



EMBARGO 14.10.2009 – 20 h 15

(seul le discours prononcé fait foi !)

Speech by Her Excellency Madam President of Ireland
delivered on the occasion of the State visit
on 14 October 2009 at the grand-ducal palace

Your Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, distinguished guests.

E schéine gudden Owend.

My husband and I are delighted to be here with you this evening. The warm welcome which we have received since our arrival this morning has reminded us of the strong and comfortable friendship which exists and has long existed between Luxembourg and Ireland. It's a solidarity that has remained strong no matter what has come or gone in our ever-changing world and indeed even in the few short years since the State Visit to Ireland in 2002 by Their Royal Highnesses the Grand Duke and the Grand Duchess, much has changed in Europe and in the wider world. These things clamour for our attention and essential to their resolution is the very kind of living, breathing friendship which is exemplified in the relationship between Ireland and Luxembourg.

Your Royal Highness, we were deeply honoured when you chose Ireland as the destination of your very first State Visit as Grand Duke. You were no stranger to our shores even then and similarly on this my first State Visit to Luxembourg I come not as a stranger but as one who has visited before, usually on business connected to the European institutions. This visit offers a wonderful and welcome opportunity to deepen and widen our knowledge of the Grand Duchy – from the old city of Luxembourg and the historic town of Echternach to your modern enterprises and the European institutions of the Kirchberg plateau. Importantly this visit also reminds us of the history we share and the future that we are crafting together out of the present.

Many centuries ago, monks from Ireland became our first ambassadors to Luxembourg. One such was Willibrord, an Englishman, educated in Ireland who became Archbishop of Utrecht and patron saint of Luxembourg. A true European indeed, but one wonders who he would have cheered for in this evening's World Cup qualifiers with England, Luxembourg and Ireland all playing matches! Whatever his sporting allegiances might have been, the centre of learning which Saint Willibrord established at Echternach still stands today, a monument to the deep roots of faith, intellect and friendship which our two countries share.

Today of course we share in membership of the European Union, a concept which your small country helped germinate from seed. In so doing you showcased the power of small states to shape the destiny of an entire continent, to be effective partners with bigger neighbours in a common enterprise and to never be rendered voiceless or powerless by dint of size – rather the opposite to be strong by dint of effort and passion. Through your example we learnt that the Union provided an unparalleled opportunity to small states to play a significant part on a much broader and more effective stage. Since that day in 1973 when Luxembourg welcomed Ireland into the European family, new networks and partnerships have not alone re-opened the roads travelled by those monks of old, reminding us that we are old friends, but they have built many new bridges to one another to ensure a future of fresh, vibrant, working relationships and not

simply far off memories from the bowels of history.

Today Luxembourg is home to a sizeable Irish community. They have been warmly welcomed here and in typical Irish fashion while they have settled and integrated effortlessly, they have brought a little bit of Ireland with them. The Place d'Armes, just a stone's throw away from here, has been the scene of some very lively Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in recent years and I do hope that these haven't kept Your Royal Highnesses awake at night! There is also a wealth of Irish sporting and cultural organisations to add to the richness of life here in the Grand Duchy and there are more than a few Luxembourgers and other nationalities among their members.

The success of Luxembourg in many fields is much admired in Ireland. You have had legendary achievements in international finance, industrial conglomerates, satellite communications, and cycling just to mention a few! Although I hear Nicholas, the son of Ireland's great cyclist Stephen Roche's is training hard for the next season, so Luxembourg's legends Andy, Fränk and Kim may need to watch out!

Luxembourg has quite a story to tell of its rapid transformation from an agricultural to an industrial and then to a service-based economy, its ability to absorb huge numbers of international and *frontalier* workers, its game-changing shift from being a casualty of international events to becoming an important driver of them and a European player to be reckoned. These things and more are all testament to Luxembourg's impressive ability to reinvent itself, adapting to change and making change happen.

Yet paradoxically your national motto is "Mir wëlle bleiwen wât mir Sinn", "*We want to remain what we are.*" But I have seen for myself how this paradox is resolved. You resolve this paradox so cleverly, proudly retaining your own language, identity and culture, your complex history and unique structure, yet making of them a launch platform and not a bunker, making of Luxembourg a catalyst for the most exciting adventure in democratic partnership ever undertaken by human kind- the European Union.

Tomorrow, I will speak on the theme of Ireland and the European Union at the Abbaye de Neumünster but tonight it would be remiss if I did not refer to the referendum in Ireland on the Lisbon Treaty which was carried by a two to one majority, with a 67.1% Yes vote, on 2nd October last. It was a comprehensive verdict on the Treaty and on the Union which had so sensitively and honourably addressed Irish concerns which had led to an earlier rejection of the Treaty. Irish voters came out in large numbers to state their views as European citizens who have a powerful commitment to the great European project. I expect that on my return to Ireland that I will sign the instrument of ratification and once that instrument is deposited in Rome, Ireland will have completed its process of ratification ahead of the European Council meeting to be held in Brussels on 29 October.

I come from an Ireland which has shown a powerful commitment also to that other great project - the Northern Ireland Peace Process. After generations, indeed centuries of conflict, we have seen significant steps towards lasting peace on our island. Relationships that were once skewed and twisted by history are being straightened out. There is today an unprecedented level of political cooperation between the divided communities in Northern Ireland and between North and South. The relationship between Ireland and Great Britain has never been better thanks in part to the collegiality which has developed between us around the common European Union table and the stunning example which the Union provides of replacing fighting against one another with working with and for one another.

That vision of a stable, egalitarian, compassionate and prosperous Europe is one shared by Ireland and Luxembourg. The fulfilled lives we want for our children and Europe's children, we

also want for the children of the world's poorest nations. Our care for humanity does not end at our own borders or the borders of Europe. It is a care that is distilled from suffering and waste which we ourselves endured and never wish to see repeated. It is a care that knows the devastation wreaked by hatred and believes in the miracles that can be wrought by love. That care, common to us both, gives us our agenda, our ambition and through this visit I hope we will reinforce the sense of common purpose and partnership between our two countries which is so essential to realise these, our shared goals.

I now invite all present to join me in a toast to His Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Luxembourg and to the well-being of his people.

Op er Gesondheet.