



THE FIRST PRESIDENCY

IRELAND'S PRESIDENCY OF
THE COUNCIL, JANUARY-JUNE 1975.

by Tony Brown

PART TWO
THE FIRST EUROPEAN COUNCIL,
10-11 MARCH 1975

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Ireland's Presidency of the Council, January-June 1975.

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Introduction

This is the second of three papers written as Ireland holds the EU Presidency for the seventh time. They seek to tell the story of the first Irish Presidency, in the first six months of 1975, in terms of facts and figures, gleaned from a wide range of sources, including insights and commentary from those who participated in the events and from academic and media circles.

The papers cover:

1. The buildup to the Presidency in the opening years of Ireland's membership of the European Community;
2. The central event of the Presidency, the first formal meeting of the European Council; and
3. The significant events and issues over the six months of the Presidency.

A separate volume contains the texts of the key background documents from the Commission and Council and from the Presidency.

The papers are written from the personal viewpoint of someone who was closely involved in the preparation and delivery of one part of that significant period in Ireland's early experience of life in the European Community. As Special Advisor to the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Social Welfare, Brendan Corish T.D., and to his Parliamentary Secretary, Frank Cluskey T.D. between 1973 and 1977, I devoted a large amount of my time to European issues and developments, in particular to the adoption and implementation of the 1973 Social Action Programme, introduced and promoted by the first Irish member of the European Commission, Vice President Patrick Hillery (for more information see Brown, 2013). I was actively involved in a number of aspects of the 1975 Presidency.

The Background

The founding Treaties make no reference to the European Council and, while meetings of the Heads of State or Government of the Member States were held periodically, no specific role was assigned to such gatherings. The first meeting of the Community leaders took place in Paris in 1961 and further meetings were held in Bonn (1961), Rome (1967), The Hague (1969), Paris (1972), Copenhagen (1973) and Paris (1974). The meeting in October 1972 was historic insofar as it brought together the leaders of the original six Member States and those of the three states which were about to

accede to the Community on 1 January 1973. The extensive Conclusions of the Paris Summit set out an ambitious policy agenda for the enlarged Community (Brown, 2012).

The first Summit meeting after the enlargement of the Community took place in Copenhagen in December 1973, under the first Danish Presidency. It concentrated on two main issues:

- the implications of the Yom Kippur War in the Middle East for world energy markets and for the economic health of the Community, with particular reference to the employment situation. The Commission was asked to make proposals for the Common Market for Energy. The Foreign Ministers of several Arab countries arrived in Copenhagen during the days of the Summit and held discussions with the Danish Presidency of the Council.
- the need to move ahead with the agenda agreed at Paris in 1972, with a particular emphasis on the social dimension of the European project. A Declaration on Europe's Identity was adopted which addressed the common heritage of the Nine, the degree to which they were already acting together in relation to the rest of the world and the dynamic nature of European unification. The text is included as Appendix 3 in the Appendices volume (Heads of State or Government, 1973).

The need to address this broad agenda, made more difficult by the evolving economic situation, led to high-level discussions in 1974 on the working of the Community institutions, led by the new French Government of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. His Foreign Minister, Jean Sauvagnargues, was charged with promoting a number of ideas on the future of the Community designed to bypass the institutions – and the Commission in particular – by creating an intergovernmental system, centred on the Community's 'Big Three' (France, Germany and the United Kingdom). Giscard d'Estaing issued an invitation to the Heads of State or Government to meet in Paris in December 1974 to discuss these ideas.

The initial concept of the European Council was to make it as informal as possible. Willy Brandt liked to think in terms of *Kamingesprächen*, fireside chats. The motto of his successor, Helmut Schmidt, was "*keine Papiere, keine Beamten*" (no papers, no officials). The idea was to make meetings of the European Council as different as possible from normal Council meetings. Council rules of procedure would not apply, the composition was different, there was no legal basis in the treaties: this was a place where power was exercised and not one where legal procedures were implemented.

Even its decisions were issued 'only' as the Presidency's conclusions. In a way this approach suited everybody: the more majestic members of the European Council did not want their activity to be assimilated in any way to the day-to-day haggling of COREPER and Council, the more Community-minded wanted the working of the European Council to be as distant as possible from the institutional framework of the

Community, although the President of the Commission was always a full member of the European Council.

At a Foreign Ministers Council in October 1974, Sauvagnargues put forward a formal proposal for the creation of a 'European Council' which would meet regularly, at least twice yearly and which would have considerable decision-making powers. In his memoir, Dr. Garret FitzGerald wrote that the proposal "was in fact an initiative concocted between the 'Big Three': a move towards the '*Directoire*' or Directorate that some of us had begun to fear." FitzGerald and other Ministers advanced serious criticism of the proposal arguing that it undermined the basic Community system and the balances in that system which were vital for the smaller Member States. They succeeded in establishing an ad hoc group of Political Directors with the task of advancing the French proposals in a form acceptable to everyone. In this context the French began to retreat from the more controversial elements of their proposal. "As a result in the weeks that followed the work of preparation for the Paris summit went ahead reasonably satisfactorily from our point of view both in the ad hoc committee and at Ministerial level" (FitzGerald, 1991).

Of great importance in this rapidly changing situation was the position of the Commission which had been a major concern of Garret FitzGerald. The Commission President, François-Xavier Ortoli, commented that the decision to establish the European Council "represents a major change in spirit and may, if we are not careful, shake the institutional structures set up by the Treaties...the Commission must adapt its modus operandi to the new system in which ideas will come from the top. It must insure against the risks involved – for risks are involved – by converting Member States to its conviction that the real answer to the major problems facing them lies in the collective Community solutions implicit in the construction of Europe. It must make vigorous and incisive use of its power of initiative when choices that are decisive for Europe's future are being made. It must not betray its own ideals" (Commission, 1975).

The Paris Summit of 9-10 December 1974 reached important decisions on a number of major policy concerns. The extensive Summit Communiqué is reproduced in the separate Appendices volume.

The Heads of State or Government agreed that, "recognising the need for an overall approach to the internal problems involved in achieving European unity and the external problems facing Europe", the 'European Council' would meet three times a year. Preparation for these meetings would be by the Foreign Ministers and the Commission would play a full role and would "exercise the powers vested in it". Secretariat functions would be carried out "with due regard for existing practices and procedures." The main concerns of FitzGerald and others had been met and the new series of meetings would not constitute a threat to the established 'Community Method'.

Other key results of the Paris meeting included:

- The setting up, from 1 January 1975, of a Regional Development Fund, initially concentrated in three Member States – Italy, the UK and Ireland – and with an initial budget of 1.3 billion units of account or £0.542 billion, of which Ireland would be eligible for 6 per cent.
- A decision in principle to reintroduce qualified majority voting for Council decisions, which had been replaced by a unanimity rule in the face of a stand-off between French President Charles de Gaulle and the other leaders.
- A decision that the direct election of the European Parliament would take place in 1978 or thereafter. The UK and Denmark were unable to make a firm commitment on this but did not seek to prevent the other Member States from making progress.
- Agreement that the UK request for a renegotiation of the terms of its membership should be addressed by setting up a ‘correcting mechanism’ to “prevent the possible development of situations unacceptable for a Member State and incompatible with the smooth working of the Community.”
- Agreement on the need to develop a meaningful Energy Policy and to pursue a greater convergence of economic policies.
- Agreement that steps should be taken to plan for making the Community a passport union and for the introduction of a uniform passport within the Community.
- Agreement that the goal of ‘European Union by 1980’ set at the 1972 Paris Summit should gain impetus. The Belgian Prime Minister, Leo Tindemans, was asked to produce a report, before the end of 1975, on the form the Union should take.

(Heads of State or Government, 1974)

Just three weeks after the Paris Summit, Ireland assumed the Presidency of the Council and Garret FitzGerald “soon found myself deep into preparations, physical and political, for the first meeting of the European Council, which, ironically in view of my opposition to the establishment of this institution, was to be held in Dublin” (FitzGerald, 1991).

Speaking in the European Parliament just weeks before the first European Council meeting, the President of the Commission, François-Xavier Ortoli, stated that the decision to hold regular Council meetings at Head of Government level provided new opportunities but also involved some risks:

“The decision may respect the letter of our system but it represents a major change in spirit and may, if we are not careful, shake the institutional structures set up by the Treaties to their foundations...”

“We must therefore take a chance and shorten the odds. But this means that the Commission must be true to its profound political vocation. The

Commission must adapt its modus operandi to the new system in which ideas will come from the top. It must insure against the risks involved – for risks are involved – by converting Member States to its conviction that the real answer to the major problems facing them lies in the collective Community solutions implicit in the construction of Europe. It must make vigorous and incisive use of its power of initiative when choices which are decisive for Europe’s future are being made. It must not betray its own ideals.”

(Ortoli, 1975)

Thus, the initial European Council took place as debate continued about the concept and about its compatibility with the established working methods of the Communities. The guarantees and commitments given at the 1974 Paris Summit had to be accepted at ‘face value’ but it was clear that the outcome of the first such meeting would be closely scrutinised.

European Council, March 1975

The meeting was scheduled for 9-10 March 1975 in Dublin Castle, and the physical preparations to which Dr. FitzGerald made reference included a programme of work designed to turn the historic Castle into a suitable, and user-friendly location for a meeting which was certain to attract major media attention from across Europe, and beyond. The great St Patrick’s Hall was designated as the meeting place for the European Council, with the historic banners of the Knights of St Patrick and the British Royal Standard hanging overhead and with the magnificent painted ceiling and gilded pillars providing a fine setting. Other parts of the Castle were renovated to provide rooms for other meetings. For example, George’s Hall – constructed in 1911 for the last royal visit before Irish independence, that of King George V and Queen Mary – was adapted for use for informal Council meetings.

A Press Room was located on the floor directly under St Patrick’s Hall, to the acknowledged convenience of the visiting journalists and commentators. Favourable comment was forthcoming about the telecommunications arrangements, offering instant contact with capitals. This was a real achievement in a country where, in 1975, the telephone system was more usually a subject of frustration and satire. The contribution of the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, Dr. Conor Cruise O’Brien, and of the Head of the Government Information Bureau, Muiris Mac Chonghail, was mentioned in much more positive terms than might have been the case in respect of other, more controversial, occasions.

The Agenda for the Dublin European Council covered the following issues:

- UK membership of the Community: ‘The Unacceptable Situation and the Correcting Mechanism’;
- New Zealand dairy produce;

- Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe;
- Energy policy;
- Cyprus;
- Raw materials and the developing countries;
- World economic situation and the Community's economic and social situation.

The European Council assembled at Dublin Castle on 10 March 1975 with the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, in the chair.

The National Delegations at the first European Council were:

Ireland	Liam Cosgrave, Taoiseach; Dr. Garret FitzGerald, Foreign Minister
Belgium	Leo Tindemans, Prime Minister; Renaat van Elsende, Foreign Minister
Denmark	Anker Joergensen, Prime Minister; Knud Andersen, Foreign Minister
France	Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, President; JV Sauvagnargues, Foreign Minister
Germany	Helmut Schmidt, Chancellor; Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Foreign Minister
Italy	Aldo Moro, Prime Minister; Mariano Rumor, Foreign Minister
Netherlands	Joop den Uyl, Prime Minister; Max van der Stoep, Foreign Minister
Luxembourg	Gaston Thorn, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs
UK	Harold Wilson, Prime Minister; James Callaghan, Foreign Secretary

The Commission was represented by Francois-Xavier Ortoli (President) and Wilhelm Haferkamp (Vice President responsible for Economic and Financial Affairs).

It was clear that there were two issues of substance – the UK renegotiation and the related New Zealand question. Garret FitzGerald commented that “after a well-choreographed ritual dance of negotiation between the principal Heads of Government, solutions were found to these outstanding problems and the Council was judged to have been a success. It was subsequently contrasted with immediately following European Councils, which, as it happened, did not have any significant issues into which they could get their teeth” (Dooge and Barrington, 1999).

Garret FitzGerald’s memoir contains a personal reflection on one aspect of European summits – the after-dinner discussion with the Foreign Ministers joining the Heads of Government for coffee. At Dublin Castle the subject for consideration was the progress of the negotiations within the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. “Wilson, Schmidt and Giscard d’Estaing all showed a wish to bring these negotiations to a conclusion that summer, in case Brezhnev should retire and be replaced by a leader less committed to even a limited process of détente. Moreover, all three expressed suspicion that a proposal just received from Moscow for an end-of-June conference might be the result of a secret agreement between Kissinger and Gromyko. As on many subsequent occasions, I was struck by the fact that the discussion on such matters by Heads of Government seemed to be informed by relatively few hard facts and to be, frankly, somewhat amateurish; but perhaps on relaxed occasions like these, without papers, it could hardly have been otherwise” (FitzGerald, 1991).

While no formal Communiqué was issued after the European Council the Taoiseach, as President, made a statement to a press conference (text reproduced in Part Four) and the Commission produced a more detailed summary of the outcome in respect of each agenda item. Much space was devoted to the detailed results of the deliberations on the UK and on New Zealand which are dealt with in greater detail below. On Energy, the leaders agreed that the Community should make intensive preparations for the International Energy Conference, proposed by the French President, by establishing a high-level *ad hoc* committee of national representatives and Commission experts.

They reaffirmed the will of the Nine to pursue policies of détente and cooperation in Europe through constructive engagement with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The situation in Cyprus was discussed and the Nine made a commitment to support the efforts of the United Nations to make progress on negotiations (Commission, 1975).

On the day after the European Council, the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, reported on its outcome to Dáil Éireann, characteristically opening by saying that he “would like to take a little of the time of the House to give a brief outline to members of what transpired over the last two days...”

His presentation followed the terms of the statement he made immediately after the conclusion of the Council's deliberations but included a number of comments on the possible implications for Ireland of the decisions taken. He placed particular emphasis on the importance of the solution to the British question achieved by the agreement to apply the correcting mechanism outlined by the Commission in its Communication 'The Unacceptable Situation and the Correcting Mechanism.' He went on to explain that "because of the number of variables involved – like the rate of growth of the country concerned and of the Community as a whole, the state of its balance of payments and the composition of its trade over a period of years – it is quite impossible to indicate with any useful degree of accuracy how this new arrangement will affect Ireland. I can say, however, that whether we are beneficiaries or contributors under the arrangements, the amounts involved will be insignificant in comparison even with the monetary benefits alone, of our membership of the Community."

The Taoiseach then referred to the decision on the review of the importation of quantities of New Zealand dairy products to the Community, another matter of concern to the UK, in accordance with Protocol 18 of the Accession Treaty, pointing out that "the meeting decided on certain guidelines to be given to the institutions of the Community in carrying out this review. The Commission's proposals on the subject are to be ready as soon as practicable and are to include special import arrangements...(and) will provide for price reviews having regard to certain defined criteria. I cannot, of course, anticipate the outcome of the review by the institutions of the Community under the arrangements we agreed yesterday, but I do not think that it will give rise to any great difficulties so far as this country is concerned."

Having dealt with issues such as energy prices, the world economic situation – in particular the problems of unemployment and inflation – and security and continuity of supply of raw materials, Liam Cosgrave turned to international political matters. He spoke of "a useful discussion on the Conference and Security and Co-operation in Europe which is currently taking place in Geneva" and referred to ongoing discussions within the United Nations on the question of Cyprus. He concluded: "I was glad to have had the opportunity to preside over this Heads of Government meeting which, in addition to dealing successfully with other items, brought to a conclusion the prolonged discussion of the issues raised by the question of British membership" (Cosgrave, 1975).

In reply, the Leader of the Opposition, Jack Lynch T.D., expressed satisfaction at the outcome of the Council meeting "insofar as reasonable adjustments now seem to have been agreed in the areas which were causing some concern for the British Government, so that the opportunity of their continued membership is now brighter." He then made the significant comment that "I am glad, however, to note that during the course of some interviews at the conference the Minister for Foreign Affairs affirmed the view expressed so often by this side of the House that even if Britain does not wish to continue its membership that it would be in Ireland's best interests to continue even though we

accept it would be even in our better interests if Britain were also a member” (Lynch, 1975).

Report to the European Parliament

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Garret FitzGerald T.D., travelled to Strasbourg on the 12 March 1975 to report to the European Parliament on the outcome of the first European Council.

He was joined by the President of the Commission, François-Xavier Ortoli, who spoke of the role of the new body as “debating, at the highest level, the major issues of concern to the Community.” The Dublin meeting had carried out this responsibility in exactly the manner expected. The political issues on the agenda of the European Council had been addressed in practical terms and solutions were to be found in appropriate form, including provision for close surveillance of future developments.

President Ortoli stressed the central role of his institution in the work of the new European Council, stating “the role of the Commission had been fully respected and it had participated actively in all aspects of the work of the council, playing not only its legal but also its political role.” President Ortoli made reference to the ‘savoir-faire’ of the Irish Presidency and to the efficiency of the organisation of the event.

Dr. FitzGerald began his Strasbourg speech by stating that “you know already that the meeting was a success. The Heads of Government were able to deal successfully with all the issues before them and, above all, with those questions which remained in relation to the question of continuing British membership.” He picked up President Ortoli’s remarks about the role of the Commission and made it clear that the Irish Presidency was determined that the new arrangements would not interfere with “the proper working of the Community” and had taken the necessary steps to see that Community powers were fully protected throughout and that the Commission played a full role.

On the British question he made it clear “that we are at the end of this process. There is no question of coming back again for any further negotiations on this matter. The arrangements that have been agreed will be put to Mr. Wilson’s Government and they will be either accepted or rejected. If accepted, they will be recommended by him to the British people and I am sure that he will wish to recommend them with the full political force of which he is certainly capable. I hope that I may be permitted to express the hope...that this will be adopted and endorsed by the British people.”

Dr. FitzGerald concluded by saying that it was “a source of great satisfaction to my Government that we have been fortunate enough to inherit the Presidency at a moment when the Community is regaining momentum and that within the first ten weeks of our Presidency so many matters which had matured under previous Presidencies had reached the point of discussion: the conclusion of the ACP negotiations, the preparation of the GATT mandate, the final stages on regional policy and the regulations on the Budget which are now before you...” (FitzGerald, 1975).

The practical and logistical arrangements for the European Council, together with the low-key but effective chairmanship of Liam Cosgrave, earned much favourable comment from the participants and from the international press corps. Roy Jenkins, who would succeed François-Xavier Ortoli as President of the Commission in 1977, commented that Garret FitzGerald “made Ireland not merely an official but an integral part of the European Community, an honorary member of the somewhat exclusive club of the original six...(he) succeeded in making London look peripheral to Europe, while Dublin was Metropolitan.” A review of press coverage of the meeting concluded that the Irish performance “enhanced the image of Ireland as a country capable of hosting a meeting on such a scale and of ‘steering’ it to concrete results...many reporters, mainly British, who had previously expressed doubts regarding the ability of the Irish to mount a summit and had particular suspicions of the efficiency of the Irish telephone system were magnanimous enough to eat their words publicly...” (Ferriter, 2012).

Much could be written about the evolution of the European Council from that initial meeting in Dublin Castle to the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty (Articles 13 and 15 TEU) under the terms of which the European Council became an Institution of the European Union with an elected full-time President replacing the rotating Presidency and meeting as many as twenty times in the period 2010-2012.

The UK Question

As discussed above, a critical issue on the agenda for the Irish Presidency related to the UK and its place in the Communities.

The United Kingdom entered the European Economic Community on the same day as Ireland and Denmark. Whereas in Ireland and Denmark – and in Norway where the people rejected EEC membership – the decision on accession was taken by the national electorate in referenda, in the UK the decision was taken by parliament.

On 28 October 1971, the House of Commons voted in favour of entry by 365-244. In that vote the Labour Party opposed the proposal on grounds of perceived defects in the negotiated terms of entry, but sixty-nine Labour MPs voted for entry in defiance of the party whip, with twenty abstentions. On the Conservative side, under the strongly pro-European leadership of Prime Minister Edward Heath, thirty-nine MPs voted against entry. One of the main arguments of those opposed to entry, and in particular in Labour ranks, related to the decision to proceed by parliamentary vote rather than by referendum. Tony Benn, as chairman of the Labour Party, called for the party to commit itself to an eventual referendum on membership. This led to a response from the Tory Minister, Geoffrey Rippon, that referenda were “wholly contrary to our constitutional practices” (Young, 1993).

Harold Wilson, as Labour Leader and as Prime Minister in the 1960s, had managed to advance his own fundamentally pro-European views over a number of years while maintaining the unity of the party in which anti-European sentiment was strong and growing. The Labour Party’s opposition to the Commons vote on entry was not based

on principle but on a purely tactical argument. The rebellion by the Labour Europhiles, led by Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams and others, gave Wilson increasing problems which he sought to contain by supporting Jenkins as Deputy Leader. The anti-European majority in the Labour Party advanced an argument which changed the nature of the debate: “it was no longer a question of whether to support British entry, but whether, once the Conservatives had taken Britain into the Community, a future Labour Government should pull it out again. Wilson had hoped that once the Tories had made British membership a reality, the heat would be taken out of the controversy. The new argument threatened to perpetuate it...” (Pimlott, 1992).

In June 1972, Wilson agreed to support a proposal that a future Labour Party administration would ‘re-negotiate’ the terms of Britain’s entry and to put the result to a referendum. The party conference in October 1972 adopted this policy position. “Wilson was now effectively committed to making faces at the Europeans, but not – critically – to a path of negotiation that might lead to withdrawal.” He was then able to concentrate on uniting the party around an election manifesto capable of bringing Labour back to power. The opportunity was provided in late 1973 by the impact of the Yom Kippur War in the Middle East on the price of oil and thus on the economy as a whole. In February 1974, faced by the challenge of a miners’ strike, Edward Heath called an election on the theme: ‘Who Governs Britain?’

On 28 February 1974 the General Election saw Labour emerge as the biggest party in Westminster with 301 seats compared to 297 for the Conservatives. After an unsuccessful attempt by Heath to form a coalition with the Liberal Party, Wilson became the Prime Minister of a minority administration. He appointed a Cabinet which was designed to keep the party united. The pragmatic James Callaghan became Foreign Secretary and Roy Jenkins was effectively sidelined as Home Secretary. The leading anti-Europeans – Tony Benn, Barbara Castle and Michael Foot – were appointed to senior posts.

The commitment to re-negotiation had to be honoured and Wilson gave the chief role to Callaghan while ensuring that he was seen as “a firmer champion of the British national interest than had been his predecessor; as a leader who would ensure that acceptable terms were negotiated.” Callaghan was supported in the re-negotiations by the formidable anti-European Peter Shore as Secretary of State for Trade but his first public statement to the Commons in March 1974 was designed to meet the demands of the party manifesto while reassuring Britain’s European partners. He insisted that the Government would “not aim to conduct the negotiations as a confrontation” but that it would “embark on these fundamental talks in good faith not to destroy or to wreck but to adapt and reshape” (George, 1994).

Callaghan’s memoir – ‘Time & Chance’ – devotes a lengthy section to the beginning of the negotiations in 1974, detailing visits to Bonn, for meetings with Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, to Brussels for conversations with Francois-Xavier Ortoli, President of the Commission and to the annual Gymnich weekend meeting of Foreign Ministers. He recalled that, at their meeting, Ministers from the founding states pressed for a

'declaration of faith' by Britain on the subject of European Union, which he refused. Ireland, he commented, "seemed ready to go along with the majority but the Danes were as forthright as I was and remained unconvinced." He concentrated on clarifying the Community's response to four key issues: Britain's contribution to the Community Budget; the Common Agricultural Policy; access to the Community for Commonwealth agricultural produce, such as sugar; and clearance for national policies of financial aid for development areas (Callaghan, 1987).

The Budget issue emerged at an early stage as the most difficult to solve, with the UK arguing that the financial arrangements agreed at the time of accession were proving to be unfair insofar as there was a growing gap between the British contribution to the Community Budget and the funds returned through the various common funds and schemes. In 1974, it was argued, Britain was paying 10 to 12 per cent of the Budget and receiving in return no more than 8 per cent. In response, the Commission questioned the British arithmetic and insisted that the 1972 settlement on Britain's contribution could not be altered. The Commission President, Ortolini, argued that "there could be no tampering with the principle that the financial resources of the Community were its own property and were inviolable" (Callaghan, 1987).

The Wilson minority Government was determined to find the right moment to hold another election in the search for a working majority. He decided that the poll should take place before the end of the year and, eventually, named 10 October 1974 as the date. The chosen theme was 'Labour Government Works' and Wilson hoped for a calm, united campaign. Just days before the election, the divisive European issue exploded when the strongly pro-European Secretary of State for Prices and Consumer Protection, Shirley Williams, declared that she would resign from politics if a referendum went against continued British membership of the European Community. Wilson attempted to persuade her – and her opponents like Tony Benn – to refrain from such controversial statements and told reporters that Labour was a united team. Unfortunately, the Williams remarks had infuriated the anti-Europeans for whom Peter Shore retaliated sharply and very publicly. Television coverage of the split on Europe was extensive and damaging.

As election day approached earlier positive opinion polls narrowed and, in the event, the result saw Labour return with 319 seats to the Conservatives' 277. The Liberals and others won thirty-nine seats, leaving Labour with an overall majority of three! Harold Wilson became Prime Minister for a fourth term.

The process of renegotiation got underway immediately and the memoirs and biographies of the key UK personalities reflect the intensity of the visits, discussions and official consultations over the closing months of 1974. The firm purpose of the negotiation soon became clear. Pimlott, in his Wilson biography, quotes an unnamed senior official "it soon became clear to me that the objective was to create conditions in which we could stay in. Wilson was obviously quite determined from the word go to stay in, but he needed a price to pay to satisfy the mood in the Labour Party. The final deal exacted that price. It was not meaningless, but it was fairly cosmetic" (Pimlott, 1992).

Wilson and Callaghan met with the key European leaders, notably Giscard d'Estaing and Schmidt. The Foreign Secretary, in his memoir, recalled that "the matter took up much of my energies and the constant journeys and meetings left too little time for other important problems that I cared about, especially the situation in Rhodesia" (Callaghan, 1987). The pace of re-negotiation was enhanced by the proposal from Giscard d'Estaing that the Heads of Government should meet in Paris in December 1974. The British leaders saw this meeting as an opportunity to concentrate minds on the major objective – the claim for a new financial settlement. Contact with all the other capitals was stepped up and it became clear that there was much sympathy with the British position and strong support for continued British membership of the Community. Of course, each Member State had its own opinion on the details of budgetary policy and on the appropriate way to deal with regional economic disparities.

The state of opinion within the Labour Party was important and it was decided that the Party Conference in London, just days before the Paris Summit, would be addressed by Helmut Schmidt, as the fraternal delegate from the German Social Democratic Party. Speaking in English, the Chancellor "made some good jokes, quoted Shakespeare, spoke flatteringly of the Labour Party's historic contribution to trade unionism and the welfare state and in general cut the ground from under the feet of some of the most insular of our comrades by appealing to the Labour Party's traditional internationalism...he was very warmly received and applauded" (Callaghan, 1987).

The Paris Summit, on 9-10 December 1974, is discussed in greater detail above. At the Summit, Harold Wilson reaffirmed the position of the UK Government on the financial and budgetary issues to which it attached the highest importance. After a lengthy debate, the Heads of Government reached a decision to:

"invite the institutions of the Community (the Council and the Commission) to set up as soon as possible a correcting mechanism of a general application which, in the framework of the system of 'own resources' and in harmony with its normal functioning, based on objective criteria and taking into consideration in particular the suggestions made to this effect by the British Government, could prevent during the period of convergence of the economies of the Member States, the possible development of situations unacceptable for a Member States and incompatible with the smooth working of the Community."

(Heads of Government, 1974)

The Prime Minister reported to his Cabinet that the re-negotiation had succeeded in its key elements and that the basis had been laid for the promised referendum. The anti-Europeans in the Cabinet were furious and Tony Benn wrote in his diary that "it was a most unsatisfactory, devious report" and quoted himself as saying that "I don't accept this, I'm not committed to it, and we must be free to discuss. This is a critical matter." Barbara Castle wrote that Wilson "was at his worst – wordy, defensive and repetitive ...it is a familiar technique: when Harold reduces everything to a boring, and almost bored, low key." Peter Shore told the Cabinet that he could only register his feelings of

absolute shock. “Our credibility in the country has been greatly undermined” (Benn, 1989; Castle, 1980).

Following the Paris meeting, the Commission set out to fulfill the mandate on the ‘corrective mechanism’ and, on 30 January 1975, published a formal Communication to the Council on ‘The Unacceptable Situation and the Correcting Mechanism’ which dealt in a succinct paper with the definition of an ‘unacceptable situation incompatible with the smooth working of the Community’; the economic situation; disproportionate contribution to Community financing; procedure; and, the suggested correcting mechanism. The mechanism involved giving an entitlement to a refund from the budget in respect of any excess payment of Own Resources (Commission, 1975).

Ireland had taken over the Presidency of the Council from France on 1 January 1975 and with it, the on-going British issue. Talks continued on other British preoccupations, such as New Zealand butter, but the Commission paper provided the essential groundwork for agreement at the first European Council meeting, scheduled for Dublin in March. In February 1975, Callaghan tabled a Cabinet Paper – the Second Tactical Plan on Renegotiation – which was criticised by the anti-Europeans but which was the basis for agreement with Britain’s partners. At a Cabinet meeting on 20 February there was agreement in principle on the wording of the question to be put to the people in the referendum: “ Do you think the UK should stay in the European Community (Common Market)?”

As outlined above, at the Dublin European Council, on 10-11 March 1975, reached agreement on the main British issues with positive decisions on the ‘Correcting Mechanism’, on Regional Policy and on New Zealand butter. Reporting to the European Parliament, Dr. Garret FitzGerald described the outcome as “a major achievement, because from the beginning this was seen on the side of the United Kingdom as being one of the most crucial elements in any decision the United Kingdom Government would take in recommending continued membership to the people of the United Kingdom...” He further commented that the discussion of the British situation “was carried out in an atmosphere of great good will, as indeed has been the case throughout these negotiations. It was evident that all members present were anxious to reach a satisfactory conclusion on this matter at this meeting and no efforts were spared in seeking solutions to particular problems, some of them technical and very difficult” (FitzGerald, 1975).

On 18 March 1975, the British Cabinet considered the outcome of the Dublin European Council and endorsed the terms of the agreements reached there by sixteen votes to seven. The seven opponents were Tony Benn, Barbara Castle, Michael Foot, Peter Shore, John Silkin, Willie Ross and Eric Varley. A number of potential ‘no’ voters switched to the Prime Minister’s side, mainly through personal loyalty to the Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan. The battle lines within the Labour Party were now clearly drawn.

The referendum date took place on 5 June 1975 after a campaign between two *ad hoc* groupings reflecting the divisions within and between the political parties and the various elements of civil society. On the ‘Yes’ side were moderate Labour Party members, including a majority of the Cabinet, a majority of the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, and the SDLP and Alliance parties in Northern Ireland. Against them were lined out the left wing of the Labour Party; a small number of Conservatives; the UUP and DUP in Northern Ireland; the Scottish National Party; Plaid Cymru in Wales; and from the opposite extremes of politics, the National Front and the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The referendum attracted a turnout of 64.5% and the result was decisive:

Yes	17, 378, 581	67.2%
No	8, 470, 073	32.8%
Majority	8, 908,508	

Harold Wilson commented that “it was a free vote, without constraint, following a free democratic campaign conducted constructively and without rancour. It means that fourteen years of national argument are over” (Pimlott, 1992). Barbara Castle wrote in her diary that, at the first Cabinet meeting after the referendum “the pro-marketeters as a whole, though not wholly avoiding looking like the cats that had got at the cream, were patently trying to restrain their jubilation. No gloating” (Castle, 1980).

Evaluating the First Presidency

The first Presidency in 1975 presented major challenges for the Irish political and administrative systems and there is general agreement that they had been handled well, despite early concerns about the need to be seen as an efficient, businesslike administration and country. Achieving this perception involved taking seriously the warning that “any obvious attempt by the Chair to pursue national objectives is likely to be counterproductive.” This required particularly sensitive handling of agenda items such as the establishment of the Regional Development Fund and the detailed stocktaking of the Common Agricultural Policy (Ferriter, 2012).

The senior Tory statesman, Sir Geoffrey Howe, commented that “the first Irish Presidency of the Community came dauntingly soon after accession. Thanks not least to Garret FitzGerald’s performance as the first-ever Irish President of the Council of Ministers, it was hailed as a remarkable model of efficiency. It was certainly an instructive and inspiring example for those planning the first UK Presidency two years later” (Dooge, 1986).

An important part of the Irish ‘success story’ related to the foreign press coverage of the European Council meeting. It was commented that the image of the Presidency was

greatly helped by “the willingness of Irish ministers to tell the press just what was going on...” The overall press relations activity “enhanced the image of Ireland as a country capable of hosting a meeting on such a scale and of ‘steering’ it to concrete results. This positive and widespread publicity was a welcome counter to the almost daily diet of agency-based factual reports of violence in Northern Ireland.” There was comment from many journalists from the continental Member States on “the irony of the fact that a conclusion to British renegotiation was being sought not alone in Dublin but in Dublin Castle!” (Ferriter, 2012).

In his statement to the European Parliament on the outcome of the European Council meeting, Dr. FitzGerald commented that “my country and the Presidency were very conscious of their responsibilities with regard to the meeting in Dublin, recognising that it is the first of a series of meetings. The way in which it was planned and organised and the procedures adopted were important, not merely for the sake of the success of the meeting but because, due to its nature, it would set a precedent for future meetings.” There was a serious commitment to organisation and planning but also to ensuring that the experience of the Presidency would contribute to the country’s ability to participate effectively in all aspects of the work of the European Community and, thereby, to establish a distinctly Irish approach to European affairs.

The political scientist Tom Garvin has suggested that the EEC experience “offered a reality which had always been fantasised about: a powerful entity that was perceived as benign, was not English and was not controlled by England.” A conference of all senior Foreign Affairs officials and ambassadors, convened by Dr. FitzGerald immediately after becoming Minister in 1973 had addressed the reality of EC membership “looking at the question in European terms, broader in scope than narrow national interest or even enlightened self-interest for we were now members of the European Community, responsible with our partners for achieving its objectives” (Ferriter, 2012; FitzGerald, 1991).

The Subsequent Irish Presidencies

The second Irish Presidency of the Council, from July to December 1979, with Jack Lynch as Taoiseach and Michael O’Kennedy as Foreign Minister, saw the conclusion of the agreements made during the Tokyo Round of multilateral trade negotiations which resulted in major cuts (about 35%) in the tariffs imposed by the developed countries on industrial products. The European Council meeting in Dublin in November 1979 proved to be most difficult. The Commission President, Roy Jenkins, described it as “the most difficult of the nine which I have attended.” Major international issues – global energy supply and demand, the dramatic situation in Iran where the staff of the US embassy was being held hostage – were pushed off centre-stage by the arrival of the new British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, with her demands for a new basis for Britain’s contribution to the EC Budget and for a rebate on these contributions. Agreement was impossible with Mrs. Thatcher rejecting a compromise solution.

The Irish management of the 1979 Presidency was, once again, well planned and effective and the difficulties experienced were outside the Presidency's capacity to ensure agreement. The preparation of the key debates on energy, economic and monetary policies and employment was recognised by all participants and progress was reported under each heading. As the Leader of the Labour Party, Frank Cluskey T.D., commented in a Dáil debate on the European Council "it is appropriate, at the outset, to offer to the Taoiseach, to his colleagues in the Government and to the officials of all Departments concerned, a word of appreciation for the technical efficiency with which the meetings have been conducted. This appreciation must also extend to the technical work associated with the Irish Presidency in general which has brought considerable credit to our country."

Thus, in the first seven years of Ireland's EEC membership the country held the Presidency of the Council on two occasions and carried out the various tasks with efficiency.

The third Irish Presidency in 1984 saw the European Council in Dublin clear the way for Spanish and Portuguese accession to the European Communities. The same meeting, chaired by Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald and with Peter Barry as Foreign Minister, reached decisions on reinforcing the European Monetary System (EMS) and on giving the European Currency Unit (ECU) a more important role, a major step towards full monetary union. A high level Committee on Institutional Affairs was established to look at progress towards European Union through changes in the Community's institutional structure, with the former Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jim Dooge, as chairman. This contributed significantly to the preparation of the 1987 Single European Act, the first major amendment to the founding Treaty of Rome.

Ireland's fourth Presidency in 1990 came just months after the fall of the Berlin Wall and during the collapse of Communism across east and central Europe. With Taoiseach Charles Haughey as President of the European Council, the urgent need to address the implications of these historic developments was fully acknowledged and two meetings of the Council in Dublin gave full support to the process of German reunification and established an Intergovernmental Conference on European Political Union to run alongside one already underway on Economic and Monetary Union. These led to the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Foreign Minister Gerry Collins chaired the Council sessions at which the Community and the EFTA states (Liechtenstein, Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland) started formal negotiations for the creation of the European Economic Area (EEA).

Ireland's next presidency in 1996, with John Bruton as Taoiseach and Dick Spring as Foreign Minister, oversaw the Intergovernmental Conference which finalised the text of the Amsterdam Treaty. The Council took important decisions on aid for the reconstruction of the republics of former Yugoslavia after the Balkan War and agreed on Community action for a total ban on anti-personnel landmines. The European Council meeting in December 1996 in Dublin reached agreement on the various elements

necessary for the introduction of the single currency, with Finance Minister Ruairi Quinn achieving agreement on the content of the Stability and Growth Pact.

In 2004, the sixth Irish Presidency, headed by Bertie Ahern as Taoiseach and Brian Cowen as Minister for Foreign Affairs, succeeded in finalising the text of the Constitutional Treaty which had emerged from the work of the European Convention of 2002-2003. In the Justice and Home Affairs area a substantial body of work was completed in the areas of immigration, asylum, police cooperation and crime, action against drugs and better access to justice across borders for Europe's citizens. On 1 May the Accession Treaty came into force and the leaders of ten new Member States were welcomed into the European Union at a special Day of Welcomes Ceremony held at Áras an Uachtaráin, Dublin.

The 2003-2004 IGC

The successful completion of the Constitutional Treaty negotiations in 2004 merit particular comment. A formal Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) had been established to negotiate the text. The Italian Presidency, under Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in the second half of 2003, failed to obtain agreement and effectively abandoned the effort. On the flight back to Dublin, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, is reported as telling his senior officials that Ireland should 'have a go' at resolving the impasse. This determination was reflected in an intensive work programme of bilateral discussions with all of the other Member States, involving the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Brian Cowen T.D.), the Minister for European Affairs (Dick Roche T.D.) and senior officials.

A complex working method was used to narrow the range of issues on which there was difficulty – involving the production of two documents at each IGC session, setting out the 'open' and 'closed' issues and seeking to move more and more 'open' issues into the other category. A filtering mechanism – with official-level meetings forwarding more difficult questions to Foreign Ministers for discussion – finally reduced the number of matters requiring the attention of Heads of Government and a European Council meeting in June 2004 concluded the negotiations and adopted the text of the Constitutional Treaty.

It is recorded that the Taoiseach received a standing ovation from his colleagues at the European Council and the French President, Jacques Chirac, described the Irish term of office as the best Presidency he and his officials had ever witnessed. French voters, and those in the Netherlands, took a more negative view of this Irish success when they rejected the Constitutional Treaty in referenda in 2005 (Callanan, 2007).

The Irish Approach

By 2013, Ireland had held the Presidency six times and is acknowledged to have handled it well on each occasion. The former Secretary General of the Department of Finance, Seán Cromien, has remarked that "the culmination of the Irish administration's work on EU matters has always been the six months of the Presidency. It has been

acknowledged – and not just by ourselves – to have been very successful on each occasion we have held this burdensome but exciting task.” Indeed there is some evidence that small Member States are more effective in the Presidency than larger ones. Smaller states can find it easier to lead the path to consensus, whereas larger countries have a wider range of interests of their own (O’Donnell, 2000).

In his ‘Foundations of an Ever Closer Union’ Mark Callanan wrote that “Ireland has had a tradition since 1975 of running presidencies that “are popular and well regarded amongst other Member States. The Irish approach tends to emphasise efficiency and getting the work done, with Irish representatives seen as constructive and good negotiators, occasionally introducing an element of pragmatism and realism into the proceedings” (Callanan, 2007).

Looking at the history of Irish Presidencies since 1975, Callanan commented that “presumably more by accident than by design, Ireland has regularly found itself in the Presidency chair in the run-up to important treaty changes – this was particularly so during the negotiation of the Amsterdam treaty and the Constitutional Treaty and key provisions closely reflect Irish proposals. In addition to these occasions, Ireland was in the chair when the sensitive decision was taken to open an IGC on political union leading to the Maastricht Treaty. And in the case of the Single European Act, the Irish representative, Prof. Jim Dooge, chaired the group to identify key areas of treaty reform” (Callanan, 2007).

In Callanan’s volume a number of relevant thoughts on Ireland’s Presidency performance, from unnamed commentators, were recorded. One commented that “rather than coming up with grand conceptual designs, small Member States can contribute in effectively managing the Presidency. I think what we give back every so often is a Presidency that works, that facilitates and mediates, and delivers.” This argument was supported by another contributor: “In the context of the Amsterdam Treaty, an Irish sense of realism of what might be possible to achieve in the negotiation, as set out in the Irish draft, fixed the level of ambition and as such eventually determined a fair amount of the shape of the final treaty” (Callanan, 2007).

Conclusion

“The periodic exercise of the Presidency is, perhaps, the most obvious public expression of the political responsibility involved in membership of the European Community. It is a responsibility which should be recognised and understood by everyone. If there is to be a real future for the Community, the balance between responsibility and self-interest must be achieved and supported in all the Member States.”

(Cluskey, 1979)

Thus, Ireland’s performance in the Presidency of the Council on six occasions over thirty years has been widely recognised as consistently successful and as reflecting the

quality of the input of Taoisigh and Ministers in Governments of different political colours and of a generation of civil servants across Departments.

Mark Callanan has commented that “success was a testament to the skills, dedication and extensive preparation work conducted by those involved and the ‘can do’, professional, even-handed, pragmatic and problem-solving manner in which Irish politicians and officials tend to approach negotiations.”

Addressing the Oireachtas Joint Committee on EU Affairs in July 2012, the Minister for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton TD, argued that:

“Each Presidency since our accession has been different and has presented its own unique challenges, but Ireland has consistently shown that a small Member State can manage the agenda of the Union in an efficient, impartial and effective manner. Our reputation among our partners was enhanced by the way in which we fulfilled our Presidency obligations...”

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