

**SPEECH BY DOMINIQUE DE VILLEPIN  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address you here, in Dublin's City Hall, which occupies a central place in the memory of Ireland. From the funeral of Charles Stewart Parnell to the installation of Michael Collins's Provisional Government, via the Easter Rising of 1916, this building tells the whole story of Ireland's emancipation.

We live in exceptional times. Yet there is a paradox. On the one hand there is growing tension, with crises springing up around the world and the threat of a clash of cultures and identities. On the other hand, in the face of this risk, there is a logic of union and regional groupings at work, with Europe playing a major role. Enlargement, further progress in Europe, the adoption of a Constitution—we must together tackle these challenges in order to consolidate peace and stability in our continent, and in the world.

A race has begun, between the forces of order and those of disorder. In order to succeed, we must take the measure of the new state of the world, driven by a new dialectic, where all of the peoples and cultures are coming into contact with each other through the process of globalisation, and yet where people feel a need for roots, for a sense of belonging.

Faced with the risks of dislocation, today we must reconcile two aspirations, bringing together the planetary with the local, reconciling identities with modernity, and combining our energies in order to build a stronger and more united Europe.

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Ireland occupies a unique place in the hearts of all French people. Rarely have two nations been bound by such enduring ties, dating back to the times when Hibernia and Gaul were part of a single Celtic civilisation and spoke sister languages. Despite the Roman Limes which separated our two universes, despite the hegemonic rivalries which for so long tore Europe apart, our two peoples have constantly kept faith with each other.

On many occasions in the past, our paths have mirrored one another.

First came the paths of Ireland's missionaries who travelled to France to share with us their hunger for knowledge—men of lofty intellect with fire in their souls. At their urging, monasteries sprang up all over our country, preserving the heritage of the ancients. Centuries later, in the age of the Anglican Reformation, scholars and students

from Ireland sought refuge in France. They founded the *Collège des Irlandais* in Paris, now restored at last.

Then came the paths of Ireland's soldiers, when, under the Treaty of Limerick, those who came to be known as the “Wild Geese” joined us on French soil. They formed the regiments of that celebrated Irish Brigade which, until 1791, covered itself in glory alongside French soldiers, especially at the Battle of Fontenoy. When Louis XV complained to Archbishop Dillon of their reckless courage, the latter, another scion of Irish stock established in France, retorted that the King's enemies too complained loudly of it—on the battlefield.

We have also shared together the rocky, sometimes violent path of revolutionary ideals and fervour. The clamour of the French Revolution inspired the upsurge of the United Irishmen led by Wolfe Tone, who himself became a general of the Republic. So relentlessly did Tone plead their cause that revolutionary France twice sent expeditionary forces in support of the insurgents. It was then that the republican ideal put down deep roots in the consciousness of our two peoples.

Meanwhile, the flow of ideas continued. Daniel O'Connell exercised a genuine fascination over a younger generation of French thinkers, with Lamennais and Montalembert, seeking to reconcile the Church and political liberalism. While Alexis de Tocqueville was dissecting the United States, his travelling companion Gustave de Beaumont undertook a detailed study of Ireland. Later, in 1848, the Young Ireland political and literary movement hailed the Revolution in Paris.

Nor can we forget the path of sacrifice: when France faced the gravest perils in its history, many Irishmen joined its side, particularly in the First World War, when more than 200,000 Irish volunteers fought with the French. Several thousand of them lost their lives, and many now lie buried on our soil. It is fitting that we should remember them, and in the name of France I want to pay tribute to them.

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Leaving aside this long history in common, today our two peoples share a strong attachment to culture and everything that, in a society increasingly ruled by the marketplace, elevates man and guides him the world over. The Irish identity can be read in your stones and buildings, but also in that element of desire and imagination that inspires the works of your poets, novelists and playwrights.

Your writers, like your people, have continually swung between their passion for their soil and the call of other lands. Yeats, in his poetry, celebrates his love for the mythical land of bards and ancestral traditions which still haunt Fingal's Cave and the rocky, windblown shores:

*Though the great song return no more  
There's keen delight in what we have:*

*The rattle of pebbles on the shore  
Under the receding wave.*

And Joyce replies with his taste for travel, taking him to Venice and Trieste via Paris, where “Ulysses” was first published. In a few months time, indeed, we shall be celebrating an unusual centenary—that fictitious and novelistic, yet utterly unforgettable day of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1904, when Joyce followed his two heroes, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus through more than a thousand pages. From one city to another—from Dublin, scene of a modern Odyssey, to Paris where the writer lived out the last twenty years of his life—Joyce’s journey embodies a new form of writing that criss-crosses the labyrinthine surface of the city to explore the nooks and crannies in the depths of the human soul. A few years later, Samuel Beckett followed the same path from Dublin to Paris, where he collaborated with Joyce on the writing of Finnegans Wake. His work, in English as in French, bears the stamp of his twin culture, driving him to question the human condition with excruciatingly painful lucidity. Not only literature, though, for many talented Irish painters have enriched the output of the French schools of Pont-Aven, as with John Lavery and Nathaniel Hone. And landscapes of Brittany and the Forest of Fontainebleau now adorn the walls of the National Gallery in Dublin.

Today, questions of identity are increasingly significant within the major currents affecting our world. One only has to think of the dramas in the Balkans or West Africa. To a large extent these flow from cultural, historical or ethnic tensions once frozen by the balance between the two major blocs. But think also of the construction of Europe. Each successive enlargement is reviving the ancient bonds that unite our identities, assembling them around a grand design for the future. Here we are today, side by side in defending the diversity of outlooks against increasingly standardised life styles, and in helping sustain the polyphony of the world.

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These paths which we have trodden together down the centuries have helped to forge deep, powerful and trusting bonds between us.

Admiration has played its part. A people such as yours, which has displayed so much courage and determination in the face of History’s trials, some particularly painful—I am thinking of the Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century, for example—cannot fail to arouse our sympathy. Significantly, General de Gaulle chose to visit Ireland, the land of his ancestors the MacCartans, after his resignation in 1969: “At important turning points in my life, as at the present time,” he then explained, “a kind of instinct drew me towards Ireland, perhaps because of the Irish blood that flows in my veins, but also because it was Ireland, which has always occupied a very special place in the hearts of the French.” It was during this visit to Ireland that he began writing his “Memoirs of Hope.” Many of us cherish the warm welcome he received as a token of Franco-Irish friendship.

Today, the French community in Ireland numbers around 11,000 and is expanding steadily. Clearly the French appreciate your dynamism. For your outstanding economic success of the past decade is evidence of the vitality of a society truly open to the world, which has harnessed all its energies to become the homeland of new technologies. Think of the vast stream of sophisticated new products that flows from your factories and research laboratories!

Trade between us has expanded considerably in recent years. France is now Ireland's fourth-largest trading partner. Our firms are contributing actively to the growth of the Irish economy through their investments, with 130 French subsidiaries altogether. We would like to go still further in order to be worthy of the shared ambitions our two countries harbour.

This success is also the triumph of a social model that has retained a sense of proportion, a concern for Nature, and a sense of responsibility towards peoples less fortunate. Ireland has seen too much poverty and adversity, her sons have been forced into emigration too often for her not to feel a spontaneous sympathy with the great humanitarian causes embodied by a man like Nobel Peace Prize winner Seán McBride. As a new age dawns for Europe, how can we not find in Ireland's experience a precious source of inspiration?

A nation's influence cannot be measured by the size of its territory. Ireland maintains strong and enduring links with the descendants of its children who emigrated overseas in their millions, to the United States in particular. Thanks to that sense of common roots, your country has exerted an influence way beyond its borders, which is why it is naturally well-suited to serve as a link between Europe, America and other continents. Ireland's Diaspora has produced—and still does—many prominent men and women, wonderfully testifying to the vitality of your nation. I believe it is said that a quarter of all American entrepreneurs are of Irish origin.

The weight of history and the appeal of novelty have conspired to impart a special vitality to our cultural relations. More than 60% of Ireland's secondary school pupils learn French. The success of Dublin's *Alliance Française* has made it the largest institution of its kind in Europe. Scientific co-operation between us is expanding, with promising ventures in sectors such as the new information and communication technologies, and in biotechnology. Not a season goes by without a theatre in Paris putting on a play from your repertory. The great Irish authors are fully represented in our Sixth Form curriculum at school, while the French are increasingly avid readers of your contemporary novelists.

In a few weeks time, the *Ensemble Intercontemporain* will be joining with the Irish Symphony Orchestra to bring to Dublin audiences some of the finest works of music by contemporary French and Irish composers, with pieces by Pierre Boulez, Olivier Messiaen, Iannis Xenakis, Siobhán Cleary and Jurgen Simpson. What finer

encouragement to artistic creation in our two countries? Cork has been selected to be Europe's capital of culture in 2005, and France will gladly contribute to this event.

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Today the world demands our attention and commitment. The quest for a new world order, the ongoing construction of Europe, and more active solidarity with the developing countries: we must work together on these tasks. Persistent crises and new threats bursting upon the scene are a reminder of our common duty to work for the general interest.

Your own country has experienced violence on its doorstep. How can we fail to applaud the example the Governments of Ireland and Great Britain have set for the world, in their arduous yet relentless quest for a peaceful and democratic solution to the conflict that has split the communities of Northern Ireland for far too long? We earnestly and warmly desire to see all the people of Ireland celebrate their final reconciliation shortly.

The certainties afforded by the bipolar world of yesterday are now a thing of the past. Permanent instability is the rule in today's international environment, spawning many new kinds of threats : terrorism has entered into a new era and has, since September 11, taken the whole world as a target. Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction constitutes a major threat for international stability since it increases the risks of unbalance. Regional crises threaten every day to spread – as in the Near East or Africa. Furthermore, international crime feeds on all grey zones of the planet and exacerbates local, regional and international tensions.

The stakes are high, and we must act urgently. But with one imperative: the unity of the international community. We must shun the temptation to act unilaterally and the pitfall of seeking to impose outside models that ignore local complexities and the legitimate aspirations of peoples. When faced with challenges—ranging from security to the environment—that transcend national boundaries, the international community must uphold rules and principles applicable to all. Legitimacy, today, holds the key to efficiency, since the aspiration for justice constitutes the driving force of peoples on the international stage.

That is the reason why France is pleading relentlessly in Irak for a return to sovereignty as quickly as possible and for greater responsibilities being given to the United Nations in the on-going political process. This is why we are calling for an international conference that will contribute, once a transitional government is in place in Bagdad, to reintroduce Irak at the centre of the Middle East region and among international community.

As for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, my country cannot accept the stalemate we are facing today and which plays in the hands of the extremists. More than ever, there is an urgent need to give a new momentum to the “road map” and relaunch the peace process. It is our common responsibility to unite our efforts for the achievement of peace and for allowing the two states of Israel and Palestine to live together in security for the future.

We live in a world where major new regional groupings are arising, in Asia and Europe, Latin America and the United States, as well as Africa. The risk is that these poles prove unable to work together, that regional interests clash, as was clearly illustrated by the recent trade talks in Cancun. In this new climate, it is more urgent than ever to rebuild a strong and effective multilateral order. An order capable of producing lasting solutions to the crises that threaten to unbalance the world. An order capable of tackling the major global problems.

That is why we are convinced that a strong European Union, possessing the necessary capabilities to play an active part in conflict prevention and crisis management, is crucial to the stability of tomorrow’s world.

In pursuit of such a goal, we need a common charter to enshrine this ambition and give it the means to function optimally. It was not possible to reach agreement on the draft European Constitution in Brussels, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December last year. France was the first to be disappointed, having consistently regarded the document approved by the Convention as the right answer to our ambition. But let us not exaggerate the seriousness of this failure. It would not have been worthwhile seeking agreement at all costs, at the expense of our project’s consistency and effectiveness.

Now it falls to Ireland to take up the reins and breathe new life into this process, so that it can be completed within a reasonable length of time and satisfactorily, without jeopardising the huge quantity of work accomplished by the Convention. In addition to the adoption of a Constitution, which will provide for a more coherent and more flexible institutional framework, Europe is also on the verge of an enlargement that will restore to it its unity formerly sundered by the logic of blocs. The quality of your leaders, the acknowledged calibre of your diplomats as well as your balanced, pragmatic approach to sensitive issues are first-class assets in working for the success of the present historic phase.

Already, your Government has displayed its determination to seize every opportunity of agreement on the European Constitution, through frank and open dialogue with all partners. You may be assured of French support in this task.

For Ireland has amply demonstrated its commitment to the construction of Europe, mirroring your country’s fruitful and successful integration into the Union. Your country’s removal, last year, from the list of countries eligible to the Cohesion Fund was a sign of just how far you have come since 1973. Your choices, indeed, are evidence of your commitment to action, whether by lending troops to many

peacekeeping missions in all four corners of the Earth, or by your readiness to take part in operations entrusted to the European Union by the United Nations.

We hold some principles especially dear. You play an active role in Europe's institutions, and Ireland's positions often reflect those of many other countries. Indeed, the generalisation of qualified majority voting in the Council would actually help to make your voice heard louder. In tomorrow's enlarged Union, preservation of the rule of unanimity would be to court the risk of paralysis. I am confident we can fashion arrangements for a transition to qualified majority voting while guaranteeing to each Member that no Union decision will be prejudicial to it.

After Brussels, everyone understands the need for a Constitution. We want to build a Europe of twenty-five ; it must be our common house. From there, we can introduce, if necessary, more flexibility. Strengthened by its unity, Europe will thus be enriched by its diversity. Member States who wish to show the way in the common interest of all will have, when time is ripe, to be allowed to do so. France, through its President, has for several years now advocated the idea of "pioneer groups," which would give us the necessary flexibility while leaving the door open to all Member States wishing to join in : in no case do we wish to oppose one Europe to another ; on the contrary, we want our whole Union to make progress, taking in account the different rhythms of each of our countries and building up a co-operation that must be open and gradual.

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The Union is at a vital crossroads in its history. As it girds itself for an unprecedented enlargement, it needs to harness all its forces in facing up to several key challenges.

The first is political. We want Europe to be a pillar of tomorrow's world, to wield genuine influence over the course of events and to shoulder its responsibilities wherever its presence is desired and required. Therefore, it must imperatively establish a fully-fledged foreign policy and an autonomous defence capability. That is essential if we are to respond, in our interventions, to the demands of today's world and the new threats it harbours with the requisite flexibility and transparency vis-à-vis each of the Member States. France welcomes the significant progress made in this respect at the European Council on 12 December last.

Challenge number two is economic : Europe must regain its competitiveness vis-à-vis America and Asia. It must also establish the systems it needs in order to respond more fully to the demands of the modern world and to the aspirations of its citizens, notably in terms of jobs and education. All these ambitions depend in particular on the establishment of a genuine economic and social governance.

Enlargement invites us to look beyond Europe's new frontiers. Ireland makes a major effort in the field of development aid, being one of the very foremost donor countries relative to its GDP, particularly to Africa. As you know, that continent occupies a central place in our own efforts to promote development and reduce poverty. On that

subject, we welcomed the success of the first meeting of the Africa Partnership Forum which took place in Paris on 10 November 2003, and which your country attended. The Forum will serve to establish this new partnership between Africa and the developed world, which has been extended to other partners such as Ireland, on a long-term footing.

There is no longer any doubt, today, that the key to international stability lies in eradicating poverty and its accompanying evils, malnutrition, illiteracy and endemic diseases. Here, I want to applaud the excellent initiative of the Irish Presidency in organising a major international conference in Dublin, next month, on HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia. France will go on arguing tirelessly in international fora for a genuinely political approach to these questions, for a resolute assault on the debt problem, and for a steady strengthening of bilateral and multilateral aid to the developing countries.

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In the name of all French people, I wish the Irish Presidency every success at the head of a Europe confronted with momentous times. For we are striving to invent a flourishing and effective democracy for our continent, capable of tackling the major issues of our time, which extend well beyond the confines of our individual States. At the same time we are striving to forge a diplomacy capable of enabling Europe to occupy its rightful place on the international stage.

Our two countries have an essential role to play in this collective process. Their commitment to a Europe capable of nurturing unity within diversity, their natural propensity to seek conciliation, and their experience as nations forged through long experience, are key assets in driving forward the exciting and daunting European adventure that beckons. Ireland and France must not disappoint, for they lie at the heart of the immense hopes in which our peoples are more than ever eager to believe.

Together, we must set about tackling this task so vital to the future of our continent, and hold aloft the ambitions that our history has nourished in each of us. It is up to us to steer the European venture in a manner befitting the issues at stake in today's world.

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