

OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

PROFESSOR PATRICK O'SHEA, President University College Cork, on 21 June 2018 in the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, on **MR JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Is mór an onóir dom fáilte chroíúil a fhearadh romhaibh go léir chuig an Ollscoile Náisiúnta ar an ócáid stairiúil, san ionad iontach álainn seo chun céim oinigh a bhronnadh ar Uachtarán Choimisiún na hEorpa, an tUasal Jean-Claude Juncker.

Här Juncker,et ass ons eng Freed iech haut bei eis willkommen ze heeschen.

Chancellor,

I commend to you Jean-Claude Juncker, one of the longest serving and most experienced leaders both in, and of, Europe.

For almost 20 years, until 2013, President Juncker served as Prime Minister of Luxembourg, much of that time combining the portfolio of Finance Minister. From 2005 until 2013, he was also the first permanent President of the Eurogroup – the group of Eurozone Ministers of Finance that was instrumental in leading us all safely out of the 2008 financial crisis.

Since 2014, President Juncker has served as the 12th President of the European Commission, the all-important executive branch of the European Union.

At the outset of his term we got a taste of what was to come. As the new President, he imaginatively and effectively reorganised and streamlined this institution. He allocated portfolios and responsibilities in a totally new way to enhance both the Commission's function and its focus. This gave his Commission a clear policy agenda for all the its legislative proposals. As such, he became one of the most powerful and influential officeholders in Europe and beyond.

Born in 1954, and always precocious, President Juncker joined the Christian Social People's Party of Luxembourg at the age of 20. He studied law at the University of Strasbourg at a time when that city was a living symbol for post-war reconciliation in Europe. Perhaps, his Burgundian touch for reconciling nations, positions and peoples was forged in Strasbourg.

President Juncker's first ministerial appointment was as Deputy Minister of Labour at the age of just 28, in 1982.

Though has matured a little, he has never lost his youthful drive. While today the likes of Taoiseach Varadkar and President Macron have reduced the average age of the European Council to well below 50 – we forget that within two years of his first appointment, President Juncker was Minister of Labour, then of Finance, at the age of 35, and finally Prime Minister by the time he was 40.

Though from a country much smaller than Ireland, his influence as Minister of Finance was monumental and enduring. As he chaired the meetings of the Ministers of Finance of what was then the European Economic Community, he became a key voice in the run-up to the Maastricht Treaty, which created the European Union as we know it today.

By the time he became Prime Minister, he had already experienced two Luxembourg Presidencies of the Council of the European Union. In 1997, his third, and first as Prime Minister, saw the launch of the EU enlargement process aimed at finally putting an end to the post-war divisions of Europe. He also steered through a resolution on economic policy coordination which completed the third stage of Economic and Monetary Union.

Beginning in 2005, he forged the reform of the Stability and Growth Pact. He also succeeded in revitalising the Lisbon Strategy with a focus on its social and environmental dimensions.

In short, even before he came to the European Commission, President Juncker had helped to recast just about every aspect of economic policy making in Europe.

In 2014, at a meeting here in this city, the European Peoples Party selected a perhaps reluctant Jean-Claude Juncker as its *Spitzenkandidat* for the post of President of the European Commission. Once the die was cast, he took up the task with determination and successfully campaigned across the EU, skillfully using what he heard from real people to shape his agenda as President. Thus, he put a strong emphasis on only having 10 priorities, and he has stuck to them.

President Juncker is renowned for a strong personal commitment to social justice. He was one of the prime movers promoting the "social dimension" of the EU. For years, though a number of countries attempted to frustrate such ambitions, President Juncker persevered. It is in large part thanks to his persistence, that last year's Social Summit took place in Gothenburg, and that the EU agreed to have a further pillar of social rights. In keeping with his commitment to doing right by the individual, he has been a strong advocate for a more open EU approach to migration, another difficult cause, where he shows the stamina and street smarts to negotiate and navigate intelligently.

Again, in keeping with his social commitment he is a strong supporter of equality, diversity and inclusion within the European Commission itself. He told the Prime Ministers that he would resign as President of the Commission if they did not nominate a sufficient number of Female Commissioners - and the threat worked. He set a goal of having a minimum of 40% women at the senior level in the Commission staff by the end of his term.

No assessment of President Juncker, especially one made in Ireland, would be complete without reference to this man's wicked sense of humour, and plain speaking. This tendency often gets him into trouble - but as we Irish understand more than most, this is often just a way to hit the nail on the head.

Thus recently President Juncker noted that: *"I am not the British prime minister. It would be better for Britain if I was, but unfortunately I'm not."*

Similarly, speaking of the current occupant of the White House and his rejoicing at the Brexit vote, President Juncker said: *"If he continues this way, I will encourage Ohio or Texas to leave the United States."*

And responding to the US President's recent utterings on trade, President Juncker was overheard simply to remark that "we can always threaten him with the facts. It is rather an old-fashioned weapon but still effective." And President Juncker reminded us of Europe's nuclear option.... and I quote, *"we can also do stupid."*

In these days of fast moving news, of sound-bites and of Tweets, President Juncker has found a way to live up to the late Otto von Habsburg's mantra that *"the busiest people always have time"*. I have learned that he takes the time both to read and to think about things. My good friend, Dr. Catherine Day, former Secretary General of the Commission, tells me that President Juncker was the first ever boss that she had who asked for long and detailed notes and memos ...and, what is most impressive, he took the time to read them.

In his many roles, President Juncker either attended, presided at or contributed to just about every key meeting and event in Europe over the past quarter century, and he is, therefore, a deep font of knowledge about the EU and everything that happened. This presents a considerable challenge for any officials who know less than he does, and for his peers in the European Council, because he remembers quite well, and will not hesitate to remind them, what their predecessors not only said, but also promised and did, using this advantage most effectively!

There is perhaps one quotation that sums up the approach President Juncker has taken in his current office and here it is:

"Since it took up office, the Commission which I lead has pursued a clear policy: we need less interference from Brussels when it comes to the things that Member States can deal with better on their own. That is why we no longer regulate oilcans or showerheads, but concentrate instead on what we can do better together rather than alone - such as tackling the refugee crisis or securing our external borders. Only in that way can we make people feel that Europe makes a tangible difference."

Coming from a smaller EU state, President Juncker understands and supports the need for solidarity among all of us, whether located in the heart of Europe, like Luxembourg, or on the margin, like Ireland.

As Irish people we can be very confident that we can rely on the European Commission, and on its President, for support in times of need, and especially as Brexit looms. President Juncker, we know we can count on you, and you can count on us.

All these recent events have reminded me of a quote from that great American, Benjamin Franklin. *"We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."*

By working together in partnership, we will prosper. Our European partnership, the European Union, will long endure. We all thank you, Jean-Claude Juncker, for your role in enabling us to embrace our European identity.

We now move to the conferring of the degree. In Ireland, even with our modern focus, we still do some things the traditional way. Therefore, I will now, using the ancient pan-European language of Latin, formally present President Juncker to the assembly and the Chancellor, who will confer the doctorate.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento 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.