

## **Junior Minister Donaldson speech**

Distinguished guest, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you Mr President for your kind words. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome you also.

President Pöttering – Herzlich Willkommen in Nordirland.

I hope you have enjoyed your trip to Northern Ireland, and I am particularly glad that you had the opportunity to come and visit my constituency earlier on today.

- I would also like to welcome all the other guests here tonight. I have met many of you previously in the context of my Ministerial responsibilities for children and young people, community cohesion and good relations so it gives me particular pleasure to be here tonight.

- Europe was created out of the ashes of division and destruction of the second world war, yet it has become one of the great examples of what can be achieved and how people in conflict can be transformed.
- Through the years, Europe has become stronger, working together for the benefit for all. Europe evolved to remain relevant and meet the challenges it faced through the decades. As we move forward towards building a shared and better future for all the people of Northern Ireland, we can learn the important and valuable lessons about overcoming deep division and building a firm foundation of shared values.

- We have all seen the many dark days in our Province's past. Today the future does look brighter. There is a determination by all those in government to make Northern Ireland work. We are stronger today than we ever were. We must recognise that through those difficult days, Europe stood shoulder to shoulder with us. The Peace Programmes and other financial help given to us have been an essential plank in building to where we are today. Many of those sitting here tonight have benefited from European funds and we all know, recognise and appreciate the key role they have played.
- Since devolution we have actively engaged with Europe to try and maximise the benefit for Northern Ireland. We have been overwhelmed by the interest and help we have received thus far. We are determined to ensure that we don't waste this opportunity and time of good will.

- The unprecedented European taskforce has identified many areas where Northern Ireland can become better involved and where we can obtain real and tangible outcomes. We will need the help and support from the European Parliament if we are to achieve all of the objectives. So this visit from President Pöttering is a very welcome step towards developing a closer working relationship with the European institutions which will ultimately be of benefit for all of us.
- We are moving forward together to build a new Northern Ireland – one based on fundamental principles of respect for each other, equality of opportunity, tolerance for diversity and mutual respect for the rule of law. These are the core foundations of any cohesive society and it is on that

agreed basis we can work together in partnership for  
the benefit of all.

In conclusion can I say - Herr Pöttering, Gute Reise nach  
Hause