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Draft of Taoiseach's Address to Congress

Please see attached the latest draft of the Taoiseach's forthcoming address to the Joint Houses of Congress in Washington on Wednesday 11 next, which we have just received from the Department of the Taoiseach.

We have been asked for any observations as soon as possible, in view of the Taoiseach's departure for Washington at the weekend.

Seán Ó hUiginn
4 September 1996

cc. PST
PSS
A/Secs Townsend and Fahey
Ambassador Washington

ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

EIGHTH DRAFT

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress.

Ireland has been inspired by America. Irish people have found refuge in America. Irish-Americans have contributed much to this country - in business, literature, law and politics. Their success has given Irish-Americans more confidence than ever to proclaim their Irish heritage and more interest than ever in Ireland itself.

I want to report today to all Americans on how Ireland is doing, and acknowledge the debt that we each owe to one another.

But it is not just a two way street. Both Ireland and the United States have responsibilities to the wider world - to the six billion people who inhabit this globe. There are three times as many people on this earth today, as when the Irish state was founded in 1921, and six times as many as when the United

States was formed. Africa had half Europe's population in 1950. Thirty years from now there will be three times as many Africans as Europeans.

could cause offence | All these people will have to be fed and clothed. All will need 2,000 calories per day and 2 litres of clean water. All will want to feel that they are respected members of the world community.

All we have achieved so far - in Ireland as in the United States - prepares us for the next challenge. For I believe that the formula that has worked for the United States - a free market subject to rules, and democracy based on the rule of law - I believe that this formula provides the world with the only viable method of meeting the population, the environmental and the resource challenges of the twenty first century.

Freedom and democracy work, because in a democracy change must be based on consent, and because it leaves space for individuals to innovate. Democracy works because it allows people to be different.

Ireland is a good example. Ireland's economic growth rate last year, was the highest in Europe for the third year in a row. Inflation in Ireland is amongst the

lowest in Europe. Government expenditure has come down from 52% of G.N.P. in 1986, to just 40% today. Four times as many Irish people go to college now, as did so in 1965. The proportion of Irish children who complete high school has more than quadrupled.

As a result, one third of all U.S. high tech investment in Europe comes to Ireland. Education is the key. We do have problems. Too many Irish people are still unemployed. But the biggest common factor among many who are unemployed, is that they left school early. It is not enough that 85% of students complete high school, or to use the Irish term - sit the Leaving Certificate - we need 100% to do so. Not just to acquire technical qualifications, but to understand their place in the world - their history, where they are coming from, who they are, and as much as possible about all the other cultures, peoples with whom they will share this increasingly crowded world.

In finding a way to cope with a very different world, from the one in which I grew up, the young people of Ireland and America can draw on the great constructive achievements of our common history.

It is a great honour to Ireland that I have been asked to this joint session of Congress today - as only the ----- European leader to do so since 1945. But it is a particular honour to be asked to do so, on the 11th September.

For it was this day, the 11th September, two hundred and ten years ago, almost to the hour, that delegates from New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Virginia met [eighty] miles from here at Annapolis in Maryland. It was there in Annapolis that they decided to convene the convention in Philadelphia that gave the people the Constitution of the United States of America - the world's first federal Constitution - making Americans "the first people whom Heaven has favoured with an opportunity of deliberating upon, and choosing the form of Government under which they shall live", making America the pioneer of that most powerful of political ideas - democracy under the rule of law.

Two hundred and ten years later, Americans can look back with pride at what they have given to the world. Never before, in all that long period, have more of humanity lived under a system based on democracy and the rule of law.

Even in the case of countries as afflicted as Burma, people are standing up for the principle of democracy under law. For the first time in their history, the

Russian people have freely selected their own President, after the idea of law-bound democracy ate away gradually at the fabric of Communist totalitarianism, leading to its downfall in 1989-91.

The American model - constitutional democracy - has succeeded and spread because it is built on a realistic view of human nature. Men and women are not angels, even after they have been elected to office. Checks and balances are needed. As Madison said "you must first enable the Government to control the governed, and in the next place oblige it to control itself".

American democracy has worked because it has controlled itself - through the separation of powers in a written Constitution, and through a strong and independent Supreme Court to interpret that Constitution. As your 7th President Andrew Jackson, whose father came from County Antrim in Ireland, said in 1821 "the great can protect themselves, but the poor and humble require the arm and shield of the law".

I speak today, as President in office of the European Council, a body that is seeking to do for the fifteen member States of the European Union, what the men who met at Annapolis and Philadelphia did so long ago for America. The

European Union, through an Inter-Governmental Conference launched last April in Turin, is seeking to write a new Constitution for itself that will enable it to bring in new member states to its East, just as your Constitution of 1789 allowed this American Union to expand to bring in so many new states to its West.

The establishment of the United States of America was the great constructive constitutional achievement of the late eighteenth century. The establishment of the European Union out of the devastation of World War II could be described as the great constructive constitutional achievement of the late twentieth century.

We in Europe can learn much from the American experience. Americans came together because they had to.

Without an effective Federal structure, the Americans of the 1780s knew that they would be helpless against European imperialism.

Without a strong Federal structure, they could not prevent individual states interfering with one another's trade, as was already beginning to happen in the

1780s. And Americans knew that they could not agree commercial reforms to protect trade, without making political reforms as well. That is why the men at Annapolis decided to call a conference at Philadelphia, with a wider political agenda.

It was necessity that brought Europe together too. The necessity of reconstruction, the necessity of resisting Communism, and the necessity to resolve a conflict that had led to three wars in the previous eighty years.

Very few of the eventual framers of the American Constitution came together in Annapolis because they were inspired by the theories of Montesquieu or Locke and wanted to build the perfect state - a model democracy - a castle in the sky.

They came together because they had to reach urgent agreement on a framework to sort out problems about shipping on the Potomac, about how they would pay for the army, about who was going to pay taxes and who was going to collect them, about how they could get goods to market, and how their frontiers would be protected - day-to-day problems. But by working together, to forge a means of solving the practical problems of life for their citizens, the

framers of the United States Constitution forged the most durable, and one of the fairest, systems of Government the world has ever seen.

They came together as people who each were loyal first and foremost to their own individual states, but who knew that that loyalty and allegiance could find its best expression as part of a wider American continental identity and loyalty.

The same dynamic applies in Europe today. If Europeans do not constantly work at bringing their Union closer together, the strains arising from differences in interests will gradually pull their Union apart.

It is often said that politics and politicians are made to serve commercial needs. The European Union has done the reverse. It has made commerce the servant of a great political objective. By creating a single coal and steel industry, a single agricultural market and a single commercial market, the European Union has created bonds to bind its members together politically. It has struck at the economic base of the force that causes wars - national chauvinism. But the political and psychological base of national chauvinism has yet to be defeated.

Europe's task of constitution-building is particularly difficult. Europeans were on different sides in past wars, whereas America's founding fathers, whatever their differences, had, at least, all been on the same side. But we are determined to make the European Union work - to make it work for peace, to make the European Union a firm friend and partner for this great American Union.

Now that the external threat of communism is gone, will the economic bonds created by the European Union be strong enough to persuade European states to make sacrifices and to take risks for a common objective?

That is the question that Europe now has to answer for itself. And, depending on how Europe answers that question, we will know whether the Balkan violence of 1992 - 1993 was but the dying convulsion of old and primitive Europe, or a sign of wider threats to come in the twenty-first century.

And Europe must get the right answer to that question, while simultaneously bringing in new members with different political traditions from central and Eastern Europe. This problem - of bringing existing members closer together

while simultaneously expanding membership - is one that is familiar to anyone who has studied the history of the United States.

The United States has built a Union that is robust enough to accommodate radical disagreements, but still take tough decisions when tough decisions have to be taken. Europe must do the same.

This Union - the United States - has worked because it is based on freedom. As Thomas Jefferson said "error of opinion may be tolerated, where reason is left free to combat it". Conformism of thinking, political correctness if you will, is the great enemy of democratic discourse. We must not be afraid to disagree. We must not dismiss people's opinions just because they have chosen the wrong words to express them. Equally we must accept that some people's views are so profoundly different from ours on some things that they will never, ever, agree with us. Living with difference. That's the challenge for the United States today. It's the challenge for Europe. And it is also the challenge for Northern Ireland and for Ireland as a whole.

In Northern Ireland, we see two communities, each offended by the views of the other and by how those views are expressed. Two communities, each

feeling itself to be a minority - a minority that has been oppressed, or a minority that may be oppressed in the future. The fears of each mirror those of the other. Two minorities - each justly proud of their heritage, each believing their heritage is one founded on tolerance and civil liberties. Two minorities - who will always be different from one another, but who have not yet been able to see that on many other vital issues they already agree with one another much more than most.

Thus, if there is to be a peaceful and fair accommodation, each tradition must be willing to sit down for long enough, and listen for long enough, to the views, worries and concerns of the other tradition.

Thanks to the effort of many people here in the United States, of your President, your Vice President, of the leaders of both Houses of Congress, most of the parties in Northern Ireland have now at last been sitting down together since the 10th June under the able chairmanship of former Senator George Mitchell, whom I salute today. They have had about six weeks of talks together and have made some progress. They have agreed some procedural issues.

Against the background of twenty five years of brutality of all kinds, and of almost four centuries of distrust, one might not expect rapid agreement between nine different parties in the space of only six weeks of talking.

My own view is that the harmony we seek will come in stages, from the experience of working together to solve practical, immediate problems. But, if that is to happen, it is the strong view of my Government that the talks must move on soon to discuss substantive matters. This must happen if we are not to miss the window of opportunity so often highlighted by President Clinton on his visit to Ireland.

In trying to work out a system of Government for Northern Ireland that all can share, on the basis of equality and parity of esteem, we are not asking Unionists to cease to be loyally British, or Nationalists to cease to be loyally Irish - any more than the framers of the United States Constitution ceased to be loyal Virginians or loyal members of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We are asking nationalists and unionists to agree a political framework which will allow them, together, to take responsibility for solving the day-to-day problems that affect the lives of the million and a half people who live in

Northern Ireland, and to do so in harmony and co-operation with the people of Britain and with the rest of Ireland.

Europe is full of psychological boundaries that go back to the Thirty Years War and earlier, boundaries of religion, boundaries between one world view and another. One of those psychological boundaries does indeed run through the ancient province of Ulster. Yet similar boundaries in Europe have not prevented the development of political structures whether within or between countries, as in Catalonia or the South Tyrol/Alto Adige, or at the level of the European Union, which allows region and countries, majorities and minorities, to work together in partnership, to the mutual benefit of their people.

We in Ireland can admire our history, we too can be proud of it, but we certainly cannot erase it. We do not owe our history any debts. We cannot relive our great grand parents lives for them. We are not obliged to take offence on their behalf, any more than we are obliged to atone for their sins.

It is our task to live in this generation, as people who live in Ireland and whose children will live there.

Yes, we need peace. But peace is not enough. Peace is just the absence of violence, and as such peace is only temporary, if profound antipathies persist.

Northern Ireland needs more than just a peace process. It needs a political and institutional process that allows people by agreement to exercise responsibility for their own future - as they do in cross community economic projects aided by the International Fund for Ireland. The agreements reached at local level last month in some areas about the routes of marches are also testimony to the potential for constructive accommodation.

Almost half (check) of the men who met in Philadelphia to frame the United States Constitution were of Ulster Scots ancestry - some of their distant cousins will sit on the Unionist benches at the Belfast talks today, just as some of their ancestors defended Derry's walls in 1689.

If men of that ancestry could devise the greatest and fairest democratic Constitution in the world, surely they can work with their neighbours to devise a fair and just system for their home country - taking some encouragement from the great compromises that were worked out in the process that started at Annapolis two hundred and ten years ago.

Let each preserve their own allegiances. Those of the nationalist tradition in Ireland must learn that no amount of talk will make a Unionist feel that he is not British. Allegiances are divided, and we have all got to live with that. It may not fit in with romantic ideologies derived from the nineteenth century, but it is the truth. No amount of talk will make nationalists feel British either.

Let the agreed system of Government be built on checks and balances. Let it be complicated if necessary.

Let the parties build on what they already agree about. All parties already agree that the form of Government should be democratic, all agree that there should be a Bill of Rights, all agree that there should be links with the South of Ireland, both tradition agrees that the other should be respected, and both agree that the other cannot be coerced.

Let us build on small successes, let us not wait for a big breakthrough, or wait for St. Paul to fall off his horse. There will be no Pauline conversions on the part of either side, just a gradual accretion of mutual confidence as people get used to working together to agree on shared institutions.

Let the talks concentrate on agreeing a political framework under which people of different national allegiance can work together on practical issues such as how the roads can be made better, how the drug menace can be combatted, how more jobs can be created, and how living standards can be raised.

Agreed institutions for Northern Ireland must be ones that enforce fairness, and which check the arbitrary excesses of whoever happens to be in the majority in any area at any given time. The need to enforce fairness through law has been one of the keystones of the American Constitution.

As your second President, John Adams, said ,

"The people, when unchecked, have been as unjust, tyrannical, brutal, barbarous and cruel as any king or senate possessed of uncontrollable power. The majority has eternally, and without exception, usurped over the rights of the minority".

That is why we need rules and a balanced system of institutions in Northern Ireland, fair rules and institutions of governance that require people to share

power. Rules which recognise that not all of the people will be good all of the time, that people are different from one another, and that people's allegiances are many and varied.

The nationalist theorists of the nineteenth century assumed that a person could only have one sovereign allegiance - to his or her territorial nation state.

Territorially based natural resources were crucial to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so nation and territory had to be. Knowledge, instant communication and mobility will be the ways of the twenty first century, and nationalities will inevitably become more intermixed. A new political model is needed to organise this new reality. The rules that we need in the modern world are ones that recognise that many people can have more attachments and allegiances than one and can have different allegiances and yet can live and work together happily.

Indeed, before the nineteenth century, that was quite normal. The European Union today is a return to that earlier concept. In the European Union someone can, at the same time, owe allegiance to Flanders, to Belgium, and to Europe and yet share the same working and living space with someone who has a different set of allegiances.

If this can be done in Europe, it can be done in Northern Ireland, if we devise a political system which allows people with a British allegiance and others with an Irish allegiance, to share the same living and working space. We can create in Northern Ireland, a space in which everyone can live and work, in equality and dignity, if we get the rules and the institutions right. And, if we can get that right, we will be setting a model for similarly divided communities across the world, just as the men of Irish descent set a model for the world two hundred and ten years ago in the constitution of this great Union.

That is the challenge for the participants in the Belfast talks - to make the rules for a just society.

I referred at the beginning of my speech to the global challenges that face us. These are, in the final analysis, political challenges. It is a political task to write rules that will enable the world's people to share the world's resources in freedom.

For example, we need global rules against terrorism, terrorism which exploits the freedom of our media. For as President Bush said "simply by capturing

headlines and television time, the terrorist partially succeeds". As a country that is turning its back on terrorism at home, Ireland supports the United States efforts to create world rules to combat terrorism. ?

But rules work best when there is consent to the way in which they are made. That is why we need to reform the United Nations, not to reject it. If the United Nations had not been created in 1946 in San Francisco, we would have had to invent it - because we must have a means of making rules for using the world together, to which all nations have had a recognised input.

Recognition is important. Islamic fundamentalism is a reaction to a perceived lack of recognition and respect for the Muslim heritage by western culture. The troubles in Northern Ireland arose from a lack of recognition and respect.

Having said that, one can understand, but one can never condone violence. The Civil Rights movement in the United States demanded, and got, respect and recognition for Afro-Americans by exclusively peaceful, if exceptionally courageous, political methods. Violence and democratic politics can never mix. If a bomb is wrong off Long Island, it is equally wrong in Manchester. Civilised states do not negotiate under threat. That is why those who want to

win respect through democratic politics, must give up all connections with terror, with the threat of terror, and even with coded warnings about terror.

Terror cannot be part of the political calculus of a democracy.

If the twenty-first century is to be a peaceful century, the world must have a forum, in which all are recognised, to make civilised rules for settling arguments between us by exclusively peaceful methods. That is why we need to reform the United Nations.

By any standard, the world is a better place today than it is was fifty years ago, thanks, in large measure, to a global system created by the United States in the wake of World War Two. It can be even better still fifty years from now, if we continue to apply the lesson, taught us by the founders of the United States, that we must build freedom within rules set by democratic consent.