
Speech by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD, Enterprise Ireland / Ireland-Canada Chamber of Commerce Business Breakfast, Toronto, 21 August 2017

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Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning.
I would like to thank Neil Cooney, Enterprise Ireland and Rob McDonnell, Chamber of Commerce for their warm welcome, and indeed Ambassador Jim Kelly for his kind introduction.

Almost seventy years ago my forebear as Taoiseach, John A. Costello, announced on a visit to Canada that Ireland would formally become a Republic. On his return home, he spoke movingly in parliament about 'the feelings that unite us with Canada'. Discussing the incredible affection he was shown on his visit, he called it 'a measure of goodwill' which he found impossible to put into words, and said it was all because of the 'feelings of sympathy' which our two countries share. I have received a similar welcome on my many visits here and I thank you all for it. I'm delighted to be here in Toronto – a truly multicultural and cosmopolitan hub for business, finance, the arts and culture – one of the powerhouses of North America.

For us in Ireland the magnetic appeal of this great city is not a recent phenomenon; it goes right back to Toronto's earliest days, when she opened her arms and welcomed our emigrant sons and daughters in their thousands. This welcome has continued over the centuries, through good times and bad. This morning, I think we can look forward with justification to good times ahead, particularly in terms of the relationship between Ireland and Canada. Following our initial meeting in Dublin just a few short weeks ago, yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting Prime Minister Trudeau again. We had another excellent discussion on how we can take the Ireland-Canada bilateral relationship forward. We are both convinced that this is a genuine moment of opportunity for our two countries.

At a time when some nations have lost their sense of place and self-confidence in this inter-dependent world of ours, Ireland and Canada retain a strong and deep commitment to openness, multilateralism, individual freedom and free trade. Ireland's relationship with Canada is based on deeply-rooted cultural and people-to-people connections dating back hundreds of years.

Over two hundred and fifty years ago, Irish men fished the cod banks off the Newfoundland coast. While I doubt that our respective fishermen would have struck a formal trade deal back then, the Irish clearly made a lasting impression. Even today, that region in Newfoundland bears a distinctive Irish name: Talamh an Éisc, or the Fishing Ground.

In 1847 many Irish fled the Great Irish Famine and came here to start a new life. Despite the massive humanitarian crisis, the people of Canada responded with kindness and compassion. Instead of the politics of fear, we saw the way people could come together in adversity, to share in the suffering of strangers, to be united by optimism, and by the better parts of our nature.

A bond was created that has endured to the present. In Dublin we have the wonderful Rowan Gillespie sculpture, 'The Departure', remembering the Irish who had to leave. In Ireland Park we have Gillespie's companion piece, 'The Arrival', commemorating all those who started new lives here.

It is a message of hope that still resonates today, and which should inspire us all. Over the next 170 years the descendants of those Irish people worked to build the modern Canada, supported federation, and helped to create the democratic institutions that now thrive. You saved them, and they repaid the debt. Today 4.5 million Canadians claim Irish ancestry. The influence of this enormous Irish diaspora is evident in all walks of Canadian life, here in Toronto and throughout this remarkable country.

Whether abroad or at home, the Irish are recognised for our optimistic and outward-facing disposition. In fact, I would even suggest that this attitude towards others is key to our well-being, prosperity and security in an increasingly globalised and connected world.

Ireland has long been recognised as one of the most open trading economies in the world. Ours is a highly competitive, export-driven economy, which has recovered very strongly from the economic crisis of the last decade.

Over the last two years Ireland has been one of the fastest growing economies in Europe, with GDP growing by 5.1% in 2016, and forecast to grow by 4.3% this year. At 6.4%, unemployment is now back to levels last seen in 2008.

Our exports are performing particularly strongly. Enterprise Ireland client exports reaching €21.6bn euro or \$32bn Canadian dollars in 2016, growing by more than 6% year on year.

Notwithstanding our strong competitiveness and vigorous economic growth, Ireland today faces undoubtedly the greatest set of political and economic challenges in a generation. The decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union poses major economic and political challenges for us.

As you know, Ireland's key priorities in the Brexit negotiations include minimising the impact on our trade and economy, maintaining our strong bilateral trade with the UK; the Common Travel Area between our two countries; and the preservation of the hard won achievements of the Northern Ireland peace process. We are resolute in our determination that there can be no return to a physical border on the island.

Indeed, we want no new barriers to trade or movement at all. We should build bridges, not borders.

The fourth area of priority for us is to influence the future of the post-Brexit European Union. The future of the EU matters because we helped create it, and we recognise that it is our own future we are speaking about.

While we place great importance on our close links with the UK, and will continue

to work for the best possible outcome to the negotiations, Ireland will remain an active, influential and committed Member State of the EU.

EU membership has been a central factor in Ireland's structural, economic and social transformation over the past four decades.

The EU is not a barrier to trade with other parts of the world. It is an enabler of it. A case in point is CETA, the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement. On this day next month, September 21st, CETA comes into effect on a provisional basis. More than 98% of the tariff barriers to trade between Canada and the EU, including Ireland, will be removed.

For the first time, our procurement markets will be opened to each other, regulatory barriers will be eased and market access rules will be made more transparent.

This will help unlock the enormous untapped potential for greater trade and investment between Ireland and Canada.

As most of you in this room know only too well, Canada is an increasingly large market for Irish companies. To put it in context, Canada is – in value terms – now a top 10 export market. Outside of Europe, the US and China, Canada is our largest indigenous export market.

Irish firms are succeeding in Canada in sectors as diverse as enterprise software, e-learning, retail technologies, digital health, fashion, agri-food, the internet of things, fintech and advance construction products.

I'm delighted to see representatives of many such companies here today. I congratulate you on your success – which not only boosts Irish exports, but translates into practical economic impact in Canada, with over 6,000 people employed here by EI client companies.

Trade is a two way street. Canadian investment in Ireland is estimated today at \$14 billion (Canadian) dollars. Foreign Direct Investment from Canada to Ireland has been buoyant in recent years and at the end of 2016, IDA Ireland had 28 Canadian companies in its client portfolio, employing over 3,100 people in Ireland. We plan to grow this inward investment significantly in the years to come. Our efforts will undoubtedly be helped further by the entry into force of CETA.

Announcement of Ireland's Global Footprint 2025

As I mentioned earlier, Ireland is emerging from what has been a lost decade for many of our citizens, and it is clear to me that we are emerging with a greater sense of self-confidence and ambition for what we can do as a country.

That national self-confidence requires that we always be ambitious, visible and active in promoting the interests of our nation on the international stage.

Everyone here will be aware of the work our Embassy and agency personnel do in carrying out that mission, and I am hugely proud of that work.

That work is central to ensuring that while we are a small country at the geographic periphery of Europe, our actions and engagement mean that we can truly be considered an island at the centre of the world. To fulfil that ambition we need to greatly increase our international presence.

Therefore I am pleased to announce, here in Toronto, my intention to double the Team Ireland footprint overseas by 2025. This means new and augmented diplomatic missions and as well as significantly increased resources for our investment, tourism, cultural and food agencies overseas.

Earlier this month, I asked my colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Simon Coveney to begin consideration of what this means for our diplomatic missions, and later this year government will approve the specifics of what Ireland's doubled presence overseas will look like in 2025.

This new plan, Ireland's Global Footprint 2025, will set out milestones between now and then, and will clearly articulate the benefits from this initiative: greater investment, tourism and trade; stronger links with our diaspora and increased cultural exchange.

I think it is opportune to announce this in Canada. As I mentioned earlier, it is not the first time that a major statement on Ireland's future has been made here. More pertinently, this is a country where we really do get huge value for limited resources and where I – and I imagine everyone in this room – can clearly see how what the benefits would be from an increased diplomatic and agency presence.

Conclusion

To conclude this morning, let me encourage you to reach out and speak with our agency and Embassy staff, and join us in building stronger business and trade links between our countries, which will enhance the success and prosperity of the Irish and Canadian peoples.

Back in 1948 John A. Costello asserted that while we are a small country, 'we wield an influence in the world far in excess of what our mere physical size and the smallness of our population might warrant'. In his vision we were a big nation in terms of our 'devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation between nations, founded on international justice and morality'.

Today, in the twenty-first century - with all the challenges we face - we have an even greater 'task and a duty' to perform.

So let's do it.

Thank you.

Agus go raibh maith agaibh.

ENDS