

Speech for New York

Ireland has recently voted overwhelmingly for peace and stability. It is now necessary to ensure that the great opportunity which presently exists to create a durable and acceptable political system is taken. On June 25th, the people of Northern Ireland will elect their representatives to the new institutions. There is a clear choice between the supporters of the Good Friday Agreement, determined to look to the future, and its opponents whose minds are firmly attached to the past. We have made massive progress in recent years, but the hard work remains to be done. You too will have a part to play in the transformation of Ireland.

We are entering into the difficult process of implementing the Good Friday Agreement. Ultimately, of course, it will be the inhabitants of the island who determine the success or failure of the Agreement. But we will still need every ounce of support from our friends in America and in Europe as we strive to overcome the hatreds of centuries. The positive and constructive engagement of the US and of Irish America will be as necessary, and as forthcoming, in the coming years as it has been in the past.

I do not need to spell out how difficult and long the process of establishing peace in Ireland has been. It has been a lonely struggle for myself and my colleagues sometimes - but never here in America. We have always been sure of a warm welcome, of genuine encouragement and solid support in America.

This process would not have been possible without the active involvement of Irish America, without the support of the leaders of the American people and the American people themselves. It is difficult to single out individuals but I have to say that President Clinton and George Mitchell have earned the eternal gratitude of the people of Ireland, North and South, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter.

You could be forgiven for thinking that this is a one-way process with Ireland asking America giving. Given the immense strength of the US, your friendship is clearly important to us. But I would like to stress the advantages to you of the Irish-American connection.

One of our most pressing tasks is to build a 21st economy in Ireland, particularly in Northern Ireland. We need investment, we need trade and we need tourism. But we have the people, we have the skills. We need the opportunities.

I am not asking you to be sentimental. We are part of a single European market of 300million people. Sooner rather than later, we will be part of the euro currency zone. As a region, we are very well-connected with the centres of European decision in Brussels and elsewhere. We believe that hard-headed calculations alone would justify investment in Northern Ireland. Just come and look. See for yourselves. Bring your spreadsheets.

There is of course an important cultural dimension in our relationship. Being hard-headed doesn't mean you cannot enjoy yourself in Ireland. Quite a few of you can vouch for that! I can assure that Ireland is the best place in Europe to mix business and pleasure.

We have drawn much inspiration from the principles of the US Constitution and America's commitment to freedom and justice. The US has had a fundamental influence on us in our efforts to create an Ireland where difference is respected, diversity appreciated and tolerance admired. Our vision of a new Ireland is derived from your basic principles - E pluribus unum, unity in diversity. That is what we have worked for. That is what we will continue to work. And with your continuing support, we will overcome.