

Statement by John Lynch to the Commission of the European Communities (Brussels, 27 July 1967)

Caption: On 27 July 1967, at a meeting held in Brussels with Jean Rey, President of the European Commission, in connection with the negotiations for Irish accession to the European Communities, John Lynch, Irish Prime Minister, emphasises his Government's European credentials.

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Mr. President, I very much welcome this opportunity afforded myself and the Minister for Finance for a discussion with you. I recall with pleasure our last meeting in September, 1966, when I, as then Minister for Finance, and the Minister for External Affairs had a most useful exchange of views with you, Dr. Mansholt and M. Marjolin. Since then, a number of my colleagues in the Irish Government have visited Brussels and have had the benefit of discussions with members of the former EEC Commission on developments in the Community generally and specifically on the question of Irish membership. These discussions have proved most useful in providing for Irish Ministers briefing at first hand on Community policies and developments and enabling them to acquaint the Commission with particulars of measures which are being taken in Ireland with a view to the preparation of the economy for membership of the EEC.

You are aware, Mr. President, that in letters dated 10th May last to the Presidents of the Councils of the European Communities I, on behalf of my Government, requested the opening of negotiations on Ireland's applications for membership of the Communities. We are pleased to note that, in relation to the application by Ireland and other countries for membership of the EEC, the procedures provided for in Article 237 of the Treaty of Rome have now been set in motion. We are also particularly gratified that the opinion which is to be presented by the Commission to the Council by the end of September is to cover, in addition to the question of British membership, the questions of the membership of other applicant countries, including Ireland.

With the reactivation of our applications, I have undertaken with the Minister for Finance a series of visits to the capitals of member States of the Communities. My purpose in doing so is to have an exchange of views with the Governments concerned in relation to our applications and to the Communities generally, to bring attention to our desire for membership at the first available opportunity and to seek the continued support of Governments for our applications. I am very happy to be able to say that in my visits to the capitals I have received heartening assurances of the support of the countries concerned for Ireland's entry to the Communities.

The Irish Government in their letter dated 31st July, 1961, applying for membership of the EEC under Article 237 of the Treaty of Rome declared that they shared the ideals which inspired the parties to the Treaty and accepted the aims of the Community as set out in the Treaty, as well as the action proposed to achieve those aims. My predecessor reaffirmed this declaration when he presented Ireland's case for membership to the Ministers of the Governments of member States of the EEC on 18th January, 1962. It continues to represent the policy of the present Government and this I have emphasised in my letter of 10th May to the President of the Council of the EEC requesting the opening of negotiations

In the major debate in the Irish Parliament, which has just concluded, on Ireland's application for membership of the EEC, I again made clear the Government's willingness to accept fully the provisions of the Treaty of Rome and the action taken or in contemplation in implementation of these provisions. As you will see from the text of my speech I stated that we do not look on the EEC as merely an economic institution. We recognise that the Contracting Parties, in the Treaty of Rome, have affirmed their determination to lay the foundations of an ever closer union between European peoples and their resolve to strengthen, by combining their resources, the safeguards of peace and freedom. I would like to emphasise without reservation that we remain determined to play our full part in the new and greater Europe which we hope will emerge. The endorsement by Parliament of the Government's policy reflects the very wide support which the idea of Irish membership of the European Communities has in the country as a whole.

We are, as I have said, prepared to meet fully the provisions of the Treaty of Rome and the action taken in the implementation of these provisions. Generally, we do not anticipate any serious difficulty in meeting the obligations of membership. We would expect, and we are confident that the Community would be agreeable to the granting of some reasonable transitional arrangements. Such arrangements would principally arise in the industrial sector.

As far as agriculture is concerned, we would be prepared to accept fully the principles of the Community's common agricultural policy and the measures adopted or in contemplation to give effect to this policy. The Irish Government can give an unqualified assurance of their co-operation in the application of these measures. Any particular problems which might arise for Irish agriculture, such as the need to expedite the improvement of the structure of agriculture in certain regions, could, we believe, be dealt with in conformity with the principles of the common agricultural policy. I do not think this is the most appropriate time to dwell on any current problems we have in regard to agricultural exports. I should like to mention, however, that reduced access to the markets of the Community is creating some difficulties for us, particularly on traditional items of trade like cattle and meat.

As the Commission is aware, the Government have, for a number of years, accorded high priority to preparing the Irish economy for membership of the EEC in which considerable progress has been made. This progress has been assisted by the revision of our external trade policy which is now firmly oriented towards the gradual freeing of trade. The reactivation of our application has given an added impetus, in all sectors of the economy, to the work of completing preparations for membership.

The recent developments in relation to the enlargement of the Community have coincided with the review which the Government had decided to undertake of their Second Programme for Economic Expansion. The Programme was initiated in 1964 with the main objective of a substantial increase in real income and was framed on the assumption that Ireland would be a member of the EEC by 1970. The development of the Irish economy up to 1970 — that is, the period covered by the Programme — and after, depends, of course, to a great extent, on the outcome of our application for membership of the Community. My Government consider that any worthwhile appraisal of the potential growth of the economy over this period and the means by which it is to be realised, must be based on the firmest possible information on the timing and conditions of membership and related considerations. The Government have, therefore, decided that, in the circumstances that now obtain in relation to the admission of new members to the EEC, the best course is, firstly, to complete the review of progress under the Second Programme, supplementing it by references to the re-assessment of the industrial preparations for free trade which is now proceeding and linking it with the 1967 review of both industrial and general economic conditions; and, secondly, according as our position in relation to the EEC is clarified, to prepare a Third Programme of policy and action specifically related to the external trade conditions which Ireland is likely to face within the next few years.

There is a matter of particular importance to the Irish Government to which I would like to invite your attention. I refer to the question of the timing of our negotiations and of our entry into the EEC. We appreciate that, because of the nature and complexity of the problems which will be the subject of negotiations with Britain, these negotiations, once under way, will inevitably be a major preoccupation of the Community. In view, however, of the close inter-relationship of the Irish economy with that of Britain and of the degree of integration of the respective agricultural sectors, my Government are most anxious that the procedures to be adopted for negotiations with applicant countries will permit of parallel negotiations on the Irish application and of consultation with us on matters arising in the British negotiations in which we have a major interest. It is, above all, most important that the accession of the two countries should take place simultaneously so as to avoid any disruption of trade, with the serious consequences which this could have for Ireland. Members of my Government have mentioned our interest in this matter to the Commission in their discussions earlier this year and I have been at pains to emphasise our concern on the question to Governments of member States during my current series of visits to them.

Finally, may I repeat, Mr. President, that we very much welcome this opportunity for an exchange of views with you particularly at this time when the admission of new members to the Communities is again a real possibility. As I have indicated, we shall be glad to elaborate on any aspect of our policies and developments on which you wish to have further information and we, in turn, will be most interested in having the benefit of your views and advice on a number of matters, some of which I have mentioned in the course of my remarks.