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The Confederation of Irish Industry

Speech by Liam Connellan, Director General, Confederation of Irish Industry, at the Official Opening of the German/Irish Chamber of Industry & Commerce, at 7.30 p.m. on Monday, 19 October 1981 at Jury's Hotel.

Today's official opening of the German/Irish Chamber of Industry & Commerce marks the culmination of a four year process. In 1977, I was invited by the Government of the Federal Republic to spend ~~two weeks~~ studying economic and industrial development in Lower Saxony, North-Rhine Westphalia and Bavaria. That visit brought home to me the very great potential that existed then, and still exists, for the development of trade and industry links between Ireland and the Federal Republic.

On my return to Ireland, I arranged the formation of a German/ Irish Association within the Confederation of Irish Industry to bring together the people from the industrial and commercial sector who had a particular interest in developing trade and industry links between our two countries. This move had the very strong support of the then Ambassador of the Federal Republic to Ireland, Gerhard Fischer. The group investigated such issues as transport, communications, industrial development, training, and language education.

However, after some time it was inevitable that we would look at similar organisations in other countries. In late 1978, we invited Herr Klaus Balzar, Director of the

German Chamber of Industry and Commerce in London, to visit us and outline the services provided by the Chamber in Britain.

Following this meeting it became clear that our objective should be to encourage the setting up of a German/Irish Chamber of Industry & Commerce which could draw on the very great knowledge and contacts of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce organisations in the Federal Republic, and that this should be an independent office, situated in Dublin, with its own full time staff.

The process of serious discussion then got under way. In July 1979, Herr Plass, the Director of German Chamber of Industry and Commerce Overseas Offices, visited Dublin for discussion on the feasibility of establishing a Chamber here.

The Confederation was pleased to offer some financial guarantees regarding membership in order to ensure that a German/Irish Chamber of Commerce & Industry would be set up in Dublin.

Towards the end of 1979, we had the opportunity of expressing our interest in this venture to Chancellor Schmidt during his visit to Dublin.- while recognising that the ultimate decision would be taken independently by Deutcher Industrie und Handelstag Headquarters in Bonn.

Finally, in January 1980, we received formal confirmation from Bonn that a decision had been taken to set up a Chamber in Dublin within a few months. Heinz-Jorg Schurig, Director of the Chamber, arrived in Dublin in May of last year and, since then, has been engaged in the preliminary

work of establishing the office. He has integrated extremely well into the Irish business community and, like so many earlier visitors, deserves fully the complimentary accolade that he "has become more Irish than the Irish". The Confederation was very pleased to have been able to offer him facilities at our offices, in Confederation House, during this start-up phase.

The Official Inauguration of the Chamber today marks the end of this preliminary phase. We will continue to support the activities of the Chamber in every way to ensure that trade and industrial links between Ireland and the Federal Republic will continue to grow. Over the last decade, Irish trade with the Federal Republic has expanded thirteenfold. Germany is now our third major trading partner. Trade with the Federal Republic almost doubled over the last three years. The base is larger and becoming more and more significant. I have no doubt that the formation of the German/Irish Chamber of Commerce and Industry will be a very significant catalyst in ensuring that this rapid rate of growth will continue.

On behalf of the Confederation of Irish Industry I wish to extend our sincere congratulations and good wishes, and to wish the Chamber every success in the years ahead.