

Minister Madigan Speech at Equity Ireland and UK Conference, Belfast – 18 Jan 2019

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A dhaoine uaisle, is cúis áthais dom bheith anseo libh inniú ag an gcomhdháil thábhachtach agus oiriúnach seo chun tionchar an Bhreathimeachta ar chúrsaí ealaíne in Éirinn, agus Tuaisceart na hÉireann, a phlé.

The performing arts have always been a channel to transcend change and division and, indeed, I am reminded that this august venue, which last year celebrated its 50th anniversary, was founded in difficult times of uncertainty and division and sought to be a venue where all could participate.

We are all keenly aware of the impending deadline of March 29th when the UK is due to withdraw from the European Union. The Government of Ireland is disappointed at the outcome of this week's vote on the Withdrawal agreement in the House of Commons. It is not the outcome we wanted but over the coming weeks, the Irish Government will continue to work with our European partners in a collective effort to conclude an agreement with the UK.

We remain firmly of the view that the only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal is to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement as endorsed by the European Council and agreed with the British Government.

The Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration on the future relationship reflects long and difficult negotiations, which resulted in compromises on both sides. It delivers on the shared objective of providing an absolute guarantee that a hard border will be avoided, while also ensuring that nothing in the Agreement will prejudice the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. It also includes important provisions on protecting North South cooperation as well as acknowledging the continuation of the Common Travel Area.

The key provisions in the Political Declaration envisage a deep and comprehensive partnership between the UK and EU that will serve to mitigate some of the more challenging impacts of Brexit, both North-South, and between the UK and the rest of Europe, including Ireland, one of its closest neighbours. This is of such importance to our collective societies and economies.

Over the past two and a half years, my Department, has been engaged, along with the various agencies under its remit and associated stakeholders, in identifying the risks to the cultural and creative sector arising from Brexit and putting in place measures that will, to the greatest extent possible, address these risks.

They cut across a number of different strands but foremost amongst these is the risk to the EU freedom of movement – the freedom to work, train, collaborate and network with artists living and working across the EU.

It is the freedom to perform before and bring entire productions to diverse and multiple audiences across different jurisdictions. I know that any loss of freedom of movement can undermine the sustainability of artists and organisations, in a sector that depends on, and, indeed, thrives on the capacity of its performance, directorial and design operators to move relatively uninhibited.

I would like to reiterate the commitments already made by the Irish Government that the Common Travel Area and the associated rights and entitlements of Irish and British citizens under the longstanding reciprocal arrangement will continue in all circumstances. This will assist in ensuring that the collaboration we have today, North-South and East-West will continue. However, I know there will still be challenges.

I also know that uncertainty over currency fluctuations and possible changes to taxation rules can impact on a sector that is often subject to tight margins in the negotiation of contracts and the meeting of existing commitments. Uncertainty over future access to funding programmes, such as the Creative Europe Culture and MEDIA Programmes, can also lead to lost opportunities as project ideas that involve a multi-national and multi-annual commitment may not be pursued.

The possibility also arises that a divergence in visa and labour market rules and standards may result in a loss of competitiveness in either jurisdiction as well as impeding future co-productions, particularly in the film and television sector, in what is truly an area of close and ever-expanding co-operation between the North and South of Ireland.

These risks are but some of the most prominent faced by the cultural and creative sectors in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and, indeed, in the UK, arising from Brexit. I do not outline these risks to focus on the negative or to scaremonger, but to let you know that through our discussions, analysis, and contingency planning, we are truly cognisant of them and it is not difficult to see from the agenda for today, that they are also numbered amongst the matters of most concern to you.

Notwithstanding, and in part, because of these risks, the Government of Ireland has never placed higher emphasis on the importance of culture and creativity to our overall social and economic wellbeing.

The Creative Ireland Programme, launched at the end of 2016, aims to harness the positive energy the Centenary Programme of that year generated across the country. Through the Creative Ireland Programme, we are prioritising and promoting arts, culture and creativity at a local, national and international level because an active and engaging cultural sector can enrich every aspect of our society and every stage of our lives. We are beginning to recognise that how a community understands itself, celebrates itself and expresses itself are major contributing factors in its ability to withstand economic, political, and cultural winds of change and transition.

The culture component of *Global Ireland - Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025*, published in May last year, takes these ideas and initiatives forward and aims to double funding to arts and culture between 2018 and 2025. In doing so, the Government recognises that artists and other creative workers need to be properly supported to allow them to continue to operate in the cultural sector on a self-sustaining basis.

In the context of Brexit which we are here talking about today, I must say I agree with Ciarán Davane, Director of the British Council, the UK's international organisation for cultural relations.

At a Global Ireland conference in Dublin Castle week he was asked what success would look like post-Brexit in terms of Ireland and Britain.

His answer, 'More engagement, not less, more co-operation, more arts organisations and artists working together and more people experiencing culture.'

So it is important that government support, when it comes to creativity, goes beyond financial support and recognises the particular challenges faced by creative workers who often operate in a precarious environment.

Support by State bodies, North and South, for culture and creativity provide a significant boost to the sector in Ireland. The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland initiated a joint agreement in 2014 to enable arts practitioners to engage in North South Touring. Since then, 75 tours across a range of art forms, with over 500 shows and the employment of 910 artists, have taken place.

They also jointly fund All-Ireland arts organisations and other arts organisations engaged in co-production, co-presentation and co-operation between the two jurisdictions. Indeed, co-productions by the Abbey and Lyric Theatres of *Fire Below (A War of Words)* and *Double Cross* staged successively in Belfast and Dublin in 2017 and 2018, demonstrate the close and successful co-operation between these two wonderful theatres, supported by the respective Arts Councils.

Culture Ireland, which operates under my Department, and is responsible for the promotion of Irish artists abroad, works on an all-island basis. Since its establishment in 2005, it has provided travel supports for artists from anywhere on the island of Ireland to present their work internationally. It also works with its Northern Ireland based funding counterpart – the Arts Council of Northern Ireland – to ensure awareness of and access to Culture Ireland opportunities by Northern Ireland-based artists.

Recent notable examples of artists from Northern Ireland that were supported include: Oona Doherty, a Northern Ireland-based dance artist, who was supported by Culture Ireland at Tanzmesse (Dance Industry Showcase event) in Dusseldorf in September 2018. Her success there has led to multiple international opportunities, such as touring in France and Switzerland in Spring 2019;

And; Cahoots Northern Ireland, which has been supported as a Showcase artist at the International Performing Arts for Youth in Philadelphia, USA. They are performing *Penguins* this week at a special industry event for North American bookers.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Culture Ireland also jointly manage and deliver the Ireland desk at World Music Expo on an annual basis, most recently in Las Palmas in October 2018. They also engage as part of the Horizons Partnership, a collective of funding and international promotion agencies from the UK and Ireland.

We will continue to provide support to artists, through bursaries, awards, residencies and commissions and through working with our partners in key bodies in Northern Ireland and across the UK.

The audio-visual industry, North and South, has gone from strength to strength in recent years, and is, as I mentioned earlier, a key truly all-island industry, with directors, actors and production staff fluidly working between the two jurisdictions.

We want to maintain that momentum. Last year, I, along with the Taoiseach and Minister for Finance, launched the *Investing in Our Culture, Language and Heritage plan for the period 2018 to 2027*, which, amongst other things, proposes funding of €200 million, through Screen Ireland, for the audio-visual industry and media production.

The associated *Audio-visual Action Plan*, which I launched last June, as part of the Creative Ireland programme, has the potential not only to increase the number of full-time industry employees to an estimated 24,000 but also to grow its gross value to nearly €1.4 billion.

It is my aim, that over the next ten years, the Plan will consolidate the development of a vibrant media production and audio-visual sector, bringing new economic opportunities across Ireland, through increased Government support. I have set up a Steering Group to drive forward this Plan.

It is vital that Ireland's creative talent has the opportunity to work and collaborate on an international basis and build long-term relationships with their international counterparts. Opportunities to work globally are essential for many artists and creative professionals in order to sustain their careers.

Indeed it was the global phenomenon herself, the late Aretha Franklin who once said.

"Be your own artist, and always be confident in what you're doing. If you're not going to be confident, you might as well not be doing it."

So while this is a time of uncertainty, I am committed to supporting you through all means at my disposal, now, and in the longer term, to avail of all opportunities. I wish you well in your discussions today and look forward to continued engagement with you.
Go raibh míle maith agaibh.