

EUROPE IS OUR STORY

TOWARDS A NEW
NARRATIVE FOR THE
EUROPEAN UNION

Edited by Dermot Scott

iiea.com
Sharing Ideas
Shaping Policy



[The Institute of International and European Affairs](#)

Tel: (353) 1-874 6756.

Fax: (353) 1- 878 6880.

E-mail: reception@iiea.com.

Web: www.iiea.com

8 North Great Georges Street,
Dublin 1,
Ireland

“Europe is Our Story - Towards a New Narrative for the European Union”.
© Institute of International and European Affairs 2014.

IIEA Working Group on Values and Narrative in the EU.

Cover design and type by Alba Comenge.

The Institute of International and European Affairs does not express any opinions of its own. The words and opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the authors.

The IIEA would like to thank the members of the Working Group on Values and Narrative in the EU for their contributions to this paper: Linda Barry, Tony Brown, Ruth Casey, Ivan Cooper, Jill Donoghue, Eugene Downes, Caroline Erskine, Hugh Frazer, Paul Gillespie, Edmond Grace, Brendan Halligan, Neville Keery, Gina Menzies, Dermot Scott and Horst Siedschlag.

Preface

‘Nations in solidarity’ – beyond doubt, that is the founding vision of Europe. This vision overcame the dark reality of times when, in much of the continent, human dignity was degraded, freedom denied, democracy abandoned, equality overruled, the rule of law ignored and human rights held in contempt. The values which underlie the vision are set out in Article 2 of The Treaty on European Union, for which the people of Ireland voted in 2009:

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities...”

Respect for these values has its roots, not in the pages of a treaty, but in the mud of trenches, the brutality of concentration camps and the cruelty of the torture chamber.

When we in Ireland hear the word ‘famine’ the response is heartfelt. The same is true, but in a different way, with the name of this country. Something stirs – pointing us beyond ourselves. As long as people have known how to live at peace, there have been words which awaken a generous attitude – a sense of solidarity. Peace would not survive otherwise.

Its survival all depends on a sense of a shared story, which speaks to our vulnerability. These stories often have their origins in moments of humiliation and grief and the telling of them can inspire the hope of triumph over daunting odds. They enable us to speak of the family, the tribe, the nation, but also to create new realities, new ways of living at peace in a changing world. Recovering addicts can inspire others by candid accounts of their degradation and how they eventually found their way. In the same way nations, for the sake of peace, can come together and learn from what former German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, called “the catastrophe”.

He wrote of his own people, of how they endured “hunger, cold, need and death,” of how they were “despised by all the peoples of the earth”. He added: “If we were to emerge from this misery and to find the right way forward, we had first to understand what had brought us so low...we had to search our consciences.”

Those who founded modern Europe had to learn and lead.

When many in Ireland think of ‘Europe’ they tend to think of bureaucracy and money – either getting it or having it taken from us – but the story of Europe is a lesson in solidarity. It begins in seething national resentments and the imposition of cruel financial burdens and in the two tyrannies, Communism and Fascism, which swept across Europe in the twentieth century. All this had the effect of isolating peoples from each other. Corrupt elites lorded it over the rest of the population, inspiring fear by their abuse of power and denying their fellow human beings a say in their own future. Those who raised their voice in opposition were humiliated and locked away. Minorities were singled out for persecution and genocide. Life was cheap.

Those who value patriotism and freedom, and who see the dead-end of isolation for what it is, will want their country to live in solidarity with its neighbours. A nation does a disservice to humanity when it isolates itself from the rest of the world. The European project is a vehicle of peace and solidarity – and of human thriving in the wider neighbourhood in which we Irish live.

There can be no true solidarity without a generous commitment to the welfare of others. This commitment is unreal if it excludes finance, but it cannot be confined to it. We in Ireland experienced the solidarity of our fellow Europeans when we first joined in this great project over forty years ago. We were the least developed Member State and not only did we receive financial help, we were treated with respect. Those who showed their solidarity with us had seen, in their lifetime, what can happen when a people is humiliated. Ireland, in turn, became a net contributor to the EU at a time when Europe was enlarging to receive ten new Member States.

The underlying cause of the catastrophe in Europe was a failure of solidarity – between both classes and nations. Communism was born in the yawning gap between the lives of Russian workers and peasants and those of a heedless aristocracy. The Third Reich was born in the cruel reparations imposed on Germany after World War I – with the resulting economic and political chaos.

As the solidarity of European nations was undermined, it became easy for them to turn in on themselves, begrudging other ways of life, scapegoating minorities, condemning diversity, ignoring social divisions and insisting on pre-defined and unchanging roles for different groupings – particularly women. In the name of a supposed self-sufficiency, pluralism was discarded, discrimination and intolerance thrived, social problems festered and the contribution of women was trivialised.

Those who endured the European catastrophe realised that no country can remain free in isolation. The nations of Europe have learnt that the struggle for freedom is unending and that same Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, already quoted, sets out a vision of solidarity which is shared by all Member States:

“...a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”

These values and that vision are not the property of any bureaucracy or council. They are the guiding light of Europe, but this light will remain shrouded in fog unless we, citizens of Europe, take it to heart and set about the task of giving these values and that vision a reality in our lives, in our country, in our great and ancient European neighbourhood.

Aim

This paper aims to explore the values and functioning of the European Union and to consider the compelling reasons for Ireland's continued participation in the European project. It analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the European project and suggests a new way of looking at the European Union in the 21st Century. Reflecting on these fundamental issues is vital to the legitimacy of the European project, in particular in light of the institutional changes due to take place in 2014. However, the long-running economic crisis has not only added additional layers of complexity to the issues in question, but it has meant that political attention and energy has been directed elsewhere, particularly to economic and financial crisis management.

Structure

Section 1 provides an introduction to the paper, providing context and background information.

In Section 2, the paper considers the original drivers of European integration and the values of the European Union as explicitly expressed in the treaties. It explores the extent to which these values provide an overarching vision, from which the principles and policies of the EU are derived.

Section 3 lists common criticisms of the European Union and outlines counter arguments. These critiques arise in varying combinations in Ireland whenever there is public debate on EU issues, usually in advance of a referendum on EU treaty change.

Finally, Section 4 discusses a new narrative for Ireland in the EU. It considers the EU as an arena for the realisation of Ireland's own values, with reference to its historical experience and looking ahead to the future. It discusses openness, accountability and democratic legitimacy in the Union, and its evolution as a citizen-centred community.

1. INTRODUCTION

The financial and economic crisis of the last few years has raised fundamental issues for the European Union. The level of public hostility to the so-called austerity regime; the apparent disjuncture in Europe between north and south; the rise of deep public concern about migration; the waning of support for redistribution/solidarity and cohesion; the rise of extreme nationalist and sectarian political parties; all these and other factors demonstrate the need for a reappraisal of what the European Union is, what aims and values it expresses and how well it achieves them.

From the beginning the European project had noble aims: to make war unthinkable between states and to increase the prosperity of its peoples. Its founding treaty spoke of an ever-closer union of the peoples of the different countries and of deepening the solidarity between them. For many decades it provided the citizens of the Member States with political stability and economic opportunity and so gained their trust and approval.

But while the Union has indeed integrated considerably in the economic, monetary, financial and other spheres, it has failed to match such technical progress with a social union, relevant to the lives of ordinary people. The model of development has, in the popular mind, become too unbalanced with insufficient integration between economic, social and environmental concerns and rising inequality.

As a result, the impression given to EU citizens is that decisions which affect their lives are made by distant bodies unresponsive to and unaware of their needs or perspectives. They feel powerless as national executives reach decisions at EU level, which, if unpopular, are blamed on 'Brussels', while democratically elected MEPs have so far failed to gain the public recognition and support that their role deserves. The fact that this disenchantment is a reflection of a similar disengagement from national politics does not make it any easier to solve.

The institutions of the Union will begin a new cycle in 2014. Over the course of the year, Europe-wide voting will elect a new European Parliament and the heads of the main institutions (European Commission, European Council, European Parliament, European External Action Service) will be renewed. The elections and appointments will take place against a background of increasing alienation of EU citizens, shown particularly by the general decline in approval given to the EU and its institutions in the regular Eurobarometer poll.²

It is therefore timely to examine the values espoused by the EU, how they have developed in tandem with the extension of the Union's powers and remit, and whether – and if so, how far – they have fallen short of their stated aims. The paper moves on to consider the narrative of the EU in the 20th Century; responds to criticisms directed at the EU; and finally seeks to develop a new narrative of the European Union for the 21st Century.

In approaching this task, this Working Group³ has no doubt of the myriad of achievements of the EU in bringing peace, stability and prosperity to the greater part of Europe within the space of six decades. Twenty-eight countries now constitute the Union, and more are queuing to join. The modest beginnings of this unique political construct have developed into a single market, an economic and monetary union and a centre of soft power in world affairs. As often observed, the EU is more admired and respected from without than within.

² Eurobarometer, *Standard Eurobarometer 80 – First Results*, December 2013, p5-6

³ IIEA Working Group on Values and Narrative in the EU. For more information see appendices 1 and 2.

The challenge therefore is to match the progress of the European Union in the economic and monetary spheres with a corresponding level of integration in the political, social and environmental spheres. Only thus does it seem possible to begin to rebuild the trust and allegiance of the citizens. Yet, of itself, this is hardly sufficient. In addition, we may need to engage in a public debate about the way in which we conduct politics both at EU and national level, adapting the classic system of representative democracy, where the citizens are restricted to voting for their representatives at stated intervals, to provide additional opportunities for the voice of the citizens to be heard, listened to and responded to, throughout the electoral cycle.

The EU must work to convince the citizens of Europe that immigration is balanced by emigration, and that each is a product of what is called freedom of movement – one of the four freedoms of the single market; that the single market is a means of creating prosperity for all; that a social Europe is a reality, and that the EU is working to improve it; that harmonisation of laws can be an advantage; that action by the EU to project its soft power to stabilise and encourage the economic and social development of our neighbours and trading partners is to be supported; that the EU's budget is under control and is at least as well-managed as those of its leading Member States; and crucially, that the Union is managed in the interest of its people and that it protects their fundamental rights.

We are confronted with major changes in the international environment such as the realignment of power in the world; climate change and consequent food shortages and migration; the need to assist our neighbours to eradicate instability and achieve a settled, peaceful and prosperous existence; energy shortage and dependency; environmental pollution. Facing these, and many other challenges, is beyond the compass of any country acting alone and thus demands far-reaching action by the European Union with the willing support of public opinion.

2. VALUES

The early drivers of European integration

Peace – Making war unthinkable

Successive generations of Europeans had suffered in two world wars and longed not simply for peace but rather the guaranteed absence of war as a means of settling disputes in Europe. Their leaders developed a vision of making the states of Europe so interdependent that they would be unable to develop an arms race and more, that they would become so integrated at all levels as to make them a genuine community or union. As captured in the words of Jean Monnet, “There will be no peace in Europe if the states rebuild themselves on the basis of national sovereignty, with its implications of prestige politics and economic protection.”⁴

Prosperity – Rebuilding the European economy

The Marshall Plan, the exemplary initiative of the United States, required Europe to establish a basic instrument of economic cooperation, the OEEC, later OECD. The US insisted that Europe, and particularly Germany, be allowed to develop economically, and later militarily, to ease the burden on the American economy. From these beginnings sprang the initiatives to establish the European Coal and Steel Community and later the European Economic Community (EEC), both progenitors of the European Union. Over the thirty years between 1945 and 1975, Western Europe had an astonishing renaissance. From the ruins of a continent devastated by World War II sprang a region, and a Community, of greatly increased wealth, accompanied by highly developed social services.

Political context – The external challenge

It was often claimed that the real impetus for the establishment of European cooperation was the threat of aggression from the Soviet Union, demonstrated by the Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia, the quashing of rebellions in East Germany, Hungary and Prague, volatility in Italy and the continued strength of pro-Soviet Communist parties in France, Italy and elsewhere.

Recent events, notably in Crimea, demonstrate that we are not at the “end of history” in this regard. Besides instability on its eastern borders, which in itself serves to confirm the external role of the EU, other external challenges have emerged, including: the declining importance of the EU in the world; low economic growth; instability in the Mediterranean and near East; climate change; water shortage; hunger; fragile states; and migration, to name but a few. The necessity for Europe to act together, and the opportunities thus provided to demonstrate leadership in the world, means that the external stimulus for European integration is as powerful as ever.

Values, principles, policies

Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the EU, the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, defined the Union as “a community of values”.⁵ Shared values provide the foundation on which society is built, defining what it stands for, believes in and aims to achieve. Values are fundamental to the nation state – for example the values espoused by the French Revolution (liberty, equality, solidarity) and the American Declaration of Independence (freedom and equality) still resonate strongly today in those countries and beyond, and can be found in our own 1916 Proclamation and the Democratic Programme of the first Dáil. At the

⁴ Monnet, Jean, *Speech to the National Liberation Committee of Algiers*, 5 August 1943

⁵ Herman Van Rompuy, *From war to peace: A European tale*, Nobel Prize lecture on behalf of the European Union, Oslo, 10 December 2012

level of the European Union, shared values are perhaps even more important, as countries with very different economic, geographical and cultural identities embark on a shared journey of ‘ever-closer union’. Any country wishing to become a member of the EU must respect the Union’s democratic basis and its values in order to be considered eligible for admission; and failure by a Member State to respect these values could lead to the suspension of that State’s rights deriving from membership.

Values found in the treaties

The founding treaty of the European Economic Community, the 1957 Treaty of Rome, does not contain an explicit statement of values. Its outline of the objectives of the Community contains a number of elements that could, however, be considered values such as those prefigured in the Schuman Declaration to the effect that war between the Member States would not merely be unthinkable but materially impossible. The objectives contain references to peace, liberty and solidarity, as well as economic and social progress. Much later, in the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, a list of values on which the EU is founded was explicitly stated for the first time.⁶ In addition, certain non-treaty texts, such as the Europe 2020 strategy, also contribute to our understanding of the full range of values of the European Union.

This examination of the EU treaties uncovers a large number of values⁷, which can be grouped under five headings:

- **Fundamental values:** These include respect for human dignity, respect for human rights, peace, democracy, security and freedom;
- **Equality-related values:** These include pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance and gender equality;
- **Economic values:** These include balanced economic growth, price stability, free and fair trade and a highly competitive social market economy;
- **Social values:** These include human security, social progress, social justice and protection, solidarity among Member States and inclusive growth;
- **Environmental values:** These include sustainable growth, resource efficiency, the protection and improvement of the quality of the environment and that the polluter should bear the cost of environmental degradation.

In considering the future of the EU, these values, as well as the principles of transparency, accountability, participation, subsidiarity and proportionality, warrant attention. Values and principles constitute the blueprint according to which the EU functions. On top of these two foundational layers are built the visible manifestation of the EU – its policies and instruments. Therefore, values are central to an appreciation of the Union’s impact on its citizens, to what they expect of it, and how they appreciate it. European political, economic and social systems must develop in ways that will foster and realise the potential in these espoused values.

⁶ Article 2 TEU: The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women prevail.

⁷ The Treaties of the European Union contain the following objectives: Respect for human dignity; Freedom; Democracy; Equality, including specifically between men and women; Rule of law; Respect for human rights (including the rights of persons belonging to minorities); Pluralism; Non-discrimination; Tolerance; Justice (without internal frontiers); Solidarity, including amongst people and amongst Member States; Peace; Well-being; Security; Free movement of persons; Asylum; Immigration; Prevention and combating of crime; Resource efficient, sustainable development of the Earth; Balanced, sustainable economic growth; Price stability; Highly competitive social market economy; Social progress; Protection and improvement of the quality of the environment; Promotion of scientific and technological advance; Combat social exclusion and discrimination; Promote social justice and protection; Solidarity between generations; Protection of the rights of the child; Economic, social and territorial cohesion; Free and fair trade; Eradication of poverty; Smart growth based on knowledge and innovation; Inclusive growth; High employment economy, aiming at full employment

An evolving hierarchy of values

The categories above, as well as the full list footnoted on the previous page, indicate the large number and broad scope of the values referred to in the core documents of the European Union. While no hierarchy of values is provided, respect for human dignity appears to be the keystone, as the dignity of the person is the foundation of liberty and traditional rights.

It is also important to consider that values may not be entirely static – they change over time as the hierarchy of values evolves in response to real-world developments. Particular values are in the ascendant at specific points in time. In the early years of the European Communities, the values of peace, freedom and democracy were to the fore, as these were the coalface at which European unity was emerging. Later, in the 1970s, economic values became central, as the world reeled from successive oil crises.

In recent decades, the kaleidoscope has turned once again. With the progressive empowerment of the individual, citizen-centred issues now dominate. If the EU wants to attract the allegiance of citizens, it must focus on equality, social justice and intergenerational solidarity, which have assumed greater urgency in the wake of the economic crisis. Individuals want a more human, responsive EU, where the challenges of demography, migration, asylum, globalisation, climate change, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty are confronted. The relationship between citizens and decision-makers must also change in tandem with the values – adapting the current functioning of representative democracy and enriching it with new elements so as to develop into a truly participatory, citizen-centred system of governance.

Realising the EU's values: Gap between values and reality?

Assessing the EU in the context of its stated aims

It appears from the decline in public support for the EU that people feel it is falling short of its aims. If it were indeed credited with the effective implementation of the values outlined in this paper, then there might be little to worry about. After all, in an increasingly globalised world, many of the challenges and problems Ireland faces cannot be solved only at a national level. Ireland's future development will depend to a significant extent on external economic, environmental and social factors. Alone, Ireland can do little to influence these factors, whereas being part of a larger union can help it to do so. It is important to demonstrate how the EU will, in the future, help Ireland to better promote its values and interests in the wider world.⁸

Transparency, accountability and participatory democracy

The European Union represents a unique experiment in political cooperation and the willingness to participate in this common project is a signal of the trust that exists between the nations of Europe. The European Union has opened up a new path, a new sense of our shared humanity based on respect rather than warfare, tyranny or manipulation. The economic crisis has exposed shortcomings in transparency, accountability and participatory democracy in the EU, key principles that help to realise the values of the Union. Some would go further and say that, alongside irresponsible public finances and lax regulation, the insufficiently clear commitment to these principles has *caused* the current existential crisis. This perspective raises the question of whether the absence of such a commitment is opening up a gap between the actions of the EU and its own espoused values.

⁸ In late 2013 and early 2014, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade conducted a public consultation as part of a review of Irish foreign policy. The IIEA made a submission to this consultation, which will be made available on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in due course.

Key to the core values of solidarity and the principle of accountability are the concepts of fairness, mutual trust and reciprocity. These ensure that the EU Member States can rely on each other to stick to their commitments; otherwise the sharing of sovereignty and closer integration will rest on shaky grounds, be it in the field of economic development or in the area of security and defence.

Promoting and attending to the principles of transparency, accountability and participatory democracy would steer the development of European democracy towards a more open model that is more responsive to citizens' priorities. Reinforced accountability would require a greater role for national parliaments and for the European Parliament in EU decision-making, as well as a rethink of the transparency and responsiveness of the other EU institutions.

Participatory democracy is closely linked with the issue of legitimacy, one of the four building blocks for the future of the EU identified by Herman Van Rompuy in his December 2012 Roadmap.⁹ The crisis that the EU is currently experiencing is widely referred to as economic, but arguably, while there have been failures in the financial system and in economic governance, the nature of the crisis today is political. As a result, citizens across the Union have sought ways to express their dissatisfaction with politics as it is currently practised, and the results have been in evidence at the ballot box and in the streets. This reinforces the need for 'citizen-centred government', which was recommended in the 2008 OECD report on public service in Ireland.¹⁰ One method of implementing increased participation is through citizen assemblies – forums for debate and citizen-input into the policy process. Such processes have been tried throughout the world, including in Ireland, and provide for reflective and deliberative engagement between citizens and their political and administrative structures.

Subsidiarity and proportionality

A currently-held view of the EU, popularised through misinformation and fears of a federal Europe, is that EU law renders the law of member states invalid. Although this is a gross oversimplification, it should be acknowledged that this fear has its roots in the principle of the primacy of EU law and in comments of the European Court of Justice (CJEU).¹¹

EU law seeks to ensure that its institutions will act only when Member States cannot. The principle of subsidiarity is well established in EU law, together with the principle of proportionality and both secure local autonomy for the Member State. The principle of subsidiarity stipulates that the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States at a local or regional level, due to the scale or effects of the proposed action. The institutions of the EU are required to demonstrate why EU action is needed and why it should be of a particular nature.

Similarly, the principle of proportionality determines that “the content and form of Union action shall not exceed what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaties”¹², providing a safeguard against unnecessary actions. These conditions for action on the part of the EU ensure not only that the values of accountability and transparency underpin the work of the Union in a very real way, but they also ensure that the Union works on behalf of the Member States.

Despite the presence of subsidiarity in the treaties, there is a perception that the EU is inexorably arrogating to itself further powers, at the expense of the national and local level. This may be only

9 Herman Van Rompuy, in close collaboration with José Manuel Barroso, Jean-Claude Juncker and Mario Draghi, *Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union*, 5 December 2012

10 OECD, *OECD Public Management Reviews – Ireland: Towards an Integrated Public Service*, June 2008

11 Case 26/62 Van Gend & Loos [1963] ECR 1

12 Article 5(4) TEU

an impression and it is easy to see how it might come about, given the already-mentioned tendency of political leaders to take any benefit from the EU without acknowledging the Union as source, while blaming it for any unwelcome measure. Certainly the emphasis in economic policies devised by the EU can mean that in areas that are technically national competences, i.e. social policies, the ability of Member States to act is limited by the imposition of economic restrictions by the Union.

However, some commentators have countered this interpretation, arguing that as the EU is a voluntary arrangement, it only acts when it is essential for Member States to act together, and that this is evidence of the principle of subsidiarity at work. Other analysts have argued that the development of powers for the EU is not only inevitable given the evolving nature of the European project, but necessary, and not incompatible with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Indeed, the findings of the first two sets of reviews of the balance of competences between the Member States and Brussels, carried out by the UK Government, has found the balance to be appropriate in the vast majority of policy areas examined.¹³

Implications for Ireland and the EU

It is clear that membership of the values-based community of the EU has brought about much progress in Ireland. Women in particular have been among the beneficiaries: a generation has grown up unaware that, before 1973, women were required to resign from public sector jobs if they married, and that the principle of equal pay for equal work did not apply, even in theory. These restrictions on civil rights were quickly removed after Ireland joined the Economic Community. Study abroad in the 1960s was a rare privilege and foreign travel was in any case much curtailed by the strict limits on taking money out of the country.

The inverse is also important: to what extent has membership of the EU allowed Ireland to apply its values in a wider frame? And has Ireland played a role in projecting EU values around the globe? Many would point to Ireland's contribution to UN peacekeeping throughout the world, now increasingly under EU and NATO auspices; and to the work of the Irish Government/Irish Aid, and NGOs such as Concern, Goal and Trócaire, beyond what one would expect of a small country. Ireland's political and diplomatic contribution has been notable, whether in bringing agreement to difficult issues such as the ill-fated EU Constitution in 2004, voting to break an impasse leading to the 1986 Inter Governmental Conference, or in managing a successful EU Presidency in the first half of 2013.

Yet we should acknowledge that Ireland in the years of the boom risked gaining a reputation for overconfidence: many foreign observers may have got the impression that the Irish felt that they now had little need of Europe and that they could afford to give negative votes to EU treaties and escape with impunity, while still being a net recipient of EU funds and an alleged tax haven. The collapse of the Irish banks and the risk to sovereignty only compounded the poor impression, exacerbated by the sometimes-hostile attitude towards the sources of the rescue, such as Germany. These factors emphasise the timeliness of this paper's attempt to refocus minds on the fundamental values underlying our society.

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/review-of-the-balance-of-competences>

3. CRITICAL VIEWS

Before proceeding to outline the choices to be made in devising a new narrative of Ireland in Europe, it is worth taking account of the principal criticisms that have arisen in the past, and confronting the issues they raise. Such criticisms are varied and often unconnected.

1. Ireland's interests are lost within the EU

The contention is often made that Ireland's interests and values are lost in an assembly of larger Member States and that they could be more effectively pursued outside the EU.

In fact, the whole history of the EU demonstrates that the opposite is the case: Ireland has flourished in the EU. Heads of State and Government and senior ministers from all Member States now meet frequently and develop a rapport; this is reflected in the fact that so few decisions in Council are taken by vote – a consensus is almost always achieved. Ireland is part of that consensus. The Irish Government and Irish officials and diplomats are skilful and resolute participants at all levels. While the outcome of negotiations may not in any particular case be 100% what Ireland wants, the advantages of a place at the decision-making table are enormous. In any event, only two European democracies, Norway and Switzerland, have elected to remain outside the Union, both of them with special economic advantages which are not easily replicated.

2. Membership of the euro has weakened Ireland economically

Ireland's participation in the EU, and more particularly the euro, is attacked with the suggestion that membership of the euro has led to economic downfall.

Ireland's participation in the European Union has transformed this country from a poverty-stricken dependency of the UK to a modern, competitive economy. The population of the state at the time of the 1973 accession was less than 3 million and is now more than 4.5 million. The workforce has doubled over the same period. GNP per head has increased threefold since 1973. Ireland has become one of the richest countries in the world.

The decision to adopt the euro represented an historic commitment to participation in the long term project of European economic integration. Ireland's experience of membership has been mixed, with a period of success and growth followed by the more recent crisis, which began in 2008 with diverse causes, domestic and global. The inherent strengths of the Irish economy, with a strong export element, combined with the country's established role as a fully engaged member, both of the EU and the Eurozone, have provided a basis for recovery.

The crisis has revealed defects in the construction of the euro system and in its regulatory capacity which are now being tackled vigorously. For example, when the Commission and Council criticised the Irish budget of 2001 as fuelling a 'bubble' in the construction sector, the then Government was able to ignore them since the system lacked powers to enforce compliance. Ireland refused to use available mechanisms to control the boom and the economy crashed in 2008. In the wake of the crisis, the structural and design flaws in the European economic framework have been recognised and major reforms are underway to redress the weaknesses of the banking system, national fiscal policymaking and solidarity. These are the subject of separate IIEA reports.

Ireland has reaped many economic benefits from its membership of the EU and the euro, in particular as the only English-speaking country in the Eurozone. Ireland has become an important

link in the value chain of US firms, for which its access to the Single Market is key. Since the crisis began, Ireland has continued to act as an investment gateway to Europe, and in 2013, became the number one export platform in the world for US multinationals. Between 2009 and 2012, US firms invested \$97.7 billion here (8.5% of its total global investment), making Ireland the fourth largest recipient of US FDI in the world.¹⁴

3. Limits on sovereignty

One common discourse in Ireland and elsewhere is that national sovereignty is reduced by membership of the EU.

Yet the case of Ireland demonstrates that this argument does not give a full account of the changes brought about by membership. Critically, and mainly unnoticed or forgotten by the public, Ireland has emerged from a position of virtual vassalage to the United Kingdom that pertained before entry. Then Ireland was subject to decisions taken in London on banking regulation, interest rates, exchange rates, agricultural prices, industrial standards and tariffs, to name only a few. These are now areas in which Ireland is a part of the decision-making process at EU level.

Indeed, this has been perhaps the greatest – and often unacknowledged – benefit of membership: the loosening of the ties that formerly bound independent Ireland to policies dictated by the United Kingdom for the United Kingdom. Irish people under the age of 60, accustomed to hearing of policies agreed in Brussels, have little or no memory of Ireland simply complying with policy made in London, invariably without Irish input. The sense of relief, of expansion of horizons, that accompanied EEC entry, the right to a place at the decision-making table, and the discovery of small-country allies, was widely felt as a psychological boost to the state. People now hearing of policy agreed in Brussels, by Ireland and its partners, must remember to contrast that with the pre-1973 acceptance of policy made by Britain for Britain. Dr. Garret FitzGerald forecast the membership of the EU would be a psychological liberation for Ireland, and so it has proven to be.

Now more than ever, it is essential for citizens to understand that without a sharing of sovereignty, sovereignty itself will not survive. This is an important insight because shared sovereignty is unique in the conduct of international relations. It calls for a different way of thinking and a new form of analysis, a need recognised in an Irish Government White Paper on Accession more than four decades ago, which stated “The powers which, by becoming a member of the Communities, we would agree to share with other Member States would in fact be enhanced rather than diminished by the cooperation involved. It is by this sharing of powers that the Communities ensure that they act in harmony for the benefit of all Member States and that the interests of all Member States are served in the formulation and pursuit of Community policies and actions.”¹⁵

4. German hegemony in Europe

Another theme of criticism is that the EU is effectively a German hegemony.

Despite being the biggest EU Member State and the “economic powerhouse” of Europe, there is scant evidence to support the contention that Germany seeks political dominance. Having drawn its lessons from the catastrophic events of the last century and based on its democratic post-war Constitution (Basic Law), Germany has devoted itself to multilateralism, in particular its integration into a united Europe. Indeed, the EU itself is the strongest institutional protection against a German hegemony.

¹⁴ Quinlan, Joseph P., *The Irish-US Economic Relationship 2013*, commissioned by the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland, 2013

¹⁵ *The Accession of Ireland to the European Communities*, White Paper, 1972

The resulting German self-restraint in assuming political leadership in common European matters has even led to the perception of Germany as Europe's "reluctant hegemon", and criticism from some leading European players of a deficit of German leadership rather than a surfeit. Equally, there is a vigorous ongoing debate within the German political system that the country has shied away for too long from taking proportionate responsibility in matters of international security.

The fact that Germany has absorbed the massive cost of reunification and survived the recent financial crisis is testimony to the strength of German society and its economy. However, in the German view, a core principle for members of the European Union is responsibility and reciprocity – equal rights and equal obligations. In this sense, solidarity and reliability are seen as two sides of the same coin.

The "hegemon" critique should be distinguished from broader and long-standing concerns about the rise of intergovernmentalism in the EU, and potential domination of decision-making by a "directoire" of the large Member States. Ireland and other smaller Member States have traditionally been vigilant in countering any move in that direction, and indeed Germany has also traditionally been the principal advocate among the larger Member States of the community method and in opposing intergovernmentalism. While some political initiatives have seemed less in keeping with this principle, Chancellor Merkel has recently strongly re-emphasised the importance of reasserting the community method and resisting the temptation of intergovernmentalism.¹⁶

There continues to be a widespread debate in Ireland, internationally and indeed within Germany as to whether the policies advocated by the German government in the management of the banking crisis since 2008 have been correct. It is vital to distinguish between this fact-based assessment and vital discussion on the merits of those policy choices, which is the essence of democratic political debate, and tabloid caricatures of Germany as a hegemon or dictator.

5. Ireland is not seen as an equal partner in the EU

Another fundamental misunderstanding is the idea that Ireland's voice is marginalised in the EU and, consequently, that decisions can be imposed on Ireland against its will on issues such as taxation, defence, protection of the right to life, family and education.

Ireland entered the EEC in 1973 as a full member and remains so today – not semi-detached, and certainly not a victim of 'its European masters'. Acceptance of the 'full membership' idea implies engagement in the search for common solutions and understanding of the real meaning of solidarity. The EU is an unprecedented form of governance – embodying, as it does, a voluntary sharing of sovereignty among its Member States. A high percentage of economic and social legislation in place in any Member State is collectively enacted in Brussels. Every one of these enactments comes with the approval of the government of each Member State. Yet, due to poor communication by governments and the media, when the vast majority of European citizens talk about laws made 'in Brussels', they have little or no sense of the role played by their own governments and national parliaments in making those laws.

Irish representatives are always at the table when EU laws are discussed and decided. Irish Ministers negotiate with and vote alongside their counterparts from each Member State in the Council of Ministers. The Taoiseach is present when the European Council convenes to lend political direction to the EU. Directly elected MEPs represent Irish voters in the European Parliament, where small Member States are disproportionately well represented. Ireland successfully fought to retain the

¹⁶ 'Angela Merkel urges EU states to not rest on post-crisis laurels', Irish Times, 22 November 2013

one-Commissioner-per-Member-State system, so there is always an Irish nominee in the College of Commissioners.

In addition, many of the most sensitive issues for Ireland (taxation, defence, social issues) are outside the remit of the European Union or are subject to unanimity amongst Member States, essentially giving each country, including Ireland, a veto over action in those fields. In the aftermath of the first Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, guarantees on these issues were specifically agreed by all Member States.

6. Running the EU is a waste of money

The cost of running the EU is often a source of criticism, especially in the current context of increasing focus on the cost of all public services at local, national and EU level. It is frequently alleged that the EU budget has not been given a clean bill of health for many years.

Public opinion is often assailed with remarks about the cost of the EU and its institutions. In fact the budget of the EU is 1% of the combined GNP of the Member States, or about 2% of their combined budgets. Of this sum, some 40% goes on agricultural policy, another 40% on regional and other similar policies, about 15% on research and only 5-6% on running the institutions. The entire personnel of the European Commission is under 25,000, while the other institutions together bring the total to about 41,000¹⁷; this compares with about 31,000 for the core Irish civil service, or about 32,000 employees of Birmingham City Council.

The Court of Auditors audits and oversees the EU budget. According to its latest report, the accounts for 2011 were reliable, the revenue and commitments were legal and regular, though with an estimated 3.9% margin of error in the payments. In fact, the payments concerned in the margin for error were largely made on behalf of the Commission by the administrations of the Member States, and it was in the Member States that the paper trail was inadequate, evidence once again that the EU functions at least as well as many Member States.

7. Ireland in the EU is part of a neo-liberal, militarised world order

Another suggestion is that membership of the EU denies Ireland an independent foreign policy and binds the country inextricably to a neo-liberal, militarised world order dominated by the US. An extension of this is the contention that Ireland's freedom of action and attitude to the Iraq war had been undermined by its membership of the EU.

It is surely more convincing to argue that membership of the larger group has protected Ireland from isolation and from undue pressure from the US and other world powers. Globalisation is a fact that Ireland cannot ignore, much less reverse. The Irish economy benefits from this interconnectedness and is dependent on the US for much of its investment, jobs and prosperity. Isolation is not an option, and managing Ireland's relations with major world powers within the EU club affords a considerable measure of protection and comfort.

The EU is also the organisation whose soft power is best placed to limit the adventurism of Russia; it is clear that military action is off the table.

¹⁷ Draft General Budget of the European Union 2013, page 68 (OJ 15 06 2012)

Conclusion

Despite the explanations proffered above, there is a perception that the EU has not always lived up to expectations, especially as regards the values that it espouses. The question arises as to whether citizens expect too much; whether the EU has tended to add additional aims and values as rhetorical counterparts to concrete policies; or whether the problem actually arises out of a lack of understanding or the absence of a compelling narrative, communicated widely and with open engagement.

4. TOWARDS A NEW NARRATIVE

“Europe can no longer rely on this promise [of peace] alone to inspire citizens. In a way, it’s a good thing; war-time memories are fading.”

- President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy¹⁸

“...we are challenged to make a narrative for social Europe with an ethical memory and an imagination freed from failure, free to build an inclusive Europe.”

- President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins¹⁹

The basic narrative of European integration was relatively simple and, in the context of post-war history, widely understood. Now, in the second decade of the 21st Century, Herman Van Rompuy argues that, while peace is still the EU’s ultimate purpose, alone it is not a compelling driver of continued and deeper integration.

This section sketches a narrative of Ireland’s experience of European integration that is mindful of the values discussed in Section 2 and that puts new developments in context. The narrative explores the historical evolution of European integration to the present day, considering what is right about the project in order to preserve and improve it, and to look at what is wrong in order to change it. As a whole, the narrative is a matter of legitimisation, showing how Europe can respond effectively to the challenges of today and tomorrow in a manner that could attract the attention and support of citizens of all ages and interests across the political and socio-economic spectra.

The EU’s traditional narrative

The original narrative of European integration drew upon the simple terms of the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, which asserted that “world peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. The contribution which an organised and living Europe can bring to civilisation is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations.” The Declaration contained the important argument that “Europe will not be made all at once or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity.”

This traditional EU narrative of peace and democracy had lost much of its relevance, being taken for granted by many citizens. However, the EU’s crucial role in creating the framework for continuing peace in Europe has been brought starkly back into focus by the crisis in Ukraine. Also significant was the accession of Croatia as the 28th EU Member State on 1 July 2013, just twenty years after breaking away from Yugoslavia and surviving the savage Balkans wars which still require the presence of Irish military peacekeepers in Bosnia and Kosovo. Furthermore, throughout its history, the EU has underwritten the democratic transition of countries emerging from the grip of dictatorships. This process started even earlier with the dream of creating a united Europe after World War II, helping to overcome the legacy of authoritarian regimes, beginning with the fascist dictatorships of Germany and Italy, subsequently Greece, Spain, Portugal and, most recently, states of the former Soviet bloc; and the EU remains a magnet for many troubled states on its borders. Even on the

¹⁸ Herman Van Rompuy and José Manuel Barroso, *From war to peace: A European tale*, Nobel Prize lecture on behalf of the European Union, 10 December 2012, Oslo

¹⁹ Michael D. Higgins, *Defining Europe in the Year of the European Citizen*, 18 February 2013, Paris

island of Ireland, the EU context played (and continues to play) a hugely important role in enabling political progress and peace building in Northern Ireland.

The changing role and scope of the EU

The simple yet noble founding ideas and ideals of the European project appeared self-evident and were taken for granted in political discourse over the first decades of the European Communities/Union. However, behind a permissive consensus based on the traditional narrative, the real reach of integration was constantly and vastly expanding. Much of the expansion and deepening of the project was the work of national governments working within the EU institutions. What appeared to those involved to be a natural and progressive development along lines already agreed, to the public, in Ireland as elsewhere, appeared sudden, remote and often unwelcome.

During the first five decades of the European Communities/Union, the activities of the EU covered a growing range of policy objectives and activities and have required no less than five major amending treaties. The key elements of that evolution included the overarching concept of economic and monetary union; the wide-ranging agenda of justice, security and the rule of law; the Union's on-going contribution to democracy, peace building and humanitarian intervention; a world-leading role in development aid and assistance; promotion of the basic values and principles of solidarity, equality, human rights, non-discrimination and social inclusion; and the promotion and acceptance of diversity. The challenges of energy sufficiency, climate change and sustainability have been recognised, if not yet adequately confronted.

Also particularly significant for an export-based economy such as Ireland's, the EU has been a driving force in trade liberalisation in Europe and throughout the world. In the face of globalisation, the importance of the European partnership has increased. Ireland, and indeed the vast majority of EU Member States, realise that they are small players in an interdependent world with global markets and unmanageable uncertainty, and acknowledge that their values and interests are best served as part of a larger Union.

Today, although the European Union is at peace, it faces serious challenges to both its stated goals and internal coherence arising from deep recession, high levels of unemployment and lack of trust in governments and institutions. These negative effects have been exacerbated by a generally uncritical adoption of liberal economics without adequate regulatory controls; failure to understand the importance of social policies as important investments in economic, political and social stability; and the narrow and unbalanced austerity-driven approach to the financial crisis. Furthermore, although the EU currently contains 7% of the world's population, has 25% of global GNP and makes 50% of global social welfare payments,²⁰ as its percentage of the global population declines in the 21st century, the challenge of maintaining a large share of GNP and social welfare payments may get ever harder.

Many considered the EU a contributor to the financial crisis and as the driver of the austerity regime. Yet, simultaneously, the latest Eurobarometer surveys indicate that the majority of Irish people feel that the EU is best able to take effective actions against the effects of the crisis.²¹ Even as this economic and crisis-related narrative dominates, Irish citizens continue to exercise their right to work and study abroad, and generally to accrue and appreciate the benefits of EU membership, whether consciously or not.

20 Eurostat

21 Eurobarometer, *Standard Eurobarometer 80 – First Results*, December 2013

The re-emergence of nationalism across the EU

Another legacy of the crisis with profound implications is the re-emergence of a broad spectrum of nationalism with a distinct anti-European sentiment in many EU Member States. Nineteen years ago, when Francois Mitterrand addressed the European Parliament for the last time as President of France, his closing words contained a message which remains true today:

“What I am asking you to do is almost impossible, because it means overcoming our past. And yet, if we fail to overcome our past, let there be no mistake about what will follow: ladies and gentlemen, nationalism means war! War is not only our past, it could also be our future! And it is us, it is you, ladies and gentlemen, the Members of the European Parliament, who will henceforth be the guardians of our peace, our security and our future!”²²

Yet, as we approach the European Parliament elections of 2014, we see a wide spectrum of nationalist, xenophobic, some even allegedly quasi-fascist, parties across Europe that will contest those elections with hopes of significant successes – the Freedom Party in the Netherlands; National Front in France; FPO in Austria; True Finns; UKIP; Jobbik in Hungary; Golden Dawn in Greece; Alternative for Germany; the Northern League in Italy; Belgium’s Vlaams Belang; Sweden’s Democrats, amongst others.

While these parties have emerged from particular national circumstances and claim to reflect widely-held concerns in their various populations, some of their attitudes and policies can be seen as an expression of xenophobic nationalism. This nationalism tends to engender hostility towards social, ethnic and religious minorities, rejects immigrant populations and, in some cases, continues the deplorable history of anti-semitism. And, for these groups, the European Union is a foreign, elitist structure, lacking popular legitimacy and threatening national sovereignty and interests.

These nationalist attitudes extend to the economic sphere. They threaten the fundamental basis of the Single Market – “an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured...”²³ – in particular by calling into question the freedom of movement of persons and looking to protectionism as a solution to short-term economic difficulties. The malign effects of such economic nationalism were predicted by Jean Monnet who argued that “between individual countries, gains are confined to the results of each country’s isolated effort, to the marches it steals on its neighbours, to the problems it manages to off-load on to them.”

A major challenge is posed by these populist groups to the mainstream parties in every Member State and to the European Union as a whole. Given the particular situations in each country and the different approaches and rhetoric of the various populist parties it cannot be said that there is a coherent populist movement in Europe today. But, given that there are elements of the general populist case – on transparency and accountability for example – that cannot easily be dismissed, it is difficult to develop effective political responses.

The answers must lie in the acceptance, implementation and communication of the basic values which this paper describes.

²² Mitterrand, François, *Speech to the European Parliament*, 17 January 1995

²³ Article 13 Single European Act

An opportunity to refocus – Sketching the new narrative

We conclude, therefore, that the EU narrative is ripe for renewal. If the financial crisis is to prove transformative in the evolution of European integration, the new narrative would require the EU to rethink its priorities, from the fiscal and financial corrections required by the crisis to the pursuit of growth, employment and well-being. While not ignoring the traditional narrative of peace and democracy, the narrative of the future must focus anew on a values-based community with the full assent of citizens. The cornerstones of such a community would be legitimacy, transparency and accountability, in order to pursue a shared purpose amongst Member States for a high degree of social cohesion, strong participation of the European and national parliaments and a renewed dialogue with social partners.

The question of legitimacy has loomed large in discussions on emerging from the crisis and pursuing deeper integration. Many believe that the EU's current economic and financial difficulties belie a much deeper political crisis – indeed many of the citizen demonstrations that have taken place since the onset of the crisis have primarily voiced objection to the nature of governance and the decision-making process, rather than to specific policy measures. However, it must be acknowledged that there is currently unprecedented recognition of the legitimacy challenge, including at the very height of the EU establishment. European Council President Herman Van Rompuy insisted that “the decisions taken to get out of the crisis, also call for new European responses in terms of legitimacy. The European Union is only fully legitimate with the broad support of the people...we need a real debate involving the public in all our countries. But a debate not based on passions and clichés.”²⁴

Those who work in or with the EU know that it is perhaps the most open and transparent of organisations, much more so than most national administrations. It is open to input (or lobbying) from diplomats, business, trade unions, farmers, fishermen, economists, pressure groups and NGOs. An enormous and growing archive of documentation is accessible to the general public and many meetings, debates and press conferences are streamed online, although the challenge of spreading awareness of these resources remains.

In terms of accountability, the institutions were deliberately created to guarantee fair play, although this necessarily introduces a certain complexity. The Commission is committed by oath to promote the general European interest, thus guarding against the power of the large Member States in the European Council or in the European Parliament. Consultation is its method of operation. The Commission knows that if it fails to produce proposals of general European interest and shows itself to be a creature of one or more big Member States it will lose credibility, the EU system will fail and eventually the EU will come apart.

Another important consideration is that of the ethical dimension of policy and action. Ethics and the economy cannot be separated and need to be reconnected in visible form. This presupposes a generosity of outlook that the prevailing economic narrative does not provide. However fine and inspirational the words of any narrative may be, they will mean little if Europe's citizens have little or no confidence in national and EU leadership and institutions. The crucial issue in this connection is the degree to which the stated values of the European Union are respected, and seen to be respected, in practice.

To build its own long-term viability the EU must rise to challenges beyond the capacity of individual Member States to address; otherwise its *raison d'être* is deficient. Already, the EU

²⁴ Herman Van Rompuy, *Introductory speech to the Leuven Conference of Professor Jürgen Habermas*, Leuven, 26 April 2013

provides a lead, however imperfect, in the effort to reduce carbon emissions, through the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. It must pursue its agenda in relation to equality, safety and the environment, notably through implementation of the polluter pays principle. It must face up to a large number of urgent global issues: the emergence of China as a world economic and political power; the reform of world trade; reform of the United Nations; the challenges arising from the Arab Spring; the long-term supply of energy and the reduction of energy usage; development issues and peace building – all areas where the EU can act more effectively than individual states. It must articulate and conduct a sufficient and effective policy in the areas of defence and security, and the security of the individual.

Ireland's optimal contribution will be to play to its strengths: deal-brokering; modest, hard-working diplomacy; experienced peacekeeping; innovative thinking with a strong sense of culture; political acceptability outside the EU. If Ireland can also recover economic and financial stability then it may become a model for resilience. Ireland also has the opportunity to provide a cadre of young European leaders to breathe life into the EU institutions at a time of great change in their architecture and composition, just as Catherine Day, David O'Sullivan and others have done.

Introducing a citizen-centred political process

Both Member State governments and the EU institutions are perceived by many citizens as remote, insular coterie of elites who speak to each other but seldom to the rest of the population. The fundamental challenge is to change the nature of democratic consultation at all levels, national and European, and even local. This need is highlighted most dramatically by the emergence of 'subterranean political movements', such as Occupy, but the effect is more widespread and helps to explain falling turnout in elections and growing political apathy. If citizens felt more engaged by their national political processes they would surely become more engaged with the extension of national politics at the European level.

After decades of peace, international trade and technological innovation have thrived. We have seen the emergence of wealth on a previously unimaginable scale and of unprecedented globalised mobility. The pervasive role played by technology in society and the growing interdependence of nations in a global market has made the task of government increasingly complex. Simultaneously, social media and instant online communication have changed the way that Europeans engage with politics and politicians, bringing individuals closer to each other and to their political representatives. The demise of the age of single-direction communication to a passive audience has empowered citizens and provided them with a new impetus and ability to inform themselves and share their opinions.

The EU must embrace these developments and earn the allegiance of European citizens, especially young people, if it is to have a future. It can only do this by insisting that there is a European way of government that is based on respectful listening and a disinclination to control. Every encounter between citizen and government and every decision must be seen as enabling – i.e. made at the lowest level in the decision-making hierarchy, consistent with the common good and responsive to citizens' wishes. In theory, each Member State could address this challenge on its own, but the mind-set of national government is based on the traditional notion of sovereign command and traditional bureaucratic structures, with their sense of territory and spheres of separate activity. European governance has emerged precisely through the enabling of dialogue between separate states with their separate interests. In short, the mindset of national government is itself part of the problem of modern bureaucracy, and the EU may be well placed to overcome many of the inherent pitfalls.

There is a more positive advantage of tackling the issue of bureaucracy at European level. The change of mentality and of practice required for a more citizen-centred approach to public service will not come about without a great deal of inevitable painful learning. A sharing of the learning process among European nations would make the learning both more expeditious and less painful.

Finally, the project of making government more respectful and enabling, inspired by the European experience, would awaken a deeper allegiance among European citizens and would enable them together to secure the common good of all in a manner which would be beyond the capacity of any Member State.

Conclusions

The challenge of developing a new narrative for Ireland in the EU is to show how enhanced European integration will help Ireland and Irish citizens to realise their hopes for the future better than they could outside the EU. This necessitates a narrative that goes beyond the economic advantages of EU membership. It should demonstrate the uniqueness of the European social model as a way of building fairer societies that respect EU values and stop a race-to-the-bottom in social provision. It should emphasise the contribution that the EU can bring to ensuring greater environmental sustainability. It is also critical to emphasise the contribution of the EU to fostering democratic values (including, especially in the case of Ireland, peace-building and the democratic resolution of conflicts) and to making our democratic systems more participative, transparent and accountable. It should evoke and inspire a sense of genuine European identity.

The establishment and endurance of a functioning Union of 28, and maybe more, Member States is a triumph that should not be underestimated. On balance, the European Union experiment has succeeded in constructing a unique system that protects and promotes the shared values of its Member States, maximises the global reach of Europe and enhances the lives of its citizens. Now, over fifty-six years after the Treaty of Rome, it can be asserted that the EU was, and continues to be, the most progressive and effective way for the states of Europe to organise themselves to respond to the challenges of the day.

The Member States of the EU have entered a new political arrangement that may be described as post-sovereign. They achieve greater weight in the world by acting together, whether in trade negotiations, climate change conferences, dealing with their neighbours, attracting new Member States, fighting for recognition of European industrial standards and human rights norms. It can be persuasively argued that, individually, even large European states are now no longer in the front rank of global powers; but together they still count for much.

There is clearly a yearning for change in the way in which we govern ourselves, expressed in protest movements; through disengagement, particularly amongst young people, from politics; through cynicism amongst the public at large about politicians, journalists, professional bodies and the public service; even NGOs and charities are now facing unprecedented hostility. The model of representative government that has developed since the days of Edmund Burke is no longer sufficient. The increased expectations of a more educated public, the waning of social and political deference, the advent of new media and means of communication, displacing the former reliance on printed and broadcast news and opinion – all these and other factors have changed the citizen's expectations of the political system. They have also displaced power within the political system – social media now empower the citizen to engage directly with national and EU Parliamentarians and EU Commissioners who have embraced the use of the Internet and the tools of social media.

Decision-makers now realise there is an urgent priority to respond to expressions of frustration by creating opportunities for citizens to be heard, to be listened to, to receive an answer, in short to interact with the machinery of government.

Now, as the EU seeks to deepen financial, economic and political integration, Ireland must be prepared for the important choices that lie ahead. Ireland and Irish citizens must take the opportunity for their voices to be heard on the critical choices facing the Union, such as:

- whether to guard national autonomy or to share sovereignty in order to expand it;
- whether to continue with the prevailing economic policy or to embrace and redefine a more classic European social model;

- if the latter, how to finance it sustainably, ensuring that social policy is not a cost but an investment which strengthens countries' ability to compete economically and ensures social solidarity and stability;
- whether to work within existing political models or to engage in a fundamental public debate across all levels of citizen representation, aiming at developing more radical models of engagement and consultation;
- whether to develop a more assertive foreign, security and defence policy or allow others to control the agenda.

Crucially, Irish citizens should not be faced with decisions – for instance in a referendum – unprepared and uninformed. It is therefore vital that the Irish political class, the media and opinion-formers, should themselves be informed and willing to discuss the matters as they develop. Citizens will then be better able to consider how their interests and values are reflected in the process. The EU will no longer be perceived as some distant entity, but as a Union which they, the citizens of Europe have helped to create, and to which they are proud to belong, a Europe which for the first time in history is essentially at peace with itself.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Working Group members

Linda Barry (Secretary)

Tony Brown

Ruth Casey

Ivan Cooper

Jill Donoghue

Eugene Downes

Caroline Erskine

Hugh Frazer

Paul Gillespie

Edmond Grace

Brendan Halligan

Neville Keery

Gina Menzies

Dermot Scott (Chair)

Horst Siedschlag

Appendix 2

Context – The Future of Ireland in Europe project

The Working Group on Values and Narrative in the EU, which has produced this paper, is an integral part of a wide-ranging research project underway in the IIEA on the theme of ‘The Future of Ireland in Europe’.

This project was initiated by IIEA Chairman, Brendan Halligan, in late 2012. It brought together a number of existing and new strategic working groups to reflect synergistically on the major changes taking place in the European Union, and their impact on Ireland.

The structure of this project is based on the four pillars of Herman Van Rompuy’s 2012 Roadmap Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union, with additional work streams incorporated to deal with key underlying or arising issues. It includes working groups on the following issues:

- Banking Union
- Economic Governance
- Fiscal Union
- Political Union
- UK and Europe
- Values and Narrative in the EU

The IIEA hosted a major conference on ‘The Future of Banking in Europe’ in December 2013. All materials relating to the conference, including videos of the speeches and transcripts where available, can be accessed on the IIEA website. The Banking Union Group will produce an interim report in May 2014 and a final report before the end of the year.

The Economic Governance Group produces an ongoing series of working papers on diverse aspects of the European semester, economic surveillance and the implementation of the EU's new economic governance regime. These can be downloaded from the publications section of the IIEA website. In January 2014, the Group held a half-day seminar to present their work to date. All materials relating to the seminar can be found on the IIEA website, www.iiea.com.

The Fiscal Union Group will shortly commence activities relating to all aspects of tax policy in Europe.

The Political Union Group reflects at macro level on the changes taking place in the European Union since the outbreak of the crisis and considers questions relating to the need for treaty change and issues surrounding public perceptions of integration and the need for democratic legitimacy. The Group will produce a number of paper in 2014.

The theme of the UK in Europe has been a priority of the IIEA since its foundation in 1991. In summer 2014, the UK Group will produce a book, its third, on the current UK debate on its EU membership in the context of the Scottish referendum on independence in 2015 and a possible in/out referendum in 2017.

iea.com
Sharing Ideas
Shaping Policy

The Institute of International and European Affairs