

# **Progress Report on Follow up to The Global Irish Economic Forum**

## **Background**

1. The Global Irish Economic Forum, held at Farmleigh on 18-20 September 2009, was convened with two broad objectives: to explore how the Irish at home and abroad, and those with a strong interest in Ireland, could work together and contribute to our overall efforts at economic recovery; and to examine ways in which Ireland and its global community could develop a more strategic relationship with each other, particularly in the economic sector.
2. The Forum was marked by considerable enthusiasm among participants and a strong willingness to support and assist, as appropriate, in building a successful future for Ireland. This level of engagement by participants has been reinforced in their contacts over recent months with the Government and the Forum has come to be regarded as marking a new phase of active and practical engagement with our overseas communities, particularly in the business sector.

## **Implementation**

3. At its meeting on 13 October 2009, the Government agreed to publish the comprehensive Report on the Forum prepared by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Report contained details of the main themes to emerge; the specific initiatives proposed; and the medium term objectives identified. It can be viewed in full on the home page of the Department of Foreign Affairs' website at [www.dfa.ie](http://www.dfa.ie) The initiatives in the Report were not formally endorsed by Government, but instead reflected the opinions and suggestions advocated by those who participated at Farmleigh. Some of the proposals were

of a nature that they could be more effectively progressed by the private sector.

4. The Government also decided to establish an inter-Departmental Committee of senior officials, chaired by the Secretary General to the Government, to examine and take forward the recommendations contained in the Report. This Committee formally met on 13 November, 27 January and 17 February and its work programme has been taken forward between meetings by a team of coordinators in relevant Departments.
5. The Committee was asked to present an interim progress report to Government in early 2010. The document was considered by Government at its meeting on 23 February and a decision was taken to publish it in advance of St Patrick's Day.
6. This report summarises the specific areas under thematic headings where significant progress is being achieved as part of the follow up process. All of the initiatives listed were proposed or discussed at Farmleigh and featured in the Report of the Forum. While the Forum was primarily aimed at developing a new and more strategic level of engagement with the most influential members of the Irish Diaspora, the wide range of themes and ideas generated there have complemented the work of the Innovation Task Force and the implementation of *Building Ireland's Smart Economy*.

### **Economic Policy**

7. The broad economic policy and call for leadership advocated by many participants at the Forum was reflected significantly in Budget 2010. While significant progress has been made in relation to the public finances, the banking sector and improving our competitiveness position, considerable challenges still remain which require our continued attention.

8. The emphasis in the Budget on encouraging innovation, maintaining Ireland as a friendly and supportive environment for international business, and highlighting emerging strengths in areas such as renewable energy, green technology, scientific research and innovation, all reflect the concerns and views put forward by those present at Farmleigh.
9. An aggressive effort has been made by the Government to highlight these actions to the international business community and media. Comprehensive briefing has also been provided by Irish Diplomatic Missions and State Agencies to those who attended Farmleigh, the wider business sector abroad and the international financial media. Taken together, these key post-Budget 2010 messages constitute a substantive and forward looking brand that Ireland can project to the world market. Such coherence was a key suggestion of Forum participants.

### **Engaging the Diaspora**

10. A number of specific initiatives have been taken by the Government since September to build on the enthusiasm generated at Farmleigh and to ensure that this new level of engagement between Ireland and the global Irish develops on a structured basis.
11. The Global Irish Network: the establishment of a permanent global network of those invited to the Forum and other influential members of the Diaspora was identified as an important objective by Forum participants. Last December, the Minister for Foreign Affairs wrote to some 360 individuals around the world inviting them to participate in the Network. To date, a total of 300 people from 37 countries have agreed to participate. The Minister formally launched the Network in London on 4 February at a meeting of the British based members.

The Network will, for the first time, integrate the most influential Irish and Irish-connected individuals into one global group. It will act as an additional resource for the Government in promoting Ireland's economic, cultural and

tourism messages in key markets and provide a formal forum through which members can exchange views and take forward practical initiatives. It will also enable members to be kept informed of key developments in the economic and cultural sector in Ireland and of Government policy.

The Network will be managed and coordinated by a Secretariat within the Department of Foreign Affairs with our Ambassadors also playing a key role in directing and organising the members based within their area of responsibility.

12. Regional ‘Farmleighs’: a series of regional meetings of the Network will take place in a number of countries during 2010 at which visiting Ministers will participate. Meetings with Network members will form an important component of St Patrick’s Day Ministerial Programmes and other Ministerial visits abroad.
13. Supporting business and technology networks: two specific proposals contained in the Report on the Forum were the need to support business networks and to establish an Irish Innovation Centre in California. To facilitate early positive progress in this area, the Government announced funding of \$251,000 for the Irish Technology Leadership Group in Silicon Valley in December 2009 towards the establishment of a secretariat to develop and expand the organisation’s activities. The appointment of Craig Barrett, former President and CEO of Intel, as the new Chair of the ITLG can also be regarded as a positive linkage with the Forum. The new Irish Innovation Centre is due to open in the first quarter of 2010.
14. Farmleigh Overseas Graduate Programme: the Government is working closely with a number of Forum participants with the objective of establishing a Farmleigh Overseas Graduate Programme in 2010. The initial focus of this programme is expected to be in Asia and will provide up to 500 graduate placements abroad once fully operational.

In addition, the new Bord Bia Marketing Fellowship Programme places 25 graduates, with upwards of three years work experience, into 12 overseas markets working on commercial assignments for more than 100 exporters.

15. Youth Forum for the Global Irish: the Department of Foreign Affairs is working in partnership with the Ireland Funds towards convening a Forum in June 2010 at Farmleigh for up to 100 younger members of the global Irish. The Departments of Foreign Affairs and Enterprise, Trade and Employment will continue to support the development of sectoral and young professional and graduate networks. The Department of Foreign Affairs is also exploring how the existing Working Holiday Programmes can be developed to assist with the objectives of the Farmleigh process.
16. Gateway Ireland: this private sector initiative, aimed at creating a new high quality Irish portal website, is being taken forward by John McColgan in close cooperation with a number of prominent private sector partners. Considerable progress has already been achieved and the Government looks forward to its successful launch in due course.
17. Diaspora Bond: the Minister for Finance announced in Budget 2010 that the NTMA and his Department will develop a National Solidarity Bond which will be available for investment in 2010. Initially, the bond is expected to be available to Irish residents. The NTMA, the Department of Finance and relevant Departments are examining the feasibility of extending it to non-residents and how to successfully market it abroad, including through Irish Diplomatic Missions.
18. Following the Forum, each Irish Embassy abroad is in the process of developing a detailed local Diaspora Strategy aimed at supporting and enhancing engagement with the local Irish community across a number of key sectors.

## Culture

19. The importance of Irish culture in promoting Ireland, including Irish business, abroad was a prominent theme of the Forum. Since September, there has been considerable public discourse about this outcome and strong appreciation from the arts community for the profile given by the Government to the promotion of Irish culture abroad. Culture Ireland has just led the largest-ever cultural trade mission from Ireland to the United States, and is working with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the other State Agencies on a major cultural programme in the US throughout 2011.
  
20. New Arts Centre in New York: on 7 December 2009, the Minister for Foreign Affairs approved funding of €2.3 million towards the construction of a landmark New York Irish Arts Centre in Manhattan. This will be a jointly funded project with the City of New York (which has committed some \$12 million) and will, when completed, provide a venue through which Irish culture and business can be showcased. The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, Culture Ireland and the OPW are leading on the implementation of the project.
  
21. New centre or University for the performing arts in Ireland: an initiative led by businessman Dermot Desmond, an exploratory phase is underway using a dedicated web platform to enable a group of over one hundred leading cultural and business figures to discuss the idea and next steps.
  
22. Expo Shanghai 2010: the Irish pavilion at Expo will reflect the priority identified at the Forum of combining culture and business when promoting Ireland abroad, particularly in Asia. Culture Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Tourism Ireland are preparing promotional programmes for Expo in coordination with Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

23. All Embassy plans for cultural activities in 2010 have prioritised events which support the promotional activities of the State Agencies and Government Departments.

### **Tourism / St Patrick's Day**

24. Diaspora Tourism: in response to the proposal that a 'Come Home' campaign be launched to encourage the global Irish to holiday in Ireland, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism has made the promotion of Ireland as a tourist destination for the Diaspora an integral part of Tourism Ireland's 2010 marketing plan, particularly in the United States.
25. Genealogy tourism: Tourism Ireland is working closely with the National Archives and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism to maximise the tourism impact of online access to genealogical records. One of the themed activities which are being developed to reinforce Ireland's unique experiences for the Great Britain market is a genealogy-based marketing campaign for 2010, "Born in Ireland".
26. St Patrick's Day economic marketing potential: the Department of Foreign Affairs has been working closely with other Departments and State Agencies, in preparing a programme of Ministerial visits and in developing clear, coordinated messages that will be delivered worldwide, to ensure that the economic impact of St Patrick's Day is maximised across a wide range of sectors.

Tourism Ireland has developed a comprehensive St Patrick's Day related marketing campaign in the US, Britain, Europe and Australia, aiming in Britain to make it the largest consumer event in the first quarter of 2010 and mounting a St Patrick's Month campaign in Australia.

27. Ministerial Visits: Government Ministers will present a strong and focussed economic message during St Patrick's Day visits abroad which will emphasise

that the hard decisions have been taken and that solid progress has been made in relation to the public finances, the banking sector and in relation to competitiveness. Building on these steps, St. Patrick's Day 2010 will be used to reassure international commentators and business partners that Ireland is firmly on the road to recovery and is following a well planned strategy to restore our prosperity. Meetings with the members of the Global Irish Network will also form an important element of the St Patrick's Day programmes.

28. London Olympics: the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism has established a London 2012 Coordinating Group made up of other Departments and State Agencies to maximise the marketing opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympics. The Irish Embassy in London has also established a Committee to meet the logistical and other challenges arising from the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

## **Innovation**

29. The importance of investment in research, development and innovation was another important theme at Farmleigh and the Government's commitment to this agenda was clearly evident in Budget 2010 where significant funding was retained despite severe budgetary pressures.

The Government also continues to prioritise expenditure under the Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation, despite the difficult economic circumstances. *Building Ireland's Smart Economy* of December 2008 and the Renewed Programme for Government reaffirm the importance of productive public and private investment in R&D. The latter increased the previously stated target for raising national R&D investment from 2.5% of GNP to 3% of GDP.

30. The Innovation Task Force has developed detailed proposals which reflect some of the related issues raised at the Forum while a process is underway to

market test models for establishing the proposed 'Innovation Fund Ireland' to increase venture capital availability for R&D intensive start up companies.

31. A number of specific areas within this sector were also the subject of detailed discussion at Farmleigh and have been progressed in a substantive way since the Forum.
32. A new €90 million National Energy Retrofit Programme, under the aegis of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR), was announced in Budget 2010. The programme will draw together existing retrofit programmes into a more coherent, overarching framework, leveraging the relationship between energy companies and their customers to promote energy efficiency improvement measures and energy services to end-users. This new programme has the potential to be the most innovative, ambitious, energy-related initiative ever introduced in Ireland. The 2010 activity alone, disbursing €130 million, will support energy efficiency improvements in up to 60,000 homes in 2010, support 6000 jobs directly and will create energy efficiency savings worth a total of €570 million over their lifetime.
33. DCENR is also actively engaged with the ESB to develop a Smart Electricity Network that will allow greater flexibility, performance and integration of renewable energy onto the grid, and with D/Transport to progress the design and implementation of an Intelligent Transport System.
34. Ten Irish companies developing ocean energy technologies will benefit from €4.3 million in funding from Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) through the Industry Prototype Development Fund. Aimed at stimulating the development and deployment of ocean energy devices that can generate renewable electricity, the fund will enable the companies to take their proposals and prototypes to the next stage of development. Development of a full-scale grid connected wave test site off Annagh Head in Co Mayo is now underway. Site investigation has also begun with a Test Facility office established in Belmullet from where marine operations will be managed.

35. DCENR has convened a Task Force to examine content trading, taxation, legal and intellectual property issues associated with the establishment of an International Content Services Centre in Ireland.
36. A series of high-level strategic workshops are also underway to take forward the development of energy efficient Data and Cloud computing centres here.
37. DCENR has also established a Working Group to progress the appraisal, design and implementation of the Exemplar communications test-bed. The test-bed has the potential to attract inward investment and support indigenous companies to develop and optimise new ICT products and services.

## **Greentech**

38. There was strong support at Farmleigh for the implementation of the recommendations that would emerge from the High Level Action Group on Green Enterprise. The report of this Group was launched in December 2009, and the Tánaiste and her Department are taking forward its implementation, together with the Cabinet Committee on Economic Renewal. Included in the recommendations are the establishment of an annual Greentech prize to encourage positive developments in this area.

## **International Financial Services**

39. The Government's response to both the fiscal and banking crisis has received significant positive reaction internationally. This will help ongoing efforts led by the Clearing House Group to reinforce Ireland's position as a centre for international financial services and to bring forward new initiatives targeting growth opportunities.

## **New Strategy for Asia and emerging markets**

40. Following ten years of the successful Asia Strategy, the Government is developing a new strategy, which will focus on high growth emerging markets such as China, as well as on our existing key trading partners. Its aim will be to increase our exports into, and investments from, these markets. The new strategy will also bring further focus and coherence to Ireland's single-minded pursuit of our international economic and commercial interest.

## **Agriculture and food sector**

41. Food and beverage network: Bord Bia, through its market development and promotion functions, has developed a diverse international food and beverage network. Within this, Bord Bia has compiled a comprehensive Irish Food and Drink Diaspora – essentially an international network of influential players of Irish connection within the sector. Networking events will be held in 2010 in the US and Britain to connect with those individuals who have been identified as potential members of this network.
42. Product traceability: sophisticated traceability systems, which facilitate tracing from farm to fork, have been implemented for Irish meat and dairy products. Bord Bia (and the food industry) continue to utilise the high level of product traceability as a marketing tool but greater emphasis is now being placed on the sustainability of Irish products to differentiate them on international markets. Promoting Ireland as the sustainable food island is one of six strategic priorities identified by Bord Bia in its Strategic Priorities 2009-2011.
43. Develop potential market for agri-food exports in the Middle East and Asia: developing market access for Irish food products was discussed in detail at Farmleigh and continues to be a priority for the Government. Bord Bia has a comprehensive work plan to target international markets and recently commenced a 3-year promotion programme for pork, offal and beef products in Japan and Asia. The Russian market was also reopened for Irish pork from

1 February. The markets in Indonesia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have re-opened to Irish beef. The Philippines has also lifted its ban subject to plant approval. Work continues to expand market accessibility, particularly through an inter-department/agency/industry group led by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food.

## **Conclusion**

44. The wide range of areas outlined in this report where action is being taken clearly demonstrates the Government's firm commitment to advance the work begun at Farmleigh, albeit in the context of the continued challenges facing our public finances. It is intended that a further public statement on the progress being achieved in implementing these initiatives and other aspects of the agenda identified at the Global Irish Economic Forum will be made later in 2010.
  
45. While the follow up process to the Forum has a strong focus on the business sector, the Government remains equally committed to supporting the wider Irish community throughout the world, particularly the vulnerable and elderly. Over the past six years, some €70 million has been provided under the Emigrant Support Programme towards projects aimed at supporting the Irish abroad, especially those most in need. This commitment to supporting and developing all Irish communities abroad will continue.

**Department of Foreign Affairs  
February 2010**