



Introduction by
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Her Majesty The Queen's State Visit to Ireland will be an important and welcome event. This historic Visit will be the first such State Visit of a reigning monarch since the Visit of King George V in 1911, soon after becoming King.

The Queen will be accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh and the programme will include a formal welcome by President McAleese at Áras an Uachtaráin, a ceremony at the Garden of Remembrance, a courtesy call on the Taoiseach at Government Buildings and a State dinner in Dublin Castle. There will also be events at Trinity College, Dublin, at the National War Memorial Gardens in Islandbridge, at the Guinness Storehouse and at Croke Park.

This State Visit confirms the close relationship between the two countries and will allow all to reflect on how far the relationship has developed, the important achievements that have been made, and the opportunity to enhance further the close ties between two close neighbours. The Visit has received broad but not unanimous support from Irish political parties.

The State Visit comes at a time when the bilateral relationship has never been stronger and there are frequent meetings between Ministers and officials. High level visits have included those by the Foreign Secretary, the Lord Mayor and the Princess Royal. This relationship is based on shared values and mutual interest. Geographically Ireland is the only country sharing a land border with the United Kingdom and Anglo-Irish ties are very significant.

Trade and investment links between the two countries are also strong. Two-way trade in goods and services now amounts to some

£44 billion and at over £15 billion Ireland remains the United Kingdom's fifth largest export market – eclipsing total exports to the BRIC nations combined. Ireland represents an important export market for key sectors such as manufactured goods, food and drink, chemicals, machinery and transport equipment. Imports from Ireland are increasing and stand at more than £12 billion. Ireland is the tenth largest investor in the UK with more than £10 billion and UK investment in Ireland is over £24 billion. Over sixty Irish companies are listed on the London Stock Exchange.

Given past difficulties, the improvement in political relations has been remarkable and the peace process has transformed this relationship. Indeed the Queen's State Visit may well be viewed as a defining moment of the peace process. Officials say that The Queen has maintained a close interest in the process since the Downing Street declaration in 1993 via the historic Good Friday Agreement of 1998 through to the full political settlement in 2010 with the devolution of powers regarding policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland assembly. The Visit reflects the transformation of this political relationship and a further step towards a deeper relationship of friendship, trust and co-operation.

Her Majesty's State Visit will provide opportunities to reflect on the growing importance of Ireland on the world stage as well as the relationship of allegiance, friendship and mutual trust between Ireland and the United Kingdom. We at FIRST are delighted to have been asked to produce this publication to mark the State Visit and hope that it contributes, in a small way, to the success of the Visit and the further development of this important bilateral relationship.