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Speech by Eamon de Valera to the Plenary Session of the
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RUSSIA AND THE LEAGUE

It was with a feeling of no little anxiety that I ventured to put my name on the list of speakers for this evening. Many of the delegates present will remember that on a former occasion I availed myself of the indulgence which is usually given to a newcomer to the seat of the League to make some frank comments, and to give expression to the views of the plain people in my own country, as I understood them - views which I believed were largely shared by the plain people of many countries who desired to see peace reign in the world. My remarks were received not unfavourably, in the belief that they were prompted by a sincere desire for the welfare of the League. May I claim the same favourable consideration for the remarks which I am now about to make on an even more delicate subject.

Not a single delegate to the League but must be aware that the dominant issue at this Assembly is the question of the entry of Russia into the League. That was known before we came to Geneva. Since we came here it has been the sole topic of conversation, I might say, between delegates; and it is, in my opinion, in the interests of the League, in view of the suspicions and the distrust which have been aroused not merely among delegations here but among our peoples at home who receive the Press reports, that this subject should be dealt with frankly and plainly in the Assembly.

I do not want anyone to imagine that I am not fully aware of the difficulties, or that I do not realise that there are many questions which have to become the subject of private negotiations and conversations before a public arrangement can be reached. I fully realise that, but I am convinced that a continuance beyond a certain period of those private negotiations may very well defeat the purpose for which they were entered upon; and if I can judge from what I have heard from other delegations, we have arrived at the time when the danger is a real possibility.

Now, what is the position? The position, as I conceive it, is this: that it is believed - the various trends of opinion having been explored fairly carefully - that there is in this Assembly the necessary majority of votes to secure Russia's entry into the League. Of course, not every delegation has at its disposal the evidence which would assure it of that fact, but it is a fact, I understand, which is generally accepted. On the other hand, there is a belief, and those who seem to speak with authority on the matter say

they are certain, that Russia desires to enter the League. We have therefore the two necessary conditions. On the one hand there is the readiness of Russia to enter, and on the other hand there is here, we understand, the necessary majority to secure her entrance if she applies.

What is it reasonable for Russia to expect? Russia, like any other State - great or small - naturally wants to assure herself, before applying, that she is not to be subjected to the humiliation of having her application rejected. That is very natural. It is a thing we can understand; it is a thing our peoples can understand, and that can be understood in this assembly hall as well as in some hotel room. That being so, why can we not state it openly here?

On the other hand, the League has also a dignity to maintain, and the members of the League have a dignity to maintain; and those who talk of issuing invitations must realise that any person who is likely to be a party to such an invitation will need to be assured that the invitation, if issued, will not be rejected. I think the people of Russia, or the people of any State that desired to enter the League, would understand that.

With regard to this question of an invitation: those delegates who, like myself, for example, would not sign any invitation without first of all having the assurance that the invitation would not be rejected, have another very important matter to consider. It is true probably - I am assured by very many delegates that that is a fact about which there can be no doubt - that the necessary two-thirds majority is available here to support an invitation to Russia, but it is well known also that there are States which are not prepared to support Russia's entry. These States have rights too; they have the right to express their views, and any invitation or procedure that would have the effect of depriving any of those States of this right is something, in my opinion, that it would be unworthy of the League even to consider.

The necessary machinery is provided by which, when a certain majority of votes is available, the opposition of a minority can be overborne. There is no humiliation to Russia in coming along in the ordinary way, having been assured that there is no intention on the part of the majority of delegates to attempt to humiliate her in any way. But, as I have said, those of us who are in the League, whether we are in support of Russia's entry or against it, have rights which must not be abrogated. They are provided for, and if a matter of procedure is involved, have we not the Sixth Committee, for example, in which the whole question of procedure could properly be considered in the presence of all the delegations instead of in caucus in an hotel room.

I think there is no real difficulty at all. We have only to face the situation frankly. We can individually make quite clear what our attitude will be when the necessary application or the necessary steps to bring about Russia's application are taken. Russia will have in that way the assurance she requires in advance. She can then make her

application. In the nature of things she must feel in any case that there is going to be a very favourable consideration of the application. Why? Because it is obvious that anyone who has the interest of the League at heart, and looks upon the League as an instrument for the preservation of world peace, must desire to see in the League a nation of the importance of Russia.

Her territory is two, perhaps three, times the size of the rest of Europe; she has a population, I believe, of some one hundred and sixty-five millions. Is it not obvious, a priori, that there must be a strong feeling on the part of everybody who wishes well of the League in favour of having such a nation participate in the League's work, subject, of course, to the understanding that in entering the League she was entering it in no special or privileged position; that she was to be subject to all the obligations which other members of the League have to undertake.

I represent a country which, if you consider its political and religious ideals, is as far apart as the poles from Soviet Russia; but I would be willing to take the responsibility of saying openly and frankly here that I would support and vote for the entry of Russia into the League on account of the considerations I have mentioned. I admit that I should be much happier, as the representative of a country which has suffered greatly for religious freedom, if Russia, on entering the League, were to make universal those guarantees which she gave to the United States of America on resuming

diplomatic relations with that country. I hope that the rights which Russia agreed to accord the nationals of the United States on the resumption of diplomatic relations with that country will, on Russia's entry into the League, be made universal. I believe that the day has gone when nations that want liberty and peace, or enlightened Governments claiming such ideals, can continue persecution or persist in the denial of religious freedom.

I say, then, that what we should do here in this Assembly is to get at once about this business, and if it is a matter of procedure - as it now seems largely to be - to bring that matter to the Assembly. And let us not, for the credit of the League, attempt to deprive any State of its rights under the Covenant and

of its rights to object and criticise if a proposal is made for a new entrant into the League. As I said at the beginning, I have ventured on rather delicate ground. I hope that my doing so will be understood by the Assembly. To my mind, if we continue this method of hawking round draft after draft for signature, we shall do nothing but excite suspicion, and give an impression of intrigue which will be fatal to the credit of the League. It is not in the interest of the League, nor is it in the interest of Russia, that any special method should be devised for her. It is important that it should be understood that she comes in in no specially privileged position. A special situation is created

here by the fact that because of want of unanimity you cannot adopt procedures that were adopted recently in a few cases. In the great majority of cases, however, the regular procedure was followed. As far as I know, the regular procedure was departed from only when there was no question of depriving any delegation of its rights - its rights of criticism. When there is unanimity, and all are in agreement, there is no deprivation in passing over or side-tracking (if I may say so) the ordinary procedure; but when there is not unanimity, any attempt to side-track that procedure is made at the expense of certain members of the League, and this, I think, should under no circumstances be done.