

**TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS** delivered by: **PROFESSOR JOHN G. HUGHES**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University, President, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, on 21 April, 2005, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, on **AMBASSADOR JOHN BRUTON**



A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

John Bruton was the ninth Taoiseach of Ireland and a former President in Office of the European Council. His political career has also seen him serve as Minister for Finance on two occasions, Minister for Industry and Energy and Minister for Trade, Commerce and Tourism.

John was born near Dunboyne in Co Meath and educated at Clongowes Wood and University College Dublin before studying to become a barrister in the Kings Inn. He greatly enjoyed his time at UCD where he became deeply immersed in politics and made many close friends to whom he has remained close throughout his career. It was through politics that he met his wife Finola, and John and Finola have four children, Matthew, Juliana, Emily and Mary Elizabeth. Family has always been hugely important to John and he and Finola have a large extended family on both sides, with a strong farming background. Indeed it was John's father Joseph who nurtured his interest in politics and in history from an early age.

John was first elected to the Irish Parliament in 1969, for the Meath constituency, at the age of just 22. His first cabinet post came in 1981 under Garret FitzGerald as Minister for Finance, an appropriate position given his deep interest in and knowledge of economic affairs. In this capacity, he was responsible for the reform of the tax collection system in Ireland, introducing "self-assessment" which greatly improved tax compliance and reduced business costs. He became Leader of Fine Gael in 1990 leading it to victory in 1994. He was elected Taoiseach in December 1994, his administration being a three party 'Rainbow' Coalition Government comprising Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Democratic Left and he held office until 1997.

His government was responsible for the introduction of the Corporate Tax policy (12.5% on all companies) which was a major factor in Ireland's economic success.

While Taoiseach he also presided over the Irish Presidency of the European Union, during which period he represented the European Union as President of the Council at Summit meetings with the President of the United States, the Prime Ministers of Canada, Japan, Korea, China, Israel and Chairman Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

At the Dublin EU Summit, he helped finalise the Growth and Stability Pact which now governs the management of the single European Currency - the Euro.

Thus, John Bruton has played a key role in the development of the Euro, and as both Finance Minister and Taoiseach, in the extraordinary success of the Irish economy. He can speak with great authority on the economy and on future trends both in Europe and throughout the world.

His strong commitment to the development of the EU, and to Ireland's role in the Union, has been particularly noteworthy. Most recently, as a member of the Praesidium of the European Convention, Mr Bruton made an important and effective contribution to the drafting of the European Constitution, which was eventually agreed during Ireland's Presidency. His nomination as EU Ambassador in Washington was a very positive development for Europe, and an honour for Ireland.

The decision by the Commission to nominate a senior political figure to represent the European Union in the United States reflects in particular the priority that the Union attaches to EU-US relations. It underlines that a strong transatlantic relationship, which was a cornerstone of Ireland's EU Presidency agenda, is essential for prosperity and growth on both sides of the Atlantic.

Throughout his political career John's commitment to peace in Ireland has been steadfast. The murder by the IRA of his close friend Senator Billy Fox in 1974 had a deep impact on him both personally and politically and he has been a tireless campaigner for peace and reconciliation since that time. His contributions to the peace process in Northern Ireland as Taoiseach were substantial and are perhaps not always fully appreciated. However, there is no doubt that his close relationship with British Prime Minister John Major, and his deep commitment to the principle of consent, laid the groundwork for the Good Friday Agreement.

At a memorial service for Billy Fox last year John said,

*'..the time has come to put forgiveness, in respect of all those evil deeds, in the first place even in front of truth, in front of accountability, in front of retribution and all those things that the modern media frenzied world demands. Forgiveness makes no headlines. Exposure and accountability do.'*

John Bruton is a true Irish patriot – a believer in fairness and forgiveness, with a deep commitment to the development of Irish society, our quality of life and the role of Ireland in the world community.

Chancellor, I now propose to you for the award of a Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, Ambassador John Bruton.

*PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:*

*Presento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina*

*habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.*