Address by Lucinda Creighton T.D., Minister of State for European Affairs of Ireland, to City University of New York  
‘The State of the European Union’  
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

“Someday, following the example of the United States of America, there will be a United States of Europe”.

With slightly unnerving prescience, so wrote George Washington in a letter to the Marquis de Lafayette in the last throws of the 18th Century, some 200 years ago.

In the intervening period, there have been over 130 separate conflicts, civil and inter-State, including two World Wars, both of which began in the cradle of Europe and which between them alone accounted for the death of 80 million people (that’s one quarter of the population of the United States).

These are truly terrifying statistics which are not the subject of historical conjecture, but the very real and recent past. It is because of this past that the European Union is, and always has been, first and foremost about peace: achieving it, preserving and building on it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here today to talk with you about the European Union, as Presidency of the Council of the European Union, as Irish Minister for European Affairs and as a passionate European citizen.
Before I begin, I’d just like to thank Dr. Kaufmann [Director of the Centre] and the European Union Studies Centre here at the City University for inviting me here today to speak.

I don’t propose to delve into the intricacies of the workings of the Europe Union – I am sure you are all very familiar with comitology, co-decision, ordinary legislative procedure and subsidiarity (!).

I would propose instead to touch on perhaps the more fundamental questions of what European Union is today; its importance; the challenges facing the Union and my thoughts on how these might be overcome.

In doing so, I hope that this will provide you with a perspective on a truly unique model of governance in a globalised, multilateral world and will leave you with piqued curiosity regarding the importance of what Hilary Clinton termed “a miracle” [in an address at the European Parliament in 2009].

Earlier this month, on the 9th May to be precise, all 27 Member States of the EU, plus candidate and prospective candidate countries, celebrated what is known as ‘Europe Day’.

9th May 1950 is regarded as the moment when the concept of a ‘United Europe’ came into being in the form of a declaration delivered by the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman.

That Declaration spoke of cooperation and solidarity among the Nations of Europe to ensure that the horrors which beset the Continent as a result of recidivism and rampant nationalism could never occur again.

It was hard, cold economic real politik which bound Europe together in the initial stages – by pooling resources and removing economic barriers significant mutual gains could realised.

Though economics was the catalyst for change, the genesis of the European Union was about much more than that.
Never before had such a supranational Union come into being with equality between parties and a commitment to democratic governance, human rights and the market economy at its core.

The Institutions and systems of governance which sprang up in the aftermath of the Schuman Declaration were unique and bespoke to the needs of a fledging Union of Nation States, each pooling sovereignty for the common good.

The then European Community, and that moniker still holds true as the contemporary EU really is a community of European peoples, looked West to the US and there found inspiration, support and encouragement.

Schuman spoke of the “European federation”, taking his cue from the federal model which had been in practice in the US, but tailoring it to fit the requirements of a ‘Federation of Nation States’.

The founding Treaty of the European Community, the Treaty of Paris, was the first time that the concept of ‘supranationalism’ had been put in practical effect and thus the precedent was set for how Europe would develop its governance.

I wanted to touch on the history of the origins of the EU because it highlights two important points which are, I believe, crucial to any understanding of what the EU is, is not and where it is going:

1. Whilst the EU drew on, and continues to draw inspiration from, models of governance throughout the world, it is wholly unique. There are no direct comparisons and thus the Members States of the EU need to constantly adapt, creating new structures and new methodologies. In a sense, the EU is, and probably always will be, a dynamic, ever changing entity.

2. The EU was conceived as having a federal framework and the European project, in my view, is a federal project. I will touch on this point a little later.

This history also serves to highlight that the European Union is young – only sixty three years. In comparison, the US, on the other hand, is 237 years.
Though young, we have accomplished much. We have created a Union of 27, soon to be 28 Nation States. We have created a single market of over 500 million people with a GDP of $15 trillion (broadly equivalent to the US GDP) and an EU-US trading relationship worth over $700 billion per year. The EU also donates over $69 billion per year in development aid – working with developing nations and global partners, like the US, to eradicate poverty, disease and child mortality.

More important than all of that, however, is that we have created lasting, sustainable peace on a Continent that was torn apart by war for much of its existence.

Europeans travel freely, trade freely and live freely throughout the Union.

Through the Enlargement process, we support and encourage our neighbours in their reforms and ensure that democratic governance, a respect for human rights and the rule of law remains paramount.

The EU has, in a very short period, become a vital component of international relations and multilateralism.

Since 2009, with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the Union has been represented in foreign relations and external affairs by a High Representative – a role which has already paid dividends in ensuring that the EU speaks with one voice in the international arena.

This will be of even more importance with further reforms of the United Nations and the United Nations Security Council.

The European Union and the United have become critical partners, allies and friends.

As an Irish representative of the EU Presidency, I hold that friendship even more dearly. Which is why I am so pleased that, during our term, the EU and US agreed to open negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

When complete, the TTIP will be the largest bilateral trade deal ever negotiated, yielding significant gains for individuals and businesses on both sides of the Atlantic.
However, in the midst of this good news, we cannot easily forget the enormous challenges which we still face. Whilst the European Union has reacted to the economic and banking crisis with innovative and decisive reforms, much work remains to be done regarding their implementation.

Strong political leadership is required across the board in driving through the necessary measures to ensure that the entire Union can emerge from fiscal rectitude in a stronger, more stable and more sustainable position.

The Irish Presidency has been solidly focussed on delivering on these.

We have been working tirelessly to secure the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014 – 2020, and to gain agreement on the key measures necessary to implement a true banking union and to break the vicious circle between bank and sovereign debt.

None of these measures can happen in isolation.

The world in which we live in becoming increasingly globalised, interconnected and inter-dependent. Our relations which each other have become symbiotic. In such a world, where problems are multilateral, so too must be the solutions.

And it is sadly not just the economy which requires our attention. The very foundations on which our societies are built – the pillars of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights – have also been shaken.

Our citizens have become disillusioned with our methods of governance bringing into being the spectre of democratic accountability and legitimacy.

We need to ensure that our citizens not only have a voice, but that it is heard and acted upon. We need to put the citizen back at the centre of everything we do.

The interests of the people needs be our motivation. Yes, getting the global economy back on track is critical for without it we cannot create employment and growth. But we must not allow ourselves to be shackled by the constraints of unbridled free
market liberalism. The market will not look after our citizens – they rely on their elected leaders for that.

Democracy is, of course, a two way process. Citizens need to engage, participate and be active for democracy to work. Governance does not happen in a vacuum.

It requires collaboration, discourse and action.

This is why 2013 has been designated as ‘European Year of Citizens’, during which there will be a series of high-level dialogues throughout the EU on what it means to be European and the future of Europe. The first of these dialogues was held in Dublin in January with Commissioner Reding and I.

This conversation regarding democratic accountability is not new – indeed the issue is perennial in any discourse on the European Union and is a permanent feature of many a European Studies programme, as I am sure you are aware (!).

It is, however, of crucial importance. I chose this issue as the topic for discussion at an informal meeting of European Affairs Ministers which I hosted at the start of our Presidency and, I have to say, that my concern was shared by all my Ministerial colleagues.

There is a growing recognition that if the European Union is to survive, it must not lose sight of what the Union is and what it stands for: it is a Union of people, not just economies.

This is why I consider that the future of the European Union lies in the creation of a ‘Federation of Nation States’.

The Member States of EU, as we move invariably and irrevocably towards a deeper and more integrated Union, must pool more sovereignty to enable the Union to function efficiently; to respond to crisis situations effectively and swiftly; and to implement the reforms needed to realise our full potential.

The motto of the European Union is “united in diversity”; the inscription on the Seal of the United States reads, “E Pluribus Unum” (out of many, one). When the Solemn
Declaration on European Union was signed in 1983, it stated the aim of creating an “ever closer union”.

We should be guided by these mottos and aims. The unity of many in one model of governance – a federal system for our 27 Member States, which will also accommodate further enlargement – is the future.

It is the future because cooperation and solidarity are what will underpin our success and ensure that when challenges, such as those which we face today, arise, we can overcome them together, hand clasped over hand.

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