

Check against delivery
“Conflict Prevention, the EU as Peacemaker”
Speech by the Tanaiste

Interparliamentary conference for CFSP and CSDP
Oireachtas, 24-25 March 2013

Fellow Parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Dublin.

As current Presidency of the EU, Ireland is hosting multiple meetings. This includes a very successful informal meeting of Foreign Ministers, the so-called “Gymnich” meeting, which I co-hosted with the High Representative last Friday and Saturday.

I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to be with you today. I value greatly the dialogue which we have with Parliamentarians, including the Chairpersons of Parliamentary Committees, across the Union. You contribute important experience and insight to the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy.

I would like to address you today on an aspect of the European Union’s work and potential to which I attach special importance. The European Union has, I believe, a powerful contribution to make to the search for peace and political accommodation in more troubled parts of our world. The Union in which we live today has been constructed in a continent which was ravaged by two world wars over the past century. Ours is a remarkable experience of successful conflict resolution, the building of lasting peace and consensus in a space which previously experienced centuries of enmity and division.

We on this island of Ireland have known conflict and have our own story to tell. Indeed, meeting today in the imposing setting of Dublin Castle, that history is not far from us. But over the past twenty years an ambitious and far-reaching peace process has brought lasting peace and stability to Northern Ireland and has transformed relations on this

island and with our nearest neighbour. The Good Friday Agreement, concluded some fifteen years ago, created a framework which respects separate political identities and traditions. It set up political structures which give expression to these differences and at the same time help to bridge them. There is possibly no greater example in the world today of successful conflict resolution. While more remains to be done by the political leaders in Northern Ireland, supported by the Irish and British Governments, to realize the full promise of the Good Friday Agreement, there is nevertheless a remarkable story to be told of a peace process which has profoundly affected the lives of everyone living on this island -- and which has also transformed the relations between Ireland and Britain.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For many citizens of our countries today, the eurozone crisis is probably the first connection they make with the European Union, the issue of greatest impact on their daily lives. The role of the Union as a force for good in the world -- using its history, values and international standing to strengthen peace and promote conflict resolution -- is easily overlooked. This role is central to the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy. Emerging from the destruction caused by two world wars, the Union brings former antagonists together in a partnership based on a common commitment to peace and the complete rejection of violent conflict. We have unique credentials as a maker and builder of peace and this strengthens the contribution the Union can make to conflict resolution efforts at the global level.

The peace and security enjoyed by citizens of the European Union today took decades of dedicated work, across the Union and within every EU member State. As John F Kennedy recognised, “*peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures...*”

The European Union is today much more than an association of states. We have created a new legal order which serves all citizens. We have left behind antagonistic relationships and created something

revolutionary, the free choice of states to share sovereignty. We have pooled our interests across many areas of life: from fish quotas through climate change to foreign policy. The EU embodies effective compromise, negotiated amongst equals. It has succeeded in replacing war with peace and enmity with solidarity.

Beyond its own borders, the EU has exported stability to its immediate neighbourhood. And it is working, through the CFSP and CSDP and the many other instruments at its disposal, to promote peace, stability and human rights in other parts of the world. It is the first regional organisation which has made a tangible contribution to peace and security outside its own region.

International appreciation for the role of the Union is, I am happy to say, growing. Last autumn the highest possible recognition of our efforts came with the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU for the consolidation of peace within and outside its borders.

We now face the burden, of course, of living up to this honour. The CFSP and CSDP provide the Union with a range of tools which help us to respond to the challenges of conflict resolution and crisis management and to make a real difference in the building and consolidation of peace around the world.

Turning now to the contribution which the EU can make to the prevention of conflict, one might say that our Union is itself conflict prevention in action -- based, as it is, on democratic values and on respect for human rights, justice and solidarity. There is much scope, however, to develop the tools and capacities available to the Union for conflict prevention elsewhere in the world.

As EU Presidency, Ireland is actively supportive of efforts to improve these capacities. There are plans for a conference involving the European Parliament, the EEAS and the Irish Presidency to be held in Brussels in May, which would look at "The EU as a Peacemaker". This conference would focus on the reinforcement of internal and external EU capacities, specifically in relation to mediation and dialogue. I hope that it will help to strengthen cooperation between the EEAS and other EU structures in this critically important area.

Mediation is based on the principle of consent from the parties to a

conflict. It is cost-effective and can be an extremely effective tool at all stages of inter-state and intra-state conflicts. We all agree that the EU needs robust tools in order to be able to respond to conflict; it is equally important, however, that it would have resources and capacities to prevent conflict developing in the first instance.

The EU has already had significant successes in this field: from high-level mediation by the High Representative in specific situations to the work of her Special Representatives and of EU Delegations who are supporting grassroots mediation capacity around the world. However, there is plenty of scope to do more and to find ways of reinforcing the EU's own conflict prevention capacity -- for example, through the secondment of qualified personnel to the relevant EU structures.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ireland contributes to this discussion from the perspective of a post-conflict society. As we approach the 15th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we look back proudly on the achievement of a peaceful settlement on this island which will endure. But we are also conscious of the considerable effort and investment in peace which are required on a daily basis.

I want to emphasise this: peace is a process rather than a single event. It calls for long-term patience, dedication and stamina. It requires mutual trust and partnership on an ongoing basis and often in the most trying of circumstances. It requires a willingness to be sensitive to the other party's concerns and to compromise for the greater good. It means working hard to extend the common ground and to reinforce the foundations on which the peace is built. This is never an easy process but requires constant effort to adjust to other perspectives, frequently perspectives which are diametrically opposed to one's own. As Desmond Tutu tells us: *"If you want to make peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies."*

Some of the lessons from our own peace process we found to be relevant to the tasks facing us during Ireland's Chairmanship of the OSCE last year. I was privileged to serve during 2012 as Chairman-

in-Office of the OSCE, the largest multilateral security organisation. This role enabled me and my colleagues to make a direct contribution to the search for peaceful settlements of the so-called “protracted conflicts” in the region covered by the OSCE. I was pleased that we were able to achieve some important progress in the “5+2” talks process relating to the Transdniestria issue. I also visited the three Southern Caucasus states last June to explore what scope there might be to promote resolution of the conflicts specific to that region. I followed in the footsteps, incidentally, of Audronius Ažubalis, the former Lithuanian Foreign Minister and my predecessor as Chair of the OSCE, who, I am delighted to hear, is with us here today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Returning to the European Union, I would like to mention three situations in which the EU is making a significant and visible contribution to conflict resolution and the building of peace.

Firstly, in Libya, the Union has been to the fore in the assistance it has been giving the new authorities as they work to build state capacity, to establish democratic institutions and to safeguard the progress made so far. Stability in Libya faces serious challenges -- with borders which are extremely difficult to manage, armed groups which have not yet reintegrated and the destabilising presence of illicit weapons. The EU wants to help the new Libyan authorities to confront these challenges. It will do so not only through a civilian CSDP mission which will arrive later this year to train the Libyan border authorities but also through a €30 million programme of activities which includes active support for dialogue and reconciliation.

Secondly, in the Somalia/ Horn of Africa region the Union has been implementing a “comprehensive approach” which has had a profound impact on the ground. The combination of EU instruments deployed there, including humanitarian, development and CSDP support, has helped to turn the situation round and to open up the prospect of peace for the region. Ireland is proud to provide the Force Commander for EUTM Somalia, Brigadier General Gerald Aherne, who is overseeing this mission in its work of providing training to the Somalian security

forces. We are also pleased that the European Commission has supported a project to facilitate local dialogue between non-state actors, the administration and the international community.

Third, in the case of Mali, the new EU Training Mission there will help to strengthen the capacity of the Malian authorities, including the provision of training in human rights and international humanitarian law. I am pleased that eight Irish Defence Forces personnel are participating in that mission as part of a joint British-Irish team.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me say in conclusion that Ireland in its Presidency role wishes to see real progress made towards a strengthening of the EU's capacities in the field of conflict prevention and resolution. The Union has been rightly recognized by the Nobel Committee for the contribution it is making to the search for global peace. We must work to ensure that it is equipped with the tools and instruments it needs to make an even greater contribution in future.

Thank you.