

Thursday 19th April 2012

Speech by An Taoiseach Mr. Enda Kenny T.D. at the Chancellor's Lecture at
Ulster University
on Thursday 19 April 2012 at 7.00pm

"Peace and Prosperity - continuing the journey"

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellors, distinguished guests:

I am delighted to be with you this evening to deliver the sixth
Chancellor's Lecture at the University of Ulster, at the invitation of
Professor Emeritus Denis Moloney.

I particularly admired the manner in which, at the ceremony for your
installation as Chancellor, which was attended by my distinguished
predecessor the late Dr Garret FitzGerald, you dedicated the University to
helping young people achieve their aspirations.

In today's economic climate this goal remains as important as ever.

I also wish to recognise Vice Chancellor Richard Barnett, who has led the
University with such distinction since his formal appointment in 2006.

As indeed, I would like to acknowledge the appointment of Pro Vice

Chancellor Deirdre Heenan, the first woman Provost of Magee College, by President Higgins to the Council of State.

This follows on from the appointment of Denis Moloney by former President McAleese.

Ulster is a university with a deserved national and international reputation for excellence, innovation and regional engagement.

Ulster, along with other educational institutes, across the island of Ireland is on the front lines in this battle for economic growth, jobs and prosperity for our people.

Ulster is a key part of the all island goal of improving Ireland's competitiveness that will attract new investment and new jobs.

In addition it is widely recognised that the university makes a very significant contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of Ireland.

I know of your close collaboration with business and industry, your contribution to lifelong learning and your wide network of strategic partnerships.

Preparing young people for tomorrow's world today is at the core of this University's mission. Young people are our greatest asset. They are the

future. We must prepare them to deal with that responsibility and challenge.

I get the sense that University of Ulster understands and values the advantage of having a dynamic, innovative and ambitious student body.

As I arrived here this evening, I could not help but notice that this is Chinese Culture Week in the university.

The formal opening of the prestigious Confucius Institute on the Coleraine campus heralds a valuable resource for anyone in Northern Ireland wishing to build partnerships with China whether they are in education, business, the arts or government.

Having just returned from a visit to China last month I can fully understand the importance of this initiative.

My visit to China was part of our efforts to increase Ireland China relations, especially in the areas of trade and investment. As a small, open economy, globalisation is hugely significant for all of Ireland. And in that context, the major emerging and expanding markets are increasingly important.

During my visit I was very pleased to be able to conclude an important Strategic Partnership Agreement representing a major step-up in our relations, setting out our plans for increased collaboration with China in

several key areas. I know that First and Deputy First Minister will travel there later in the year.

It was also a great honour for us that Vice President Xi Jinping of China choose to spend three days with us in February.

The Chinese agreements are not the only significant international agreement I have concluded recently.

Just a few weeks ago, and no doubt of particular interest to this audience, Prime Minister David Cameron and I signed a joint statement on intensifying British-Irish relations for the next decade.

This important initiative recognises that British Irish relations have never been stronger.

The State Visit of Her Majesty The Queen last year served as a symbol of a modern, deep and friendly relationship.

It was the birth of a new phase in the relationship between our islands.

Gone are the days of cold, insular suspicion and conflict. Today we acknowledge that we have much in common and that we must work together on the European and international stage for the mutual benefit of our peoples.

One such example of working together happened when Ireland was denied access to the markets and the UK stepped in and provided the largest bi-lateral loan facility (€3.8bn) as part of our funding programme.

The Chancellor announced last year that the interest rates on the loans to Ireland will be reduced to a level slightly below the new European Financial Stability Fund (EFSF) interest rate. It is expected that agreement will be concluded on this shortly.

This support reflects the important economic relationship between Ireland and the UK. The huge level of trade between our countries supports jobs in companies of all sizes. The willingness of the UK to assist Ireland reflects how both countries gain through maintaining a strong trading relationship.

Our two countries enjoy a uniquely close political relationship, and the relationship between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive mirrors the wider relationship between the Irish and British governments.

We have a symbiotic relationship, North and South. We must show that what is good for one is good for both parts of the island.

One of the key areas both Governments have identified for greater collaboration is research and development.

We both believe that there is great scope for more and better engagement between third-level colleges, research institutes and business sectors, which in turn can increase the benefits of investment in research and development.

The University of Ulster has been a leader in this area. Such collaboration is crucial if we are to accelerate recovery, growth and job creation across these islands and between North and South.

It is great to see such a blend of youth and experience in this audience.

Northern Ireland has both in abundance, which will move it further along the journey from peace to prosperity in the years ahead.

The Joint Statement on British Irish relations underlined the wish of both governments to see Northern Ireland move from peace to reconciliation and prosperity.

We are committed to continuing to work in the closest cooperation on Northern Ireland issues and we reaffirmed our support for the full implementation of the Good Friday and related agreements and for the ongoing work and development of the devolved and other institutions.

Our joint efforts in support of these objectives must and will continue.

Above all, we stand together with the people of Northern Ireland and its

Executive in our determination to make sure that they are never again blighted by violent conflict.

The excellent security cooperation between our two governments will continue, standing fast together in the face of those who resort to violence.

The attempts by a – thankfully tiny - minority of so called dissidents to return Northern Ireland to its darkest hours will not succeed.

They have nothing to offer the people of Northern Ireland and have been overwhelmingly rejected, as shown in the united cross-community response to the brutal murder of Constable Ronan Kerr just over a year ago.

That response illustrates how far we have come in a short few years. But the work is not yet complete.

Facing down terrorists and dissidents is vital, but so too is building stronger and deeper cross-community trust, respect and friendship.

So-called “peace walls” still define many communities in Northern Ireland. For me, a true test of peace in this city and elsewhere in Northern Ireland will not be the number or size of “peace walls”, but their absence. That’s why we are committed to full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

While working closely with my British counterpart, there are matters on

which we share a difference of opinion.

Late last year, I had the privilege of presenting Geraldine Finucane with a Person of the Year Award in Belfast and I want to say once again how much I respect and admire the way she has campaigned for over 22 years...with great dignity and courage...and I support her in her campaign for a full public inquiry.

There are many positive signs for the future in Northern Ireland.

The people and representatives of Derry overwhelmingly rejected attempts by marginal groups to disrupt Derry's role as City of Culture next year.

This honour offers great opportunities for Derry and its hinterland to emerge from a long winter into a bright new spring.

A spring that is promoting an explosion in arts, culture and tourism.

Northern Ireland's unique land and seascape, its history and sense of myth and wonder is attracting new investment and visitors.

I understand the worldwide TV hit 'Game of Thrones' is filmed across counties Down and Antrim, employing hundreds of actors, tradesmen and technicians, while showing off the Irish landscape to a huge global audience.

This month's Titanic Centenary is a wonderful opportunity to showcase Belfast at its best. The three week festival, which is just drawing to a close, was, as the organisers rightly said, about much more than tragedy and lost lives.

The story of the Titanic is indelibly carved into the city and into 2012.

The simultaneously breathtaking and mournful history of Belfast's most famous maritime creation has uniquely touched the popular imagination worldwide. Last Sunday I attended the Opening of a Titanic Memorial Park in Addergoole, a small village in my native Mayo. 14 people from that rural parish perished on the Titanic. They, like so many people from this great city were travelling to a new life and to realise their dreams in the United States.

Other developments, such as the new visitor centre at Giant's Causeway in July, will help to attract international attention and new visitors.

Of course we cannot forget that Ireland – and particularly Northern Ireland - is now the golfing capital of the world!

It is absolutely brilliant that the Irish Open is coming to Portrush from 28 June to 1 July. The Open will truly be a world class event on a world class golf course.

This is fitting recognition of the amazing run that Northern Ireland golfers like Darren Clarke, Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell and Michael Hoey

have had in the last couple of years. Little wonder that so many of them have honorary degrees from Ulster University!

This year, another sporting occasion will have special resonance for relations on these islands, with the Olympic Torch travelling to Ireland, North and South, in early June, on its route to the London 2012 Olympic Games. Memories indeed of Mary Peters all those years ago.

These Olympics hold the promise of a wonderful spectacle and I would like to wish the very best to all athletes from all parts of this island that have the good fortune to participate.

2012 also marks the beginning of a decade of centenary commemorations of events that helped shape our political destinies. This series of commemorations offers us an opportunity to explore and reflect on key episodes of our past. We will work with the Northern Ireland Executive in a spirit of historical accuracy, mutual respect, inclusiveness and reconciliation.

As part of this year's programme of events, I was pleased that First Minister Peter Robinson recently gave a lecture at Iveagh House, reflecting on Edward Carson and perspectives on Irish Unionism. This was the first in a proposed series of lectures on the theme of commemoration.

But we want to ensure that this is a decade not only of remembering but also of looking forward; a decade of renewed and strengthened co-operation

between our two countries.

I want to see our island economy grow and become prosperous. I want to live in an economy where young people have the choice to stay at home in their own place and have a job and a career if that is what they want to do.

I do not like to see forced emigration. If young people choose to go abroad I want them to do so with confidence and with a good education and valued skills.

I want to see a prosperous Republic and I want to see a prosperous Northern Ireland. Our people North and South face similar challenges. The global financial crisis affects everybody. We all want to see robust growth return to our island economy.

I have set out many times what I aim for and hope to achieve; by 2016 to prove that we are the best small country in the world to do business with; secondly to be the best country in the world to raise a family and thirdly to be the best country in the world in which to grow old with dignity and respect.

I see no reason why such an objective cannot apply to all parts of this island, nor why we cannot cooperate and collaborate with each other to achieve it.

We both face continued and difficult challenges as we reshape our economies

and seek to manage our public finances.

In Dublin, we have set a clear trajectory and made considerable progress, but we still have a long way to go to bring our budget deficit back to under 3% of GDP.

Here in the North, it is increasingly accepted that the economy is over-reliant on the public sector and there is a need to see a greater level of private sector activity.

Above all, in both parts of the island we want and need to see a flourishing business environment, which promotes innovation, entrepreneurship, investment and trade.

Experience on both parts of the island has shown how stability, both socially and economic, is the solid foundation for new business, jobs and investment.

Stability is the cornerstone of a successful and prosperous economy.

It is in this context that Ireland, as a committed member of the eurozone, is going to its people to ratify the European Stability Treaty.

To bring back a sense of economic stability to the wider eurozone and to our own national finances.

The Stability Treaty for Ireland is a vital part of the overall architecture of our shared currency.

It might be easy for people in Northern Ireland to be indifferent, or ambivalent, on this issue or for people in the South to mistakenly adopt a politically populist campaign against it.

But that would be a mistake. I believe that it is unequivocally in all of our interests – North and South – for Ireland to ratify the Fiscal Stability Treaty, for Ireland to continue to be a member of the Euro, and for the Euro to survive and succeed as a strong currency.

Rejection of this Treaty would harm Ireland as Europe would continue without us. Economic instability would harm the Irish economy and any other economy.

More generally, I think it is worth recalling how significant the European Union has been as a backdrop to the journey we have come on together on this island.

Britain and Ireland share almost 40 years of common membership. I don't think it is an understatement to say that this helped to create an improved context for dialogue between Dublin and London, as the two Governments increasingly found themselves as allies on issues on the EU agenda.

More recently, the European Union has played a more direct part in

supporting the Peace Process in Northern Ireland, by providing funding for cross-community and cross-border initiatives, by helping to promote dialogue and by maintaining international attention and political support.

European funding and our outward looking attitudes have helped transform our regions and attract in new jobs and opportunities for our young people.

In this time of uncertainty we must not turn our back on Europe or our outward looking focus.

I see lots of exciting and interesting ways in which we can collaborate and cooperate on the European Union agenda.

Indeed, in areas like research and innovation, where an increasingly large proportion of EU funds are applied but where collaboration between Member States is a requirement, there will undoubtedly be even greater opportunities for cooperation between the University of Ulster and other universities and research centres across the island.

Chancellor, our island's journey continues.

Our wisdom grows as our relationship becomes ever closer.

I wish this great seat of learning well.

And leave you with a line from Seamus Heaney

It will be good for us to retrace this path.

Ends

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