

SPD Reception, Sofia, 18 March 2019

Speech – Minister of State Sean Canney, TD

Honourable guests, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen:

Dobra Vaytcher - Good Evening!

I am delighted to be here this evening, on my first trip to Bulgaria, to celebrate St Patrick's Day with all of you.

Although it is Ireland's national holiday, St. Patrick's Day is celebrated globally, from New York to Seoul, from Helsinki to Dubai, and in countless other locations. It is a shared celebration, a day when everyone is, as Ambassador Forbes said, a little bit Irish.

Bulgaria and Ireland share many things. Even though our two countries lie at the furthest reaches of Europe from each other, I have seen, even in the short time that I have been here, how close we are in so many more important ways.

We are both small, open, modernising economies on the periphery of Europe. But, at the same time, we remain close to the land and our strong traditions, most notably our traditional music and dance.

Our national independence and cultural movements in the 19th century led to the establishment of sovereign, independent states and, although our experiences in the 20th century were very different, we are now strong partners and enthusiastic members of the European Union.

Like Bulgaria, Ireland has an unwavering commitment to our membership of the EU, which, in the decades since our joining, helped us to achieve so much. We can see similar progress under way here in Bulgaria.

Undoubtedly there will be challenges in the period immediately ahead. But like you we are convinced that the EU will emerge stronger and more united.

In a world of rapid change and uncertainty, the EU is ever more necessary as a bulwark of peace, stability and international cooperation and a beacon for human rights, free trade, for collective efforts to tackle global problems, and for support for the international order and rule of law.

I would like to congratulate Bulgaria on your very successful Presidency of the Council of the European Union last year, which brought a special focus back to the accession vocation and perspective of the Western Balkans countries – something to which Ireland is very committed.

So this evening I am very pleased to be here, not only to celebrate Ireland, but to celebrate Ireland's relationships around the world, in the European Union, and, in particular, the links between our two countries and the friendship, cooperation and mutual support that defines the Irish-Bulgarian relationship.