



PRESS RELEASE

The Confederation of Irish Industry

Speech by Mr Liam Connellan, Director General, Confederation of Irish Industry at North Dublin Rotary Luncheon on Tuesday, 26 April, 1977, at Crofton Airport Hotel at 1 p.m.

INTRODUCTION

Ireland has now been a member of the EEC for over four years. This afternoon I would like to assess briefly the impact which the EEC has had on our business life and to suggest some of the work which remains to be done.

The following figures indicate the present position :

The old EEC :

- * Has 75% of total EEC population
- * Has over 80% of the buying power of the European Community
- * Accounts for over 80% of European Investment in Ireland
- * Buys 36% of our exports to the other eight EEC countries compared with only 13% five years ago.
- * Supplies almost 30% of Irish imports from the other eight EEC countries
- * Supplies about 25% of Irish receipts from European tourism compared with less than 20% five years ago

It is clear from the above figures that Ireland's involvement with the original EEC has accelerated significantly in recent years. This contact is likely to deepen further over the next five years. It is likely to account for a greater part of our exports; for a greater portion of our trade and tourism.

The President of the European Commission recently pointed out that there are significant differences in living standards between the richest and poorest regions of many countries. For example, in the United States, Mississippi has only 57% of the income per head of Connecticut. On the other hand, within the EEC, Ireland's income per head is 46% that of Denmark. However, this European Community, which we are all seeking to build, is one which has accepted the goal of reducing regional imbalances. We know that this will not just happen.

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The dynamic for growth must come from within the society in each region. We have seen a similar process at work here in Ireland. Regions throughout Ireland have developed their own industries and attracted in new industry, frequently, because the people in those regions were alive to the opportunities available. On the other hand, other regions, often with greater geographic or population resources, have progressed much more slowly.

It is an opportune time to ask if our whole community is making sufficient effort to avail of the opportunities open to us.

I have no doubt that the pace of change in trade and tourism which has taken place in recent years can continue and can even be made to accelerate. A closer contact with all of the other member states of the Community will create new opportunities, provide new ideas, wider markets, more investment and a greater understanding between the people throughout the different regions of the Community. I believe that these factors are all closely linked to a more rapid pace of economic and social development.

I would suggest that we need to take action in three major areas :

- a) Trade : The growth in exports to the original EEC has been due, primarily, to the access gained for food products when we joined the Community and to the output of new industries which were set up in Ireland in order to supply the continental markets. The remainder of established industry in Ireland still has an exceptionally high concentration on the U.K. market because of difficulties in marketing on the continent, due to differences in taste, higher marketing costs, different languages and distribution systems. A greater concentration of effort is required in order to overcome these obstacles.

- b) Tourism : Last year, over 200,000 tourists came to Ireland from continental Europe. Each week, at present, two or three plane-loads of shoppers are coming to Dublin from continental cities. Let us try to communicate with these visitors in their own languages. We need promotional literature, announcements and sales staff in our shops, hotels, banks and factories, capable of communicating with visitors from countries such as France and Germany.

- c) Language Training : It does not seem impossible that, in five years time, 50% of Irish European exports and one third of Irish receipts from European tourism will be from the non-English speaking areas of Europe. How well are we fitted to cope with a change of this magnitude? It is clearly desirable that every person who wishes to do business with the original EEC should have, at least, one continental language. Yet, less than one fifth of Irish managers know a modern continental language, whereas, 80% of senior executives in Belgium and the Netherlands can speak English. It is doubtful if one person in ten in the whole population has a 'smattering' of a modern continental language.

Irish trade and tourism with the non-English speaking areas of Europe, which account for 80% of the buying power of the EEC, can grow significantly over the next five years. If we can communicate only in English, we will lose much of the opportunity to communicate and do business with visitors to Ireland and to market our products in these more affluent countries. There is need for a sustained commitment by everyone who wishes to trade with the original EEC to gain a working knowledge of, at least, one major continental language.

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