



CONFEDERATION OF IRISH INDUSTRY

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Member of UNICE — the voice of European Industry

PRESS RELEASE

**Address by Liam Connellan, Director General,
Confederation of Irish Industry at CII Cork Regional
Meeting, Fitzpatrick's Silver Springs Hotel, on
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IRELAND IN THE NEW EUROPE - A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE, DYNAMISM AND EXPANSION

Ireland can look forward to the prospect of European Union with increasing confidence in its ability to participate actively in the creation of a more competitive, dynamic and caring community which will be an expanding zone of stability in a turbulent world. Irish industry has shown remarkable progress since we joined the European Community. Our economy has grown more rapidly than in previous decades, and has become more diversified and integrated with that of mainland Europe. Irish products are now sold in all the major cities of the Continent. The market share of Irish products has been steadily increasing, and they are now regularly available on supermarket shelves all over Europe.

These achievements encourage us to have a vision of how we can play an ever more active role in the European Community. It is a vision which comprises the removal of all barriers to communications, and a confidence in our ability to compete more effectively when these conditions are met. The pace of job creation in Ireland since the Single European Act, removing non-tariff

barriers, has been five times greater than in the previous fifteen years. But there are still many other barriers to be overcome.

For example, the building of Trans-European Networks linking all member states through improved transport, energy and telecommunications systems will greatly improve the competitiveness of the Irish economy. I would like to take an example in the field of transport. Earlier this week I travelled the 280 miles from Paris to Lyon on the TGV high speed train in two hours. Should we not envisage, in time, the construction of a similar high speed rail link which would cut the time to travel from Belfast/Dublin/Cork to two hours, and in turn, connect with a ferry and high speed rail link to Holyhead/London/Paris? There are plans to create a complete European network of high speed rail links over the next 20 years. Ireland must participate fully in these developments which will revolutionise the economic geography of the island, and of the European Continent.

In the same way we have seen substantial improvement in our primary road network over the last five years which have been funded by the European Community. But there remains a massive task to bring its quality fully up to the best European standards. Better roads are a fundamental prerequisite for regional development.

Similar examples could be cited in the areas of energy, and telecommunications where there are plans to develop integrated European networks.

A greater emphasis on raising education and training levels further will increase the capacity of people working in Irish business to buy and sell products and services to their counterparts across the Continent. Language barriers will be removed as an increasing number of people within the Community gain competence in communicating in two or three European languages.

The integration of the European market will create greater scope to attract mobile investment projects. Until now Europe has been

fragmented into twelve national markets many of which were protected from competition by different standards and public purchasing policies, with the result that small member states such as Ireland were unable to attract investment because of the limited size of their national markets. However, now that the restrictions have been lifted, industries are free to locate in any member state and to supply the total European market from it. Changes in technology and skill shortages in many parts of the Community have increased the mobility of industrial firms. As a result, the European Community today is an area where industrial projects move towards those regions which have an adequate supply of skilled people and a competitive infrastructure. These developments offer a considerable opportunity for a country such as Ireland which places a high priority on improving the supply of highly-qualified young people, has a very high involvement in international trade, has an openness to new ideas and a proven track record in improving its share of the European market.

Ireland has made enormous strides over the last 20 years in modernising its economy, and getting rid of the trappings of protectionism. Employment over the last five years has increased at an annual rate five times greater than in the previous fifteen years. Industrial productivity in Ireland is now fully up to European standards. Ireland's participation in Trans-European Networks in the fields of transport, energy, telecommunications and training which are highlighted in the new Treaty will enable this country to achieve a faster growth in output and a greater increase in employment than ever before. For its own part, Ireland can make a major contribution to the Community in its role as a gateway for investment from the United States, and as a window which opens out to a diaspora of 70 million of Irish extraction. Ratification of the Treaty on European Union will enable this country to make substantial further progress in making the island a centre of excellence, of dynamism and expansion within a Europe which will itself be a zone of prosperity, expansion and stability.

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