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Address by the Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, T.D.,
at the North-West Conference, Derry,
19 November, 1993 at 10.00 a.m.

It is a personal pleasure for me to have the opportunity of visiting Derry once again. I am also delighted to have been invited by the North West Region Cross Border Group to participate in this Conference on the development of the North-West region. Permit me first of all to congratulate the organisers of the Conference on their success in drawing up such a stimulating programme, and on bringing together speakers and participants of such expertise.

My last visit to the city of Derry was for the launch of the Secretariat of the North-West Region Cross Border Group. It is a continuing pleasure to see the significant successes that have been achieved in recent years in improving and restoring Derry's inner city. This achievement serves as inspiration and encouragement for the Group in its mission of developing and deepening co-operation in the North-West region.

The Group's primary aims are of great importance: to ensure that the region's strengths are used to develop its economy and to gain the support of all sectors of the region's economy in fulfilling this aim. By making a full investment of all the region's human and natural resources in this way, the Group will help create useful and productive new employment. I can assure you that the Government welcomes all proposals put forward to develop the North-West, particularly those which focus on the provision of jobs.

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The desire to generate prosperity and bring about the economic betterment of the economies North and South is a shared ambition of all the people of this island, which transcends all political differences.

This Group, by bringing people from both sides of the border into closer contact with each other, is achieving something of even deeper significance. It is contributing in a very concrete way to the wider effort of developing personal contacts and the breaking down of barriers on this island. The need for the people of North and South to develop knowledge and understanding of each other is a crucial element in our common search for lasting peace and stability.

We are all aware of the challenges which the North-West faces. I need only mention some of them: small and open economies, rapid natural increase in population, a high dependency ratio, and a particular dependence on agriculture. The whole of Ireland shares these characteristics in varying degrees, but some of them are more pronounced in this region than elsewhere. These characteristics present a picture of a region with problems, but one with considerable opportunities. In encouraging and supporting the people of this region in their efforts we can translate opportunity into achievement.

The objective of the Irish and British Governments in commissioning the North-West Study was to provide a comprehensive and integrated development strategy for the region which would represent a sound basis for policy planning in the period ahead. Many of you were closely involved with this project, and a large proportion of the ideas it contains are fruit of local initiative and consultation.

I want to emphasise that Government Departments and State Agencies North and South will continue to play their part in implementing as many as possible of the recommendations of the Study through existing or new programmes. The new round of EC funded Operational Programmes will also be used wherever possible to advance the recommendations of the Study.

I am pleased to note that the EC Commission is proposing that there will be a second, follow-on, Interreg Programme to encourage co-operative cross-border projects. This Group is an outstanding example of the projects assisted to date. In principle, we will aim to support the proposal to continue assisting the Group's Secretariat. To that end, the most useful course of action for the Group is to

provide the two Governments with a detailed costed proposal to serve as the basis for consideration.

We are all agreed that there are opportunities which can be more effectively exploited on a regional basis to increase the overall economic welfare of the region. The North-West Study recognises that fact by building its development strategy on two key elements. The first element is that of building on shared strengths. By first identifying the strengths of the region and, in particular, those shared on both sides of the border they can then be jointly developed. The second element is to overcome peripherality by creating an "outward vision", to use the Study's phrase.

Another theme of the North-West Study of particular interest is its assertion that peripherality should not be confused with remoteness. Many remote regions and countries have developed successfully - Scandinavia is one example. Moreover, the European Union's regional policy is an important invigorating element. As the North-West Study says, peripherality is associated with an absence of self-reinforcing activities in a region. Counteracting that absence can develop a cycle of improvement: firms that are successful can attack new problems with more confidence, and the network set up can in turn benefit other firms.

The Study "Ireland in Europe: A Shared Challenge", which I had published last year as a stimulus to enhancing economic co-operation between the two parts of the island, also underlines the fact that the shared features of our two economies give rise to extensive common interests. In the framework of constantly developing co-operation offered in the European Community, it will increasingly be to our mutual advantage to pursue joint approaches and strategies in the promotion of these common interests.

The Irish and British Governments fully recognise the benefits which can be obtained for the whole of the island of Ireland through closer economic co-operation, given that we now have a Single Market for the whole island. In preparing new development plans for Structural Funds assistance, both Governments have carefully examined the opportunities for expanding economic collaboration. As a sign of the importance which the two Governments attach to these opportunities for economic collaboration, a common chapter appears in the two development plans for Ireland and Northern Ireland. In addition, both Governments agreed that a joint co-operative approach should be incorporated in their respective plans.

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The preparation of these plans North and South has involved a very extensive process of consultation so that they would reflect regional and local concerns and expertise.

There is enormous scope for further mutually beneficial cross-border co-operation based on the strengths and the natural resources of this region. Protection of this region's environment, for example, can enhance the potential for tourism and facilitate the development of high quality agrifood and mariculture products. The need now is to pursue vigorously the possibilities for further joint action drawing on the goodwill and expertise of the people and organisations active in the region.

It is also important to maintain close contact with relevant funding agencies. I have in mind in particular the International Fund for Ireland. The Fund has demonstrated a strong commitment to this region, and it has expressed its keenness to identify further sound and viable economic projects which it might support. I am aware that the Fund's Chairman, Mr. Willie McCarter, who needs no introduction to this audience, will be addressing you later today.

The co-operative endeavour in the North-West is being matched by growing co-operation elsewhere along the border. The achievements of the East Border Region Committee, which comprises Louth and Monaghan County Councils and Down and Newry and Mourne District Councils, are particularly worthy of note, as is also the work being done by the Gap of the North Association of Chambers of Commerce. In addition, various community and sectoral groups operating on a cross-border basis are doing excellent work in fostering the development of their individual areas.

In the private sector, a considerable programme of co-operation is taking place under the joint North-South initiatives of the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation and the CBI (Northern Ireland) to maximise the potential for trade between North and South. The marketing of joint trade exhibitions ahead of International Trade Fairs has an important role to play. The Chambers of Commerce in both parts of Ireland are also co-operating in the development of trade and beneficial business linkages between the two parts of this island. It is through such formal and informal contacts that we can network to reap the benefit of the Single European Market.

Co-operation is essential to develop competitive advantage. Through partnership we can maximise trade, maintain and increase market share at home and win new markets abroad.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement will continue to play a central role in the promotion of North-South economic co-operation. Over the last few years, the Anglo-Irish Conference has devoted considerable attention to this crucial area of its agenda. It has lent a powerful impetus to existing co-operation in the various sectors. But in addition to this, it has identified areas where there is room for expansion and development. The Anglo-Irish Conference has also mapped out an impressive programme of future work in the economic area. Over the coming months, the Conference is scheduled to discuss co-operation in areas such as agriculture, transport and inland fisheries.

In conclusion, let me say that co-operation between North and South in the various economic and social sectors is already at an impressive level, and the foundations are in place for a substantial deepening of that co-operation. We would be failing in our duties to ourselves and the future of Ireland if we did not do everything we can to bring about the economic betterment of both parts of Ireland. The current search for peace, if successful, could make the biggest contribution of all both to the quality of life on this island and to economic prospects.

The considerable efforts being pursued here in the North-West region, particularly by the North-West Region Cross Border Group, are an important part of the wider co-operative process. I wish this Conference every success in its deliberations. My Government look forward to the conclusions of the Conference and will give them careful consideration in its work for the region.

then against using the briefing as the basis for...
states. This arrangement has been agreed with the...

(signed)

A. J. ...
SC ...