Speech by the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

at the UCC Law Faculty, 15 February 2013

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Lord Mayor, Vice President,

Thank you, Chairman, thank you to the Faculty of Law for hosting this.

I want to talk in particular today about Europe’s place in the world and foreign policy dimensions to Ireland’s Presidency.

An interesting few weeks

After seven weeks in the Presidency of the European Union, I am happy to report that our stewardship is going well. I speak to you today following a number of very significant steps, in the delivery of our Presidency mandate.

Last week, all 27 EU Member States unanimously agreed their position on the next 7-year financial framework – or Budget - for the EU. I believe that although there is work still to be done, last week’s agreement bolsters the credibility of the EU at a critical time.

We also have real momentum behind the push for an EU-US Free Trade Agreement. One of our key priorities has been to move to unlock the potential for trade between the world’s two largest markets, the EU and the US and developments in the last three days in Washington and Brussels now equip the Irish Presidency to deliver on that mandate.

But in many ways, the steps we have taken on the global stage in terms of Europe’s foreign policy and development work, may have even greater resonance. We have had, for example, renewed commitment this week to supporting peace and stabilisation efforts in Mali.

And of course, Ireland’s hard-fought conclusion to the promissory notes issue was particularly welcome. The promissory notes are now a thing of the past and I believe that can only be good. The outcome represents a significant step at both national and European level to improve the sustainability of debt – and in Ireland’s case to help ensure our return to economic independence later this year.
Internal challenges for the EU, but Global Europe remains key

It is no surprise that the EU dedicates so much attention to its economic challenges and getting our people back to work. Entirely consistent with this is Europe’s global perspective, which is rooted in its history. Its quest to secure lasting peace, democracy and prosperity for all, and to promote the same values well beyond its borders.

Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the Union last year – to each and every one of us, therefore – served as a strong reminder that these fundamental values are as core today as they ever have been.

This is true from my perspective as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Our challenges – economic, social, political, security - are also the world’s challenges. The fight against hunger, poverty and the social and environmental effects of climate change must continue. We have an obligation to the next generations to ensure that under our watch, we rise to that challenge.

We in Europe must use our union to take decisions, to reinforce our capacity to act, both in the interests of our own regional area but also with a keen eye to addressing global challenges. Mistakes of the past here in Ireland were mirrored in Europe and across the globe, particularly in the major financial and economic centres.

Ireland very much sees its current Presidency in a global context. Ireland proactively engages with the world and notwithstanding our size, we have a proud record of seeking and carrying out leadership roles.

It is no accident that we have come out of an OSCE chairmanship into an EU Presidency, at the same time we have taken up the UN Human Rights Council seat we won so convincingly last year.

How does the outside world see Europe?

Although much of our activity in Europe may at times appear to be inward looking, I am acutely conscious that the 21st century must be more about Europe in a global capacity.

Close observers will know that Europe has the potential to influence at a global level as the statistics show. More than half the money - 55% of it - spent throughout the world on helping developing countries comes from the EU and its Member States.

And although the EU has just over 7% of the world’s population versus 19.3% for China and 4.5% for the US, yet we have the highest proportion of global merchandise trade at 15% and services trade at 25%. Contrary to popular belief, the EU economy is fundamentally one with a very strong base, which boasts of a massive manufacturing trade surplus of almost €300 billion, a figure that has increased 5-fold since 2000. The EU retains close to 28% of the global income generated by the production of manufactured goods, against 18% for the US and a bit less than 16% for China. Despite the economic and financial crisis, the EU is still an attractive place to invest – in fact, it is the largest recipient of international investment projects, creating and protecting jobs.
In sum, Europe is well placed to develop a vibrant growth and jobs agenda, despite the doom and gloom associated with talk of Eurozone crisis and bailouts.

That matters to us in Ireland as an open and globally-focused economy. It matters to Europe, as 90% of world growth in the near future will come from outside its borders.

I was in South America recently at the summit of the EU with Caribbean and Latin American States, along with Prime Minister Ayrault of France, Chancellor Merkel, President Barroso and others. I spoke there of Ireland’s recovery becoming a good news story for Europe because globally, Europe needs a good news story and the world needs Europe to keep growing. All the Latin American and Caribbean leaders whom I met, including the President’s of Mexico and Colombia, stressed their strong interest in Europe’s recovery, as they see this as central for the continuing growth and dynamism of their own economies.

Over 4,000 Brazilian students come to study in Ireland every year, a number which we hope to see grow in the near future. Those students and their successors need to be assured of both Europe’s recovery and of its continued engagement with the outside world.

Presidency

So, against that background I might come to our Presidency. Our priorities have been set out many times by now – they are stability, jobs and growth. Three words that summarise what Europe needs and what Ireland needs.

A Presidency is a major project, with two years' preparation, considerable effort and a cost-effective management. We have temporarily increased our capacity in Dublin and Brussels at official level, in order to meet the enormous responsibilities of the Presidency. We will chair at least 1600 meetings. We will have 180 meetings here in Ireland with 15,000 delegates and media. A dedicated website eu2013.ie in four languages already accessed in 175 countries.

And in three days alone last month, 20 Ministers gave 27 presentations to European Parliament Committees.

Why all this effort when we have so much to do at home with limited resources? I have no doubt that this 7th Presidency of the European Union is absolutely in Ireland’s interests. The kind of issues we are grappling with in Brussels, the barriers to creating jobs, freeing up investment, getting finance for our SMEs and helping our young unemployed, are precisely the kind of pressing issues which are on the Irish Government agenda. Europe's recovery is in Ireland's interests just as Ireland’s recovery is in Europe's.

Put it this way - I am quietly pleased with the Presidency so far. We are exactly where we want to be at this point. I say “quietly” because there is a lot of work ahead and we are getting right down to it based on strong groundwork and a good start.
As I mentioned earlier, last weekend was very significant in terms of our policy priorities. With the news on the promissory notes last week, somewhat lost in the news here was last weekend’s European Council meeting.

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Of course, there were highly important steps taken about the EU’s Budget for 2014-2020. Member State governments agreed unanimously on their position regarding the overall budget – set at €960 billion - and the breakdown across the main spending headings.

The task is now for us as Presidency to see it over the next hurdle – getting the European Parliament’s consent. I and colleagues in government have invested in the relationship-building necessary for constructive negotiations – indeed, earlier last week after chairing the General Affairs Council and meeting President Van Rompuy, I met with Parliament leaders to prepare the ground for the step we have to take.

I take nothing for granted about the Parliament’s consent but I do believe we have a budget that designed to help with lifting Europe out of a crisis - forward looking; supporting jobs and growth.

It reflects economic realities, making every euro count; but with the right focus.

New money for youth unemployment, including Ireland.

Emphasis on growth-enhancing areas, including research and innovation.

It provides for a strong CAP – supporting a strong agricultural base in Europe. A national priority secured.

It maintains solidarity with less developed Member States – boosting their potential for growth, employment and competitiveness.

It recognises the economic impact of the crisis – in Ireland’s case, a special allocation of €100 million for the BMW region.

And I particularly welcome the commitment to continued spending under the PEACE Programme - €150 million in all.

It is also a smart budget, recognising that things change over time – building in greater flexibility.

As I said, the Irish Presidency will now do its utmost to win Parliament’s consent – we will be good and fair partners in that process, moving on to negotiate up to 70 pieces of enabling legislation that will allow the budget to be mobilised on time from the start of next year.
Europe in the World: Trade / US trade

In line with the Irish Presidency’s focus on trade as a key to jobs and growth, last week’s European Council also set out ambitions for a series of strategic trade partnerships that together could add over 2% to the EU’s GDP, or €275 billion. This is more than the individual GDPs of many member states including Ireland.

It is also estimated that together these partnerships could lead to the creation of over 2 million new jobs across the EU, at a time when there are 26 million unemployed.

This week, the EU and President Obama agreed to pursue trade negotiations on what President Obama called in his State of the Union speech a “comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership”.

This is extremely good news as it is about two geographic areas that together represent half of the world’s GDP and 30% of its trade, already at €2 billion. This has been emphasised in the report of the EU-US High Level Group on Growth and Jobs, whose important report was issued on Wednesday. I am delighted it is getting off to a start under the Irish Presidency watch.

Securing a negotiating mandate for a comprehensive free-trade agreement with the United States was a top priority for me and for the Government when we established the jobs and growth agenda for the Irish Presidency of the EU last year. Now, we have the basis and the political backing to push ahead.

Coming on the back of last week’s agreement on the Multi-annual Financial Framework, this now opens up enormous untapped potential for a new phase in Europe’s economic relations with the US.

I anticipate that these negotiations will begin during the Irish Presidency, and we will of course make the most of Ireland’s close relationship with the US to get talks on the mandate off to a good start. I look forward to engaging in constructive dialogue with our US colleagues as we begin working on this together.

Other external issues

As I said earlier, Ireland’s priorities beyond Europe’s borders are not limited to economic and trade issues. We are providing active support to High Representative Ashton in the task of strengthening the EU’s external policy effectiveness and coherence, and responding to major foreign policy and security challenges.

We are representing the EU in addressing global challenges including hunger, poverty and climate change.

The European Council had important discussions on the Arab Spring and on Mali last week and we are following up. Earlier this week, my colleague Joe Costello hosted EU Development Ministers in Dublin, where the EU reaffirmed its commitment to supporting peace and stabilisation efforts in Mali, including through continued
humanitarian aid and a gradual resumption of longer-term development assistance. Ministers also discussed a proposal that a donor conference to support Mali’s recovery would be convened. This was immediately followed by a discussion of the security situation in Mali and the wider Sahel region by EU Defence Ministers. Minister Shatter has indicated that he will bring proposals to Government shortly on Irish participation in the EU Military Training Mission in Mali – a mission which is a very important and concrete element of the Union’s overall response to the crisis in that country.

While closer to home, the Presidency is working intensively to advance enlargement and support states in their various stages of preparation for EU membership. Croatia, of course, is on track to join the Union as its 28th member on 1 July.

Legal dimensions of the EU – treaty change debate, the UK, etc

As I address you here in the Law Faculty, I know that EU law is naturally an area of great interest. In many ways, EU law and EU legislation get a bad rap in the public domain. Generally perceived as rigid and putting obstacles in the path of progress, the EU’s regulatory reputation needs fixing. I don’t disagree with that, but I am convinced that the clear and strong legal framework on which the Union has been built will be critical to the future progress at political and economic level. There is always a risk of throwing baby out with the bathwater – let’s take care not to go in that direction at the European level.

The Irish Presidency is about concrete results for people which can and should be delivered quickly. Sometimes, the so-called faceless Eurocrats can appear to be overly invested in process and legal or institutional structures. Yes, they matter, but the urgency to deliver stability, jobs and growth is greater still. It is in that spirit that the Irish Presidency is working with the European Union, to meet the immediate needs of our populations across Europe. But that does not mean that we will not be relying on the robust legal basis of Union law in the future – indeed, the great love affair with Treaty change has always been a mystery to me.

To inject large-scale treaty change into the debate now as the Union is trying to secure stability is questionable. That said, we have no fear of reform where it adds value and President Van Rompuy has been careful in how he has managed his debates on the next steps for Economic and Monetary Union.

We have had of course the much-awaited speech by Prime Minister Cameron. I agree with Presidents Van Rompuy and Barroso that in fact many of the issues he raises can be dealt with through the normal legislative process – short, perhaps, of wholesale repatriation of powers.

Prime Minister Cameron has seen that he can still do business in a way he can defend in his own media and parliament – the compromise achieved on the EU Budget last week was one he signed up to just as we and 25 other Member States did. Likewise the UK is there at the heart of important debates on issues from the single market to a
meaningful response to the situation in Mali. I hope that will long be the case. I believe that the UK needs Europe and that Europe needs the UK.

**Conclusion / Cork links**

Finally, Chairman, I might come back to where we are today. I am speaking now in a centre of great learning in terms of law and EU law. I am speaking in a University with a proud record in international engagement, including academic and research partnerships.

We have of course the Tyndall Institute, an icon of Irish-based centres for innovative international research and a symbol of the success of EU research supports. It’s no accident, perhaps, that the man who is chairing Research Ministers in this Presidency is my colleague Sean Sherlock. He will work to secure agreement on Horizon 2020, the next multiannual research framework programme, as the core item on his agenda.

From research to medical devices to the potential for growth from our resources on land and at sea, we will be drawing inspiration and expertise from this region as we conduct our Presidency – and indeed beyond our Presidency.

I would like to leave good time now to take questions and engage in a good discussion with you.

Thank you.