I am totally convinced that the benefits outweigh any conceivable costs.

Integrating our fellow citizens in Eastern and Central Europe, who suffered so much under decades of dictatorship into a united Europe is clearly a moral duty. We who have benefited so much from membership of the European Union must offer a helping hand to peoples whose history is even more tragic than our own. That is common humanity, and simple common sense.

But we stand to gain from enlargement ourselves. We will obviously benefit from the consolidation of peace and democracy in the other half of Europe. We welcomed

Greece, Spain and Portugal into the European Union after their emergence from Fascism in order to defend and enhance their new democratic systems. It is now time to do the same from countries emerging from Communism.

Instead of a divided Europe of two heavily armed camps on either side of the Iron Curtain that was the norm, we now have a Europe where we work together across the divide. Enlargement will ensure the new Europe will prevail and will prevent any return to the past. As a member of the European Parliament, I would far rather work with colleagues from Poland or Hungary to promote our collective interests than rely on a system where our security was entrusted to the generals on either side of Europe.

Similarly, I believe it is more sensible to have tens of millions of people striving to make new countries and societies for themselves in union with ourselves than to have millions of soldiers confronting each other across the barbed wire.

In Ireland, we have a particular interest in the integration of Europe. It is clear lesson from centuries of history that the more peaceful and united Europe is, the more peaceful and united our island is. It is clear that our divisions on this island have historically been part and parcel of the divisions and conflicts of Europe. The Battle of the Boyne, for example, was one episode in a continent-wide war. And our own peace process has been greatly facilitated by our common participation in these islands in the process of European integration.

It is also important to be aware of the economic potential of enlargement. At a stroke the single market will grow by another 120 million people to 500 million people. That will be the major market in the world. Of course, there will be competitors but there will also be more consumers, more markets. It is up to us in Ireland to develop our own methods of benefiting from membership of the single market.

The history of the European Union and our involvement in it has been positive. We have always faced the challenges of change and growth in the European Union, and

have in general come out on top. We can and should be confident of our ability to maximise the benefits to us from the new enlarged Europe.

Therefore we should be working to secure agreement on enlargement in the near future. In the European Parliament we will be scrutinising the applications from each of the candidate states, and we will be looking carefully at the terms and conditions of each accession. But our fellow Europeans in the candidate countries should be aware that we are totally committed to the success of the enlargement process.

Ireland has a lot to gain from enlargement, especially since so many of the new member states are natural allies in the new Europe. We stand to gain a lot of friends with whom we have certain common features. The size, location and history of many of the candidate countries means that they look to Ireland as an example of how a small state can best advance its interests in a globalised world.

That is why the decision of the people of the Republic on the Nice Treaty is so crucial. The citizens of the Republic must exercise their democratic rights, and take an informed and independent decision.

I would just make a few comments because the decision of the Republic's citizens affects me and all the citizens and future citizens of the European Union.

It would be nice if the Nice Treaty issue and enlargement could be separated but unfortunately in the real world they are not. The Nice Treaty must be ratified if enlargement is to proceed.

Citizens of the Republic have been confronted with a major and heavy responsibility in deciding on the ratification of the Nice Treaty. Ideally all the citizens of Europe should have had to share the responsibility of ratifying the Treaty. This is a procedure I hope will be adopted in the future when we eventually adopt a Constitution of the European Union.

But in the meantime, the eyes of Europe are on Ireland. And I can tell you that there are people in Europe hoping Ireland will block ratification who do not have the best interests of this island at heart, including the reactionary elements who want the European Union to be an exclusive rich man's club. But Ireland's decision is also an opportunity to create new friend and allies.

The main reason only the citizens in the Republic have been called upon to vote on the Treaty is in no other country has the Treaty been considered to involve constitutional or political change sufficient to require a referendum, or even serious political controversy. Not even in the most reticent member state Denmark.

In the European Parliament we ratified the Treaty without substantial dispute. Every other member state has ratified the Treaty, as they do not believe it poses any threat to their rights and freedoms.

Even more telling is the willingness of the candidate countries to agree to the Nice Treaty. I cannot believe that states that have only recently become independent are prepared to sacrifice their hard won freedom. I can only assume that they conclude, as I do, that the Treaty does not pose a threat to their fundamental interests and values.

I must say that I have not found the case against the Nice Treaty convincing. It depends on a fundamental lack of confidence in our abilities. We are not going to be submerged in a new superstate. Ireland will be Ireland, Germany will be Germany, and Poland will be Poland.

We should not underestimate what membership of the European Union has meant to both parts of Ireland. We should not underestimate our ability to shape the European Union to our own purposes. The entire history of our membership of the European Union demonstrates that we can protect our identities and values, and advance our economic interests. There is no reason why Ireland cannot continue to play an active and positive political and diplomatic role in Europe.

We cannot turn the clock back to an isolationist Ireland. That strategy failed. The scattering of hundreds of thousands of our people throughout the world through emigration and exile was the result.

We have no reason to fear that we can make our voice heard in the wider Europe. Our strength in Europe has never been related to the power of numbers but to the power of our principles and propositions.

We have no reason to be afraid of our ability to compete economically in the wider Europe. I can see no reason why we cannot go on building on the achievements of the last thirty years.

We should not be defensive. I know this is a curious time to be optimistic but I do believe that we can continue building a new Ireland and a new Europe. Adopting the Nice Treaty will allow us to continue that work, and assist our fellow Europeans to do the same in their countries.

We, North and South, need a positive vision of what we can gain from and contribute to the wider Europe of the 21st century. We can hold our own, and more, in an even more diverse and united Europe. Just as we have made a success of our membership of the European Union over the last thirty years, we will continue to advance in the new wider Europe.

Let us not be afraid to take our place in the new Europe,

Let us become the bridge between the old and the new European Union.