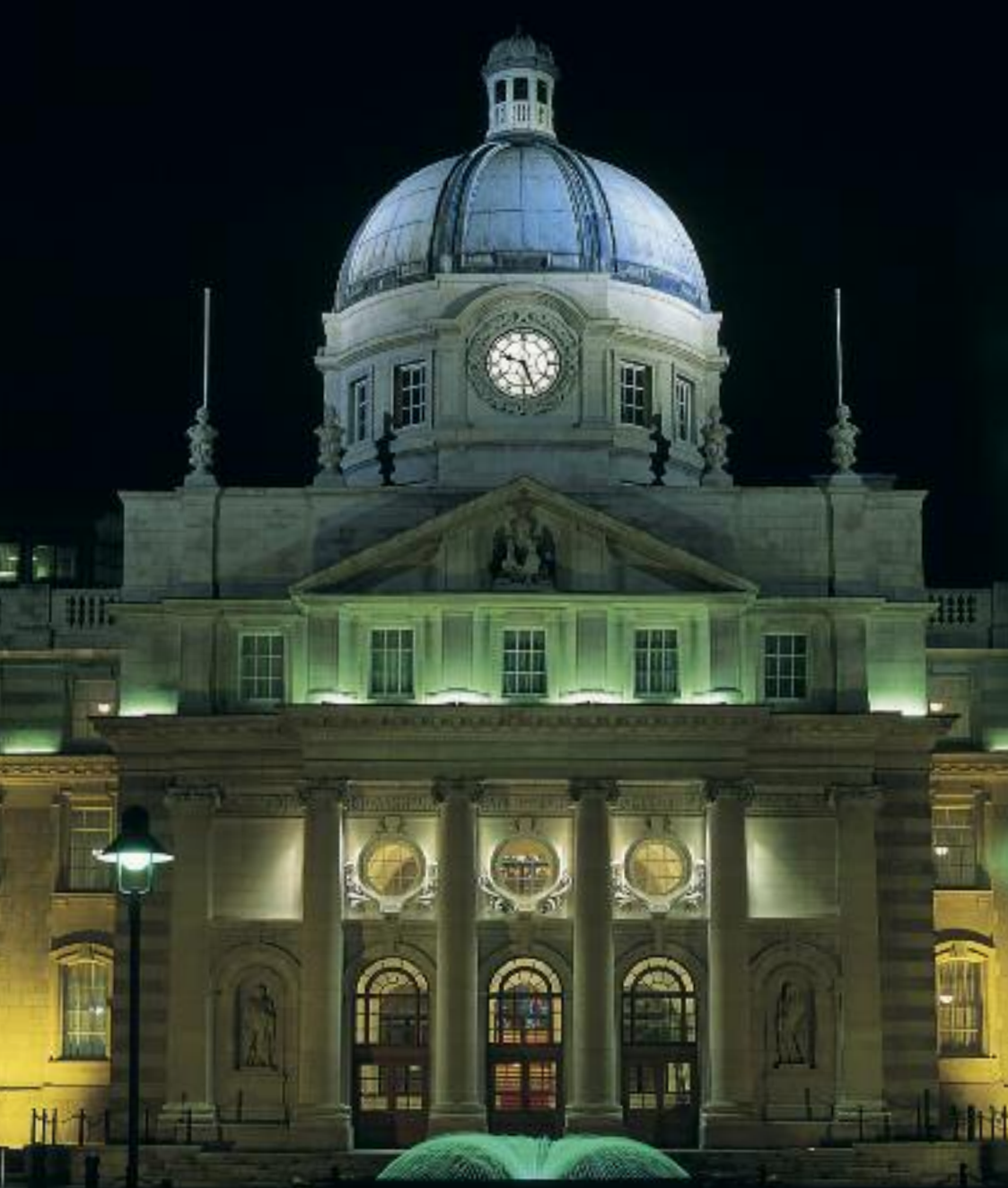# CONTENTS

This booklet provides a general overview of Ireland's political, economic and cultural life. While it is not possible to include every aspect of life in Ireland in this short publication, we hope that you will discover a little about Ireland and its people.

Government Buildings, Dublin

THE IRISH STATE

Name of State
The Irish Constitution provides that the name of the State is *Éire* or in the English language, *Ireland*.

Island of Ireland
The geographical island of Ireland consists of the sovereign independent state of Ireland comprising 26 counties, and the six counties of Northern Ireland to the north-east of the island, which are governed by a power-sharing Executive and Assembly as established under the Good Friday Agreement.

Language
Article 8 of the Irish Constitution makes the following affirmation:
1 The Irish language, as the national language, is the first official language.
2 The English language is recognised as a second official language.

Flag
The national flag is a tricolour of green, white and orange.

Emblem
The harp has been regarded as the official symbol or coat of arms of Ireland since medieval times. The heraldic harp is used by the Government, its agencies and its representatives at home and abroad. It is engraved on the seal matrix of the Office of the President as well as on the obverse of the Irish euro coins.

Anthem
Amhrán na bhFiann (Soldier's Song) is the Irish National Anthem.
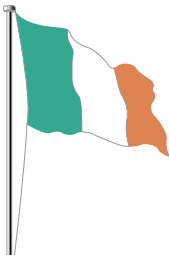
National Flag

Official Emblem

The National Day
Saint Patrick's Day, 17 March, is the National Day. Tradition holds that the use of the shamrock by Saint Patrick when preaching in Ireland led to its adoption as an Irish symbol.

Online	
St Patrick's Day Festival:	www.stpatricksday.ie

Government
Ireland is a parliamentary democracy. Its law is based on Common Law and legislation enacted by the *Oireachtas* (Irish Parliament) under the Constitution. In addition, regulations and directives enacted by the European Union have the force of law in Ireland.

The Constitution of Ireland sets out the form of government and defines the powers and functions of the President, both Houses of the *Oireachtas* and the Government. It also defines the structures and the powers of the Courts and outlines the fundamental rights of citizens. The definition of rights covers five broad headings: Personal Rights, The Family, Education, Private Property and Religion.

The Taoiseach, *Enda Kenny T.D.,* (front right) *with the* Tánaiste *and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Eamon Gilmore T.D., together with Ministers, at the first meeting of the incoming Government March 2011*

The President is the Head of State, and is elected by direct vote.

There are fifteen Government Departments, each headed by a Minister. The Ministers collectively form the Government. Executive power is exercised by or on the authority of the Government, which is responsible to the *Dáil* (House of Representatives). The Head of the Government is the *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) while the *Tánaiste* is the Deputy Prime Minister.

There are two Houses of Parliament, known as *Dáil Éireann* (House of Representatives) and *Seanad Éireann* (Senate). The *Dáil* has 166 members known as Teachtaí Dála (TD). They are elected on a system of proportional representation by universal suffrage. Elections take place at least once every five years. After the 2011 general election the main political parties represented in the *Dáil* were *Fine Gael, the Labour Party, Fianna Fáil* and *Sinn Féin*.

The President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins

The *Seanad* has 60 members, eleven of whom are nominated by the *Taoiseach* while the rest are elected from a number of vocational panels and by graduates of universities. The *Seanad* may initiate or revise legislation (except Finance Bills), but the *Dáil* has the power to reject any such amendments or proposed legislation.

Online	
Government of Ireland:	www.irlgov.ie
President of Ireland:	www.president.ie
Fine Gael:	www.finegael.ie
Labour:	www.labour.ie
Fianna Fáil:	www.fiannafail.ie
Sinn Féin:	www.sinnfein.ie
Irish Government News Service:	www.merrionstreet.ie

The Dáil Chamber

The Four Courts, Dublin

Local Government

The local government system is administered by 114 local authorities and is undergoing a process of renewal and reform.

The services provided by the local authorities include: housing and building, road transport and safety, water supply and sewerage, development incentives and controls, environmental protection and waste management, recreation and amenity, education, health, welfare and miscellaneous services.

Local government is funded partly by central government and partly by local sources including motor tax proceeds, rates (on commercial property) and local charges such as environmental waste charges, rents etc.

Online	
Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government:	www.environ.ie

The Courts

Irish law is based on Common Law as modified by subsequent legislation and by the Constitution of 1937. In accordance with the Constitution, justice is administered in public by courts established by law. The President appoints judges on the advice of the Government.

Online	
Department of Justice and Equality:	www.justice.ie
Irish Courts Service:	www.courts.ie
Director of Public Prosecutions:	www.dppireland.ie
Office of the Attorney General:	www.attorneygeneral.ie

Police and Defence Forces

The national police force, *An Garda Síochána,* was established in 1922. The general direction, management and control of the service is, subject to regulations made by the Minister for Justice and Equality, vested in a Commissioner appointed by the Government.

An Garda Síochána is unarmed with the exception of some specialized units. Since 1989, *An Garda Síochána* have served in numerous United Nations (UN) missions around the world. They have also served under the EU flag in the former Yugoslavia, Macedonia and Eastern Slavonia and have provided monitors for the South African and Palestinian elections.

The Permanent Defence Forces, which include the regular Army, Naval Service and Air Corps, operate under the auspices of the Department of Defence. The Department is also responsible for the general planning, organisation and co-ordination of Civil Defence measures. Recruitment is voluntary. The Defence Forces have extensive peacekeeping experience and have served under UN mandate in UN, EU and NATO led peace support operations all over the world since 1958.

Online	
Department of Justice and Equality:	www.justice.ie
Garda Síochána (Irish Police):	www.garda.ie
Garda Ombudsman:	www.gardaombudsman.ie
Department of Defence:	www.defence.ie
Irish Defence Forces:	www.military.ie

Irish troops peacekeeping in Kosovo

Gallarus Oratory, monastic site c. 550 A.D.

Ireland has been inhabited for about 7,000 years, and has experienced many incursions and invasions, resulting in a rich mixture of ancestry and traditions. By the sixth century B.C. Celtic invaders had established a cultural and linguistic unity on the island.

The introduction of Christianity, traditionally credited to St. Patrick, occurred in the fifth century. Viking incursions in the ninth and tenth centuries influenced the development of trade, particularly in Dublin, Waterford and Cork.

Viking swords found in Dublin

The twelfth century witnessed the arrival of the Normans, who had earlier settled in England and Wales. They quickly gained control over large parts of Ireland, which then came under the political authority of the King of England.

Following a series of revolts against the English Crown in Ireland, the last Gaelic stronghold, Ulster, was brought under Crown control in 1603. The Ulster plantation which followed brought many English and Scots settlers to Ulster and had a lasting impact on the religious and political complexion of the province.

Conflict emerged again during the seventeenth century and a struggle for supremacy was finally settled at the Battles of the Boyne (1690) and Aughrim (1691). Many of the defeated Irish leaders and followers (known as 'The Wild Geese') left Ireland to pursue military, religious or commercial careers in continental Europe and their legacy is still evident today. The Protestants of the Established Church monopolised political power and ownership of the land in Ireland, and penal laws discriminated against Catholics.

Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century saw significant economic development in Ireland. The linen industry flourished, particularly in Ulster, and Irish wool, beef, butter and pork became important exports. The Protestant Ascendancy came to see itself as the Irish nation and developed a vigorous and distinctive parliamentary tradition.

The developing dispute between Britain and her colonies in North America from the 1760s helped create a tradition of radical patriotism

O'Connell election meeting in County Clare

that was ultimately, under the influence of the French Revolution, to produce the Society of United Irishmen. In 1798 a rebellion led by the United Irishmen was crushed and the Act of Union of 1800 created a full parliamentary union between Britain and Ireland.

The nineteenth century was dominated, initially, by the pursuit of Catholic emancipation. In 1829, Catholics, led by Daniel O'Connell, won the right to sit in parliament. Thereafter, there was a succession of efforts to reform or undo the Union between Great Britain and Ireland.

In the late 1840s, as a result of the wholesale failure of the potato crop in successive years, a terrible famine occurred: one million people died of starvation and epidemic disease and a further million were forced to leave Ireland. The population had fallen by more than a quarter from 8 million to less than 6 million by 1856, and would fall further as emigration became a dominant feature of Irish society. The Great Famine had far-reaching political repercussions, strengthening the desire among Irish voters for self-government and the right to purchase their holdings.

The question of self-government, or 'Home Rule' had not, however, been settled. Under the leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell in the 1880s, the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster placed the Irish question at the centre of British politics. In 1886, the Liberal party under W.E. Gladstone came to support a limited form of self-government for Ireland.

The prospects of Home Rule galvanised the Unionists in Ireland, who were predominantly Protestant, and were a small majority in the province of Ulster. Along with their allies in England, who feared it would lead to the break-up of the Empire, Unionists campaigned to prevent the granting of Home Rule in Ireland. Nonetheless, a Home Rule Bill was finally enacted in 1914. However with the outbreak of the First World War it was not implemented.

Towards Independence
In 1916 a republic was declared in Dublin and an armed insurrection

took place. This rising, which initially did not enjoy significant public support, was suppressed. However, supporters of the Rising, capitalising on public revulsion at the execution of its leaders, and on opposition to the introduction of military conscription to Ireland in the First World War, succeeded in ousting the Irish Parliamentary Party in the General Election of 1918.

Sinn Féin ('We Ourselves'), the election victors, set up the first *Dáil* (Parliament) and a war of national independence ensued. By the time an Anglo-Irish Treaty was concluded in 1921, six counties in North-East Ulster, with a roughly two-thirds Unionist majority, had already been constituted as Northern Ireland. As a result of the Treaty, the remaining twenty-six counties formed the Irish Free State, which had dominion status within the British Empire. The establishment of the Free State was followed by a short civil war between those who accepted the Treaty as offering effective self-government and those who held out for a full republic. The Civil War was to colour attitudes and determine political allegiances for decades.

In 1916 a republic was declared

The first government of the new State was headed by W.T. Cosgrave of *Cumann na nGaedheal*, later the *Fine Gael* party. From the 1930s onwards the *Fianna Fáil* party, founded by Eamon de Valera in 1926, dominated Irish politics for decades.

In the first two decades after Ireland achieved independence in 1922, the institutions of the State were consolidated and a tradition of political stability was established. The Constitution of 1937 and the Republic of Ireland Act 1948 severed Ireland's last formal links with Britain. Ireland remained neutral during the Second World War.

Ireland was admitted to the United Nations (UN) in 1955, and joined what is now the European Union (EU) in 1973. New economic development policies led to substantial and rapid growth.

Online	
National Archives:	www.nationalarchives.ie
Documents in Irish Foreign Policy:	www.difp.ie
History Ireland:	www.historyireland.com

River Barrow, County Carlow

ENVIRONMENT

The island of Ireland consists of a large central lowland of limestone with a relief of hills and several coastal mountains and is situated in the north-west of Europe. The mountain ridges of the south comprise old red sandstone separated by limestone river valleys. Elsewhere granite predominates, except in the north east which is covered by a basalt plateau. The central plain contains glacial deposits of clay and sand. It is interrupted by low hills and has large areas of bog and numerous lakes.

Longitude	5.5˚ and 10.5˚ west
Latitude	51.5˚ and 55.5˚ north

Total area	84,421 km^2
	(Ireland 70,282 km^2; Northern Ireland 14,139 km^2)
Coastline	3,172 km

Highest mountain	Carrantuohill	1,041m
Longest river	Shannon	340 km
Largest lake	Lough Neagh	396 km^2
Highest waterfall	Powerscourt	122m

Climate
Influenced by the Gulf Stream, and with the prevailing south-westerly winds, the climate of Ireland is temperate.
  The coldest months are January and February which have mean daily air temperatures of between 4˚C and 7˚C while July and August are the warmest, with mean temperatures of between 14˚C and 16˚C.
  In low-lying areas average annual rainfall is mostly between 800mm and 1200mm but in mountainous areas it may exceed 2000mm.

Flora and Fauna
Ireland was separated from the European mainland after the last Ice Age. As a result the island has a smaller range of flora and fauna than is found elsewhere in Europe. The original forests have been cleared over most of the country. There are over 400 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) protected under the EU Habitats Directive.
  A spectacular example of the impact of glaciation on the landscape

Sunset, County Donegal

is found in the Burren in Co. Clare, a region of bare carboniferous limestone containing arctic-alpine plants.

  Ireland is important for its seabird colonies and migratory waterfowl, with considerable migration of birds from Iceland and Greenland in spring and autumn. Rivers and lakes contain a wide variety of fish life. Mammals are similar to those found throughout the temperate regions of Europe. The only amphibians are a single species each of frog, toad and newt. There are no snakes in Ireland and the only reptile is the common lizard.

The Burren, County Clare

ENVIRONMENT

Responsibility for protecting and conserving Ireland's natural and built heritage lies with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Office of Public Works.

Population

Preliminary figures published by the Central Statistics Office in June 2011 showed the total population was 4,581,269 in April 2011, the highest on record since 1861. A resumption of positive net inward migration coincided with Ireland's strong economic performance in the period from the mid-1990s to 2007. This trend was amplified by immigrants from the newly acceded EU countries from 1 May 2004 onwards. However, the decline in Ireland's economic growth rate from 2008 onwards has resulted in a re-occurrence of net outward migration.

The major centres of population are Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. Sixty per cent of the population live in cities and towns of 1,000 people or more. A high proportion of the population is concentrated in the younger age groups.

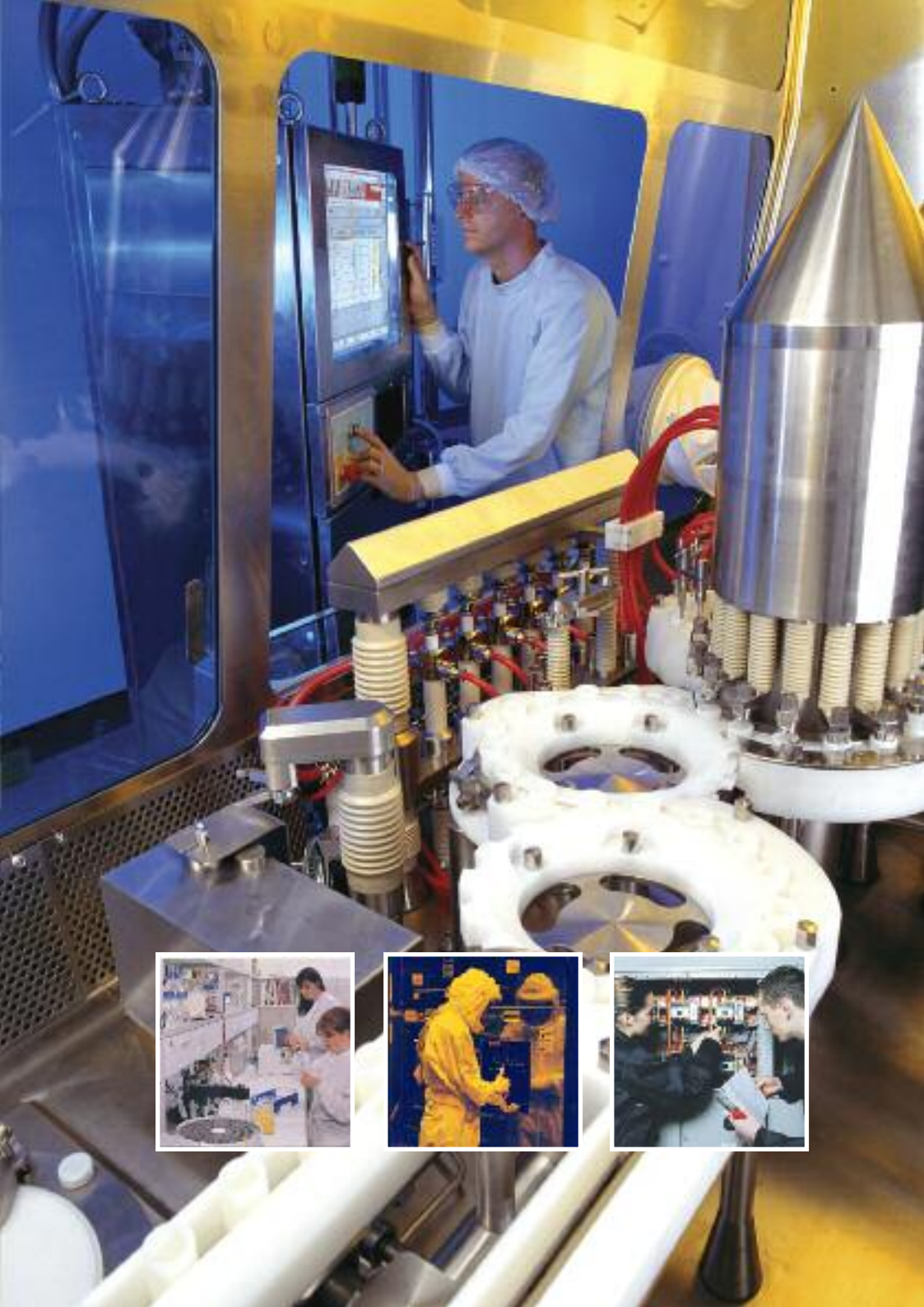| Online	
Ordnance Survey Ireland:	www.osi.ie
Office of Public Works:	www.opw.ie
Met Éireann:	www.met.ie
Heritage Council of Ireland:	www.heritageireland.ie
The Environmental Information Service:	www.enfo.ie
Environmental Protection Agency:	www.epa.ie
Central Statistics Office:	www.cso.ie

Ireland had a period of extraordinary growth from 1993 to 2007, becoming one of the world's most dynamic, innovative and globalised economies, with extensive external trade and investment links.

In 2008, partly due to the open nature of its economy Ireland began to feel the effects of the global economic downturn. Pressure on the economy was significantly accentuated by the end of a prolonged Irish property market boom and problems within the domestic banking system. This led to a period of recession and a sharp contraction in economic output.

The economy is now returning to growth and this growth is forecast to continue in the coming years. Ireland is facing its current economic challenges in co-operation with its funding partners in the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. It is meeting its fiscal targets and the Government has an unprecedented mandate to implement the required adjustments in the public finances.

Many of the strengths that drove our recent economic boom and brought unprecedented levels of prosperity, with growth and GDP per capita among the highest in the European Union, remain in place. These strengths will position Ireland to take advantage of the global economic recovery as it emerges.

Ireland's economic success is generally attributed to its educated and flexible workforce; government measures to ensure macroeconomic stability and to attract foreign investment; and membership of the European Union, which now provides a market of almost 500 million people. Ireland is a member of the Eurozone.

Ireland continues to be one of the most open economies in the OECD, and exports are now showing strong growth after a slowdown in recent years. Ireland has developed a strong entrepreneurial culture in terms of new businesses being established.

Ireland has a strong track record in attracting investment in Information Communications Technology (ICT), Life Sciences, Financial Services and Globally Traded Business (GTB) including Digital Media, Engineering, Consumer Brands and International Services. Ireland's positioning as a 'Smart Economy' continues apace combining our innovative, enterprise economy with an ever-increasing emphasis on

◄ *Main photo: Merck Sharp & Dohme working environment*
Bottom left: Ireland has a well-qualified labour force
Bottom centre: R&D facility University College Cork
Bottom right: Training session in progress

the emerging areas of Clean/Green Technologies, Services Innovation and Convergence. Ireland is also a centre for digital media in Europe with major multinational companies locating their European headquarters and a range of business support activities here.

Inward and Outward Investment
Inward investment has been critically important to Ireland's economic development, providing tens of thousands of jobs, disseminating technological know-how and expertise within the wider economy, linking up with indigenous industry, boosting productivity, and underpinning export growth.

Silicon wafer processing in the Tyndall Institute Central Fabrication Facility

Outward investment by Irish companies has increased noticeably in recent years, albeit from a very low historic base. This emerging trend is consistent with the pattern observed in other economies as they move to higher stages of economic development.

Education and Training
Education and Training is a vital component of Ireland's knowledge-based economy. Ireland enjoys one of the best education systems in the world, with approximately 1 million people in full time education.

Innovation and R&D
R&D in Ireland has expanded dramatically in recent years reflecting the Irish government's massive injection of funding into the sector. Leading global companies have found Ireland to be an excellent location for knowledge-based activities. The young Irish workforce has shown a particular aptitude for the efficient collection, interpretation and dissemination of research information.

Corporation Tax
Since 2003 Ireland's corporate tax regime has been fixed at a rate of 12.5%. This applies to all Irish corporate trading profits. A rate of 25% applies to non-trading (passive) income.

Online	
Economic and Social Research Institute:	www.esri.ie
Central Bank of Ireland:	www.centralbank.ie

Trade
Ireland's total trade in 2010 was approximately €270bn; with a merchandise trade surplus of more than €39 billion. This consists equally of Merchandise Trade and Services Trade each of which stand at approx. €130bn. The main merchandise goods traded include organic chemicals (mainly for the pharmaceutical sector), medical & pharmaceutical products and computers. The main services areas are Computer Services, Trade Related Business Services, Insurance and Financial Services.

Ireland's main trade partners are the United States, Great Britain, Belgium, Germany, France, Spain and the Netherlands.

Industry and Services
The Industrial sector has a highly skilled technological labour pool. Within this high technology grouping, the most active sectors currently are life sciences, medical and information technology sectors. Many of the world's leading companies have subsidiaries in Ireland.

The service sector in Ireland accounts for approximately half of GDP. Just under half of total Irish exports are services, and Ireland is in the top ten countries worldwide for exports of commercial services due largely to a growth in financial services and telecommunications and a recent upsurge in tourism.

Three agencies deal with industrial development in Ireland. *Forfás* provides overall policy advice and co-ordination for enterprise development and science, technology and innovation in Ireland. *Enterprise Ireland* helps develop Irish-based enterprise with the potential to trade internationally. *IDA Ireland* has responsibility for securing new investment in manufacturing and internationally traded services. It also has responsibility to encourage existing Foreign Direct Investors to expand and develop their businesses in Ireland.

There are also a number of regional development agencies such as Shannon Development which was set up in 1959 to promote Shannon International Airport, and Údarás na Gaeltachta, which is the regional authority responsible for the economic, social and cultural development of the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking parts of the country).

Online	
Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation:	www.deti.ie
Forfás:	www.forfas.ie
IDA Ireland:	www.idaireland.com
Enterprise Ireland:	www.enterprise-ireland.com
Shannon Development:	www.shannondev.ie
Údarás na Gaeltachta:	www.udaras.ie
Intertrade Ireland:	www.intertradeireland.com
Science Foundation Ireland:	www.sfi.ie
Foras Áiseanna Saothair (National Training Authority):	www.solas.ie

Financial Services

Dublin's International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), which was set up by the Irish Government with EU approval in 1987, is recognised as a leading location for a range of internationally traded financial services, including banking, asset financing, fund management, corporate treasury management, investment management, custody and administration and specialised insurance operations. More than 430 international operations are approved to trade in the IFSC, while a further 700 managed entities are approved to carry on business under the IFSC programme.

Online	
Department of Finance:	www.finance.gov.ie
International Financial Services Centre:	www.ifsconline.ie
National Treasury Management Agency:	www.ntma.ie

Agriculture

Of the total land area of approximately 7 million hectares (17 million acres), 5 million hectares (12.32 million acres) are used for agricultural purposes (including forestry). Beef and dairying are by far the most important sectors of the agricultural industry. The main crops are barley, wheat, potatoes and mushrooms.

The Agri-Food industry makes a significant contribution to the Irish economy. The combined agri-food and drink sector accounts for 6% of GDP, almost €8bn of exports and accounts for 133,400 jobs.

Online	
Department of Agriculture, Marine and Food:	www.agriculture.gov.ie
Bord Bia:	www.bordbia.ie
Teagasc (Agriculture & Food Development Authority):	www.teagasc.ie
Food Safety Authority of Ireland:	www.fsai.ie

Fishing

The Irish seafood industry provides employment for over 11,000 people. It makes a significant contribution to the economic and social fabric of the many small communities located in mainly rural

areas or small towns and villages around the 3,172 kilometres of our coastline.

Online	
Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources:	www.dcenr.gov.ie
Bord Iascaigh Mhara:	www.bim.ie

Tourism

Approximately 6 million tourists visit Ireland each year, spending approximately €3.9bn, and sustaining more than 180,000 jobs.

Tourism Ireland was established under the framework of the Good Friday Agreement 1998 to co-ordinate the work of the two tourist boards on the island, Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Logo of Tourism Ireland

Ireland's successful tourism industry is built around the three themes: Irish people; Irish culture and the physical beauty of the country.

Online	
Tourism Ireland for visitors to Ireland:	www.discoverireland.com
Tourism Ireland corporate website:	www.tourismireland.com

Radio and Television

The national radio and television service is operated by *Radio Telefís Éireann* (RTÉ), the public broadcasting company which transmits on two television and four radio channels as well as digital channels. RTÉ derives its revenue from licence fees and the sale of advertising time. TV3 is a commercial broadcaster and there are many commercial radio stations including Today FM and Newstalk. In addition to the wide availability of British radio and television programming, satellite broadcasts are achieving an increasing audience.

Irish speakers are served by a dedicated radio channel, *Radio na Gaeltachta* (operated by RTÉ) and by TG4, an independent Irish language television channel.

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) was established in 2009,

as an independent regulator for radio and television broadcasters in Ireland. The Authority is funded through a levy on all broadcasters licensed in the State.

Online	
Radio Teilifís Éireann:	www.rte.ie
TG4:	www.tg4.ie
TV3:	www.tv3.ie
Today FM:	www.todayfm.com
Newstalk:	www.newstalk.ie
Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI):	www.bai.ie

Newspapers

Newspapers have been published in Ireland for over 300 years. Today there are a number of daily broadsheet and tabloid papers, two evening newspapers, and five Sunday newspapers.

There are also about 60 local newspapers usually published weekly and a wide variety of magazines dealing with current affairs, economic issues and leisure interests.

Online	
The Irish Times:	www.irishtimes.com
Irish Independent:	www.independent.ie
Irish Examiner:	www.irishexaminer.ie
Sunday Business Post:	www.thepost.ie
Sunday Independent:	www.independent.ie
Evening Echo:	www.eecho.ie
Evening Herald:	www.herald.ie
Press Council of Ireland (and Press Ombudsman):	www.presscouncil.ie

Education — Primary and Secondary Education
Education in Ireland is compulsory from age 6 to 16 or until students have completed three years of second level education. The primary education sector serves some 506,000 pupils. There are over 3,200 schools at first-level.

The second-level sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. There are over 350,000 students in this sector attending over 750 schools.

Third-level Education
The third-level education sector consists of universities, institutes of technology colleges and colleges of education. All of these are substantially funded by the State and are autonomous and self-governing. In recent years, several independent private colleges have opened offering mainly business-related courses.

There are more than 140,000 students in full time third-level education. Almost half of Ireland's young people proceed from second to third level and some 50 per cent of these take degree level programmes.

Online	
Department of Education and Skills:	www.education.ie
Higher Education Authority:	www.hea.ie

Health Services
Public expenditure on health accounts for approximately one quarter of Government current spending. The expenditure is allocated to hospitals, community health services, community welfare services, community protection services, psychiatric services and services for those with disabilities.

The health services in Ireland are centrally directed by the Department of Health. The provision of services is currently the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE).

Those with low incomes receive medical services free of charge. The rest of the population can avail of the public hospital services at a relatively low charge.

Patients in public hospitals may opt to be treated privately. There

are a number of private hospitals, some 14 per cent of the total, which essentially serve private patients. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs deals with policy matters affecting early childhood care and education, youth justice, child welfare and protection.

Online	
Department of Health:	www.doh.ie
Dept of Children and Youth Affairs:	www.dcys.gov.ie
Health Service Executive (HSE):	www.hse.ie

Social Welfare
The Social Welfare system covers all of the internationally recognised forms of social protection. Incorporating a mix of both social insurance and social assistance programmes, it provides financial support to people such as the unemployed, the elderly and those suffering from illness.

Other features of the system include supports for people seeking employment, in-work benefits and family support for people at work on low pay, free or reduced-cost dental and optical care, and a range of secondary benefits such as free travel for pensioners and financial support towards the cost of fuel, TV licences and telephone rental charges.

Spending on social welfare accounts for approximately one quarter of gross current Government expenditure and provides benefits to more than 1.5 million people.

Online	
Department of Social Protection:	www.welfare.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

The consolidation of peace in Northern Ireland and the promotion of partnership and cooperation between both traditions on the island of Ireland is a key policy priority for the Irish Government.

This work involves sustained contact with the Northern Ireland Executive, the British Government, with the political parties and all sections of society in Northern Ireland, and with a range of international partners. These collective efforts, which are ongoing, have transformed the social, political and economic landscape of Northern Ireland, particularly in the years since the Good Friday Agreement (see below) was signed in 1998. Northern Ireland is now a far more peaceful, prosperous and stable society than when the first steps towards peace were taken in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

The restoration, on 8 May 2007, of the power-sharing institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement represented a critical step forward, not only in creating effective government for Northern Ireland, but in building a common future for all its people. Devolved government was further consolidated in April 2010 by the devolution of policing and justice powers from Westminster to the Assembly and the appointment of a Northern Ireland Justice Minister.

Historical background

The existing political division in Ireland dates from the passing of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 by the British Government. Following the signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland gained independence from Britain. The remaining 6 counties formed Northern Ireland, which continued to be governed within the United Kingdom.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1921-1972: Devolved Government at Stormont in Belfast oversees local matters. Power remains exclusively in the hands of the Unionist party. Nationalists had in practice no role in government and they suffered discrimination at local level in many areas, including voting rights, housing and employment.

◀ *Rope Bridge, Carrick-a-rede, County Antrim*

1969: Non violent civil rights campaigners are met with a repressive response from the Stormont authorities leading to civil unrest and the revival of violent activity by paramilitary organisations.

1972: In a deteriorating security situation, the local Northern Ireland Parliament and Government were prorogued in 1972 resulting in direct rule by the British Government until 1999, with the exception of a brief period in 1974 when a local executive was established on a power-sharing basis under the **Sunningdale Agreement**.

1980-1985: From the early 1980s onwards, the British and Irish Governments began to co-operate more closely in an effort to achieve a widely acceptable and durable political settlement of the Northern Ireland problem.

1985: In November, the Irish and British Governments sign the **Anglo Irish Agreement** which enabled the Irish Government to have an input on Northern Ireland policing and administration and created intergovernmental structures to facilitate and advance cooperation.

1993: The Irish and British Governments issue a Joint Declaration outlining a charter for peace and reconciliation in Ireland and establishing the principles of self determination and consent in relation to the status of Northern Ireland. It offers those associated with paramilitary violence a route into the political process provided they established a commitment to exclusively peaceful means and the democratic process.

1994: In August, the IRA announces a "complete cessation of military operations", followed by a similar statement from the Combined Loyalist Military Command the following October. These announcements led to direct political dialogue with Sinn Féin and the two loyalist parties, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP).

1995–1997: The British and Irish Governments publish **A New Framework for Agreement**, outlining their shared understanding of the possible outcome of comprehensive negotiations. An Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) is established to address the key issue of paramilitary weapons. Multi-party talks involving the two Governments and Northern Ireland political parties began on 10 June 1996.

1998: A comprehensive political settlement, the **Good Friday Agreement**, is negotiated between the Irish and British Governments and the Northern Ireland parties. The Agreement is overwhelmingly endorsed by referendums, North and South of the border.

2006: Further agreement between the parties on policing, power sharing and rights issues, is reached at **St. Andrews**.

2010: The **Hillsborough Agreement**, finalised in February 2010, completes the process of devolution (see detail below).

Good Friday Agreement 1998

The Good Friday Agreement was negotiated between the British and Irish Governments and eight Northern Ireland political parties under the chairmanship of US Senator George Mitchell. Having begun in June 1996, the negotiations ended on 10 April 1998 after a marathon final session.

  The Agreement addressed all the key issues of the Northern Ireland conflict. It set out a balanced and agreed definition, based on the principle of consent, of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and how that could change in future. It provided for new political institutions: an Assembly and a cross-community Executive in Northern Ireland, a North/South Ministerial Council and North/South implementation bodies, and a British-Irish Council and Intergovernmental Conference. The Agreement also covered a range of other vitally important issues, including policing, criminal justice, human rights, prisoner release, decommissioning, and demilitarisation. The text of the Agreement can be found at

http://www.dfa.ie/uploads/documents/Anglo-Irish/agreement.pdf.

The fundamental importance of the Agreement lay in its being "a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning", based on partnership, equality and mutual respect and on a total and absolute commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means of resolving political differences. In an unparalleled exercise of self-determination, it was approved by the overwhelming majority of the Irish people, voting in separate referendums, North and South, on 22 May 1998.

1998-2011: Consolidation of the Peace Process

Following the endorsement of the Good Friday Agreement, elections to the **Northern Ireland Assembly** took place on 25 June 1998, with power first devolved to the new Assembly and Executive on 2 December 1999. However, the decade following the Agreement was marked by breakdowns, delays and loss of momentum in the political process. Disagreements between the parties, principally over the decommissioning of weapons, led to disruptions to the work of the Assembly, and in October 2002, the Executive and Assembly were suspended. In an effort to restore momentum, the Irish and British Governments issued a **Joint Declaration** on 1 May 2003 outlining areas where progress could be made, and continued to work with the

The Giant's Causeway, County Antrim

parties to allow for the full restoration of these institutions and the full implementation of the Agreement.

  After the 2003 Assembly elections, the Democratic Unionist Party became the largest party in Northern Ireland, and Sinn Féin became the second largest party. However, the Assembly remained suspended. The announcement in July 2005 that the IRA had ended its armed campaign led to renewed negotiations between the parties. These efforts culminated in the publication of the **St Andrews Agreement** in October 2006, which focused on securing progress on power sharing and justice and policing issues. These positive developments led to the restoration of the Assembly and the Executive on 8 May 2007. On that day, Dr Ian Paisley, DUP Leader, and Mr Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin were appointed as First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland. Peter Robinson subsequently replaced Dr. Paisley as leader of the DUP and First Minister in June 2008. The dissolution of the Assembly in March 2011, to allow for elections to a new Assembly in May 2011, marked the longest period of continuous devolved power since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. The 2011 Assembly elections saw the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein as the largest and second largest parties respectively and the appointment of Peter Robinson as First Minister and Martin McGuinness as Deputy First Minister.

Hillsborough Agreement: Devolution of Policing and Justice
In 2009, political focus in Northern Ireland shifted to finalising arrangements to devolve policing and justice powers from Westminster to the Assembly, as set out in the St. Andrew's Agreement. To facilitate progress, the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister convened all party talks at Hillsborough in Northern Ireland on 25 January 2010. Following intensive negotiations between the parties, assisted by the two Governments, a deal was reached on 5 February which set out a timetable for devolution of policing and justice. On 9 March a cross community vote was passed requesting the devolution of these powers and on 12 April 2010, a new Justice Minister was appointed (David Ford of the Alliance Party) and a new Department of Justice was created.

All-Island Partnership & Co-operation
Following the restoration of the devolved institutions in 2007, the **North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC)** could once again meet and

the North/South Implementation Bodies function fully. There have been twice yearly meetings of the NSMC in Plenary format since the restoration of the Institutions, chaired by the Taoiseach and by the First and deputy First Ministers. The NSMC also meets regularly in sectoral format, where Ministers from the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive discuss cooperation in areas such as agriculture, education and health.

The Irish Government is committed to promoting partnership and deepening economic, social and cultural relations between both parts of the island of Ireland. Since restoration of the power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland in May 2007, there has been greatly increased cooperation through the North/South Ministerial Council, North/South Implementation Bodies, like Tourism Ireland and Inter*Trade*Ireland, and through other contacts between key decision-makers North and South.

The Northern Ireland First and deputy First Ministers Peter Robinson, MLA and Martin Mc Guinness, M.P., MLA together with the Taoiseach *Enda Kenny, T.D., and the* Tánaiste *and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Eamon Gilmore, T.D., Armagh, November, 2011*

   In recognition of the shared benefits that can be gained through all-island co-operation, particular focus has been placed on joint efforts in areas like infrastructure, spatial planning and the delivery of cross-border public services in health and education. In October 2006, a **Comprehensive Study on the All-Island Economy** was launched, which set out the economic rationale for North/South collaboration, as well as concrete proposals for joint initiatives. This was followed in the **National Development Plan for 2007-2013** by a dedicated chapter on all-island cooperation and key North-South projects prioritised by the Government. Much progress has been made on agreed joint initiatives in the intervening period, including a major cross-border roads investment programme, the introduction of a Single Electricity Market for the island and the delivery of a major North-South broadband infrastructure project (Project Kelvin) connecting the island with North America.

The Taoiseach*, Enda Kenny T.D., meets with the British Prime Minister, David Cameron M.P., in London, April 2011*

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II meeting fishmonger Pat O'Connell at the English Market, Cork

British-Irish Relations and the Peace Process

Over the last thirty years, the context in which the Irish Government's objectives in relation to the peace process in Northern Ireland are pursued has been transformed. The British-Irish relationship is multi-faceted, influenced by historical connections, geographical proximity and strong economic links. There is a vast network of individual connections between the two islands. Many Irish-born people live and work in Britain. The British-Irish relationship is evolving towards an enhanced degree of understanding and a greater recognition of shared interest at almost every level.

A State Visit to Ireland by Queen Elizabeth II took place from 17–20 May, 2011. The successful programme touched upon history, trade and community and showcased the strong partnership which now exists between Britain and Ireland. Highlights included the wreath laying at the Garden of Remembrance and at the Irish War Memorial Garden, as well as the speech made by Queen Elizabeth II at the State Dinner, where opening in Irish, she went on to refer to the need for reconciliation and *"being able to bow to the past but not be bound by it"*. She also commented that *"with the benefit of*

historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all".

The British-Irish Council (BIC) continues to develop its work programme and strengthen links between the eight administrations of the islands. Since the restoration of the Institutions in 2007, the BIC Plenary has met twice a year.

International Support for the Peace Process
The peace process in Northern Ireland has always benefited from the widespread support of the international community, including our EU partners, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and others. The focus of international support has included both political support for the evolving peace process and practical assistance in the areas of economic regeneration and cross-community reconciliation, including through the **International Fund for Ireland** and **the EU's Programmes for Peace and Reconciliation** in Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland. The Irish Government has committed itself to sharing its experiences of the peace process and to work with others where this would prove helpful.

Online	
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:	www.dfa.ie
Northern Ireland Office:	www.nio.gov.uk
The Northern Ireland Assembly:	www.ni-assembly.gov.uk
The Northern Ireland Executive:	www.northernireland.gov.uk
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister:	www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk
North South Ministerial Council:	www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org
British Irish Council:	www.britishirishcouncil.org
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission:	www.nihrc.org
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland:	www.equalityni.org
International Fund for Ireland:	www.internationalfundforireland.com
Police Service of Northern Ireland:	www.psni.police.uk
Northern Ireland Policing Board:	www.nipolicingboard.org.uk
Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:	www.policeombudsman.org

Emigration memorial, Cobh, County Cork

Foreign Policy

The Constitution of Ireland affirms Ireland's strong commitment to the ideal of peace and friendly cooperation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality. Ireland's foreign policy is based on this conviction.

As a small country in a changing world, Ireland remains firmly committed to collective approaches to international relations and security based on the primacy of the Charter of the United Nations. Key principles underlying this commitment are respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. Ireland seeks to pursue these core objectives in cooperation with regional and bilateral partners and through its membership of international organisations, in particular its membership of the United Nations and of the European Union.

United Nations

Ireland joined the United Nations (UN) on 14 December 1955. Within the UN, Ireland has sought to promote effective international action on global issues such as disarmament, peace-keeping, human rights and development. Ireland's most recent term on the UN Security Council in 2001–2002 reinforced its commitment to working with the wider UN membership for international peace and security. This commitment is reflected in the continuous participation in UN peace keeping operations by Irish Defence and Police Forces since 1958. Our commitment to the UN is also reflected in the substantial contributions Ireland is making to UN Funds and Programmes. Ireland is also a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court, established by the international community through the adoption of the Rome Statute in 1998.

European Union Membership

Ireland joined the European Economic Community (EEC) on 1 January 1973 and has participated actively in the evolution of what is now the *European Union* (EU). EU membership is pivotal to Government policy. It is a central framework within which the Government pursues its foreign policy objectives. Ireland's membership of the European Union is rooted in an understanding that the Union is the cornerstone of political and economic stability in Europe.

Ireland has held the six-month rotating Presidency of the Council of

The Taoiseach, *Enda Kenny T.D., meets the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso*

the European Union on six occasions and will assume the Presidency again in the first half of 2013.

On 1 January 2007, Bulgaria and Romania became the latest States to accede to the EU, increasing the total number of Member States to 27.

Online	
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:	www.dfa.ie
Irish Aid:	www.irishaid.gov.ie
European Commission:	www.europa.eu.int
— in Ireland	www.euireland.ie
European Parliament:	www.europarl.eu.int
— in Ireland	www.europarl.ie
EU Matters:	www.eumatters.ie
EU Gateway:	www.europa.eu
Council of the European Union:	http://consilium.europa.eu
Court of Justice of the European Communities:	www.curia.europa.eu
The European Ombudsman:	www.ombudsman.europa.eu
European Central Bank:	www.ecb.eu
EU Common Foreign and Security Policy: www.europa.eu./comm/external_relations/cfsp/intro/	

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
Ireland assumes the chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for the first time in 2012. The OSCE, with

56 participating states, is the world's largest regional security organisation covering a population of over 1 billion people.

Irish Aid

Irish Aid is the Government of Ireland's official programme of assistance to developing countries. The Irish Aid programme is administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Ireland has had an official development assistance programme since 1974. It has grown steadily over the years from modest beginnings and is now approximately €659 million per year. The Government is committed to reaching the United Nations target of spending 0.7% of GNP on Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The Irish Abroad

More than one million Irish citizens are currently living abroad, and it is estimated that as many as 70 million people worldwide can claim Irish descent. Our largest emigrant communities have consistently lived in Britain and the United States. Irish citizens have also been an influential presence in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, and Southern Africa.

The high priority and value that the Government attaches to the diaspora is reflected in the substantial funding it provides to support Irish community, cultural and heritage projects across the world. Supporting a wider range of initiatives across a greater geographic range than ever before, the Government actively recognizes the tremendous contributions the Irish abroad continue to make, both to Ireland and to their adopted countries.

The Taoiseach*, Enda Kenny T.D., meets the U.S. President, Barack Obama, at the White House on St. Patrick's Day, 2011*

JAMES
JOYCE
1882-1941

Ireland's Culture

Ireland has a rich cultural past and present. The traditional lore preserved by the early Irish poets has left a colourful heritage of mythical and historical stories. Modern writers in turn have drawn on these stories to enrich their own work.

The Irish Language

Most people spoke Irish until the early nineteenth century but by 1891 the majority spoke English only. It is one of the Celtic family of languages and is closely related to Scots Gaelic, Welsh and Breton. Since Independence the State has actively encouraged the use of Irish and it is the first official language with English as the second.

The latest figures show that 42% of all adults declare a knowledge of Irish. It is widely spoken in areas known as the *Gaeltacht*, situated mainly along the western seaboard. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has responsibility for promoting the cultural, social and economic welfare of the *Gaeltacht* through *Údarás na Gaeltachta* (*Gaeltacht* Authority). The Irish Language Agency (*Foras na Gaeilge*) has responsibility for the promotion and encouragement of the use of Irish as a vernacular throughout the island of Ireland. Irish is a core subject in primary and secondary schools and a growing number of schools offer tuition exclusively through Irish (*Gaelscoileanna*). There is an Irish language national radio service (*Raidio na Gaeltachta*) and an Irish language television service (*TG4*). On 1 January 2007, the Irish language became the 23rd official language of the European Union.
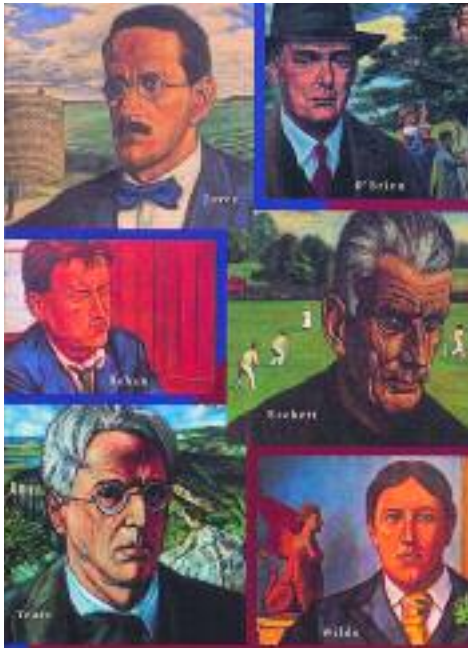
Irish Literature

Irish writers have long made a significant contribution to world literature in both the Irish and English languages. Written literature in the Irish language dates from the sixth century. With the end of the Gaelic order in the seventeenth century and its tradition of patronage of poets, Irish writers began to preserve a record of the old civilisation. Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries members of the clergy, teachers and poets continued to write in Irish. One of the best known poets of this time is Brian Merriman (1747–1805) author of the frequently translated *Cúirt an Mheán*

◀ *Sculpture depicting the death of Cú Chulainn, hero of the epic poem the Táin Bó Cúailgne. Inset: Bust of James Joyce, St Stephen's Green, Dublin*

Oíche (Midnight Court). In the twentieth century writers such as Patrick Pearse (1879–1916) and Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882–1928) opened Irish literature to European influences. Distinguished writers in Irish in the modern period include such diverse voices as Liam Ó Flaitheartaigh (1896–1984), Mairéad Ní Ghráda (1896–1971), Máirtín Ó Cadhain (1906–70), Máirtín Ó Direáin (1910-88), Seán Ó Ríordáin (1916–77), Michael Hartnett (1941–99), Críostóir Ó Floinn (b. 1927), Gabriel Rosenstock (b. 1949), Liam Ó Muirthile (b. 1950), Cathal Ó Searcaigh (b. 1956) and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (b. 1952).

In the English language, the satirist Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) authored *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Oscar Wilde's (1854–1900) plays, prose and poetry continue to be performed and read worldwide. Irish Nobel laureates include the playwright and novelist George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) and the poet and dramatist William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), whose work inspired the modern renaissance in Irish writing. James Joyce (1882–1941) wrote the pioneering modernist novel, *Ulysses* (1922) — widely recognised as one of the greatest novels ever written. Joyce inspired the work of satirist Brian O'Nolan (Flann O'Brien) (1911–66), who also wrote in Irish. Nobel laureate Samuel Beckett (1906–89) wrote in a minimalist vein, often in French. His play, *Waiting for Godot* (1953) has become a twentieth century classic of absurdism.

Illustration showing some of Ireland's best known writers: James Joyce, Flann O'Brien, Brendan Behan, Samuel Beckett, W.B. Yeats & Oscar Wilde

The generation of poets after Yeats included very

different talents in Patrick Kavanagh (1904–67). Kavanagh's example as a poet of rural realism inspired Seamus Heaney whose vision of the redemptive power of poetry earned him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

Sculpture of Patrick Kavanagh, Mespil Road, Dublin

Irish fiction continues to be well received — in recent years, several Irish writers have won the Man Booker Prize including Anne Enright in 2007, John Banville in 2005 and Roddy Doyle in 1993. Writers shortlisted for the prize include Colm Tóibín (1999, 2004 and 2009), Sebastian Barry (2008) and Emma Donoghue (2010). Colum McCann's novel, "Let the Great World Spin" won the National Book Award in the USA in 2009.

Seamus Heaney

Irish theatre companies such as the Abbey, the Druid and the Gate regularly tour their productions to international venues and host the work of visiting theatre companies to Ireland.

Art
The earliest Irish art consists of carvings on megalithic monuments dating from 3500 B.C. Celtic art reached its apogee in the manuscripts of the gospels such as the books of Durrow and Kells. After the ninth century Irish art absorbed Viking, Romanesque and Gothic influences producing, for example, richly carved stone High Crosses.

From the mid-seventeenth century decorative arts such as goldsmithery, plasterwork and glass flourished in conjunction with the large-scale public buildings of the time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Irish painters looked to the French Impressionists for a new idiom. These include William Leech (1881–1968), Walter Osborne (1859–1903), John Lavery (1856–1941)

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For the Road *by Jack B. Yeats*

and Roderic O'Conor (1860–1940). Crossing from Impressionism to Expressionism, Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957) towers over his contemporaries much as his brother, the poet W.B. Yeats, was pre-eminent among his peers.

Other artists, working in an abstract expressionist mode, include Louis le Brocquy, Norah McGuinness (1901–80) and Patrick Scott. A strong new expressionist movement emerged in the late twentieth century including Brian Maguire, Eithne Jordan, Michael Mulcahy, Michael Cullen, Dorothy Cross and Alice Maher.

Sculpture in the nineteenth century was heroic and monumental as exemplified by the statues of Oliver Goldsmith and Edmund Burke by John Henry Foley (1819–1874) outside Trinity College, Dublin. This tradition continued into the twentieth century with the works of Oisin Kelly (1915–81), Seamus Murphy (1907–74) and Hilary Heron (1923–77) pioneering the use of new casting techniques and promoting the concept of an Irish vernacular sculpture. Contemporary sculpture is more abstract and witty as can be seen in the diverse work of Edward Delany (1930–2009), John Behan, Michael Warren, Eilis O'Connell, Kathy Prendergast and Eileen MacDonagh.

Architecture

The earliest examples of architecture visible in Ireland today are megalithic tombs (3500–2000 B.C.). These include dolmens (three or more standing stones supporting one or two capstones) and passage graves such as Newgrange. Stone Age techniques survived into the twelfth century and are still visible in the beehive structure of early churches and monasteries such as those on Skellig Michael and Gallarus Oratory in County Kerry. During the Iron Age (after 500 B.C.) large circular stone forts were built, usually on hilltops such as Dun Aengus on the Aran Islands.

Newgrange, County Meath

The Round Tower is almost exclusive to Ireland and is found in many parts of the country. Built from the tenth to the twelfth centuries on monastic sites, the most notable being at Clonmacnoise in County Offaly, round towers were frequently more than 30 metres high. Their primary purpose seems to have been to serve as bell towers although the raised level of the doorway would suggest they may also have had defensive uses.

After this period, Romanesque architecture with its intricate and ornate carved stonework influenced the shape of Irish churches, the finest examples being Cormac's Chapel on the Rock of Cashel in County Tipperary and Clonfert Cathedral in County Galway. The arrival of the Anglo-Normans heralded the introduction of the early Gothic style of architecture, with the two Dublin cathedrals, Christ Church and Saint Patrick's, being the most notable. The Normans built substantial castles

The Custom House, Dublin

with large rectangular keeps, many of which, like Trim in County Meath and Carrickfergus in County Antrim, still figure on the landscape. The fifteenth century castle at Cahir in County Tipperary is the most impressive of the surviving feudal strongholds.

Classical buildings date from the late seventeenth century. At the turn of the eighteenth century Palladian mansions were emulating Italian palazzos, but by the end of the century, this style had given way to neo-classicism and Dublin became an outstanding example of Georgian architecture. Key buildings from this period include the Custom House and the Four Courts in Dublin, with their distinctive copper domes, designed by James Gandon (1743–1823). By the nineteenth century Gothic revivalism was in vogue influencing the design of churches such as Saint Finn Barre's Cathedral (1867) in Cork and adapted to domestic architecture in the construction of Ashford Castle (c.1870), County Mayo.

Music

Music has always been an important part of Irish culture, from the traditional accompaniment to festivals and funerals in the form of playing and ballad singing, to Irish dancing which is very much alive in Irish communities around the world. The harp was the dominant instrument in early historical times. One of the earliest Irish composers whose work survives is Turlough O'Carolan (1670–1738), the blind harpist and one of the last of the ancient bardic tradition.

There is also a classical tradition in the forms pioneered by other European composers. Eighteenth century Dublin was an important musical centre and Handel chose to premiere his *Messiah* there in 1742. In the twentieth century traditional Irish music inspired modern composers such as Seán Ó Riada (1931–71). Count John McCormack

(1884–1945) was a world famous Irish tenor.

Traditional Irish music is now popular in many countries through the influence of groups as diverse as Clannad, the Chieftains, Altan, Dervish, Lúnasa and Anúna, all of whom perform in a modern context without compromising the integrity of the original sound. Reflecting this versatility is the phenomenon of *Riverdance*, with music composed by Bill Whelan, combining the best of Irish song, music and dance. *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* plays a prominent part in the development and preservation of Irish traditional music and dance.

The 'Brian Boru' harp dates from the 14th century

On the jazz scene guitarist Louis Stewart has played with leading international musicians. Bands such as U2 and Westlife are famous at home and abroad, as are individual singers such as Van Morrison, Sinéad O'Connor and Enya.

There are three full–time professional orchestras performing in Ireland. The National Opera Company was founded in 2010 forged from two State-funded companies, Opera Ireland and Opera Theatre Company. There is also a wealth of individual classical musical talent such as the well known pianist John O'Conor and singers Ann Murray and Suzanne Murphy.

Film
Films have been made in and about Ireland since the Lumiére Brothers filmed in Sackville (now O'Connell) Street in 1897. Dublin born Rex Ingram was a Hollywood silent film director in the early 20th century. In 1910 the American, Sidney Olcott, filmed *The Lad from Old Ireland* in New York and Kerry, the first film ever made on two continents. Ireland has since played host to many international directors — Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Francis Ford Coppola, John Huston and Steven Spielberg.

Throughout the last century Irish film makers were prolific in their production of amateur films, newsreels, documentaries and informational films. It was not until the 1970s however that a new wave of indigenously produced fiction films began to provide a striking alternative to foreign produced representations of Ireland.

The work of Irish producers, directors and screen writers is facilitated

by the Irish Film Board who fund production and distribution of feature films, shorts, animated films and Irish language productions.

Irish films have enjoyed international acclaim such as *Michael Collins* (Neil Jordan 1996), *I Went Down* (Paddy Breathnach 1997), *The General* (John Boorman 1998), *The Wind That Shakes The Barley* (Ken Loach 2006) winner of the Palme d'Or at Cannes, and *Once* (John Carney 2006), winner of an Academy Award for best original song.

Annual film festivals in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Belfast showcase Irish and international films while a year–round venue for art house cinema is provided at the Irish Film Centre in Dublin, the Kino in Cork and the Town Hall in Galway. The Irish animator, Richard Baneham, won an Academy Award for Best Visual Effects and a BAFTA Award for Special Visual Effects for his work on Avatar, in 2010.

Online

The National Theatre Society:	www.abbeytheatre.ie
National Concert Hall:	www.nch.ie
National Archives:	www.nationalarchives.ie
Irish Museum of Modern Art:	www.modernart.ie
National Gallery of Ireland:	www.nationalgallery.ie
National Library of Ireland:	www.nli.ie
National Museum of Ireland:	www.museum.ie
Chester Beatty Library:	www.cbl.ie
Irish Research Council for the Humanities & Social Studies:	www.irchss.ie
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna:	www.librarycouncil.ie
Bord Scannán na hÉireann:	www.filmboard.ie

Sport

Among the most popular sports are Ireland's traditional games, gaelic football, hurling and camogie, which are played almost exclusively in Ireland and in Irish communities abroad. Games in the All-Ireland hurling and football championships attract large attendances throughout the summer months culminating in the finals, the highlight of Ireland's sporting year, which are held in Croke Park in Dublin.

Soccer is popular at all ages from school to senior level in domestic competitions. The Irish International team, which plays as the

The traditional games of hurling (left) and football (right)

GAA Football All-Ireland Senior Championship Final 2011, Dublin vs. Kerry

Republic of Ireland, has over the past number of years enjoyed some success and is well supported by enthusiastic and friendly fans. The team qualified for the UEFA Euro 2012 finals.

  Rugby football is popular in Ireland at international, club and schools level. The sport is managed by the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU). Ireland competes in the international annual Six Nations Championship, winning the tournament in 2009.

Ireland-England rugby match

The Irish bloodstock industry is considered one of the finest in the world

Padraig Harrington, Champion Golfer

Ireland has a strong reputation for field sports such as shooting, fishing and also for equestrian events, show jumping and horse racing. The Irish bloodstock industry is considered one of the finest in the world.

As Ireland has over 3,000 kilometres of coastline and numerous inland waterways, sailing and boating are long-established sports. A wide range of marine leisure activities such as fishing, water-skiing, canoeing, wind-surfing, diving and swimming are also pursued.

Over 400 golf courses offer facilities through the country. All-Ireland teams compete in international amateur golfing competitions with the major Irish tournaments on the international professional circuit being the Irish Open and the Irish PGA Championship. The Ryder Cup was held in Ireland in 2006, with top Irish golfers Pádraig Harrington, Darren Clarke and Paul McGinley contributing to the European team's victory over the United States. Harrington later went on to become a three times 'Majors' winner, winning the British Open Championship in July 2007 and in 2008, and the US PGA in 2008. 2010 and 2011 were remarkable

John Michael Gannon, Cloghan, Co Offaly with his two Gold and two Silver Medals at Athens Special Olympics in June 2011

years for golfers from Northern Ireland: Graeme McDowell, Rory McIlroy and Darren Clarke won three major tournaments — the US Masters 2010, the US Open 2011 and the British Open 2011— respectively.

  Ireland has a history of successfully hosting prestigious sporting events and hosted the Special Olympics in June 2003. This was the largest sporting event ever to take place in Ireland. Over 7,000 special athletes from 160 countries came to Ireland to participate in this unique sporting achievement. Ireland hosted the September 2011 biennial professional women golfers' Solheim Cup at Killeen Castle Golf Resort, County Meath.

Online	
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Football Association of Ireland:	www.fai.ie
Irish Rugby Football Union:	www.irfu.ie
Gaelic Association of Ireland:	www.gaa.ie
Horse Racing Ireland:	www.horseracingireland.ie
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