

PAPER PRESENTED BY LIAM CONNELLAN C.I.I.

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HOW IRISH INDUSTRY CAN INFLUENCE DECISIONS TAKEN IN BRUSSELS

Ireland has 1.2% of the population of the enlarged Community, and 0.6% of the wealth. Irish industry can be greatly affected by decisions taken in Brussels whether these decisions relate to competition, incentives to industry, taxation or worker participation on boards. It is clear that we cannot be passive acceptors of policies emanating elsewhere but must play our full part - and more if possible - to ensure that the policies which emerge will assist our industrial development.

Let us look at how decisions on regulations and directives are made. There are three major stages :

1. Preparatory phase when proposal is prepared
2. Discussion on the draft proposal
3. Decision by Council of Ministers

At the preparatory stage of a proposal affecting industry an expert group within the Commission will prepare a working document, and consult directly with industrial representative organisations. These may include UNICE, which is the Confederation of Confederations within the Community, or specialised sectoral organisations varying from the Textiles Federations to the Margarine Manufacturers Associations. In all the Commission recognises formally about 200 different industrial consultative organisations.

The intergovernmental groups from departments of industry and commerce are also invited to comment at this preparatory stage. Both the industrial organisations, and civil service groups will check back to their members in the nine countries for comment. Having received these representations the Commission will eventually prepare a proposal.

Irish industry therefore is involved at the same stage as our civil servants in commenting on draft legislation - providing we are part of the recognised European negotiating associations, federations and confederations, and we have no choice but to be. Generally Ireland has equal representation with other countries on these committees. The impact of the Irish representations will be a function of the quality of the case prepared and the personal ability of the Irish representative when he attends meetings.

The C I I is a member of UNICE, most of its Federations and many Associations are linked with their European counterparts. The Irish Business Envoy employed by CII, FUE and the Chambers of Commerce is now operational in Brussels and is permanent representative to UNICE. I have no doubt that this level of permanent industrial representation is but a start, and will have to be extended considerably at much cost to Irish industry over the next few years.

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The second stage is to discuss the proposal. Draft proposals are sent to two institutions for comment. These are the Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament. The Economic and Social Committee is particularly important from the industrial viewpoint. It is the only Community Institution on which industry is directly represented. Ireland will have 9 members out of 144 (or 6.3%) from 1 January. These 9 members will be appointed by the Commission : - 3 from industry and commerce, 3 from the trade union movement, and 3 from agriculture, banking and the professions. The appointments will be made by the Commission on the basis of recommendations from the Irish Government. These are unpaid positions, members are appointed in their personal capacity but this is a very important body for Irish industry. The Commission pays particular attention to the opinions expressed by the Economic and Social Committee and modifies its proposals accordingly. There is a direct link between UNICE - representing the Confederations of industry - and the industrial group on the Economic and Social Committee. The recent Summit meeting extended the powers of the Economic and Social Committee so that it will now be able to initiate proposals, and send them to the Commission. The Economic and Social Committee will therefore have power, not only

to comment on proposals coming from the Commission, but also to initiate proposals itself.

Industry can also have an impact through T.D.'s who will be members of the European Parliament which is also consulted on draft proposals.

After the consultative process the Commission amends the proposals, and sends them to the Council of Ministers for decision. This is the third stage. The relevant Irish Minister is a member of the Council - depending on the subject under discussion. The Council may have further examination carried out by the Committee of Permanent Representatives made up of the Ambassadors to the EEC, before finally passing the proposal as a regulation or directive.

There is, therefore, a fairly elaborate system for developing legislation and community policy regarding industry. The important thing to realise is that industry has the opportunity to comment at a very early stage, through its Associations, Federations and Confederations; through representation on the Economic and Social Committee; through Government Departments; and through the elected representatives in the European Parliament, and the Council of Ministers. Ireland has only 1.2% of the Community population, but it usually has between 5% and 11% of the voice in decision making. The challenge is ours. We have gained the power. Can we use it effectively?

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