

Statement by Bertie Ahern following the second referendum held in Ireland on the Treaty of Nice (20 October 2002)

Caption: On 20 October 2002, the day after the Irish referendum is held in Ireland on the Treaty of Nice, Bertie Ahern, Irish Prime Minister, welcomes the positive outcome of the vote.

Source: Taoiseach's Statement on Nice Referendum Result. [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: European Commission, [27.07.2005]. Available on http://europa.eu.int/constitution/futurum/documents/speech/sp201002_2_en.pdf.

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Taoiseach's Statement on Nice Referendum Result (20 October 2002)

I warmly welcome this extremely important decision of the Irish people. We can now ratify the Treaty of Nice and the truly historic enlargement of the European Union can go ahead. The Irish people's decision was made following extensive debate, a deeper debate than any we've had since our initial decision to join the EEC.

Our decision shows we remain strongly committed to the European Union, that we fully realize and accept that what is good for the people of Europe is good for the people of Ireland. But this decision shows above all that as a nation we want to welcome the peoples of the applicant countries into the Union with open hearts as well as open minds.

From our own perspective this decision ensures that Ireland remains at the heart of Europe where we belong, where we can continue to make a valuable contribution and where we can ensure our interests continue to be protected.

Last year the Government took on board the serious concerns expressed by our people about the protection of our neutrality. We were happy to propose further protection for our traditional policy by including it in our constitution and we fully recognize the significance of the people's decision in this regard.

The country has come through a very hard fought campaign where strong feelings have been expressed on both sides. I made it clear throughout the campaign that I believed it was absolutely critical for Ireland's future that the people give the green light to enlargement. I am happy today that their decision was so decisive.

But I also recognize that there are genuine concerns about how the Union does its business. We must now ensure that our original enthusiasm for the great European project is rebuilt.

I will continue to look at ways to ensure that the Irish people are better informed about the Union.

The National Forum on Europe, which has already made an enormous contribution in this area, has still an important role to play. At the same time the Government, in the ongoing Convention on the Future of Europe, will seek to ensure that the European Union itself becomes closer to its citizens.

I know from my colleagues in the European Council that the concerns expressed by our people are not unique to us and if the Union is to thrive its citizens must be fully engaged. In the Oireachtas we will also make every effort to ensure that the parliamentary scrutiny measures which have been put in place are effective.

Today is an historic day in our relationship with our sister states in Europe. I wish to thank all those who worked so hard to bring about this positive outcome for Ireland and for Europe. No one party or group can claim sole credit. Indeed this campaign was remarkable for the manner in which so many organizations and individual people came together in a simple act of practical patriotism. People canvassed together for a successful outcome who until now had never shared the same political perspective. The partnership we have seen produce such successful results in other aspects of Irish society produced this wonderful result today. At a time when many have turned away from active political participation this has been a genuinely good experience and I pay tribute to all those who gave so unselfishly in this effort.

A huge amount of time and energy has been invested by the Government in ensuring that the Nice Treaty would be ratified. We did this because Nice was necessary, necessary for Ireland and necessary for Europe. Intense political energies were demanded from all of us in delivering today's result and I look forward to directing those energies now, with a renewed vigour and authority, to the challenges Ireland faces at home and in Europe.

With this decision, its now time to move on. I will be attending the European Council meeting in Brussels at

the end of the week. That meeting will be devoted almost exclusively to the enlargement of the European Union. Now that the last obstacle to the ratification of the Treaty of Nice has been removed the European Union can move to address the challenges and opportunities that we in Europe will all face together. And we can work to welcome our new partners in 2004, during Ireland's Presidency of the European Union.