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“Staid na Díospóireachta ar Thodhchaí na hEorpa”

Parlaimint na hEorpa, An Bhruiséil

10 Deireadh Fómhair 2018

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Travel Report

Committee on Constitutional Affairs Interparliamentary Committee Meeting

Exchange of views with National Parliaments on

“The State of the Debate on the Future of Europe”

European Parliament, Brussels

10 October 2018

BACKGROUND

On 2 August 2018, the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs received an invitation from the Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) Danuta Hübner to attend an interparliamentary committee meeting in Brussels, on 10 October 2018, to discuss the state of the debate on the Future of Europe.

The Joint Committee agreed at its meeting on the 19 September 2018 to take part in the meeting and that Senator Craughwell would attend the meeting in Brussels on behalf of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs. Senator Craughwell was accompanied to the meeting by the Policy Advisor to the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, Stephanie Bollard.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING

Prof Hübner opened the meeting by emphasising the importance of the parliamentary dimension of the European Union. Members of Parliaments of the European Union are directly elected by citizens and have a duty to show citizens who elected them that they have influence.

Minister Bogner-Strauß discussed the progress made on the priorities of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. She explained that, in her opinion scenario, four as outlined in the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe, "Doing Less More Efficiently" was the preferred option. The EU did not need to involve itself in smaller issues which could be dealt with at national and local level by Member States. On behalf of the Austrian Presidency she welcomed the report of the European Commission's Taskforce on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently", and reported that the presidency will be holding a conference in Bregenz on 15-16 November 2018 to discuss the report's recommendations.

Commissioner Jourová emphasised the need for the European Union to work efficiently and find solutions to bigger challenges, such as climate change and threats to democracy. She also defueled the European Commission's Electoral Package, which proposes the introduction of rules for online election campaigning in advance of the European Parliament elections in May 2019.

Mr Lopatka and **Mr Buchmann** both asserted that the challenges facing the EU need to be dealt with on multiple levels: EU-level, Member State national-level and also on a local and regional level.

Mr Jáuregui Atondo described in his presentation how he believed that the European Union's future is under threat, and that it was important for the member states to stay united and find solutions. He suggested that streamlining of processes was needed, as Europe works too slowly to deal with the fast-paced developments in foreign and economic policy.

DEBATE

Senator Craughwell in his intervention thanked the delegates for their dedication to the European project, outlining how it has started as an economic project, but had since evolved to include cooperation on a wide range of areas. He explained that while Ireland regretted Brexit, it respected the democratic process. He highlighted the strong public support in Ireland for remaining a Member of the EU, with recent polls showing support at 92%. Timing to the question of the Future of Europe, Senator Craughwell discussed the need for the EU to promote itself, and remind citizens of the benefits of the EU; especially young people who may take the advantages of the European Union for granted.

As part of the debate, the challenges of **Brexit, democratic legitimacy, external security and economic policy** were discussed.

The delegate from the House of Lords commented that a prosperous European Union was in the best interest of the UK and that despite **Brexit**, and that he personally would like the UK still to be able to take part in interparliamentary for a with the European Parliament and the EU Member States' national parliaments. Prof Hübner replied that she was committed to having an EU-UK delegation set up as soon as possible, so that relations between the European Parliament and the UK could continue after Brexit.

Democratic legitimacy was discussed in the context of subsidiarity, the upcoming 2019 European Parliament elections; and amidst calls to introduce qualified majority voting in the Council of the European Union for additional policy areas. The delegate from the Czech Parliament put forward the view that it is not possible to decide on the direction to take on the Future of Europe until there is **agreement** about current policies. A delegate from the Spanish Parliament noted that all of the members agreed that there was a need for an EU project, but not always on how it should function. The delegates from Montenegro and Turkey discussed how candidate countries should also be included in the Future of Europe debate.

CLOSING STATEMENTS AND REMARKS

Mairead McGuinness MEP, emphasized the need for the European Parliament and National Parliaments to work together to serve the citizens who elected them. She highlighted the necessity of compromise to find solutions to the bigger challenges facing the EU.

Prof Hübner concluded the meeting by underlining the importance of engaging through dialogue with citizens coming up to the 2019 European Parliament elections, and campaigning on European, not national, issues.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE

Senator Craughwell discussed the proceedings of the interparliamentary committee meeting with the Joint Committee on European Affairs at the meeting of 17 October 2018.

The Joint Committee concluded that while there is broad support for the concept of a European Union in the future a shared vision of the exact destination didn't exist yet between Member States. The Joint Committee felt that it was important to keep debating and discussing challenging issues through interparliamentary fora. The Joint Committee believes 2019 will be an important year in determining the future direction of the European Union, as the UK will leave the EU in March 2019, the European Parliament elections will be held in May 2019, a new European Commission is expected to begin its work at the end of the year and the Romanian Presidency will host a special European Council Summit on the Future of Europe in Sibiu in May 2019. In this context, the Joint Committee committed to continue to closely follow the Future of Europe debate.



Michael Healy-Rae T.D.

Chairman, Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

5 February 2019

Committee on Constitutional Affairs

AGENDA

Interparliamentary Committee Meeting

European Parliament – National Parliaments

STATE OF THE DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Wednesday, 10 October 2018,

14.30 – 18.30

European Parliament, Brussels

room: József Antall building – JAN 4Q1

Organised with the support of the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments of the European Parliament

Order of business

Wednesday, 10 October 2018

- (09.00 – 12.30) (Ordinary AFCO meeting)
- 11.30 – 12.30 Registration of participants
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- 14.30 – 18.30 Interparliamentary Committee Meeting**
- 14.30 – 15.15 **Introductory statements by**
Danuta Maria Hübner, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs
Juliane Bogner-Strauß, Federal Minister with the Federal Chancellery for Women, Families and Youth
Věra Jourová, Commissioner in charge of Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality
Christian Buchmann, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian Federal Council
- 15.15 – 18.15 **Presentations by**
Ramón Jáuregui Atondo, AFCO rapporteur on “State of the debate on the Future of Europe”(2018/2094(INI))
Ivana Maletić, ECON (associated committee) rapporteur for opinion **and interventions of INVITED EXPERT**
Joaquín Almunia, former Vice President of the European Commission **followed by a debate with members of national parliaments and members of the European Parliament**
- 18.15 - 18.30 Closing statements and remarks by**
Reinhold Lopatka, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the Austrian National Council
Danuta Maria Hübner, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

