Green Foundation Ireland

Seminar

CREATING A PEOPLE'S EUROPE:
Integration or Disintegration?

The Mansion House, Dawson Street, Dublin 2

Friday 6 December 2013, 6:00pm to 9:00pm

R E P O R T

by **Nuala Ahern,** ***Chair of GFI***

CREATING A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: Integration or Disintegration?

1) DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENT

Recognising that the European Union faces its greatest challenges since its foundation, the Seminar explored the causes of the current crisis and the necessary steps to create a new Europe to meet these challenges. If increased integration is necessary to solve the Eurozone crisis how can this be legitimised? Is there a danger that increased centralism, which may be necessary in some instances, may in fact alienate citizens even further from the EU?

There is a necessity for a social dimension to the discussions on Eurozone Integration. Further integration of the Eurozone is deemed necessary to its proper functioning as a currency area by many influential economic commentators, and Banking Union is already well advanced. However the economic debate fails to include a proper social dimension. The EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, László Andor, has urged that the discussions on Eurozone integration should include solving high unemployment.

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/andor/documents/developing_social_dimensio-en.pdf

and

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/news/archives/2013/10/pdf/20131002_1-emu_en.pdf

The Seminar addressed both of these issues with a discussion on what kind of social and ecological Europe is possible and desirable to urgently address these concerns.

SPEAKERS
Emer Costello MEP
Dermot Scott
Alex Warleigh-Lack

They were asked to speak on the following questions:

> *Is integration of the Eurozone proceeding without the inclusion of a proper social dimension?*
>
> *Is the Eurosceptic debate increasing in intensity in the member states where unemployment is unacceptably high?*

The Seminar hoped to address both of these issues and to debate what kind of social and ecological Europe is possible and desirable to meet such concerns.

PARTICIPANTS
55 people pre-registered to come along to our Seminar and an extra 17 people were in attendance.

IRISH FILM PREMIÈRE
The debate was preceded by the screening of *"Creating a People's Europe".* This film, produced by Bandit Films, is a project of the Green European Foundation for the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament. It was supported with funding from the Heinrich Böll Foundation and with the financial support of the European Parliament.

The film made a lively and interesting introduction to the proceedings, and the debate which followed the presentations of the speakers was passionate and very engaged with the topic.

After the formal Seminar had concluded, discussions continued over mince pies and other seasonal fare.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATIONS

Emer Costello MEP

Emer has been a Member of the European Parliament representing the Dublin Constituency since February 2012. She is a Member of the European Parliament Committee on Social Affairs. From 2003 to 2012 Emer was a Member of Dublin City Council and served as Lord Mayor of Dublin in 2009-10 and as Deputy Lord Mayor of Dublin in 2008-09.

Emer's professional background is in education and training. She has worked as Programme Manager for Léargas, the National Agency in Ireland for the management of national and international exchange and co-operation programmes in the field of education, training and youth. She has also managed Community Projects with FÁS.

During her speech, Emer Costello considered the employment question in detail, and what the EU was doing to address the issues, particularly in relation to youth unemployment. She said that Commissioner Andor's intervention was timely, and that it was past time the debate on the Eurozone addressed the issues of high unemployment. Europe is currently facing the worst social and economic crisis since the Second World War. The budget is one of the major instruments that the European Union has to create growth and jobs and boost the European economy.

The European Parliament has long been calling for the Youth Guarantee to show that Europe is serious about tackling youth unemployment. If the EU failed to address this issue adequately, we would be condemning young people to a life with little hope for employment and the opportunity to take their place in society. She stressed that:

> *"As a Member of the European Parliament, I am glad that the European Council finally agreed to the European Parliament's recommendations with regard to tackling youth employment, promoting research and innovation, and protecting the most vulnerable."*

Emer Costello stated that particular focus needed to be placed on supporting those young people who are most at risk of moving into long-term unemployment and she welcomed investment in a range of supports for young people to ensure that they are truly work-ready: rather than just looking at an option of work experience or training, we need also to encourage the acquisition of other 'life-skills' which can have a real impact on how a young person engaged with work.

Dermot Scott

Dermot is former Head of the European Parliament Office in London and is a former official of the Institute of Public Administration. Now retired, he is participating in a study at the Institute of International and European Affairs on The Values of the EU.

Dermot Scott began his presentation by stating that we know there is an economic and financial crisis in Europe (and elsewhere) and we know that there is a political crisis as well:

- There is distrust of the governments and political parties that led us into the crisis.
- There is a problem in getting support, or even in some cases consent, to the means of getting over the crisis.
- There is a lack of long term thinking: Monetary union was created without a real economic union, let alone political union, and we continue to create unfinished business today through short term-ism.

The younger generation took Europe for granted. They said: "We travel around Europe. We are students in different universities. We use the Euro. We're part of the EasyJet culture." So they felt European, but for them the European Union, by and large, was irrelevant to that feeling. If you ask them explicitly, they saw it as a neoliberal bureaucracy. The old narrative that the EU is a peace project, never again would there be a war in Europe, never again would Europe become imperialist, that narrative just doesn't resonate with the young.

There was also a geographical difference. By and large, southern Europeans and eastern Europeans were more pro-Europe than people from France, Germany, and Britain. And particularly countries which had gone through a transition to democracy tended to be more pro-Europe.

The current crisis is fundamentally a political crisis and the activists are right to perceive it as such. It concerns the collapse of the legitimacy of nation states which is a result of globalisation – decisions that are supposed to be taken at national level are actually taken in Brussels, in the headquarters of multinational companies or corporations in New York or Washington.

The whole aim should be to create a layer of political authority which allows us to take back democracy, not only at national level but maybe at city level and regional level. In other words, to set the framework at European and national level, and work out modalities locally.

Dr. Alex Warleigh-Lack

Alex is Professor of EU Politics at the School of Politics, Surrey University, UK, and is also Executive Director of the Centre for Research on the European Matrix (CRonEM). He previously held chairs at Brunel University (2006-11) and the University of Limerick (2004-06). Before that, was Deputy Director of the Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research at Queen's University Belfast (2001-03), and prior to that was a Lecturer and Research Fellow at the University of Reading (1997-2001).

He worked in the European Parliament as Adviser to Ken Collins MEP (who was the then Chair of the Committee on the Environment, Consumer Protection and Public Health, 1996-97). From 2006-09, Alex was also Chair of UACES (the academic association for Contemporary European Studies and is the world's largest EU studies association – see www.uaces.org).

His main research interests are: the politics of European integration, (with particular regard to legitimacy and institutional reform); comparative regional integration (particularly regarding the EU, ASEAN,

APEC and NAFTA); Green politics (in particular the application of Green Theory (Deep Ecology and Gaia Theory) to regional integration).

In his presentation, Alex Warleigh-Lack concentrated on "Why Green the EU":

- Under neoliberal conditions, radical change is not possible without cross-sector, international alliances and structures *(Harvey 2010).*
- 'Because the Earth system is the wider context in which our social, political and economic systems operate, and because our actions now have planetary consequences, we … (must) develop forms of governance that are compatible with the larger system that environs and sustains us' *(Litfin 2010: 196).*
- *Ecological ethicists e.g. J. Baird Callicott (2010) and Patrick Curry (2006):* We need active political structures capable of intervening in public life wherever necessary to shape and embed the social and economic revolution required for sustainability
- *Robyn Eckersley (2004: 3*): Whatever form of political organisation we create, they will need to be 'ecological steward(s) and facilitator(s) of trans-boundary democracy rather than ... selfish actor(s) ... ignoring or discounting the needs of foreign lands'.

2) PROMOTING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE EU IN IRELAND

The event promoted awareness of the role of the EU in combatting youth unemployment.

Emer Costello outlined the provisions of the Youth Guarantee and took questions from the floor on the topic.

Under the Youth Guarantee, those under 25 years will be offered a good-quality place in employment, education or training within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving full time education. Youth unemployment has serious implications for the future of communities: where high rates persist and long-term unemployment is allowed to become a feature, the confidence and potential of those impacted is difficult to recover.

The provision for €6 billion to tackle youth unemployment, to be frontloaded in 2014 and 2015, is particularly welcome in countries such as Ireland, with high youth unemployment, as is the assurance that Youth Employment programmes will continue for the duration of the EU Multiannual Budget. The €6 billion for the Youth Employment is also backed up by additional front-loading of some €2.5 billion additional funds for research and development, under the Erasmus Programme.

The EU budget will also protect the most vulnerable suffering from extreme poverty through the new Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD). Emer Costello is Rapporteur for the Social Affairs Committee on FEAD and she had recommended an increase in the budget from €2.5 billion to €3.5 billion which was accepted by the Council of Ministers. This will provide crucial assistance to charities providing food and basic material assistance to families who literally cannot afford to eat. It is hoped that the programme can take effect from 1 January 2014. (Negotiations recently concluded between the European Parliament, Council and Commission on the new Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) to run from 2014 to 2020. A fund of €3.5 billion has been secured to support food provision and

social inclusion for our most vulnerable citizens, across the EU, including in Ireland.)

The event promoted awareness of how the EU was able to respond to 21st century challenges.

Dermot Scott mentioned that these 21st century challenges, by their very nature, necessitate international response – climate change, resource scarcity, failure of the international financial system, cyber-crime and terrorism.

He argued that the EU could become an institution that actually protects democracy at local level from the storms of globalisation.

Europe can be an institution that taxes global 'bads' (like financial speculation, like carbon, like multinationals that try to escape taxes) and on the other hand promotes global 'goods' (renewable energy, health and education, youth employment).

It is clear that the decline in public support for the EU suggests that people feel that it is falling short of its aims and it is clear that steps need to be taken by the EU to address this shortcoming. Not of course by the EU institutions alone: the national governments are now increasingly involved.

Greater accountability, wider participation, transparency, the proper application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality – all these are important to giving the public a sense of ownership and information. Once again, these criteria apply as much to national governments as they do to the EU; it is clear that the same applies to both levels, and indeed to the same people.

In an increasingly globalised world, many of the challenges and problems Ireland faces cannot be solved at a national level, but rather require concerted action by EU Member States acting together in appropriate areas. Ireland in isolation can do little to influence these challenges in line with its values.

The event promoted awareness of the environmental aspects of EU policy and what the EU should do to be more effective in its green policies.

Alex Warleigh-Lack argued that the EU needed to extend its powers and obligations to the following areas:

- ensure high standards of human rights, social rights, and political rights for all EU citizens, set out in a Declaration of the Rights of the Citizen and the Earth;
- ensure high levels of animal welfare, ecological health and product standards;
- external trade policy, in the service of trade subsidiarity and ecological health;
- diplomatic representation in international organisations and with third countries;
- ensuring renewable energy supply and food security across the EU;
- ensuring public transport provision;
- customs union;
- defence (as a neutral Union);
- border control between the EU and the rest of the world.

There was a lively Questions and Answers session where the implications of some of these proposals were teased out.

3) OUTCOMES

The Seminar served to deepen public discourse and understanding of the current problems that beset the EU. The Seminar achieved a public conversation and debate on the EU.

The Seminar also addressed itself to innovative solutions that will remedy these problems by addressing youth unemployment, and promoting a greener and therefore more sustainable EU. It also proposed new thinking on legitimising the EU through addressing the trans-national challenges of the 21st century.

Emer Costello addressed ensuring that the EU delivers good living standards and employment opportunities.

Dermot Scott concentrated on the deep-set political and economic problems of the EU as well as problems of legitimacy.

Alex Warleigh-Lack focussed on how to ensure that the EU improves our quality of life and ecological sustainability.

The report of this Seminar is available on our website at www.greenfoundationireland.ie. We were not able to make a video of the proceedings, as we have of other seminars, because of the low budget. However the film *Creating a People's Europe* is available to view on our website at www.greenfoundationireland.ie/creating-a-peoples-europe-integration-or-disintegration/