



THE FIRST PRESIDENCY

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

by Tony Brown

PART THREE
EVENTS AND
ISSUES

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The First Presidency

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

PART THREE – EVENTS AND ISSUES

Introduction

This is the third 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.

EVENTS

Council Meetings

There were in all twenty-eight meetings of the Council during Ireland's first Presidency:

- The first meeting of the European Council, in Dublin on 10-11 March 1975.
- Nine meetings of Foreign Affairs Ministers, chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, with the Irish delegation seat occupied by the

Tánaiste, Brendan Corish T.D., on one occasion and by the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Justin Keating T.D., on the others.

- Eight meetings of Agriculture Ministers, chaired by the Minister for Agriculture, Mark Clinton T.D., who also acted as the Irish national representative.
- Five meetings of Economics and Finance Ministers, chaired by the Minister for Finance, Richie Ryan T.D., with the Irish delegation seat occupied by the Secretary of the Department of Finance, Mr. C.H Murray.
- Two meetings of Energy Ministers, chaired by the Minister for Transport and Power, Peter Barry T.D., with the Irish delegation seat occupied by the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Justin Keating T.D., on one occasion and by the Secretary of the Department of Transport and Power, Mr. D. O’Riordain, on another.
- One meeting of Development Co-operation Ministers, chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Garret FitzGerald T.D., with the Irish delegation seat occupied by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Welfare, Frank Cluskey T.D.
- One meeting of Social Affairs Ministers, chaired by the Minister for Labour, Michael O’Leary T.D., with the Irish delegation seat occupied by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Welfare, Frank Cluskey T.D.
- One Meeting of Research and Development Ministers, chaired by the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Justin Keating T.D., with the Irish delegation chair occupied by the Minister for Transport and Power, Peter Barry T.D.

The official reports of these meetings, recording decisions, declarations and policy statements, run to 335 pages. In preparation for these meetings of the Council, Ireland provided chairmen for 190 Council Committees and Working Groups.

Among the more significant developments during the Irish Presidency may be noted:

- Adoption of a Supplementary Budget to finance the new Regional Development Fund;
- Conclusion of the EC-Israel trade agreement;
- Agreement on the right of establishment and freedom to provide services of doctors;
- Progress on ‘stocktaking’ of the Common Agricultural Policy since its foundation;

- Adoption of the Regulation establishing the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, to be located in Ireland;
- Adaptation of the Economic Policy Guidelines for 1975 to deal with the problems of unemployment, rising inflation and balance of payments disequilibria and to reduce divergent economic trends which threatened the cohesion of the Community;
- Adoption of a Resolution on measures to be taken to combat international tax evasion and avoidance;
- Adoption, after discussion at four Council meetings and consultation of the Parliament, of the five instruments required to set up the Regional Development Fund and the Regional Policy Committee;
- A series of decisions on elements of the Community's Social Action Programme, including the Directive on Equal Pay for Men and Women;
- Progress on the preparations for the International Energy Conference, the forerunner of the G8.

Foreign Ministers of the Nine

The Foreign Ministers of the Nine met in Dublin on three occasions during the Presidency. Two meetings, in Dublin Castle, were devoted to discussion of Political Co-operation.

The Foreign Ministers spent an informal weekend at Farmleigh House on 12-13 April 1975. This meeting followed the 'Gymnich' precedent established only a year earlier by the German Presidency with a weekend in the castle of that name close to Bonn. The Ministers discussed progress on the report on European Union by the Belgian Prime Minister, Leo Tindemans, commissioned by the Paris Summit and the evolving situation in Portugal following the revolution which had ended the fascist dictatorship of Salazar and Caetano. Farmleigh House was made available to the Government on that occasion by the Iveagh family and was later purchased by the Government as an official guesthouse and conference venue.

The work of the Foreign Ministers was prepared by the Political Committee, comprising the Political Directors of the nine Foreign Ministries. During the Presidency, this Committee met on seven occasions in Dublin, Brussels and Luxembourg. Another fifty meetings of expert working groups took place in the political co-operation framework, including five meetings of a group devoted to the Euro-Arab dialogue, launched at the Copenhagen Summit in December 1973 as a forum shared by the European Community and the League of Arab States. The European states saw it as a forum to discuss economic affairs, while the Arab side saw it as a forum for discussion of political affairs.

Another element of the Presidency's work in the Foreign Affairs field was arranging consultation among the embassies of the Nine in third countries and concertation on important issues arising in international meetings and conferences, in particular within the United Nations and its related bodies, such as UNESCO, and in organisations such as the OECD, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Law of the Sea Conference.

European Parliament

A priority objective of the Irish Presidency was strengthening the working relationship between the Council and the European Parliament. Over the six-month period the Minister for Foreign Affairs, as President of the Council, attended the seven sessions of the Parliament to report on the outcome of Council meetings and other Ministerial meetings. He answered questions from MEPs and participated in debates. In particular, the Irish Presidency introduced a procedure to enable MEPs to address questions on Political Co-operation to the President of the Council. Other Irish Ministers attended the Parliament to deal with specific policy matters.

During the Presidency period more than one hundred meetings of the European Parliament's twelve standing committees took place. Irish Ministers attended committee meetings when appropriate and Irish officials monitored the work of the committees for the purpose of briefing Ministers.

In his final address to the European Parliament at the end of the Presidency, the Minister for Foreign Affairs linked the prospects for progress towards closer European integration with the evolution of the European Parliament towards a genuinely democratic mandate based on direct elections as provided for in the founding treaties. The Parliament itself had adopted, in January 1975, a Resolution containing a draft Convention on Direct Elections, setting a target date of 1978 for elections to a 355-seat assembly, with thirteen members from Ireland. The Resolution was forwarded to the Council which had not considered it before the end of the Irish Presidency.

The Irish Members of the European Parliament – which was still a nominated body – were Donal Creed, Thomas Dunne, James Gibbons, Michael Herbert, Liam Kavanagh, Brian Lenihan, Charles McDonald, Thomas Nolan, David Thornley and Michael B Yeats.

Economic and Social Committee

The Economic and Social Committee was set up by the 1957 Rome Treaty in order to involve economic and social interest groups in the establishment of the common market and to provide institutional machinery for briefing the European Commission and the Council of Ministers on European Union issues. The members of the Committee are drawn from economic and social interest groups in Europe and belong to one of three groups: employers; workers and various interests.

The practice of a Council Presidency address to the Committee which represents employers, trade unions and other social and civil society organisations had been

introduced in 1974. The Minister for Labour, Michael O'Leary T.D., as President of the Social Affairs Council, was scheduled to address the Economic and Social Committee (ESC) in Brussels on 24 April 1975 but was unable to attend. His address was delivered by his Belgian colleague, Minister for Labour, Albert Califice.

The President of the ESC, Henri Canonge, made an official visit to Dublin in February 1975 when he held talks with several Government Ministers and with sectoral representatives and the National Economic and Social Council. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, as President of the Council, attended a lunch in Brussels given by the President of the ESC in the same month. The Irish Chairman of COREPER held an exchange of views with the ESC during the Presidency.

Standing Committee on Employment

The Standing Committee on Employment was established in 1970 to bring together representatives of the Community institutions and of employers and trade unions to discuss the implications for employment of the Community's economic and social policies.

The Committee met twice during the Irish Presidency in 1975, with the Minister for Labour, Michael O'Leary T.D., in the chair and attended by the Vice President of the Commission, Dr Patrick Hillery. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Welfare, Frank Cluskey T.D. was the Irish Government representative. The meetings addressed a wide agenda, covering the work of the European Social Fund, the situation in particular sectors, youth unemployment, illegal immigration and co-ordination of employment policies among Member States.

Visits To and From Ireland

The official record gives details of sixteen visits to Ireland during the six months of the Presidency by members of the governments of the other eight Member States other than for Council sessions. They included the Prime Minister of Luxembourg and no less than seven Ministers of Agriculture.

Fourteen visits abroad by Irish Ministers include nine by Dr. FitzGerald, among them visits to the United States and to Togo for the signing of the Lomé Convention.

Other Presidency-related visitors to Ireland included seven members of the Commission, the President of the Economic and Social Committee and two full Committees of the European Parliament.

Visit by the President of Ireland to the Institutions of the Community

A notable event in the final month of the Presidency was an official visit to the Institutions of the European Communities by the President of Ireland, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh and his wife. On 16-18 June 1975 the President made visits to a meeting of the Council of Ministers and to the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, to the European Commission and Economic and Social Committee in Brussels – where he

made a courtesy call on King Baudouin of Belgium – and to the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

In Luxembourg with Michael O’Leary and Frank Cluskey for an important Social Affairs Council meeting, I was invited to attend the impressive reception at the European Parliament building at which he spoke quite passionately about his European commitment, recalling his service as the first Irish member of the European Court of Justice.

Welcoming the President to the meeting of the ECOFIN Council, its President, Irish Finance Minister, Richie Ryan T.D., pointed to the fact that this was the first such visit by the Head of State of a Member State and commented that he was sure “that the Founding Fathers of our Community would have been happy to think that this visit, with all its implications, would have taken place in this year in which we are celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Schuman Declaration.” He went on to describe the President’s presence in Luxembourg as “the outward and visible sign of the attachment of Ireland to the European Community and her determination to participate fully in our common enterprise for the construction of Europe, and the betterment of the world” (Ryan, 1975).

During the various events President Ó Dálaigh spoke in Irish, English, French and Luxembourgish. In his speech to the Council he reflected on the experience of the twenty-five years following Schuman’s initiative: “*Si l’on jette un regard sur les vingt-cinq dernières années, en se souvenant de l’état de destruction et de division dans lequel se trouvait l’Europe à la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale, la transformation qui s’est produite est rien moins que stupéfiante.*” (“If one looks at the last twenty-five years, recalling the extent of destruction and division in Europe at the end of the Second World War, the transformation which has come about is nothing less than amazing”) (Ó Dálaigh, 1975).

Speaking at a meeting of the European Commission, the President recalled the visit to Brussels of Hugh O’Neill in 1607 on his way to Rome: “...the last Irish Chief who visited all the countries of the Community of the Six.” Commenting on the policy initiation role of the Commission he defined that role as “presenting to the peoples of Europe not just those sectional policies dictated by the economic exigencies of the moment, but also providing the concept of a Europe in which its citizens can not only live and prosper but of which they can be proud” (Ó Dálaigh, 1975).

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)

The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe began in 1973 in Helsinki where the Foreign Ministers of thirty-five states from East and West outlined their positions on future relations in Europe and launched a process which was to result in the establishment of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The second phase of the Conference entered its final stage during the Irish Presidency, in preparation for the second Helsinki Conference in July-August 1975.

In implementing its Presidency tasks – including chairing meetings of the delegations of the Nine and co-ordinating their work – the Irish delegation had a special responsibility to ensure close co-operation in the crucial concluding period of negotiation.

TEPSA Conference, Dún Laoghaire, January 1975

As Ireland prepared to take on the Presidency, Dr. FitzGerald approached his close friend, John Pinder, a British academic who was head of the London-based think-tank, The Federal Trust. “(He) asked me if the Federal Trust would organise a seminar in Dublin which could help him to prepare for his role as Council President. This we did, with the participation of people from Trans European Policy Studies Association institutes who had knowledge of the various aspects.”

The seminar took place in the Royal Marine Hotel, Dún Laoghaire on 17-19 January 1975. “His comment after the end was that it had been ‘enormously useful’; and, like subsequent Irish Presidencies, that one was a significant success. None of us imagined that our modest seminar in that hotel would lead on to the much more magnificent pre-Presidency conferences that TEPESA has organised since then.” The most recent of these took place in Dublin Castle in November 2012 in preparation for the 2013 Irish Presidency (Pinder, 2008).

ISSUES

The Work Programme for the Irish Presidency was drawn up towards the end of 1974. In December 1974, the Minister for Foreign Affairs discussed the programme with the full Commission in Brussels, covering issues such as the order of priorities, the timetable and contingency planning for unexpected events during the six-month period. This meeting was seen as an important innovation, reflecting the determination of the Irish Presidency to ensure the closest cooperation between the Council and the Commission.

Majority Voting in Council

The Paris Summit in December 1974 had discussed reform of Council procedures and concluded that the practice of making agreement on all questions subject to unanimity should be dropped. Thus, the Community’s leaders reversed the so-called Luxembourg Compromise of 1966 which, on the demand of France under President de Gaulle, provided that, where vital national interests were at stake, the Council must continue its discussions until unanimous agreement was reached. This arrangement had clearly affected the efficiency of the Council as a decision-making body.

The August 1975 ‘Developments in the European Communities’ took up the story:

“It had been agreed...that the practical implementation of this decision could best be secured by establishing at the beginning of each session of the Council those questions appearing on the agenda which could be the subject of a majority vote. Accordingly at the first normal meeting of the Council (on

20 January 1975) held during the Irish Presidency after the Paris Summit the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. FitzGerald, as President of the Council, indicated that he proposed at the outset of each session of the Council to identify three categories of items on the agenda, viz. items requiring decisions by unanimity under the Treaty, items for which majority decision-making is provided for in the Treaty and items not requiring formal decisions by the Council.

“...the first opportunity to take a majority vote arose at the Council (Foreign Affairs) on 24 June 1975 when the question of the levy on imports of beef from certain countries in southern Africa was being considered; although all the Member States favoured a solution that would leave these countries with the financial benefit of the levy on beef the two solutions open to the Council were each opposed by particular countries. In these circumstances the President (Dr. FitzGerald) proposed a majority vote and a decision on this basis was taken accordingly. Subsequently, two further majority votes were taken on another item on the agenda of that meeting.”

(Government, 1975)

Dr. FitzGerald, in his memoir, recalled that “I urged my Italian successor in the Presidency to maintain this practice but, after a couple of half-hearted attempts, he dropped it and the Council soon reverted to the practice of deciding all issues, however trivial, on the basis of unanimity” (FitzGerald, 1991). It was not until the adoption of the Single European Act in 1987 that this matter was satisfactorily dealt with and subsequent treaty amendments have widened the scope of majority voting in Council.

Political Co-operation Agenda

The Government record of the Presidency work programme listed eight areas of particular concern under the heading of Political Co-operation: the Middle East; the Euro-Arab Dialogue; Cyprus; Greece and Turkey; Portugal; Africa; South East Asia; and the United Nations.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. FitzGerald, as Council President, made a tour of the Middle East in May 1975 – during which he visited Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt and met the Secretary General of the Arab League – and visited Israel in June 1975. An EC-Israel Agreement signed earlier in the year by Dr. FitzGerald gave rise to difficult exchanges in the Arab capitals over the sensitive issue of the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. On his return to Dublin he was able to produce an agreed position of the Nine to the effect that the EC-Israel Agreement did not cover the occupied areas. This was welcomed by the Arab states.

During his Middle East tour, Dr. FitzGerald held discussions with the Arab League on the Euro-Arab Dialogue to which the Irish Presidency gave particular attention. Following a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Nine in Dublin in February 1975, steps were taken to facilitate dialogue in a number of specific areas – agriculture and

rural development; industrialisation; basic infrastructure; financial co-operation; trade; scientific and technological co-operation; cultural, labour and social questions. At a joint meeting in Cairo in June 1975 detailed arrangements for meetings of experts and for the creation of a steering committee were agreed.

The Cyprus problem was addressed by the Presidency at meetings of the Foreign Ministers and in dialogue with the United Nations where the Security Council and the Secretary General were working to bring the representatives of the two communities together. This matter was dealt with in Presidency replies to questions in the European Parliament.

The conflict between Greece and Turkey over the Aegean Sea was on the Presidency agenda and the reference of the issue to the International Court of Justice was welcomed by the Foreign Ministers. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, as President of the Council, visited Turkey and Greece in June 1975.

The Portuguese 'Carnation Revolution' of April 1974 was a matter of concern for European governments as the political direction of the country was unclear, with evidence of strong communist influence among the younger army officers in the revolutionary leadership. An election for a constituent assembly – to produce a new constitution – in April 1975 saw the Communist Party receive no more than 13% of the vote with the moderate Socialist Party, led by the lawyer and one time political exile, Mario Soares, obtaining the largest vote – at 38%. It was decided that Dr. FitzGerald, as President of the Council, should go to Lisbon to encourage democratic progress and to discuss the ways in which the Community could assist Portugal on its evolution from dictatorship.

Garret FitzGerald, in his first memoir, wrote at length about his Lisbon visit where he met initially with Ernesto Antunes, the Foreign Minister of the provisional, army-based, Government. Antunes insisted that the goal of the interim leadership was to hand over to a genuinely democratic administration and he volunteered the view that "*Il faut dire qu'une aide communautaire sera dans l'optique d'un développement démocratique en Portugal.*" ("It is necessary to state that any assistance from the Community will be in the context of democratic development in Portugal"). There followed meetings with other key figures in the armed forces leadership, including the simplistically ideological Prime Minister, Vasco Gonçalves, who appeared out of touch with the reality reflected in the poll results. He met Mario Soares who encouraged the Community to engage with Portugal in a constructive, pro-pluralist manner which would encourage those in the armed forces and in the moderate political parties to work together. A year later, following a general election, Mario Soares became the first Prime Minister of a democratic Portugal (FitzGerald, 1991).

The Presidency organised and chaired a number of meetings on developments in Africa, in particular in the southern part of the continent. A major concern related to the emergence to independence of the former Portuguese territories, Angola and

Mozambique. The Presidency issued a statement announcing recognition of the independence of Mozambique on 25 June 1975.

The Presidency had a co-ordinating role in providing humanitarian assistance in Cambodia and Vietnam.

At the United Nations the Nine had been working to co-ordinate positions insofar as this was practicable before and during sessions of the General Assembly, resulting in a situation in which they took a common position on nearly 80% of resolutions in 1974. The development of the Community's role in the UN was discussed at two of the meetings of Foreign Ministers during the Presidency with a view to better co-ordination in the General Assembly in 1975-1976.

The Lomé Convention

An early Presidency duty was the completion of the negotiation of the first Lomé Agreement between the European Community and forty-six African, Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific (ACP) countries. The signature of the Agreement was scheduled for the end of February 1975 in Lomé, the capital of the West African republic, Togo. Dr. Garret FitzGerald, as President of the Council, travelled there with other European leaders to join the representatives of the forty-six ACP states in signing the Agreement. He described the event as "perhaps the most exotic moment of my political career, and it had its entertaining side." The latter aspect arose from the accidental breaking of the bridge of his reading glasses. The story of the unsuccessful attempt to repair the spectacles and the problems involved in borrowing glasses from the Prime Minister of Fiji is told at length in his memoir: "When it came to my turn to speak I found that while I could read the text with the glasses they would not stay on my nose unless I held them...", leading to a "somewhat inelegant performance."

Dr. FitzGerald's performance was evaluated by the French commissioner, Claude Cheysson, who wrote that "I remember Lomé in 1975. Ireland was in the chair of the Community. Its Foreign Minister therefore had the responsibility of finishing the negotiations and signing the Convention – as was later to be the case for Lomé II and Lomé III. It was difficult but, thank God, the Council of Ministers was represented by a man who could understand the significance of an unprecedented approach to relations between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. At the time of signature, Garret found the right words to express his pride, as a European and as an Irishman: Ireland, which had so recently regained independence, which knew the problems of development, felt closer to our African and Caribbean partners than any other Member State" (Dooge, 1986).

Initiatives during the Irish Presidency

Addressing the Royal Irish Academy in November 1975, the Minister for Foreign Affairs spoke of the various initiatives taken during the Presidency:

“During that time Ireland took a number of important initiatives within the Community. It organised and presided over the first precedent-setting European Council meeting, held in Dublin. It had the responsibility for developing the process by which in certain international fora (notably the Euro-Arab Dialogue and the first Preparatory Meeting for the Conference on International Economic Co-operation), the Community speaks with one voice through the Presidency and the Commission jointly. It introduced the practice (since followed by the Italian Presidency) of a meeting between the President of the Council and the Commission to discuss the Work Programme before the commencement of the Presidency.

“It established a new link between the Presidency and the Economic and Social Committee. It established a new and much closer relationship between the Presidency and the European Parliament, and initiated the process of answering questions on Political Co-operation matters in the Parliament, in accordance with a decision of the December 1974 Paris Summit. It made proposals for improvements in the working methods of the Council, one of which, the preparation for the Council of Foreign Ministers of Progress Reports on the working of specialised Councils, is already being put into effect. And, finally, it successfully introduced majority voting into the Council of Foreign Ministers, thus fulfilling a mandate of the Paris Summit and opening the way to much speedier and more effective decision-making in the Community.”

(FitzGerald, 1975)

Social Europe: Adopting the Poverty Programme

On 8 January 1975, the Commission sent a Communication to the Council containing details of the Programme of Pilot Schemes and Studies to Combat Poverty which had been included, as a priority item, in the 1974 Social Action Programme. It was also submitted to the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee for consideration.

The Communication outlined the history of the project and described it as introducing “a new element in the development of the Community” and went on to argue that “a programme of pilot projects cannot itself abolish poverty, but it can serve to develop clearer perceptions of a complex problem and pioneer new techniques for tackling it, thus contributing to better informed and more effective policies for the future.” The Council was asked to approve the programme which was set out in detail.

The Communication contained statements of Objectives, Definitions, Criteria and Classification. It discussed the financing of the programme, indicating that Community participation would be limited to 50% of the actual cost of the project except in exceptional cases. The question arose immediately of the legal form of the approval sought from the Council, the original idea of a Regulation having been abandoned (Commission, 1975).

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Welfare, Frank Cluskey T.D., responded that it was a priority for the Irish Presidency to advance the Social Action Programme and to achieve formal, legal approval for the pilot schemes programme so as to permit that initiative to move from theory and debate to action. He welcomed an early visit to Dublin by Commission Vice President Hillery as an opportunity to make progress on the agenda and timetable for the six months.

The meeting between Dr. Hillery and Frank Cluskey, on 7 February 1975, covered four main points: the financing of EC Social Policy (European Social Fund); the European Social Budget which offered the possibility of progress on harmonisation of national social policies and greater accuracy in developing social indicators); progress on the Poverty Programme and the future development of European Social Policy. The Social Action Programme was reviewed with particular emphasis on policy for the handicapped. Preliminary arrangements for the June 1975 Social Affairs Council were discussed and it was confirmed that the Poverty Programme would be tabled for adoption, provided the preparatory measures such as agreeing the final form of the instrument of approval and receiving the Opinions of the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee were dealt with in good time.

The Commission Communication was taken up by the Council's Social Questions Group which was by now under Irish chairmanship in the person of John Corcoran, the Permanent Representation attaché from the Department of Labour. At the first discussion on 12 February, the Department of Social Welfare was represented by me, as the Minister's Special Adviser, and the Department's attaché in Brussels, Edward McCumiskey. The Commission explained its position on the programme, claiming that it had carried out the mandate of the Council. From all sides, participants argued that the paper before them provided no legal certainty about the basis for action and, more importantly, expenditure – the Belgian attaché, Mertens, summed it up by demanding “a piece of paper” and, for Ireland, McCumiskey added “as soon as possible”. The Commission legal expert, Marie-Jose Jonczy, agreed that an appropriate document would be available for the Group's next meeting.

The Communication was submitted to the Economic and Social Committee (ESC) and John Carroll, Vice President of the ITGWU and a member of the Workers' Group in the ESC was appointed as the Committee's Rapporteur on the Poverty Programme. I was asked to act as an Expert to assist John Carroll in drafting the Opinion, working with the ESC staff advisor, Petra Kelly, a German with an Irish-American name. She was to become well known in Ireland because of her work, with John Carroll, in the Irish anti-nuclear power campaign in the period 1979-1983. She returned to Germany and was a founder of the German Green Party, serving as a member of the Bundestag from 1983 to 1990 but died in tragic and mysterious circumstances in 1992.

The ESC group met on four occasions, between February and April, concluding with a session of the ESC Plenary on 24 April at which an Opinion was adopted unanimously which approved the proposals for the programme of pilots and studies to combat poverty. The Opinion endorsed the priority status accorded to the action against

poverty. It stated the Committee's view that "the causes of poverty are manifold. It is accepted that a major element is the existence of inequality which arises to a real degree from the structure of society and of the economy. Inequality arises not only as between individuals and groups, but also as between regions within countries and within the larger Community" (ESC, 1975).

The Commission Communication had also been submitted to the European Parliament where the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment received the paper and set about preparing an Opinion. Willy Dondelinger MEP of the Luxembourg Socialist Party was appointed Rapporteur. The Irish interest in this exercise was represented by Liam Kavanagh MEP who kept Frank Cluskey fully briefed. The final opinion, delivered on 10 April 1975, approved the Commission proposal and argued that "despite its limited scope, this proposal may represent a first demonstration of Community solidarity *vis-à-vis* the underprivileged and fringe members of our society." It also called for clarity on funding and for consideration to be given to funding in the longer term "since certain schemes extend over a period of several years".

When the Social Questions Group met on 12 March 1975, it was reported that the Commission had not yet produced a proposal for a formal legal text for adoption by the Council and that the legal services of the Council and the Commission were engaged in detailed discussions. The Council Legal Services stated that a new proposal would most likely be based on Article 235 of the Treaty.

The Group continued its consideration and the question of financing, and especially the duration of any funding arrangements, continued to be of concern to several delegations. The Irish position was that the programme was being drawn up under the terms of the Council Resolution of January 1974 on the Social Action Programme. It was, therefore, reasonable to expect a continuation of action in further stages. The critical question was whether it was timely to press for anything beyond a general expression of the Commission's positive attitude to such future action. Any attempt to write in a firm commitment on long-term funding was likely to produce a strong negative reaction from some Member States, notably Germany and the United Kingdom.

Throughout March 1975 the Commission was busy with the legal and financial aspects of the programme and there was a series of meetings or lengthy telephone conversations over a two-week period between the office of Frank Cluskey and the Hillery Cabinet, the Commission services and the Permanent Representation. Frank Cluskey held regular weekly review sessions on all aspects of the Social Action Programme, but in particular on poverty and the handicapped. Hillery's biographer recorded the fact that collaboration between the Commission Vice President and the Irish Parliamentary Secretary bore fruit in the extension of Community assistance for people with disabilities, including a joint initiative leading to funding for sheltered employment (Walsh, 2008).

The Social Questions Group reconvened on 15 April 1975 with John Corcoran in the chair. I attended with Edward McCumiskey. The Commission tabled what was described

in the best bureaucratic prose as “a working document containing a provisional version of a draft Decision.” In discussion, the German and UK delegations insisted on a strict approach to funding, making it clear that they feared the possibility of creating an open-ended commitment. For the Commission, it was conceded that financing would prove difficult in future years but that the normal budgetary procedures would be followed. On the positive side there was a generally supportive approach around the table, indeed an element of impatience about the length of time required to get a relatively small programme off the ground.

On 18 April 1975 the Commission addressed a letter to Dr. FitzGerald, as President of the Council, attaching the formal proposal for a Council Decision concerning the Programme of Pilot Schemes and Studies to Combat Poverty. The Commission requested that the Council “should act on this proposal at its meeting on social affairs, scheduled for June 1975”. It called on both the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee to deliver their Opinions during the month of May.

The Draft Decision dealt with the definition of the pilot schemes – action research projects and studies – and set out the basis for financial assistance to schemes, setting a 50% limit for the usual financial participation by the Community. Financing was seen as a partnership between the Community and the Member States, or public or private organisations. A contribution above 50% could be given in certain cases, for instance for cross-national studies.

The new draft was tabled for consideration at the meeting of the Social Questions Group on 29 April, with John Corcoran in the chair. The text was dealt with on a line-by-line basis with the chair seeking to obtain clarity on the standpoint of each delegation.

The key element of the discussion related to the arrangements for financing the schemes and studies. The Irish, Belgian, Netherlands and UK delegations – and the French with some reservations – supported the proposed wording, recognising that schemes were likely to require a certain amount of time to come to fruition. The German delegation took a different position, considering that the Decision should contain a determination of the general scope of the programme and should define the financial provisions for the programme, fixing a ceiling for its implementation, confined to the financial years 1975 and 1976.

The Commission drew attention to the views of the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee according to which the Council should consider the possibility of continuing to finance operations beyond 1976. Overall, the critical point arising from these discussions was that Germany – or, rather, the German Finance Ministry – remained unhappy about the project because of the uncertainty about the likely duration of schemes and the consequent lack of clarity on funding. While the German delegates made constructive statements about the overall direction and content of the programme the continuing negativity on the funding front gave the Commission team and the Irish authorities reasons for concern about the result of the June Council.

Throughout the month of May, the project moved systematically through the various Community institutions on its way to the Social Affairs Council on 17 June 1975. The draft Decision was dealt with in the Council's Social Questions Group, its Budgetary Affairs Committee and finally in COREPER, the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee finalised their work on the paper. Regular meetings were held in the Department of Social Welfare, and between that Department and other relevant Departments, in particular the Department of Labour whose Minister, Michael O'Leary, would occupy the Chair at the Council meeting.

The final meetings of the Social Questions Group took place on 20 and 27 May 1975 at which the German position was reiterated with the addition of an objection to the statements in the draft to the effect that the schemes should inform future policies and that the Commission should accompany its progress report in 1976 with proposals for further initiatives. The Irish position on these points was clear. Ireland saw Community action in this area as having the goal of informing future policy and bringing about some changes in policy at national and Community levels. An internal note addressed this issue: "...the schemes themselves cannot cure poverty nor are they designed to. So where do we go when they are finished? Merely turn round and say 'well that was an interesting exercise'. No, they are designed to lead to further more effective action, action which can be planned for while the schemes are being monitored. The next stage of the social action programme will begin in 1977 – it must include actions in relation to poverty whether or not the pilot schemes are a success."

Over this period there were five face-to-face consultations with members of the Hillery Cabinet and a regular series of memoranda and reports from Edward McCumiskey in the Permanent Representation. Frank Cluskey convened a number of meetings to ensure that he was fully briefed and he kept in close contact with Labour Minister, Michael O'Leary. The Tánaiste, Brendan Corish, was provided with regular reports on progress and encouraged the efforts underway at both EC and national levels.

On 30 May 1975, the COREPER meeting on the poverty proposal took place under the chairmanship of Ireland's Deputy Permanent Representative, Andrew O'Rourke. Germany retained its position on the funding issues while the Commission proposals enjoyed the support of the other eight delegations. COREPER drew up a lengthy report on all aspects of the programme for transmission to the Council.

The Agenda for the June Council Meeting was circulated, with four main items listed for consideration and decision:

- Proposal for a Council Decision concerning the programme of pilot schemes and studies to combat poverty;
- Proposal for a Council Recommendation regarding the application of the principle of the 40-hour week and four weeks annual paid holidays;

- Proposal for a Council Decision for intervention by the Social Fund to encourage structural adjustment measures;
- Proposal for a Council Directive on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women workers.

This represented a tough challenge for the Irish Presidency and for Labour Minister, Michael O’Leary, in particular. While there was obvious Irish interest in the poverty decision, having regard to its origins, the proposed Directive on Equal Treatment had to be seen as a crucial element of the overall package on Equality which was at the heart of Vice President Hillery’s programme, following the earlier council decision on Equal Pay.

An opportunity for informal political contacts was provided by a meeting, on 3 June 1975, of the Standing Committee on Employment at which both Michael O’Leary and Frank Cluskey were in a position to speak with their colleagues from the other eight Member States and also to gauge the feelings of the social partners on the state of play on the Social Action Programme as a whole. There was a growing mood of concern about the direction of social policy in a period of economic crisis with talk of re-thinking the priorities to be adopted with a clear swing towards employment policies.

Two days later, on 5 June 1975, a referendum was held in the UK on the issue of continuing British membership of the EEC. This took place after a “re-negotiation” of the British terms of entry demanded by the incoming Labour Party Government led by Harold Wilson. The renegotiation policy was part of a strategy to balance opposing wings of the party and Harold Wilson went along with in the well-founded belief that a referendum would endorse UK membership of the Community. In the event, the referendum saw a 67-33% result in favour of continuing UK membership, on a 65% turnout.

Social Affairs attaché, Edward McCumiskey, came back from Brussels for three days (11-13 June) to provide a comprehensive briefing to all members of the Irish delegation on Friday 13 June, attended by the efficient Press Attaché, Mary Sheerin from the Government Information Service, whose task it would be to deal with Irish media interest in the Council and its outcome.

Parliamentary Secretary Frank Cluskey, various officials and I travelled to Luxembourg on the afternoon of Sunday 15 June, leaving Minister Michael O’Leary behind to deal with a threatened public transport strike. On arrival the delegation was given the list of Ministerial delegates who would attend the meeting. They included two UK Ministers who were already British Labour Party legends in their lifetime – Michael Foot, Secretary of State for Employment, and Barbara Castle, Secretary of State for Health and Social Security.

Barbara Castle had been a leading figure in the No camp in the UK referendum and her memoir records her flight to Luxembourg for the Council meeting. “On the way John Fraser (Michael Foot’s Junior Minister) and I swapped notes on the line we should take

tomorrow on the Directive on the Equality of Rights for Women in Employment – one of those pretentious pieces of EC ‘legislation’ which can be as grandiose as you like because everyone ignores them when it suits them. All I know is that I have no time for the shambling discussions and hypocritical attitudinising of which I have had so much at these international conferences. If Britain is in the Common Market, for better or for worse, I want to see that the EC institutions develop some of the intellectual discipline we have to have in our own Government” (Castle, 1980).

On Monday 16 June, Frank Cluskey and the delegation spent the day in final briefings with the Permanent Representation and preparations were completed in time for everyone to attend a significant occasion for the Irish Presidency – the official visit by President Cearbhaill Ó Dálaigh to the Institutions of the European Community. They had arrived in Luxembourg to visit the European Court of Justice and the Irish delegation to the Social Affairs Council meeting was invited to a packed reception in the President’s honour.

The 345th Meeting of the Council of Ministers took place on Tuesday, 17 June 1975 under the chairmanship of the Minister for Labour, Michael O’Leary. The Council lasted from 10a.m. to 11.30p.m. and was a complicated and, at times, confused and chaotic occasion. The two main items – the Decision on the Poverty Programme and the Equal Treatment Directive – proved difficult to conclude and the discussions were interrupted several times to permit bilateral contacts, consultations with the Commission teams on matters of detail, and preparation of compromise proposals from the Chair.

The poverty item became a day-long test of resolve between the Irish delegation, in the person of Frank Cluskey, and the German delegation, led by the Federal Minister for Labour and Social Order, Walter Arendt. A move to defer decision on the Equal Treatment Directive was proposed by the UK Secretary of State, Barbara Castle, who was clearly unhappy to be in the position of arguing against a proposal on women and equality, pretentious or not. In both cases the arguments came down to the financial realities of countries in the throes of an economic crisis.

On the poverty proposal, the Chairman made an opening statement which recalled the main contentious issues and highlighted the most important matters to be decided – the financing of the programme and the duration of the Community commitment to it. Stressing that there was no question of an open-ended commitment, the Chairman outlined the various safeguards which had emerged from the discussions over the preceding weeks. These included a time limit of five years, limits to the allocations in 1975 and 1976 and a progress report by the Commission by July 1976 after which no new schemes would commence. Germany responded by insisting on a financial arrangement which would limit the effective life of the Decision to two years and a day-long debate was launched.

The record of the discussion describes what became, from an early point, a direct confrontation between the former butcher, Frank Cluskey, and the former coalminer, Walter Arendt. The problem for the Chairman – apart from the fact that he was Irish and

Ireland was one of the key protagonists – was that the argument was focused on an extremely narrow element of the overall proposal – funding. More than once the Chair and the Commission invited Irish and German representatives to a working session outside the Council chamber in the search for agreement and insisted on the need to reach an outcome on the day – no postponement could be envisaged in the light of the priority status of the initiative.

A somewhat similar situation was underway in respect of the Equal Treatment paper with the UK taking a determined stand against adoption of the text before the Council. Germany supported the UK position. There was more division of position on this item than on poverty. It became unavoidable that the item would have to be taken back for assessment by the Commission services with a view to proposing amendments likely to attract support at a future session of the Council. Hillery's biographer indicates that he "recognised that he had to adapt to unwelcome political and economic realities if he was to win over the national governments" (Walsh, 2008).

The inevitable deferment of a decision on Equal Treatment made it all the more important to find the basis for an agreement on poverty. Frank Cluskey, supported by all of the other delegations, including the British, argued strongly that this was the only proposal in the Social Action Programme which went beyond the employment field and that it was vital to make progress on a proposal which had taken eighteen months to prepare and which would have a life of only a further eighteen months if the German view prevailed. It was most important that the human dimension of the programme should be recognised and Ireland could not accept a situation in which valuable work would be cut off before it could be finalised due to lack of finance.

As the day went on the issue was debated and re-debated several times and suspended for bilateral talks and interventions by the Commission team. The story is taken up in the Hillery biography:

"But the German representatives were adamant that they could not support any increase in the allocation for the following year; they had gone as far as they could in agreeing to the use of existing funding for the new poverty action programme. Hillery commented in his diary: 'The Germans had their way, saving money'. The Council agreed the allocation of 2.5 million units of account for 1975 only with the proviso that the money had to be committed by the end of the year..."

(Walsh, 2008)

The Commission inserted a Statement in the Council Minutes providing for the German insistence on the limits of funding in 1975 and, further, indicating that it would seek to fund the action in 1976 by making a proposal "as part of the budgetary procedure" and by making economies. Frank Cluskey finally accepted the inevitable and the other supportive delegations agreed with him that, subject to the Commission Statements which met the German demands, the Decision should be adopted in principle and

referred back to COREPER for finalisation. In the event, the text was finalised and adopted as an “A” item at a Council meeting on 22 July 1975 (Council, 1975).

On the next day, Frank Cluskey issued a Statement on the adoption of the Pilot Schemes Decision:

“The adoption by the Council of Ministers of the Decision on the programme of Pilot Schemes and Studies to Combat Poverty marks the culmination of almost two years of effort to give reality to an Irish initiative and, at the same time, the beginning of practical work on the programme in all the Member States of the Community. It is a cause of satisfaction that this decision has been taken during the period of the Irish Presidency of the Council of Ministers...the pilot schemes project of itself is a small and limited action which cannot end poverty or even alleviate it to any major extent. The purpose of the project has been clearly spelt out as the development of a series of planned and experimental actions to test out certain approaches, to explore their effectiveness and to contribute to the evolution of long-term policy. It has been stressed that the programme will have to involve practical intervention in areas of deprivation and among groups in need and that it will have the task of increasing public awareness of the problem of poverty...

“It has been most encouraging to see the degree of support and commitment of the governments of the Member States at the various stage of development of this project. The hard work and skill of the Commission officials has also contributed to the successful launching of this Irish initiative. What is now to be anticipated is a concerted and effective approach to the implementation of the programme of pilot schemes. Given such an approach, this initial Community action in a vital area of social concern can give a real hope of advance towards a truly comprehensive policy of benefit to all the people of the Member States.”

(Cluskey, 1975)

Thus the Council typically produced a mixture of decisions and deferred decisions, reflecting the political realities of the moment – itself a mixture of aspirations for social progress and response to evident economic and financial difficulties arising from the Oil Crisis. The Commission, under the leadership of Vice President Hillery, was seeking to maintain as much of the original dynamic behind the Social Action Programme in the face of the crisis. In particular the priority he accorded to the elements of the Programme related to the position of women in European society remained at the heart of his thinking and activities throughout his time in Brussels.

Conclusion

This consideration of the events and issues of Ireland’s first Presidency, as well as the examination of the preparations, milestones, challenges and legacy in the previous papers in this series, gives a particular insight into the current Irish EU Presidency,

Ireland's seventh. While the EU has greatly evolved since 1975, many of the original issues and challenges – of the role of the European Council, the response to economic crises and the relationship between the UK and the EU, for example – remain on the agenda. The historical perspective highlights the fact that the Irish approach of efficiency, conciliation and innovation, developed for the first Presidency in 1975, has remained the driving force behind Ireland's conduct of the Presidency to the present day and Ireland has successfully mobilised its strong track record, experienced personnel and political will for the 2013 Presidency.

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